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EDITORIAL

“The easiest way to solve a problem is to deny it exists.”

– Isaac Asimov

The behavioral scientist Gad Saad says that the desire to deny reality exists far beyond science. The human capacity for self deception is enormous. At times we deny the facts that are as evident as the existence of the moon. The human ostrich effect has been documented in many contexts. Even experts are not immune from the ostrich effect.

I had almost decided to utilize this editorial space to raise the topic of the agenda for the Modi government’s third term. But a chain of media reports on the allegedly unprofessional conduct of a probationary IAS officer changed my decision.

The media reports focused on the obnoxious conduct of the young lady IAS probationer who tried to browbeat the district administration by usurping the chamber of a senior officer and demanded privileges to which a probationary officer is not normally entitled. To add to her detestable conduct, she displayed a red and blue beacon on her personal glitzy car. Her conduct was duly reported by the District Magistrate to the state government for appropriate action and the state government promptly transferred the officer to another district.

The matter, however, did not end there. Some investigative social activists alleged that the officer concerned had fraudulently appeared at the civil service examination by wrongly claiming reservation on the ground that she belonged to a non-creamy layer OBC family and that she was also physically disabled. According to some media reports whose veracity is not established, hers is not an isolated case. There may be several more similar cases which have gone unnoticed.

The issue was prominently reported and debated not only in the social media but also in the mainstream newspapers. As happens in such cases, some senior civil servants joined the debate and raised questions on UPSC's recruitment process. A senior IAS officer brushed aside the allegations against UPSC saying that black sheep are everywhere. Another was of the view that UPSC's credibility has been seriously affected and it needs a cleanup.

Is it a sign of a deep malaise in the recruitment system? Has UPSC been compromised by political elements? Such officers, even in a small number, are not only giving a bad name to the entire civil service but also imperil efficient delivery of services to the citizens as these officers are likely to show their 'value fault' in their conduct.

We must realize that many youngsters are keen to join the higher civil services at any cost, that they are willing to adopt any means—fair or foul—to manipulate the system. It is anyone's guess whether such youngsters, if selected, will discharge their functions with the diligence and integrity required of good civil servants. It is also alleged that a significant percentage of new entrants are guided by glamour, social stature and money instead of the spirit of public service. The question, therefore, arises whether a 'value fit' criterion is necessary in addition to 'knowledge fit' and 'intellect fit' at the stage of recruitment.

With the introduction of eligibility of 'non-creamy layer OBC' and 'persons with physical disability' categories in reservation of vacancies, the temptation to forge certificates has become higher. It can be argued that it is unfair to blame the UPSC. Many of such claims are rejected by UPSC in scrutiny. Some, however, slip through the sieve of scrutiny.

A more radical question is whether UPSC should be abolished in its present form. It has become a mechanical 'compete by rote' recruiting system to select candidates for top jobs in the government. Undoubtedly, the competition is fair, but the system is manipulated by dozens of coaching academies, some of which have reached unicorn status. This is not the place to suggest a more appropriate recruitment system which would require deeper analysis of eligibility and suitability by experts. Suffice to say, while we are getting

intellectually bright youngsters at the entrance level in services, their overall suitability is unconvincing. One glaring gap in the recruitment is the absence of testing ‘value fitness’ of the candidates. The Ethics paper in Civil Service examination is a farce and should be removed as early as possible.

Many committees have given their recommendations on the subject in the past without eliciting a serious thought by successive governments. Almost all the committees recommended that the age limit should be brought down for all categories and that the number of permitted attempts should be kept small. Curiously, successive governments have taken decisions to raise the age limits and increase the number of attempts.

It has also been suggested that the serving officers in top services should be debarred from appearing in the examination again. It is seen that serving officers keep repeating UPSC exams again and again to get a better branch of their choice. This should be curbed.

It is said that the security of a nation lies with the defence forces. Its sustainability lies with its bureaucracy. Considering the complexity of politico- bureaucrat and bureaucrat-citizen equations, there are no easy fixes to the problems of bureaucracy, but an attempt must be made now to check the downslide.

In my view, this case should be used as a trigger to start a deep analysis of the entire recruitment process of top civil services. It should be a prompter to awaken the policy makers to the urgent need of restructuring the recruitment process.

Prabhat Kumar

Women's Empowerment through Panchayati Raj Institutions

Introduction

India is predominantly rural with over 60 percent of its population residing in more than 600,000 villages and has around 60 percent of its workforce located in these rural areas which contributes 46 percent to country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Notably, 48 percent of the population in rural areas are women (according to Census 2011), with a Women's Labour Force Participation Rate of 41.5% (15 years and above) in 2022-23. Recognizing this demographic significance is crucial, as women play vital roles in various developmental aspects of a nation. International Monetary Fund Chief Christine Lagarde and Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg, have highlighted the prospect of a 27 percent increase in India's GDP through the attainment of gender parity in the labour force¹. In a separate analysis by United Nations, by 2025, global annual Gross Domestic Product could increase by as much as 26%, equivalent to US\$28 trillion, if women assumed roles in labor markets identical to men².

Globally, women's empowerment is a critical imperative for sustainable development. As a signatory to the United Nations' 2030 Agenda, India aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 16, focusing on gender equality and robust institutions. In this context, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), emerge as significant

¹ https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/gender-parity-can-boost-indias-gdp-by-27-wef-co-chairs/articleshow/62589586.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst1

² <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/infographic/changingworldofwork/en/index.html>

agents in promoting women's empowerment and realizing SDGs. Mandated by the Constitution of India [Article 243D(3)], ensuring 33 percent women's representation in PRIs allows their perspectives to shape local and national policies, aligning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Evaluating women's progress requires a multi-dimensional, evidence-based approach. This paper analyzes progress in women's development across dimensions of economy, employment, digital empowerment, health, education, decision-making and political representation while utilizing international data and national level published data primarily on National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Periodic Labour Force Survey of Ministry of Statistics and Programme implementation and reports of Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) thereby providing insights into intra-country and international comparisons.

In both global and Indian contexts, there has been progress of women in key developmental areas such as health, infrastructure, and employment with the interventions of government and stakeholders. The progress can be further catalyzed through empowerment and enablement of Panchayats across six critical pillars namely, Framework, Functions, Finances, Functionaries, Capacity Building, and Accountability for overall development of women.

Status of women's development on key indices and parameters

(1) Global Gender Gap Report 2023

World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023 assesses gender equality progress across 146 countries, utilizing an index categorized into Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. A comparative score for India, in relation to its neighbouring and higher-ranking countries on gender gap is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Ranking and score of few countries as per Global Gender Gap Report 2023

Sl. No.	Country	Rank	Sub-Index Score* (Percentage)				
			<i>Economic Participation and Opportunity</i>	<i>Educational Attainment</i>	<i>Health and Survival</i>	<i>Political Empowerment</i>	<i>Average score</i>
1	United States of America	43	78.00	99.50	97.00	24.80	74.80
2	Bangladesh	59	43.80	93.60	96.20	55.20	72.20
3	Bhutan	103	70.80	96.30	96.20	9.30	68.20
4	China	107	72.70	93.50	93.70	11.40	67.80
5	Sri Lanka	115	55.50	98.80	98.00	13.00	66.30
6	India	127	36.70	100	95.00	25.30	64.30
	Global	-	60.1	95.2	96	22.1	68.35

*Score as per the report has been converted to percentage.

Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2023

The data in table 1 shows that India is almost on par with global average on all indicators, except on the sub-index “Economic Participation and Opportunity”. This index is measured across four parameters namely, labour-force participation rate, wage equality for similar work, estimated earned income and legislators, senior officials and managers and professional and technical workers. It may be suggested that relevant policy measures relating to gender parity in leadership roles and wages, creating employment opportunities closer to home and prioritizing investments in girls' education may develop financial independence and give timely results.

(2) Gender Development Index (GDI)

GDI measures gender inequalities in achievement in three parameters namely, life expectancy at birth, expected years of schooling and mean years of schooling for adults ages 25 years

and older. The closer the ratio is to 1, the smaller the gap between women and men. A comparative score for India, in relation to its neighbouring and higher-ranking countries, is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Ranking and ratio of few countries on GDI as per Human Development Index Report 2023-24

Sl. No.	Country	Rank	Ratio
1	United States of America	20	1.005
2	China	75	0.962
3	Sri Lanka	78	0.947
4	Bhutan	125	0.970
-	World	-	0.951
5	Bangladesh	129	0.914
6	India	134	0.852

Source: Human Development Index Report 2023-24

The key inference from this table is that India at present is lagging behind which can be improved through focussed interventions in the sectors of health, education and employment.

(3) Economist's "glass-ceiling index"

The Economist's "glass-ceiling index" provides insights, evaluating ten indicators like labor-force participation, salaries, and political representation for 29 OECD countries annually. Data on some of the key indicators has been presented in table 3.

Table 3: Data on key indicators relating to women as per The Economist's "glass-ceiling index"

Sl. No.	Indicator	OECD countries average (percentage/ points in comparison to men) ^{&}	Parameter relating to India	Status of India as per national reports (percentage points in comparison to men)
1	Higher education: Education attainment of women	+7.8 Percentage Points	Women with 10 or more years of schooling (%) [*]	-9.3 Percentage Points

2	Labour-force participation rate	-14.8 Percentage Points	Labour-force participation rate**	-41.5 Percentage Points
3	Gender wage gap (Women earnings)	-11.9%	Labour Income**	-78%
4	Women in managerial positions	-15.8%	Women in managerial positions***	-83%
5	Women on company boards	-17.5%	Women on company boards***	-77%
6	Women in parliament	-16.1%	Women in parliament ****	-81%

&Source: The Economist's glass-ceiling index (<https://econ.st/3TqIkiS>)

*NFHS-5

**PLFS 2022-23

*** The Economic Times article "Job Gains" date 08.03.2024 quoting source as MoSPI

****Global data on women's political participation - <https://localgov.unwomen.org/data>

The data reflects that there are more apparent gaps in key economic welfare indicators. However, sustained efforts through focussed interventions by Government, civil societies and other relevant stakeholders in the aforementioned sectors can bridge the gap in a foreseeable realistic timeframe.

(4) *Labour Force Participation Rate*

The global average ratio of female to male labor force participation rate (LFPR) is 69.1 (Year 2023) which has significantly increased by 17.9 percentage points since year 1990. In respect of India, female LFPR has increased by 12.16 percentage points for the said period. A comparative score for India on female LFPR, in relation to its neighbouring and few higher-ranking countries and percentage points increase over the period from 1990 to 2023, is shown in Table 4 and figure 1.

Table 4: Change in female labour force participation rate (LFPR) in few countries

S.No.	Country	Labour force participation rate female (%) (Year 1990)*	Ratio of female to male labor force participation rate (%) - (Year 2023**)	Percentage Points increase in female LFPR
1	Bhutan	58.69	87.4	28.71
2	China	73.02	84	10.98
3	United States	56.54	83.9	27.36
-	World	51.20	69.1	17.9
4	Bangladesh	26.64	46.2	19.56
5	Sri Lanka	45.13	44.6	-0.53
6	India	30.44	42.6	12.16

Source: *International Labour Organization/World bank data available on “Our World in Data” website <https://ourworldindata.org/female-labor-supply>
 **Gender Statistics; Series : Ratio of female to male labor force participation rate (%)

<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/gender-statistics/Series/SL.TLF.CACT.FM.ZS#>

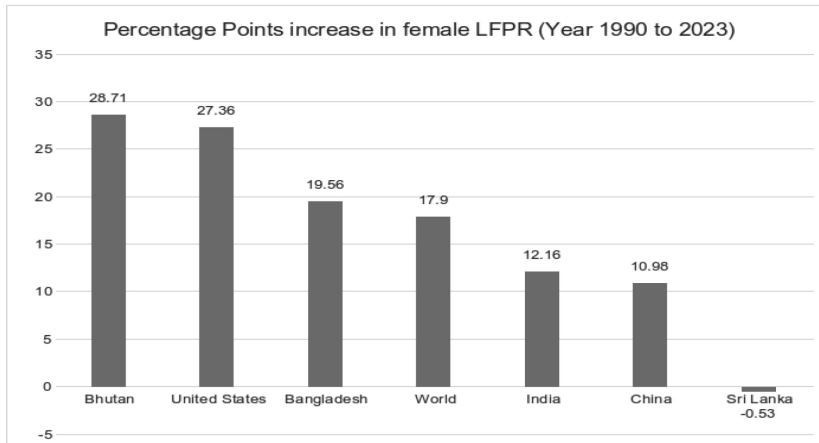


Figure 1: Country-wise Percentage points increase in female labour force participation rate (LFPR) as per World Bank Report

Source: *International Labour Organization/World bank data available on “Our World in Data” website <https://ourworldindata.org/female-labor-supply>
 **Gender Statistics; Series: Ratio of female to male labor force participation rate (%)
<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/gender-statistics/Series/SL.TLF.CACT.FM.ZS#>

Further, Periodic Labour Force Survey Report 2022-23 (PLFS 2022-23) shows that the Labour Force Participation rate (15+ years age group) for female in rural areas is around 41.5 percent as compared to 80.2 percent for males. The matter of concern is that only 8 percent women are salaried or on regular wages and remaining are in casual labour or self-employed, leading to insecurity of regular earnings. Table 5 highlights some of the important figures relating to female labour force participation as given in the report.

Table 5: Women employment data as per Periodic Labour Force Survey Report 2022-23

Indicator (15+ years age group)	Female	Male
Labour force participation rate in rural areas	41.5	80.2
Self-employed	71	58.8
Regular wage/salaried	8	14.3
Casual labour	21	26.8
Unemployment Rate in rural areas (%)	1.8	2.7

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey Report 2022-23 (July 2022 to June 2023) released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

The key inference from data in tables above is that the timely and focussed interventions by government, civil societies and relevant stakeholders for gender equality in leadership positions and wages, fostering local employment opportunities, and emphasizing investments in girls' education could foster financial independence and yield prompt outcomes.

(5) Quality of Jobs in which women are engaged

Share of the women in labour force is an important aspect but so is the quality of job in which they are engaged. A global status of occupation by gender is given in table 6.

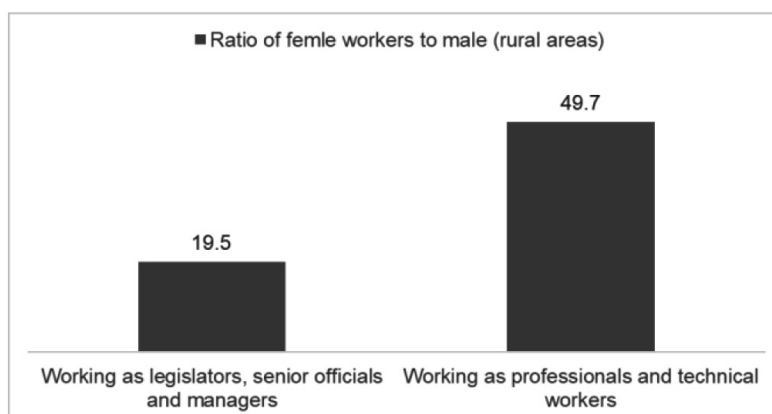
Table 6: Global share of women in occupational sectors

Sl. No.	Occupation	Share of women workforce (%)
1	Chief executives, senior officials and legislators	28
2	Science and engineering professionals	28
3	Administrative and commercial managers	35
4	General and keyboard clerks	71
5	Cleaners and helpers	74
6	Personal care workers	88

Source: International Labour Organization (<https://ilostat ilo.org/these-occupations-are-dominated-by-women/>)

The data in table 6 shows that men continue to lead senior management positions such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), senior officials and legislators, while women are primarily engaged in clerical and personal care sectors.

PLFS 2022-23 report shows that for every 100 males, there are only around 19 females working at senior level positions in an organization. Encouragingly, this ratio is in equity with males in the sector of working professionals and technical workers where the ratio is around 50 as shown in figure 2.

**Figure 2: Ratio of female workers to male workers in rural areas**

Source: https://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/press_release/Press_note_AR_PLFS_2021_22_24022023.pdf

The key inference from data in table 6 is that women are mostly engaged in non-leadership roles in employment sector. As suggested in the previous section, what is required is timely implementation of appropriate policies regarding gender equality in leadership positions and wages, fostering local employment opportunities, and additionally investing in girls' higher education and training through institutes of excellence.

(6) Gender Pay Gap

Beyond the labour force participation rate and quality of jobs, another concerning aspect is gender pay disparity. As per India Employment Report (2024) of International Labour Organization, main reason for choice of employment for 50.7 percent women is good salary. However, as per UN Women data, globally, women only make 77 cents for every dollar men earn³. Some of the important figures relating to gender pay gap in India are illustrated in table 7.

Table 7: Pay gaps across various sectors in India

Sl. No.	Sector / Indicator	Female	Male
1	Average monthly earnings of regular salaried (in Rupees)*	15,398	20,033
2	Labour Income (for every Rs.100)**	18	82
3	Agriculture sector (Average daily wage in Rupees)**	294	383
4	Key managerial position salary in Corporate sector (for every Rs.100)**	52	100

Source:

*India Employment Report (2024) of International Labour Organization

**Reports of PLFS, CFA Institute and World Inequality Report 2022 as quoted in The Hindu Business line article dated 25th October, 2023 (<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/data-stories/data-focus/in-india-women-struggle-with-pay-gap-across-sectors/article67457643.ece>)

³ <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/infographic/changingworldofwork/en/index.html>

The data from data in table 7 shows that there is a gender pay disparity in various field of employment for which focussed interventions are required to enage women in leadership roles alongwith pay parity. As suggested in previous section, timely implementation of appropriate policies regarding gender equality in leadership positions and wages may bridge this gap.

(7) Progression on key parameters of women as per National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 205-16 and 2019-21

The NFHS conducted by Government of India provides data on population dynamics and health indicators. Women related indicators of NFHS 4 and 5 Survey have been used in 5 key areas across 18 indicators as presented in table 8. Detailed status has not been presented in this paper. These indicators show correlation coefficient of +1.0 with an average score of 47 and 54 for the period corresponding to NFHS 4 and 5 demonstrating reliability of these indicators and improvement in economic, health and political representation standards of women.

Table 8: Progression across women related 5 key areas and 18 indicators as per NFHS-4 and 5 surveys

S I . No.	Key Areas of Women empowerment	Indicators	NFHS-4 (2015-16) (%)	NFHS-5 (2019-21) (%)	Percentage point change	Change (%)
1	Economic empowerment	1. Married women employed	46	54	8	17
		2. Married women employed earning cash				
		3. Women with a bank account that they themselves use				
		4. Ownership of house alone or jointly by women				

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		5. Ownership of land alone or jointly by women				
2	Digital empowerment	1. Women with a mobile phone that they use themselves	46	54	8	17
3	Health	1. Women who received Ante-natal care	54	63	9	17
		2. Pregnant women with institutional deliveries				
		3. Households using clean fuel for cooking (Electricity, LPG/natural gas, biogas)				
		4. Total fertility rate (children per woman)				
		5. Pregnant women receiving any service under ICDS				
		6. Breastfeeding women receiving any service under ICDS				
		7. Non-anemic women				
		8. Women covered under health insurance or a health scheme (Central or State Govt.)				
4	Education	1. Females completed 10 or more years of schooling	52	57	5	10
		2. Literacy rate (women)				
5	Decision making	1. Currently married women making decision regarding own health care, major household purchases, and visits to their own family or relatives alone or jointly with their husband	39	43	4	17
		2. Women seeking help against violence				
Average			47	54	7	15

Source: NFHS 4 and 5 Survey

The key observations from the table 8 are as following:

- i. **Economic empowerment:** A 17% increase in the progress reflects women's financial autonomy aided by Government initiatives promoting women's bank account ownership. The progress in indicators like married women's employment and property ownership reflect societal shifts, often taking years to show substantial progress.

As presented in figure 3, the report “Female Labour Utilization in India” (2023) of Government of India shows that among other factors, 44.5% women attribute their non-participation in labour force due to "Child care/personal commitments in home making" and 33.6% women express a preference for continuing their education rather than entering the labour force. Hence, appropriate policy measures such as child care leaves, creches at workplaces, on-job training, study leaves, maternity / medical leaves, investment in girl education, skill development and training through institutes of excellence and localized employment opportunities may lead to effective and timely results.

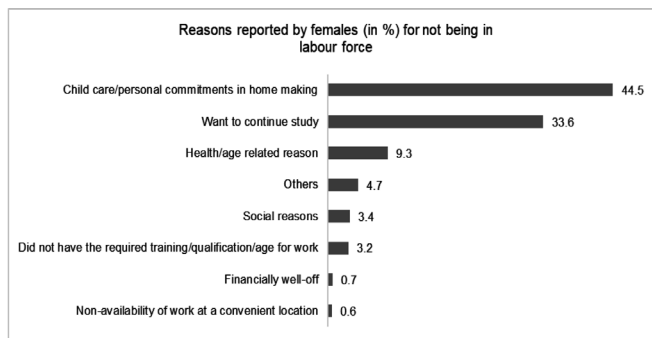


Figure 3: Reasons reported by females for not being in labour force

Source: Report “Female Labour Utilization in India” (2023) by Ministry of Labour and Employment

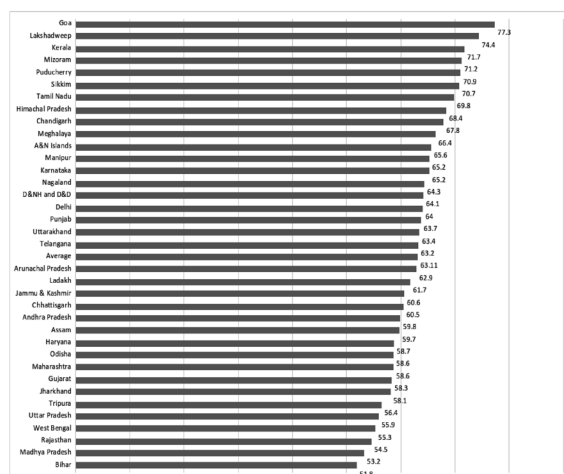
- ii. **Digital empowerment:** A 17% rise in women's mobile phone usage reflects improved ownership and proficiency in digital tools contribute to enhanced gender equity and rural digital inclusion, with 46% of rural internet users being women.⁴

⁴ (Year 2022; Internet and Mobile Association of India)

(https://www.iamai.in/sites/default/files/research/Internet%20in%20India%202022_Print%20version.pdf)

- iii. **Health:** There has been significant increase in key maternal and child healthcare parameters including those mitigating indoor air pollution. An indepth analysis, details of which are not presented here, shows a 4 percentage points decrease in prevalence of anaemia in women which could have impacted a 4.6 percentage point reduction in the neonatal mortality rate [NFHS-4 (29.5%), NFHS-5 (24.9%)] and a 5.5 percentage point reduction in the infant mortality rate [NFHS-4 (40.7%), NFHS-5 (35.2%)].
- iv. **Education:** There has been an increase of 10% in literacy rate of women which may lead to better employment opportunities and elevated social and economic status. Yet, the progress depends on societal shifts, requiring time to show significant advancement.
- v. **Decision making:** Promoting women's participation in decision-making processes is essential for reducing gender disparities, and improving their physical, mental and economic well-being. The data reflects positive development in women making their choices. Further, while percentage of women seeking help against violence remains unchanged, addressing violence against women is a complex issue that requires ongoing efforts in awareness, support services and legal protection.

Also, a State-wise status on average percentage saturation in 18 key indicators considered under NFHS-5 survey is shown in figure 4. Owing to volume of the analysis, the detailed status has not been presented here in the Paper.



**Figure 4: State-wise average percentage (descending order)
saturation on 18 key indicators of NFHS-5**

Source: NFHS- 5 survey of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Government of India, through its flagship schemes strives to empower women and accelerate the progress of women in 5 key areas namely, Economic empowerment, Digital empowerment, Health, Education and Decision making. Some of these key flagship schemes are shown in table 9.

Table 9: Key Flagship Schemes of Government of India for women

Sl. No.	Key Flagship Schemes of Government of India	Ministry / Department	Approximate Annual Budget (Rs. in thousand crores)
Total budget of all Ministries for year 2023-24 (Rs. in thousand crores) = 4500			
1	Economic Empowerment		
i	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme	Department of Rural Development	60
ii	National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)	Department of Rural Development	14.13
iii	Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDUGKY)	Department of Rural Development	0.09
iv	Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)	Department of Rural Development	54.49
v	National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)	Department of Rural Development	9.65
		Sub-total	138.36
2	Digital Empowerment		
i	Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)	Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)	2.4
3	Education		
i	Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan	Department of School Education	37.53

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ii	Beti Bachao Beti Pado / State Specific Scheme	Department of Women & Child Development	0.6
		Sub-total	38.13
4	Health & Nutrition		
i	Mid-Day Meal	Department of School Education	11.6
ii	POSHAN Abhiyan/ ICDS	Department of Women & Child Development	20.55
iii	Swachh Bharat Mission – Grameen (SBM-G)	Department of Drinking water Sanitation	7.2
iv	National Health Mission	Department of Health & Family Welfare	29.09
v	Janani Suraksha Yojana	Department of Health & Family Welfare	2.03
vi	Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana	Department of Women & Child Development	2.59
vii	Ayushman Bharat (Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY))/ State Specific Scheme	Department of Health & Family Welfare	7.2
viii	Pradhan Mantri Ujjawala Yojana (LPG Subsidy)	Ministry of Petroleum and Natural gas	22.57
		Sub-total	102.83
5	Decision Making (Leadership Skills)		
i	Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiya (Capacity Building & Training and others)	Ministry of Panchayati Raj	3.4
ii	Nai Roshni (Leadership development/Capacity building - minority women)	Ministry of Minority Affairs	0.015
		Sub-total	3.42
		Grand Total	285.14

*Reference Year: 2023-24 or the latest data as available as per indiabudget.gov.in

States are the key participants in the flagship programmes of Government of India. Hence, their participation can bring visible progress in a specific time frame.

(8) Political representation

Women's political participation facilitates women's direct engagement in public decision-making and is a means of ensuring better accountability to women. Globally, there are only 19 countries with women Heads of State with only around 26 percent representation in Parliament. While India has around 15 percent political representation of women in Parliament, it is lower than the global average of around 26 percent. However, the 128th Constitutional Amendment Bill passed vide Government of India on 9th September, 2023 is a landmark step ensuring 33 percent reservation for women in Parliament. It is estimated that this gap may be bridged soon with the implementation of this policy.

The analysis in the previous sections shows that there has been a progress in key indicators relating to women but there is a room for accelerated progress. Towards this, Panchayati Raj Institutions, constituted vide 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, of Constitution of India can play a crucial role as they provide a platform for convergence for planning and implementation of large number of flagship programmes relating to employment, education, healthcare, nutrition, drinking water & sanitation and various other sectors at the village level. In the subsequent sections, the role of grassroots level local bodies i.e. Gram Panchayats towards women's development is discussed.

Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in women's development

Women's empowerment is a global imperative crucial for sustainable development. Aligned with the UN's 2030 Agenda, India targets Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16, addressing gender equality and robust institutions. 73rd Constitutional Amendment mandates States to devolve the commensurate powers related to funds, functions and functionaries on 29 subjects including "Women and Child Development" to Panchayats to enable them to function

as units of local self-governance. Panchayats encompasses 6 lakh villages and 60 percent of the country's population in rural areas and serve as vital platforms for planning and implementing diverse flagship programs, fostering convergence in employment, education, healthcare, nutrition, and more.

Article 243D(3) of Constitution of India mandates 33 percent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), 22 States/Union Territories (UTs) have provisioned 50 percent reservation for women in PRIs. Presently, nearly 46.20 percent (around 14 lakh) of elected representatives are women, with a 28 percent increase from 2015-16 to 2019-21.

It is a matter of pride and celebration that India has emerged as a global champion in gender representation in leadership roles at grassroots levels. As shown in table 10, the grassroots level political representation in in local bodies in India exhibits nearly equal gender representation, surpassing the global average of approximately 25 percent. This signifies a positive trend toward gender inclusivity and empowerment at the local level in India, reflecting a more balanced and representative democratic process.

Table 10: Political representation of women elected leaders in local bodies

(Various Years)

S. No.	Country	Political representation of women elected leaders in local bodies (%)
1	India	44.37
2	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	35.32
3	China	32.18
4	Bangladesh	25.21
5	World	25
6	Bhutan	12.77
7	Sri Lanka	10.89

Source: Global data on women's political participation - <https://localgov.unwomen.org/data>

Status of key indicators of women's development at Gram Panchayat level

While, the national level data from periodic surveys such as NFHS or Mission Antyodaya is collected at individual and village level, respectively, it would be beneficial to present the Gram Panchayat level data on some of the important indicators relating to women development collected through sample survey.

Ministry of Panchayati Raj has collected sample-based data relating to status of Gram Panchayats (GPs) in key indicators from around 10-20 GPs in each State through its young fellows working in cluster of Panchayats in various States. The data on 5 key indicators important for women's development is presented in table 11 and represented in figure 5.

Table 11: Gram Panchayat level sample-based data collected by Ministry of Panchayati Raj on 5 key indicators of women development (Year 2023)

Sl. No.	State/UT	% of women holding active bank accounts	% of women certified through the skill development training institutes / ITIs	% of women having access to mobile and internet	% of households with access to clean gas	% of Women accessed bank loans	Average Percentage of 5 indicators relating to women
1	Kerala	98	40	95	92	85	82
2	Telangana	92	4	91	91	100	76
3	D&NH and D&D	88	12	76	98	100	75
4	Gujarat	76	8	65	83	77	62
5	Odisha	71	10	57	77	68	57
6	Assam	81	8	59	87	40	55
7	Karnataka	89	3	31	90	49	52
Average		71	14	56	76	43	52
8	Meghalaya	98	52	87	11	10	52

9	Chhattisgarh	73	10	60	70	42	51
10	Manipur	50	10	60	60	65	49
11	Mizoram	63	1	63	89	27	49
12	Tamil Nadu	63	0.4	22	93	61	48
13	Maharashtra	67	13	61	75	16	46
14	Arunachal Pradesh	78	1	60	89	1	46
15	Rajasthan	72	4	30	76	35	43
16	Jammu & Kashmir	29	64	33	80	6	42
17	Madhya Pradesh	72	3	32	62	16	37
18	Nagaland	59	16	55	44	9	37
19	Bihar	27	0	34	77	9	29

Source: MoPR records

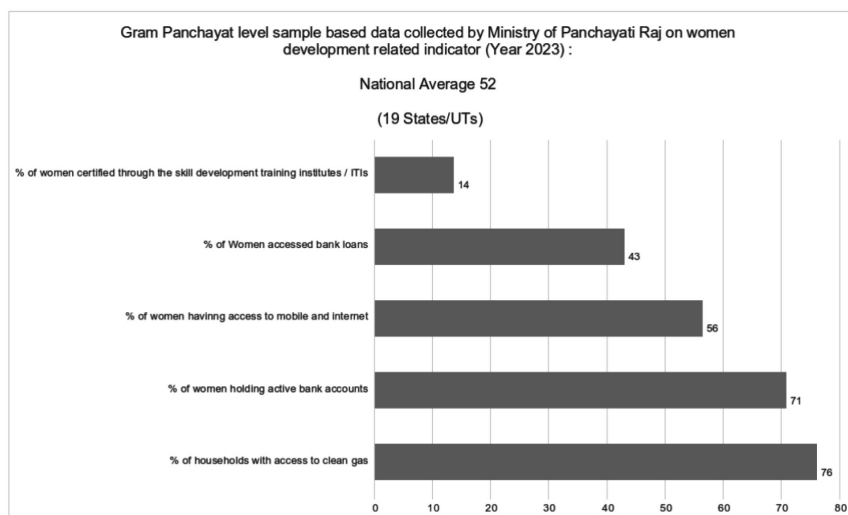


Figure 5: Gram Panchayat level sample-based data collected by Ministry of Panchayati Raj on women development related indicators (Year 2023)

Source: MoPR records

The above data shows that sufficient progress has been made on key indicators affecting women's development such as access of clean cooking fuel in households, active bank accounts and mobiles and internet. Effective implementation of concerned flagship schemes of Government of India has accelerated this progress. Particularly, usage of clean fuel for households has symbiotic effect on women's health and climate change jointly. Under PM-Ujjwala Yojana of Government of India, more than 10 crore deposit free Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) connections have been provided to adult women from poor households.

Usage of clean fuel will not only safeguard the health of women in households but will also address the climate change aspect. According to WHO's 2017 'Inheriting a Sustainable World?' 26 per cent of under-five deaths could be avoided by addressing environmental health risks. Towards climate change, Panchayats are also playing key role in awareness generation and implementation of Mission Lifestyle for Environment (Mission LiFE) on key 51 actions out of total 75 shortlisted by MoPR and affecting daily lives of rural people and climate change.

Matter of concern is that only 14 percent women are certified through the skill development training institutes for which States need to increase and improve training institutes, employ flexible methods like mobile units, afternoon sessions, and localized training and emphasis on equitable remuneration.

People's perception on role of Gram Panchayats towards women's development

People generally perceive Gram Panchayats as crucial for women's development due to their grassroots presence. However, to corroborate this, MoPR has collected sample perception data from 4,281 individuals in 252 GPs of 19 States/UTs on importance of role of Gram Panchayats for women's development. This data is presented in table 12 and figure 6.

Table 12: Perception Report: Average value of response of individuals as "Very Effective+Effective" in 19 States (252 GPs; 4281 individuals)

Response value: Yes (1) and No (0)

Sl. No.	State/UT	How important do you think it is for gram panchayats to involve the community in decision-making processes?	How do you perceive the role of your gram panchayat in providing infrastructure facilities like roads, water supply, and sanitation in your village?	How effectively do you think your gram panchayat is addressing issues related to education?	How effectively do you think your gram panchayat is addressing social issues related to women's empowerment?	How effectively do you think your gram panchayat is addressing issues related to health?	How do you perceive the role of your gram panchayat in generating employment opportunities in your village?	Average
1	Arunachal Pradesh	0.99	0.87	0.91	0.95	0.60	0.37	0.78
2	Assam	0.89	0.36	0.28	0.57	0.36	0.46	0.49
3	Bihar	0.71	0.91	0.93	0.89	0.85	0.63	0.82
4	Chhattisgarh	0.58	0.54	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.33	0.49
5	D&NH and D&D	0.71	0.91	0.80	0.97	0.71	0.60	0.79
6	Gujarat	0.75	0.96	0.79	0.74	0.79	0.64	0.78
7	Jammu & Kashmir	0.86	0.64	0.59	0.40	0.55	0.19	0.54
8	Karnataka	0.78	0.81	0.79	0.63	0.76	0.01	0.63
9	Kerala	0.91	0.91	1.00	0.82	1.00	0.64	0.88
10	Madhya Pradesh	0.92	0.67	0.74	0.77	0.75	0.46	0.72
11	Maharashtra	0.77	0.76	0.74	0.45	0.58	0.23	0.59
12	Manipur	1.00	0.67	0.93	0.90	0.38	0.37	0.71
13	Meghalaya	0.59	0.44	0.46	0.73	0.45	0.45	0.52
14	Mizoram	0.85	0.97	0.83	0.77	0.70	0.74	0.81
15	Nagaland	0.97	0.83	0.82	0.69	0.82	0.41	0.76
16	Odisha	0.87	0.72	0.73	0.69	0.67	0.41	0.68
17	Rajasthan	0.67	0.90	0.93	0.70	0.82	0.16	0.70
18	Tamil Nadu	1.00	0.84	0.57	0.54	0.74	0.66	0.73
19	Telangana	0.91	0.56	0.70	0.28	0.70	0.25	0.57
Average		0.83	0.75	0.74	0.68	0.67	0.42	0.68

Source: MoPR records

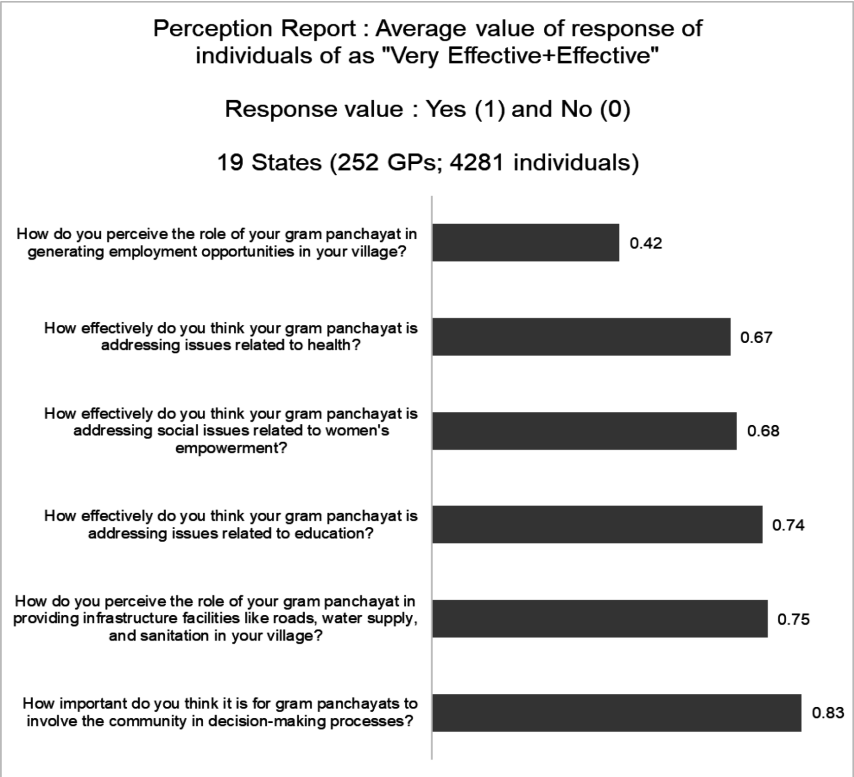


Figure 6: Perception Report: Average value of response of individuals as "Very Effective+Effective"

Source: MoPR records

Data presented in Table 12 shows that a majority of people recognize Gram Panchayats as vital catalysts for implementing schemes and key indicators relating to education, health, social issues, infrastructure facilities and decision making. Provided that Panchayats are empowered and enabled, they can play a catalytic role in implementing these indicators through active participation, and importantly employment related scheme such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme MGNREGS and skill development schemes.

Empowered Panchayats can empower women

Empowered and enabled Panchayats can effectively implement schemes and policies of the Government relating education, health, employment generation, infrastructure facilities etc. for women's development through community participation and optimizing resource utilization. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution mandates States to devolve funds, function and functionaries to Panchayati Raj Institutions under 29 subjects including "Women and Child development" to enable them to function as institutions of local self-governance. However, in essence, there are 6 key pillars of empowerment of Panchayats as defined in the report of MoPR on "Status of Devolution to Panchayats in States" (2024) as shown in table 13.

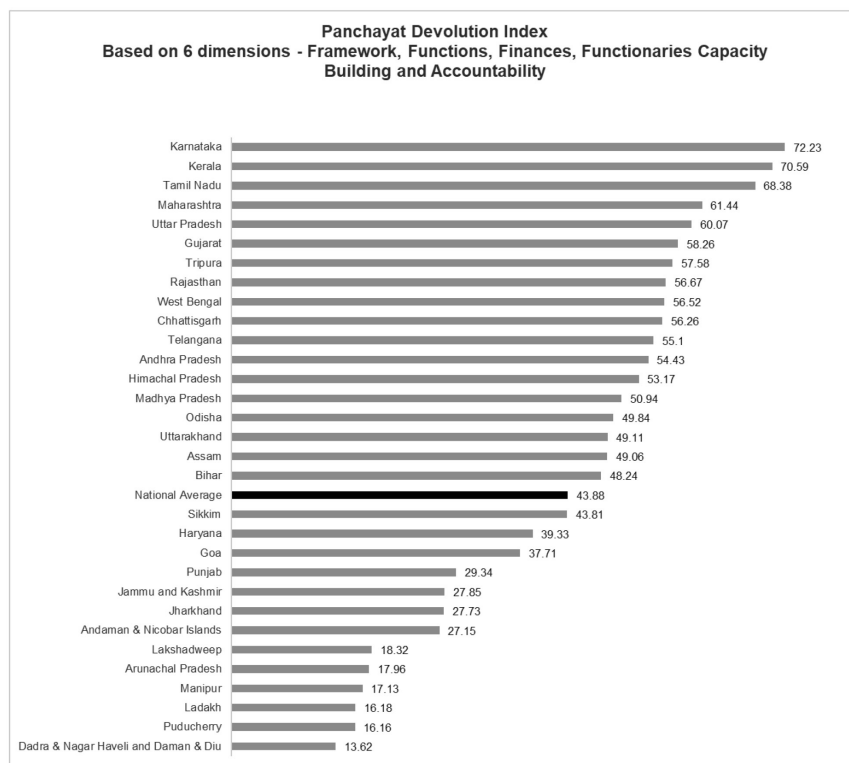
Table 13: Key pillars of Panchayats empowerment

Sl. No.	Key pillars of Panchayats empowerment	Brief description
1.	Framework	Implementation of provisions of Part IX of the Constitution such as timely conduct of Panchayats Elections (Article 243K), reservation of seats for SC/ST and Women (Article 243D) etc.
2.	Functions	Assigning of funds, functions and functionaries relating to 29 subjects in Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution and its Activity mapping etc.
3.	Finances	Devolution of Central and State Finance Commission Grants to Panchayats, Empowerment of Panchayats to Impose and Collect Revenue etc.
4.	Functionaries	Physical Infrastructure (GP Bhawan), e-Connectivity (Computers), manpower etc.
5.	Capacity Building	Basic and Specialized trainings of elected representatives, establishment of Panchayat resource centres
6.	Accountability	Auditing of Panchayat accounts, social audit, conduct of Gram Sabhas etc.

Based on scoring of States out of 100 on the above mentioned

6 key pillars in this study, a State-wise “Panchayat Devolution Index” has been calculated as presented in figure 7.

Figure 7: State-wise “Panchayat Devolution Index”



Source: Records of Ministry of Panchayati Raj

The key inference from the figure above is that the empowerment status of Panchayats in the States are at varying degrees. In the States, especially below national average of 43.88, timely interventions regarding effective devolution of funds, function and manpower to Panchayats, implementation of related Constitutional provisions, providing curated capacity building & training to elected representatives of Panchayats for better accountability may enable them function as institutions of local self-governance.

Most critical pillars out of 6 key pillars: “Functionaries”,

“Capacity Building” and “Accountability” for Panchayats empowerment

Functionaries

Availability of manpower and infrastructure in Panchayats is very important to accelerate implement schemes and interventions on various sectors including women's development. A study conducted by MoPR on “Human Resources in Panchayats” (2023) MoPR recommends staff requirements for the GPs congruent to their population and estimated annual cost as shown in table 14. Around 25 percent of the said requirement could be met from the Administrative Cost Head of Account of Central Finance Commission grants (Fifteenth) and remaining could be converged from resources of the States or other schemes.

Table 14: Tentative staff requirements for the GPs as per study conducted by MoPR on “Human Resources in Panchayats” (2023)

Group	Population of GP	Minimum staff requirement	Total annual cost (Rs. In crores)	Expected annual share from Central Finance Commission grants (Rs. In cores)
Category of staff: Panchayat Development officer/Secretary, Junior Clerk, Computer Operator/Technical Assistant/Clerk, Tax Collector, Cleaning/Health Staff, Rojgar Sevak				
1	Less than 2500	6	13,443	3733.75
2	2500 to 5000	8	19,053	3856.25
3	5000 to 10,000	12	3,937	571.25
4	More than 10,000	18	5,218	496.25
Total		44	41,651	8657.5 (i.e. 25% of total annual cost)

Source: Study conducted by MoPR on “Human Resources in Panchayats” (2023)

It may be therefore suggested that by allocating and utilizing around 25 percent grants from each of the Central Finance Commission and State Finance Commission and also own resources of States and Panchayats, upgradation of the manpower may be done by the end of upcoming 5 years period of 16th Finance Commission commencing from year 2026-27.

Further, GPs must have own Panchayat building having at least a meeting hall, one room, mini auditorium, computers well connected with internet, video conference facilities and Common Service Centres to be co-located or anywhere in GP for effectively performing their functions. These self-sufficient structures for GP play a pivotal role in facilitating local governance, community development, and public engagement. For this, Central and State Finance Commission grants and States own resources could be allocated and utilized.

Estimates made by the Ministry, as shown in table 15, shows that financial implication for infrastructural upgradation of GP Bhawans would cost around 51,784 crore rupees.

Table 15: Estimates on financial implication for infrastructural upgradation of GP Bhawans

Item	Number	Estimated unit cost needed to provide lacking facility	Total estimated cost (Rs. in crore)
GP Bhawans	30,568	Rs.50 lakh	15284
GP Bhawans infrastructure upgradation	1.30 lakh	Rs.25 lakh	32500
Logistic upgradation of GP Bhawans	2 lakh	Rs.2 lakh	4000
			51784

Source: MoPR records

Capacity Building

Ministry of Panchayati Raj supports training and infrastructure needs of Panchayats through States/UTs. During the last 3 years, 30 lakh trainings have been provided to Panchayat elected representatives. For supporting the training needs of Panchayats, there are Panchayat Resource Centres in 1050 out of 6707 Block Panchayats, 598 out of 667 District Panchayats and 26 States. Estimates made by the Ministry shows that financial implication for establishing Panchayat Resource Centres in rented buildings at Block, District and State level in remaining Panchayats would cost around Rs.714 crore, which includes recurring costs. This could be availed from Central Finance Commission Grants, State Finance Commission grants, other State resources and Own Source Revenue panchayats.

Accountability

Ministry is enabling e-governance at Panchayat level for better planning and implementation through thematic Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) which encompasses women related developmental aspects. Further, Panchayats are using AuditOnline portal of the Ministry (<https://auditonline.gov.in/>) in which for the year 2021-22, 2.4 lakh GPs have generated audit reports. Similarly, there are other portals which enables Panchayats for e-procurement through Government e Marketplace (GeM) portal for better accountability and transparency.

Empowered Panchayats can provide better infrastructure and facilities for overall development of women

Better infrastructure facilities for women at local level can serve as catalysts for women's development by addressing barriers to education, healthcare, economic participation, safety, and overall quality of life. These improvements not only benefit individual women but also contribute to the social and economic development of entire communities.

Panchayats can play a catalytic role in providing better infrastructure and facilities for overall development of women. The statement is corroborated by positive correlation (table 16 and figure 8) between 3 metrics namely, Panchayat Development Index (2024),

average percentage of facilities in village (Mission Antyodaya or MA 2020 survey) and women’s developmental status (NFHS-5 survey) discussed in sections above.

Further, women’s development status as per NFHS-5 survey has been correlated with a new metric obtained from MoPR’s study which gives State-wise ranking of Panchayats on 4 parameters namely, (i) Formation of Women Groups, (ii) Pre and Post Natal care for women, (iii) Immunization and Nutrition for women and children (iv) Use/Involvement of Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) in planning.

Table 16: Correlation coefficient between ranking of States on devolution of powers to Panchayats versus average percentage of women related infrastructure/facilities available in a representative village as per Mission Antyodaya 2020 survey

Sl. No.	State/UT	Panchayat Devolution Index (2024) (MoPR study report)*	Average percentage of facilities available in a village relating to women's welfare (MA 2020 Survey)**	Average percentage of saturation in 5 key areas of women's development considered under NFHS (2019-21)*** (Economic empowerment, Digital empowerment, Health, Education and Decision making)	Ranking of States on four women related parameters as per MoPR's study on GPDP
1.	A&N Islands	27.15	54	66	18
2.	Andhra Pradesh	54.43	53	60	8
3.	Arunachal Pradesh	17.96	30	63	26
4.	Assam	49.06	37	60	6
5.	Bihar	48.24	29	52	27
6.	Chhattisgarh	56.26	54	60	18

7.	Goa	37.71	41	77	18
8.	Gujarat	58.26	54	58	10
9.	Haryana	39.33	53	59	11
10.	Himachal Pradesh	53.17	33	68	6
11.	Jammu & Kashmir	27.85	43	61	16
12.	Jharkhand	27.73	33	58	23
13.	Karnataka	72.23	38	65	16
14.	Kerala	70.59	67	72	6
15.	Madhya Pradesh	50.94	45	53	19
16.	Maharashtra	61.44	51	59	21
17.	Manipur	17.13	35	65	14
18.	Odisha	49.84	39	59	16
19.	Punjab	29.34	43	64	25
20.	Rajasthan	56.67	33	54	8
21.	Sikkim	43.81	40	71	10
22.	Tamil Nadu	68.38	49	70	1
23.	Telangana	55.1	53	63	9
24.	Tripura	57.58	48	56	19
25.	Uttar Pradesh	60.07	41	56	14
26.	Uttarakhand	49.11	43	63	10
27.	West Bengal	56.52	42	55	8

	Metric / Indicator	Correlation coefficient
(a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panchayat Devolution Index (2024) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average percentage of facilities available in a village relating to women's welfare 	+0.4
(b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average percentage of facilities available in a village relating to women's welfare 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average percentage of saturation in 5 key areas of women's development considered under NFHS (2019-21) 	+0.2

(c)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Average percentage of saturation in 5 key areas of women's development considered under NFHS (2019-21)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ranking of States on four women related parameters as per MoPR's study on GPDP	-0.3 (Negative correlation because low numerical value of rank means better performance of State. However, the correlation is directly proportional)

Source:

- MoPR study report on “Status of Devolution to Panchayats in States” (2024)
- Kumar, C. S., & Sharma, M. (2023). Realisation of Sustainable Development Goals Through Panchayati Raj Institutions. Indian Journal of Public Administration, 69(4), 877-902; <https://missionantyodaya.nic.in/>
- NFHS 5 (2019-21)
- **4 Parameters considered (i) Formation of Women Groups, (ii) Pre and Post Natal care for women, (iii) Immunization and Nutrition for women and children (iv) Use/Involvement of Women SHGs in planning (GPDP) as per the study conducted by Ministry of Panchayati Raj on “Status, Processes, Problems in Preparation of Gram Panchayat Development plan (GPDP) and its Impact on Panchayat Service Delivery and Way forward for further strengthening of GPDP” (2023) ranks the States on parameters, inter-alia, relating to women's development at Gram Panchayat level.

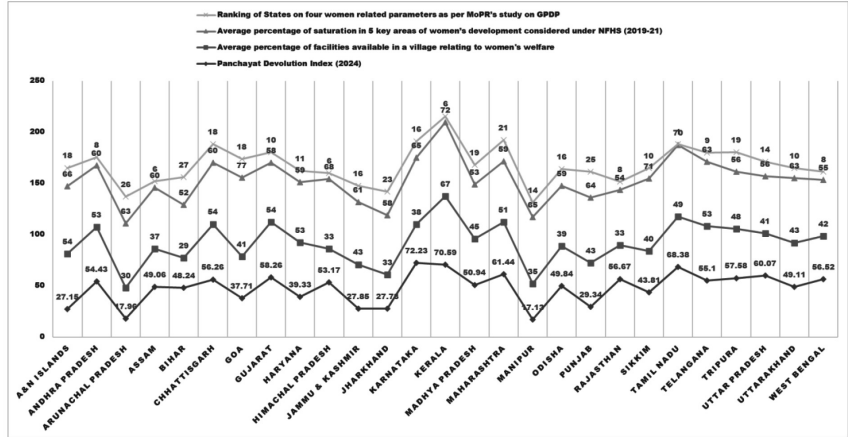


Figure 8: State-wise Panchayat Development Index, Average percentage of facilities available for women (MA 2020 survey) and overall women's development in 5 key areas (NFHS 5 survey)
Source: MoPR records, Mission Antyodaya Survey 2020, NFHS-5

The data in figure above shows direct correlation of between three metrics of Panchayat Devolution Index (2024), women related facilities available in a village, women's development across 5 key areas under NFHS (2019-21) and ranking of States on four women related parameters (MoPR's study on GPDP). This signifies that empowering panchayats with funds, functions and manpower alongwith adequate training & capacity building may help in improving facilities in Panchayats which can enable in improving the overall status of women in related indicators.

Conclusion

Both globally and in India, there is disparity in key indicators of women's development such as health, infrastructure and employment. However, there is a visible progress on these indicators. The analysis presented above suggests that for accelerating the progress on these indicators, Panchayats need to be empowered on 6 key pillars namely, Framework, Functions, Finances, Functionaries, Capacity Building and Accountability.

Out of all, the most important aspect is to devolve adequate funds functions and manpower to Panchayats and provide their representatives with adequate training & capacity building which may catalyze the progress on providing adequate facilities and other key indicators relating to overall development of women.

Further, convergence in planning, implementation and monitoring of flagship schemes of the government can support Panchayats in focussed interventions and appropriate utilization of limited resources. Ministry of Panchayati Raj is supporting Gram Panchayats to prepare Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) on 9 "Localization of Sustainable Development Goals" based themes⁵ many of which concerns women developmental issues. GPDPs of around 2.5 lakhs GPs for the year 2023-24 includes 1 crore activities of resource envelope of Rs.1 lakh crore, including large numbers of flagship programmes of Government of India. Outcome on many

⁵ (i) Poverty free and enhanced livelihoods Village, (ii) Healthy Village, (iii) Child friendly Village, (iv) Water sufficient Village, (v) Clean and Green Village, (vi) Self-sufficient infrastructure in Village, (vii) Socially Just & Socially Secured Village, (viii) Village with good governance and (ix) Women-friendly Village.

of these activities have direct or indirect bearing on well-being of women living in rural areas.

It is also important to encourage gender-neutral behaviour in parenting, cooking, housekeeping, self-defence, driving, and financial independence to shoulder the responsibilities equally with women to support their economical progress.

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Let's Consecrate India's Growth Story

The advent of automation and AI and the consequent diminishing importance of cheap labour makes it necessary to reimagine the 3Es

India faces a very different world in 2024 than China did in 1978. Companies are moving production closer to customers so they can respond faster to demand changes. Automation is slowing the attractiveness of lower wages. A new book, *Fully Grown* by Dietrich Vollrath, suggests a rich country's slow growth is a sign of success. Research, design, and maintenance are starting to matter more than production. Politics is having an antibiotic reaction to trade and immigration. This means that rich countries – with their skilled workforces, large capital pools, huge customer bases, better infrastructure, higher state capacity, world-leading universities, and high-tech companies – are actively authoring globalisation differently from the one China took advantage of 30 years ago; a supercycle of global growth, policy trade openness and a deconstruction of manufacturing supply chains that made low-cost labour valuable.

India's economic potential has always been higher than our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and the 1991 reforms sought to correct this. Over the last decade, reforms such as Goods and Services Tax (GST), Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), Inflation targeting, Fiscal conservatism, Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Road Building, Jan Vishwas, and National Education Policy (NEP) have prepared India for a cycle of higher productivity because our problem is not jobs but wages. We have never had a shortage of land as we could give every Indian household half an acre, and they would fit into Rajasthan and Haryana, labour, out of 58% of the labour force from the total population, about 30-35% is in employed poverty and capital when we make ourselves worthy, there

is no shortage; about 50% of our Foreign Direct Investment since 1947 has come in the last seven years. This diagnosis is important as India does not have a job problem, it is wages; job problems are easier to resolve than a battle for wages. We must pursue industrialisation, formalisation, urbanisation, financialisation, and skill development to promote **the 3Es of employment, employability, and education**. This will place India's workforce in a position to deliver higher productivity, better skills, and thus demand a wage premium. To achieve these objectives, we propose the following reforms:

EMPLOYMENT

India's formal job explosion is being delayed by three pending economic reforms that are unavoidable, inevitable, and overdue. The earlier they happen, the earlier we create the 200 million new formal, private, and productive jobs we need and thus achieve the desired outcome of moving people out of employed poverty and towards at least 50% formal employment.

Social Security

Societies need safety nets to catch those in need because of unlucky opening balances, past mistakes, or hard times. However, in its current state, our employer-linked social security system suffers from insufficient coverage of the worker population. It is ridden with structural inefficiencies and is severely inadequate to provide for the needs of an individual due to which only 7.4 lac (11.7%) of 6.3 crore enterprises and only 5 crore (9.5%) of our 55 crore labour force make monthly social security contributions, Return on Investment (RoI) is quite low. Paradoxically, 54% of India's regular wage/salaried workforce does not receive social security benefits. A significant 57% of women and 53% of men are not eligible for any social security benefits. Furthermore, self-employed individuals constitute 57.3% of India's labour, and 22% of casual labourers are excluded from the social security safety net. Therefore, more than 79% of India's labour force, or 44 crore people, are working in non-permanent, non-salary jobs and are beyond the purview of this social security net.

India's labour is handicapped without capital and our capital is

handicapped without labour. We need urgent reforms for wages to reduce the gap between haath waali (net) salary and chitthi waali (gross) salary caused by social security deductions. In the current state employees and employers are required to make an obligatory 12% contribution to (Employees' Provident Fund Organisation) EPFO. In a cost-to-company world, this mandatory contribution diminishes net salary rather than increasing gross salary. There is nothing wrong with mandatory savings but setting them well beyond the savings rate for that income bracket is irrationality that breeds informal employment. The mandatory deductions/costs of about 35% and 5% for Rs 5500 and Rs 55,000 monthly salary respectively are lopsided especially as research suggests the savings rate for individuals with incomes below Rs 25,000 per month is close to zero. The household savings rate as a proportion of GDP was 12% in 2020-21 and 5% in 2022-23 hitting a 47-year low. The lack of discretionary purchasing power has a direct influence on economic growth as it impairs the creation of a virtuous cycle of growth.

Hence, Employees should get two choices: whether to make any employee contributions (12%) and opt out of the defined benefit Employee Pension Scheme (EPS) and contribute this to their core fund (8.33%). A reduction in deduction will thus emerge as a double-edged sword that will improve the savings-to-spending ratio while at the same time boosting formalisation.

Ease-of-Doing Business

The wage problem in India can only be resolved by high wages that only formal, productive employers can pay. But our 6.3 crore enterprises only translate to 25,000 companies with a paid-up capital of Rs 10 crores because regulatory cholesterol encourages informality. Our employers confront over 1500+ Acts, 6000+ filings, 25,000+ jail provisions, and 67,000+ compliances. Counterintuitively, this cholesterol is a thorn in the flesh for big employers but a dagger in the heart for small employers. Our excessive regulatory cholesterol of 26,134 jail provisions is embedded in employer compliance. About 17,819 of these jail provisions arise from job creation legislation. About 80% of all employer jail provisions arise from state legislation. Unreasonable jail provisions encourage transmission losses between

what is written, interpreted, practiced, and enforced, and can be addressed with the following:

Rationalise by reducing the number of applicable acts/compliances. A risk-based, faceless, presence-free, and cashless inspection procedure is in demand. Digital interfaces for new license applications, renewals, return filings, inspection requests, etc. must be created.

Decriminalise by identifying and reducing provisions for criminalisation. Except for a few egregious violations, all business punishments must be monetary, and an appropriate policy response should be to seize those gains and more. Furthermore, the legislature must examine all imprisonment clauses every five years. The Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023, was a significant step towards decriminalization that eliminated 183 clauses. The bill is excellent, but Version 2.0 must raise ambition (Version 1.0 only cut 2%), by eliminating every jail provision that does not meet agreed criteria, and incentivise replication by states.

Digitise by establishing a single digital platform for compliance across all ministries and levels of government, imagined as the National Open Compliance Grid. This grid facilitates the effortless exchange of information between entrepreneurs and the government through a network of RegTechs.

The agenda is clear: rationalise, decriminalise, and digitise our regulatory cholesterol. The outcome is a reduction in our 6.3 crore total enterprises but a rise in our social security-paying enterprises from 10 -12 lakhs.

Labour Codes

The government has concluded a consolidation exercise to unite labour laws into four labour codes: the Code on Wages, the Industrial Relations Code, the Social Security Code, and the Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, although this has not yet been implemented.

The world has evolved, and we propose combining these four into one that is smaller and simpler. We anticipate that implementing one labor code will be the key to attracting manufacturing jobs,

particularly for Chinese factory refugees. It is critical to recognize that the low fraction of our labour force employed in labour-intensive industries is due in part to our labour rules. Another effect of the new labour code would be formalisation. The top manufacturing enterprises are presently twenty-four times more productive than those at the bottom. As a result, the lowest-performing enterprises become trapped in a vicious cycle of low productivity and pay.

We need enormous businesses that can boost productivity while paying the wage premium. The United States (US) economy is eight times larger than ours, with 3.1 crore enterprises to 6.3 crore. As a result, the idea that India needs millions of enterprises to address the job crisis is unlikely to be true.

EMPLOYABILITY

The nation's education system is failing to provide the learning outcomes in schools and higher education that are necessary for successful economic trajectories. Second, as emphasized by the National Education Policy 2020, education and skills systems are segregated to the disadvantage of our children; skills need to be inextricably linked to education and vice versa. Third, under pressure to effectively engage the enormous young demographic, governments have prioritised training, but the relationship with businesses has been unstable at best. Over time, this has created a chasm between education and training on the one hand, and job market demands on the other. Neither the quality nor the substance of education and training fully meets the needs of the labour market. So, for the jobs that do exist, companies are unable to locate qualified candidates; workers, despite training, frequently fail to find work; and thus, an already unfulfilled labour market is worse.

Skill Development

India has a 10% unemployment rate among young people aged 15–29. Rural unemployment rates are lower than those in urban areas. Rural male unemployment is 8.3%, female unemployment is 7.4%, whereas urban male unemployment is 13.8% and female unemployment is at a precarious rate of 21.7%. There is a critical situation with the student pool who have completed their various

levels of education; graduates (13.4%) have the highest level of unemployment, followed by diploma/certificate courses (12.2%), postgraduates and above (12.1%), and secondary and above (7.3%). India's overall highest four-decade unemployment rate, according to data from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), is just 6.1 percent, which is regarded as full employment in many Western nations. The primary concern is not unemployment, but rather severe underemployment caused by skill deficit.

India is the world's second-largest producer of undergraduate and graduate Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) students with around 4 crore higher education students enrolled at various levels [certificate, diploma, Post Graduate (PG) diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate, Master of Philosophy (Mphil) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)]. This young workforce can catapult India's economic growth. However, only 47% of this workforce is considered to be employable. The need of the hour is to provide adequate opportunities for training through apprenticeships which can help mitigate the skill gap and thus, harness the full potential of our youth and prepare them for the job market. The NEP 2020 provisions for the integration and mainstreaming of vocational education with general education to help students acquire the various skills to meet the needs of industries and improve the quality of education. Therefore, it is essential to create a seamless integration between the needs of the industry and the education that we provide to our youth. We also have to learn scale; we have to accept that we are a big country. Quality will come; quality arises from an expansion of quantity. This notion of getting to quality by controlling quantity has not worked for the last 60 years. It is time to question that assumption from an education public policy perspective.

Everybody doesn't need to be an engineer. The NEP 2020 aims to introduce at least 50% of learners to vocational education in both the school and higher education systems by 2025. The goal has to be leveraging vocational education in the higher education sector to address skill shortages or demand and supply gap of talent in the market.

Work Integrated Learning Programs

It is noteworthy that the number of apprentices in India is currently less than 7 lakh, with an average annual growth rate of 30-35%, which accounts for only 0.03% of the apprentice participation in the Indian workforce. Increasing this percentage to 3-4%, or achieving a similar level of engagement of 2 crore apprentices in the coming years, may seem like an overly ambitious goal. However, a rough estimation suggests that this target is not only desirable but also achievable. On average, 0.5-0.6 crore people join the workforce every year, which could contribute 1.5-2.4 lakh apprentices to the ecosystem. Evidence from around the world supports the notion that an apprentice's transition into the workforce is easier than a non-apprentice's. Despite India's long history of apprenticeships and the Apprentice Act, which has been in effect since 1961 in some capacity, the practice has not taken off. Less than 200,000 young people sign apprenticeship contracts annually in a workforce of 55 crore.

In today's fast-paced world, it has become imperative for individuals to acquire the skills needed by employers. At the same time, the rising talent crunch and skill deficit mandate that employers focus on encouraging and participating in Work Based Learning (WBL) programs and apprenticeships. The government must raise employer participation from 2.45% to 10% to enhance employability and fructify India's goal of becoming the 'skill capital of the world'.

Degree Apprenticeships

Over the last two decades, we have discovered that five design principles are crucial for skill development: earning while learning, learning by doing, learning with degree connectivity, learning with multi-modal delivery, and learning with signalling value. Integrating these principles or on-the-job training into academic degree programs or vocational studies can assist in reconstructing the education, skills, and employment continuum. When properly implemented, apprenticeships may be thought of as 1/3 formal education, 1/3 vocational training, and 1/3 employment exchange. Apprenticeships not only promise enhanced outcomes for young people, but they also have the potential to provide companies with a decent return on investment by creating scalability and enhancing access to a bespoke talent pool.

Degree apprenticeship (DA) is an innovation in the talent supply chain that perfectly blends education with skills, enhances youth employability, and makes skill development financially viable through industry-active involvement (stipend and sponsorship). To achieve this aim, we must expand substantially faster to align our demographic dividend with predicted economic growth. Two important areas to focus on are: 1. Linking apprenticeship with higher education through degree apprenticeships 2. Encouraging more Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to engage with apprentices as we have 6.3 crore SMEs; if 30% hire one apprentice, we could grow to 2 crore apprentices.

EDUCATION

India's higher education environment is one of the biggest in the world, with over 58,000+ institutions serving 4.1 crore students and supported by 16 lakh teachers. However, it confronts hurdles in fulfilling global standards for higher education access, quality, research output, industrial linkages, and faculty growth. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 intends to increase India's higher education Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035, propelling Indian universities into the top 100 of worldwide rankings. The glide path to lower graduate unemployment with higher wages and productivity lies in increasing GER to 50% by 2035. This will require massifying higher education, vocationalisation of higher education, and allowing innovation in building world-class institutions.

Massification of higher education

India's higher education system is the third largest in the world after China and the United States of America. The main sources for the financing of higher education in India include government funds, funds from self-governing bodies, tuition fees, donations, scholarships, educational cess, and so on. Although higher education qualifies among the most important investments in the government's five-year plans, India's education sector is underfunded, allocating only 2.9% of its GDP towards education. In contrast, China invests 4.01% of its GDP in education. This discrepancy in funding is a significant factor that impacts the quality of education and learning outcomes.

The gap in education outcomes will need to be mitigated by scaling up skill universities that are 1/4th college, 1/4th employment exchange, 1/4th Industrial Training Institute (ITI), and 1/4th apprenticeship. Today, only seven out of 993 universities are allowed to offer digital degrees. We will need to have a new architecture for regulation instead of the current regime that confuses universities with buildings.

The acceptance and increasing effectiveness of online learning will mean that the biggest costs for learning – travel and stay – are no longer alibis for the lack of a vibrant learning ecosystem. Academic institutions must leverage this momentum and embrace online education as a valuable tool for enhancing workforce development and academic achievements.

Vocationalisation of higher education

One of the significant challenges facing skill programs is their inability to compete with or replace traditional higher education due to the signaling value associated with degrees. However, this challenge can be mitigated or overcome through innovation. By allowing universities to launch online courses, they can create programs that combine certificate and diploma programs with apprenticeships and higher education. This approach can create new opportunities that substantially address the problem of graduate employability.

The UGC has also approved the draft guidelines which will allow industry experts to play the role of faculty for three years in a college. The assignation of people from the industry in faculty positions will encourage the transformation of our higher learning model from being very theoretical to one that focuses more on practical applications. This will go a long way in addressing the current Achilles heel of our education system which is criticized for being excessively notional.

Mitigating the Industry-Academia gap will bring parity in allocating signalling value to skill development. It will also draw attention towards strengthening teacher training and encouraging continuous learning and upgradation of skills.

Deregulating higher education

Deregulation of higher education among accredited universities can create opportunities for collaboration between academia, industry, and students. Offline learning accessibility and online flexibility can allow for the blending of theoretical learning with skill development and on-the-job training. By utilising this approach, universities can develop programs that produce graduates who are well-equipped to meet the demands of the job market. Therefore, the adoption of innovative approaches towards skilling while earning leads to formal employment and can make apprenticeships a desirable career path while significantly increasing the GER.

The secret to strengthening the education system in India lies in revamping the governance structures in higher education. In his book entitled 'Building Universities that Matter, Professor Pankaj Chandra, Vice Chancellor of Ahmedabad University, reiterates the need for institutes of higher education to be self-regulatory and self-correcting. He suggests the best way to implement this mechanism is by creating an enabling environment where an institution makes its own decisions instead of being dictated top-down. There can continue to be regulatory machinery in place comprising of an educational board, accreditation agencies, data agencies, fast dispute resolution systems, and so on.

Although universities have been around for a long time, the concept of earning while learning is relatively new and requires significant reforms to accelerate its adoption so that we can pave the way to create world-class centers of excellence.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

“It's not burn baby burn, but learn, baby, learn so that you can earn, baby, earn,” said Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the civil rights activist. These words ring true in India today as it strives to become a strong contender for a place among the leading knowledge economies of the world.

There is a significant dissonance among the 3Es of employment, employability, and education so much so that education no longer guarantees decent employment. Studies show that those with higher

levels of education constitute over 30% of the unemployed. It is imperative to revamp the higher education model to include equal participation of the corporate sector in all aspects of education and skill development. India's 6.3 crore enterprises need to have a say in the educational training of nearly 4 crore students of higher education. The higher education sector comprising 1168 universities, 45,000 colleges and 12,000 stand-alone institutions must collaborate with employers for curriculum, faculty, governance, finances, and recruitment to nurture our demographic dividend and consecrate India's place in the sun. India with its demographic dividend is the land of possibility, and it is up to us to realize its full potential; for in the words of Gandhiji, "the future depends on what we do in the present."

Reforms since 1991 have radically improved the Indian Economy and Reforms since 2014 have radically improved the formal Indian Economy. But every doctor knows that a treatment 90% complete is incomplete. Montek Ahluwalia recounts a Prime Minister's longing in his wonderful new book *Backstage*, "What we need is growth that falls like the rains on the mountains and flows down in streams to the valleys and plains below, not growth that is like snow, which sticks to the mountain tops". Creating millions of jobs will make our economy and society truly inclusive for the poorest 200 million Indians who need these reforms.

Agitations In India: Constitutional Aspects

India was born as a result of a national struggle for independence, at a time when large parts of the world were under colonial rule. The British politician Macaulay introduced English in the education system of India, hoping to showcase to the Indians the advantages of adopting British culture, way of living, philosophy and literature. However, he never realised that by doing so, he was opening the minds of the Indian intellectuals to the wider democratic philosophies of the world. He thought that the new education system, soaked in the English language, would produce efficient clerks who would help in running the well-oiled colonial system of the British Raj. He did not realise that it would also bring the Indians in touch with the British Bill of Rights or the ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity embedded in the history of the French and American revolutions. In this way the British sowed the seeds of their own destruction not only in India but in all their colonial territories where they introduced their education systems.

The Indian leaders imbibed the virtues of the British Parliamentary system of governance and desired to have a similar system of their own, free from the yoke of the British. They read the history of the English people, who agitated against the tyrannical rule of their Kings, who were exploiting them, and thus won the right to have their representatives who would control the power of the King to spend the money collected through taxes, by ensuring that the Budget had to be first approved by the peoples representatives and the King had then to sign on the dotted line. The revolution gave the right for self-rule in Great Britain, followed by the American War of Independence.

Indians began to dream of independence, led by the British educated, home-grown leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, Jinnah, Subhash Chandra Bose and several others. They agitated for self-rule and motivated the masses to join in massive agitations, protests and demonstrations. A vast variety of public movements directed towards either political and social reforms, or towards a radical transformation of the polity or social structure of the country emerged. While at one end were the quiet requests to redress some wrong or to ask for more representations in the civil services, at the other end were attempts at either violent insurrections or at nonviolent overthrow of the foreign regime. Agitations took different forms such as fasting, picketing, civil disobedience, breaking of specific laws such as the Salt Act and opposing imposition of prohibitory orders and courting arrests.

Finally, the Britishers were left with no choice but to leave the country, creating the two Dominions of India and Pakistan. The Constituent Assembly of India adopted a Constitution largely based on the Government of India Act enacted by the British in 1935, but which at the same time included the Articles on Fundamental Rights based on the French, American, Irish, British and the Australian constitutions as well as the objectives of the nationalist movement like protecting the interests of the tillers of the soil.

To free the people ruled by the powerful Maharajas, chieftains and Rajas of the 567 princely states, the leaders of the Congress encouraged the formation of Praja Mandals, in which the people of that State demonstrated and agitated against their feudal rulers and campaigned for their removal. The freedom fighters strongly supported such actions. The seeds of agitations in India were thus sown in the freedom movement itself. While the leaders of the freedom movement thought it necessary to introduce these agitational concepts to oust the British, they never thought that this would continue even after Independence. But they did.

In this background let us examine the types of agitations in post independent India and the methods adopted by the agitators to achieve their objectives. Broadly speaking the major Agitations after 1950 may be classified as follows:

- A. Agitations for Formation of States on Linguistic basis
- B. Agitations for Reservations
- C. Anti-Hindi agitations
- D. Anti-Corruption movements
- E. Water disputes between States
- F. Student movements

Let us examine each of them.

Formation of States on Linguistic Basis

One of the first agitations faced in independent India was the demand for a separate State of Andhra in 1952. The Telegu speaking population of Tamil Nadu did not want to be a part of the existing Madras state. Potti Sreeramulu, who was leading the agitation, went on a lengthy fast, and only stopped his hunger strike when Prime Minister Nehru promised to meet his demand. However, when nothing happened in the next three months, Sreeramulu started fasting again. This caught the people's attention throughout the State. Despite several strikes and demonstrations by the Telegu people, the Centre procrastinated in the declaration of a separate Telegu State. The Andhra Committee of the Indian National Congress (INC) had also disapproved of the fast.

On 15th December 1952, Sreeramulu died while fasting. In the funeral procession, the Telegu crowd went into a frenzy and resorted to destruction of public property. Some people were killed in clashes with the police and normal life was disrupted in Madras and throughout the Telegu speaking districts. On December 19th, 1952, Jawaharlal Nehru announced a separate State for the Telegu speaking people. Parliament passed the Andhra State Act in 1953.

Formation of the first linguistic State paved the way for the creation of linguist States in the coming years.

As demands for more linguist States arose in various parts of the country, Prime Minister Nehru announced the setting up of a States Reorganisation Committee to examine the creation of States based on

the linguistic criteria. On the basis of this Report, the provisions of the Constitution classifying States as A,B,C, and D was abolished and a new category of Union Territories were added. The Constitution (Seventh Amendment Act, 1956) divided the State of Assam into Arunachal, Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya and changed the boundary of several States. Andhra State got enlarged with the addition of the Telegu speaking areas of Hyderabad and was then formally called Andhra Pradesh. Later, the movement for a separate State of Telangana started in 1969. The movement saw violent agitations in 1985, followed by increasing number of demonstrations in 2001, 2004 and 2009. The Telangana Rashtra Samiti was formed under the leadership of K C Rao in 2001. Parliament witnessed strong debates on this issue, and finally the 29th State of Telangana was created on 2nd June 2014.

GOA

The next important struggle that took place was for the end of Portuguese rule in Goa. The freedom fighters came over from India and with the active support of the Indian Army and Navy, Goa was freed from Portuguese rule together with Dadar and Nagar Haveli. By the 12th amendment to the Constitution, these three territories were made Union territories. Later Goa was declared as a separate State.

SIKKIM

Similar agitations in 1975, supported by the Government of India, led to the removal of the Chogyal in Sikkim and by the 35th amendment to the Constitution, Sikkim became a State of the Union of India.

In both the cases of Goa and Sikkim, the Government of India gave strong support to the freedom fighters in these States. If we can say so, it was, in both cases, that the State (Government of India) sponsored and supported agitation, though of course in National interest.

Reservation Agitations

Gujarat witnessed two anti-reservation agitations, once in 1981

and the other in 1985. In 1981, the cause was the reservation of seats in medical colleges for the scheduled castes. The students were able to garner massive financial support in their fight against these reservations. Cities of Baroda and Ahmedabad witnessed unprecedented violence between the Harijans and the upper castes.

In 1985, the people belonging to the Patidar community sought Other Backward Class status. Public Demonstrations were held throughout Gujarat. At least 14 people were killed, and more than 200 buses and other public properties were damaged. Government of Gujarat announced 10% quota for economically backward classes in April 2016 but this was quashed by the Gujarat High Court. Finally in January 2019, Parliament of India amended the constitution granting 10% reservation for the Economically weaker sections.

MANDAL COMMISSION

The Mandal Commission was set up in 1979 by Morarji Desai to identify the socially or educationally backward classes to consider the question of seat reservations and quotas for people to redress caste discrimination. The Report was submitted to the President in December 1980. It recommended 27% reservation quota for OBC's. VP Singh's Government in 1989 accepted the recommendations. Protests immediately started. Unique features of the protests and riots were bandhs, hartals and dharnas. Rajiv Goswami was the first student to attempt self-immolation. However, the Government stuck to its stand and reservation up to 27% for OBCs has become the law through the 93rd amendment of the Constitution. This amendment allows the Government to make special provisions for the "advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens". 37 people died in these protests.

GURJAR AGITATION IN RAJASTHAN

The Gurjar Agitation in Rajasthan was a series of protests between May 2008 to December 2010. The Gurjars were demanding a special status for themselves for reservations. On 24th May 2008, the Army was called to help calm the violence as a mob tried to torch a police station in Sikandra. Thousands of protesters blocked the

rail route between Delhi and Mumbai. Highways were also blocked. They demanded a 5% quota in jobs.

JAT AGITATION

The Jat reservation agitation was a similar protest in February 2016 by the Jat community, mainly in Haryana which paralysed the State for ten days. The protesters sought inclusion of their caste in the Backward Classes category. This agitation became violent in Rohtak. Thirty people died in the violence. The Government of Haryana then enacted the Haryana Backward Classes (Reservation in Services and Admission in Educational Institutions) Bill in March 2016. This made the Jats of Hindu, Sikhs and Muslims, Bishnois, Tyagi's be a part of the Backward Classes Category, making them eligible for 10% reservation in Class 3&4 jobs and 6% in Class 1&2 jobs. However, the High Court has ruled against the Act and the matter is pending.

Anti-Hindi Agitations

The Congress wanted to make Hindi the sole official language of the country. However, because of strong opposition from the South it was decided to continue with English as an associate official language for 15 years and provision was accordingly made in the Constitution. However, in 1965 (after 15 years), The Official Language Act came into force in January 1965. This saw massive arrests and demonstrations. 70 people died. Prime Minister Shastri made a radio announcement that English would continue to be used for Centre-State and intra State Communications.

Agitation Related to Anti-Corruption Movements

Navnirman Andolan was a socio-political movement in 1974 in Gujarat by students and middle-class people against the economic crisis and corruption in public life. It resulted in the dissolution of the State Legislative Assembly. There were at least 100 deaths in the demonstrations, riots, hunger strikes and general strike that followed.

In 2011 another anti-corruption movement started under Anna Hazare. There were a series of protests and demonstrations across India intended to establish a strong legislation and enforcement

against perceived endemic political corruption. The demand was for the enactment of a Jan Lokpal Bill, an independent body that would investigate corruption cases. In 2019, the first Lokpal was appointed.

Agitations Over Distribution of River Waters

Disputes between States have risen from time to time over distribution of river waters. The Cauvery Water Distribute Tribunal was constituted by the Government of India in 1990 to look into the matter. After hearing arguments for 16 years, the Tribunal delivered its final verdict in February 2007. The dispute involved four States, namely: Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Puducherry and Kerala. The dispute, however, did not end there as in 2016, Karnataka said that it does not have enough water to release to Tamil Nadu. Agitations broke out in Tamil Nadu and all the concerned States decided to file review petitions before the Supreme Court. In 2018 the Supreme Court finalised the allocation of waters. Supreme Court further held that rivers are a common Trust. It reminded the parties that the Constitution mandates that we have to take care of our common resources as people and that it should not be divided by the borders of States.

Similarly, the issue of distribution of waters of the Sutlej, Ravi and Beas remained a contentious issue. After Punjab was reorganised in 1966 and Haryana was created, in 1981 an agreement was reached but the Akali Dal which came back to power in October 1985, repudiated the agreement. The matter went up to the Supreme Court which issued directions to the Punjab Government to complete the Canal which would carry Haryana's share of water to Haryana.

There is another dispute between Haryana, Delhi and UP on the sharing of the Yamuna River waters which is still unresolved.

Students Agitation

After independence, almost all major political parties started their students wings and several independent student groups catering to socially and economically deprived sections also came up. Post independence, India has seen several student's movements that have been etched into the memory of the nation.

NAV NIRMAN ANDOLAN

In 1973, students of an engineering college in Ahmedabad launched an agitation against a 20% hike in hostel food. A similar strike saw clashes with the police in Gujarat University. The student movements coalesced with the ongoing anti-corruption movements. It became so widespread that Indira Gandhi asked Chimanbhai Patel, the Chief Minister, to resign.

JP MOVEMENT 1974

The Chatra Sangharsh Committee led by Jai Prakash Narayan focused on corruption, nepotism, electoral reforms, subsidised food and education reforms. Starting from Patna, it spread to several educational institutions in northern India. Emergency was imposed in 1975 to counter the movement as it was deemed to be an attempt to overthrow a legally constituted government.

STUDENT MOVEMENT AGAINST EMERGENCY

In several Universities and academic institutions across India, students and faculty members organised underground protests against the imposition of Emergency. Several student leaders including the late Sri Arun Jaitley went to Jail.

ASSAM AGITATION (1979 to 1985)

The agitation in Assam against illegal immigrants was launched by the All Assam Students Union to protect the identity of the Assam people in wake of the influx of people from Bangladesh. It ended in the signing of the Assam Accord. Student leader Prafulla Mahanta became the Chief Minister in 1985.

ANTI MANDAL AGITATION 1990, ANTI RESERVATION PROTESTS 2006

These have been elaborately discussed already earlier in this article.

FILM AND TELEVISION INSTITUTE OF INDIA (FTII) AGITATION 2015, JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY AGITATION

2014, PROTEST OVER ROHIT VEMULA'S DEATH, A DALIT STUDENT OF HYDERABAD UNIVERSITY

These were the other major points when the agitation by students became widespread in different parts of India.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY (JNU) PROTEST 2016

In February 2016, Jawaharlal University erupted in protests over issues relating to Jammu and Kashmir and the alleged praise of Afzal Guru who was said to be the mastermind behind the attack on Parliament in 2001.

ANTI CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT (CAA) PROTESTS INVOLVING STUDENTS OF JAMIA MILLIA AND JNU ARE THE LATEST IN THE HISTORY OF STUDENTS AGITATIONS.

Damage to public property including burning of six buses as well as pitched battles between the students and the students marred the protests. Several students were arrested. It is alleged that the police entered the campuses without authorisation. Investigations are in progress with rival student organisations making allegations against each other.

ANTI CAA PROTESTS

The Citizenship Amendment Act passed by Parliament has become a ground for protests all over the country, The general public has joined the protests together with the students. The law, which fast tracks grant of citizenship to refugees facing religious persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan excludes Muslims. Protests have spread all over the country. Shaheen Bagh protesters in Delhi were sitting in dharna for over two months causing widespread dislocation of traffic on that vital link road connecting Noida to Delhi. The protests have led to clashes with the police in several parts of the country.

Analysis of the Causes that Led to Agitations

- Loss of faith in elected representatives both in the Centre as well as the States.

- Loss of faith in constitutional institutions i.e. Parliament, Judiciary, Election Commission, Ministers, Civil Servants.
- Lack of understanding of the problems in the field by policy makers.
- Lack of employment and a failing economy.
- Agrarian unrest with faulty implementation of land reforms.
- Lack of training of policeman and army in handling public agitations.
- Lack of communication with ordinary citizens.
- Corruption in the government at the highest levels.
- Political parties permeating student bodies and unions.
- Non-protection of tribal rights and landless labourers.
- Gender discrimination and violence against women – Nirbhaya case.
- Delay in investigation of cases against elected representatives.
- Extreme poverty and discrimination leading to Naxalite activity.
- Lack of social and communal cohesion in society.

FAILURE OF CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITIES

With the adoption of the Constitution on 26th June 1950, it was expected that while dissent is an integral part of any democracy, resolution of conflicts within the country would be through Constitutional methods. Prior to Independence there was no Constitution and people were compelled to follow the laws made by the British Government. These laws tended to suppress fundamental freedoms to the Indians and therefore the only recourse was through agitations. Gandhi ji condemned violence in these agitations as unethical. Why is it then, that the citizens of India still resort to dharnas, demonstrations and strikes to coerce the Government to meet their demands? Why is it that they end up resorting to violence which inevitably leads to loss of lives and destruction of public property?

The answers lie not in the Constitution but in the authorities created by the Constitution.

The Constitution gave us parliamentary democracy. But it is true that parliamentary democracy in India is not completely satisfactory. By and large, it has failed to embody the spirit of democracy and this failure principally stems from the fact that under it there is little scope for popular participation in the political process. The institution of elections is inadequate as a basis of democratic governance and the theory of representation is misleading and fails to base government policies on the will of the people. The individual citizen as such has no role to play. The normal channels provided for removing the accumulated grievances prove to be unsatisfactory when serious disagreement is the issue.

The political structure of the Indian parliamentary democracy functions in a manner that leaves much to be desired. Firstly, the quality of the average Legislator is already low not only in terms of parliamentary ability, but even in terms of educational standards. Secondly, the reputation of the Legislators is also low keeping in view their criminal records. A recent report of the Association for Democratic Reforms pointed out that the percentage of Legislators with criminal records has doubled since the previous elections. Thirdly, there is hardly any tendency in the legislators to specialise and go down to the details and complications on a particular subject on which a bill has been introduced. Fourthly, the motivation of the ministers and the political parties in law making are primarily political rather than ensuring social justice. The political considerations override the consideration of merit. Even when the Bills are referred to Parliamentary Committees, the members of the Committee take political stands, which was not the earlier constitutional morality, and give reports which are often prejudiced. Thus, a sort of built-in adverse set up has emerged inducing perforce the endangerment of grievances. This is further nurtured by the fact that today there is hardly any autonomy of the bureaucracy, which runs the government from day to day. The bureaucracy has been demoralised and their opinion is given scant respect. They are under the beck and call of the Ministers and Indira Gandhi's idea of a "committed bureaucracy" is what the governments want.

Under these circumstances it is only natural that we have in our country a growing volume of protests of all kinds from almost all quarters expressed in myriad forms. One major issue that arises is whether in this evolution of parliamentary democracy, public protests are justifiable. From what has been discussed already, it is evident that the answer to this question is that public protests in this given situation ought only to be expected. Aiyar and Srinivasan have stated in their book that “Public protests are inevitable and will grow more and more under parliamentary governments because they, i.e. the governments have become fetters on the concrete democratic rights of the vast majority of the population”.

In a constitutional parliamentary democracy, the function of the political parties whether ruling or in the opposition is to promote endless debate both inside and outside the legislature throughout the country so that an intelligent crystallisation of opinions evolves on a given issue. This process is sadly neglected and in its place melodramatic stunts are put up by the parties to indicate how many people are behind a party. The recent agitation against the Citizenship Amendment Act is a case in point. All over the country, as well as in the media, coercive conditions have been built up to such an extent that those opposing the Act are called anti-national while those supporting the amendment are called patriotic. Whether we accept it or not, a divisive society on a communal basis has suddenly sprung up. This goes against the tenets and provisions of the Constitution which call for a secular society.

STRAINS IN INDIAN SOCIETY LEADING TO AGITATIONS

Admittedly there are some major pulls in the Indian political society which compel coercive mass response. First of all, the illiteracy and the general backwardness and group mentality make it impossible to discuss and explain different points of view because of the difficulty of intellectual communication and correspondence. It must, however, be said to the credit of the electronic media, that by organising public debates on the screen, the public does become aware of different viewpoints. However, on sensitive issues, the individual goes by what his community leaders say.

Secondly, for centuries the Indian people have hardly experienced a regime where the State appeared as belonging to the people as their self-created social instrument of public authority. Constitutionalism was new to them. Fundamental rights cropped up after centuries of foreign rule, only at the time of the freedom movement. They had always lived under the experience of the State being something foreign to them like Delhi under the Muslim rulers or the English king during the British rule. They did not consider these governments as their own like the village panchayats. Thus, the distrust of the State is deep rooted and as a consequence, the antagonism to the State can easily be kindled.

Fourthly, the symbol of power is prized very high in India. As a consequence, once a person has become a Minister or even a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) or Member of the Parliament (MP), not only does he think that he belongs to the New Class of Rulers, but the people who have elected him also treat him in that way. The elected representative begins to attach too high a value to this position and sticks to it at any cost, thus creating a chasm between the rulers and the ruled and behaving in an authoritarian manner.

The period of General Elections, which is five years, appears to be too long in the public eye. Furthermore, it is quite possible that even good laws may not be made, or even if they are, they may not be properly administered, thus giving rise to all kinds of individual or group grievances. It could also be that new problems may arise and are not taken cognizance of in good time. Or it is even possible that there is over-administration or paternal administration where the local administration feels that what they are doing is right and the people do not understand that this is being done for their benefit. This results in too much dependence of the individual on the State apparatus or on the very persons who begin to feel that they are rulers instead of merely 'delegates' elected by the citizens as mandated in the Constitution.

Some of these above causes may give rise to situations when the citizen or a section of them feel that it is not possible to wait till the end of the five-year term and vote out those whom they had elected. They may further feel that it is not a question of throwing out the MLA/MP but to impress upon them a particular need here

and now, lest it is forgotten or it gets mixed up with other matters. It is the process of thinking on these lines that gives rise to what are called “agitations”, movements or Direct action or “Satyagraha” which permeated the recent Shaheen Bagh agitation as well.

Y.B. Chavan, the former Home Minister in the 1960s, once delivered a lecture on “Direct Action and Parliamentary Democracy”. He condemned organised defiance of law but agreed that there could be Direct Action in two exceptional circumstances:

1. Organised defiance of Law by individuals who, like Mahatma Gandhi, though having fundamental respect for law, by reason of conscience, are faced with situations where Satyagraha or other forms of Direct Action is necessary and are fit to undertake such individual action.
2. Any government that is itself out to destroy the values of Parliamentary democracy needs to be replaced by Direct Action even in a parliamentary democracy. He said – “If the people have got the feeling that the power of government is being utilised and manipulated, that the basic values of democracy are being destroyed, then I think people have a right to resort to Direct Action”. Chavan accepted peaceful demonstrations or any peaceful movement for ventilating certain grievances but opposed Direct Action which he defined as “organised defiance of law on a mass scale”.

Direct Action is of two types: that which enables to give to the parliamentary form a greater democratic content and that which leads to the deterioration towards authoritarianism. The chief criterion is that the means used must be intended to further the principal aim of strengthening freedom and democracy. If the direct actionists act under the impulse of unconscious urges or under the directions of a wrong type of leadership and do not give due consideration to the ultimate outcomes of their act, it is quite possible that they will pull the parliamentary form to pieces and push the country into the hands of a dictatorship or a military junta. This has happened in the case of Pakistan.

David Bayley, another scholar who has given much thought to the

subject, coined the phrase ‘coercive public protests’ and defines them as: “They are aggregative, they are public as opposed to conspiratorial or clandestine, they impose a constraint upon government by their very presence and action”. He includes in this category such actions as processions and public meetings, hartals, boycotts and strikes, fasts, obstruction, courting of arrest, riots, etc. He subdivides them into legal and illegal protests and further subdivides them into violent and non-violent categories.

Bayley is convinced that coercive public protests have a certain functional utility even in a parliamentary form of Government more so in countries like India where the elite policy makers are separated from the masses by a ‘chasm of education, training and experience’. What Bayley says might be true for mild forms of protests but the recent tendency of protests show that protests are becoming violent and lead to burning of public property, uprooting of rails (as in the Jat and Gurjar protests), attacking police stations setc. Coercive protests are merging into violent struggles, trying to establish a parallel authority, as in the Naxalite infested areas.

Dr. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S VIEWS

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of our Constitution, while expatiating on the objectives of the Constitution, the purposes of Democracy and their relevance, stated that “the Constitution can provide only the organs of the State such as the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. The factors on which the working of these organs of the State depend are the people and the political parties they will set up as their instruments to carry out their wishes and their politics. Who can say how the people of India and their parties will behave? Will they uphold constitutional methods of achieving their purposes or will they prefer revolutionary methods of achieving them”. In another context Ambedkar highlighted that “We must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means that we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution”. He abhorred the path of violent revolution unlike some of his communist contemporaries. Even for the Dalits he went to assert that the battle for social and civic

rights could not wait for a revolution to take place. As a means to achieving these rights he prescribed Constitutionalism. He talked of Public Goods and the delivery of quality services being at the heart of a successful democracy. Towards this, the common people must put pressure on the political class and the executive from time to time. For the sustenance of a democratic system, it is essential to have an alert citizenry. The citizens must be mentally prepared to engage with issues and even join nonviolent protest movements, if necessary, to keep democratic institutions functioning in terms of the grammar of democratic governance. It is important to have multiple articulate voices of citizens, media and non-governmental organisations. The key institutions of democracy, the courts, the media, the Election Commission, the Audit organisation and the Public Service Commission, need to remain independent and like Caesar's wife, remain above suspicion. Any decline in the respect that these institutions enjoy, will be dangerous for our democracy.

B.R. Ambedkar also talked about Constitutional morality. He felt that to stem the agitations and disturbances in society, a proper understanding of Constitutional morality is necessary. He stated that Constitutional morality, in fact, is of enormous value both for formulation of just laws and their interpretation by the Courts and for implementation by the executive. This would also induce people to demand proper functioning of institutions of governance. Ambedkar rightly reflected: "Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. We must realise that our people have yet to learn it. Democracy is only a top dressing on an Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic".

What he stated then holds good even today.

All forms of political action that help the process of discussion, of exchange of ideas, of debate and intercourse and the consequent interaction of a variety of differing ideas should be welcomed in a parliamentary democracy. Public meetings, representations, press campaigns, occasional disciplined, non-obstructive demonstrations (like the Shaheen Bagh protests), or processions, petitions to the Parliament or to Ministers, arguing with legislators, printing of pamphlets etc. should be welcome as they come within the definition

of constitutional morality. The whole idea is that the ruling elite as well as the public is to be educated to a point of view, to be persuaded to it, not coerced into it.

The purpose of political activity outside the legislature should be to make the legislature as well as the legislator more alert, more informed, more in touch with the people who have sent them to these sovereign bodies. Thus, the political activities outside the legislature are supplementary and conducive to the strengthening of the parliamentary activities. They are not aimed, and should not aim, at eliminating the legislatures.

Legislative Powers of The Governor

The Crisis

In an unprecedented move, the Kerala government has petitioned the Supreme Court on 23 March 2024 against the President of India for withholding assent to 4 bills that were passed by the state assembly. The plea says that the matter related to the acts of Kerala Governor reserving seven bills, which he was required to deal with himself. Not one of the seven bills had anything to do with centre-state relations. The government said that bills had been pending with the Governor for as long as two years and his action subverted the functioning of the state legislature rendering its very existence ineffective and otiose. The Constitution is silent on how much time the President can take in granting or not granting assent to a bill passed by the state legislature and referred to the Rashtrapati Bhavan for presidential consideration by the Governor. The petition asks Supreme Court to declare as unconstitutional the President not granting assent to a bill without assigning any reason.

The Build Up

The 'Kerala Story' began with the government of Kerala petitioning the Supreme Court stating that the conduct of the Governor in keeping the bills pending for long and indefinite periods of time is manifestly arbitrary and also violates article 14 of the Constitution. Additionally, it defeats the rights of the people of the state of Kerala under article 21 by denying them the benefits of the welfare legislation enacted by the state assembly. On 24 November 2023, the Supreme Court asked the office of Kerala Governor to read of the court's judgement in the case of Punjab holding Governors

responsible for acting within the four corners of the state legislature without flexing a non-existent veto power over bills presented to them for assent. The Chief Justice said the Kerala Governor's office should go through the judgement in the Punjab case and make up their mind on the future course of action. After a slap on the wrist from the Supreme Court, the Governor finally cleared five pending bills, some of which had been under consideration for over two years. This announcement was made on 27 April 2024.

The Kerala government has asked the Supreme Court to form a seven-judge bench to review a five-judge bench judgement in the 1962 *Purushothaman Nambudiri vs State of Kerala* which held the view that article 200 did not provide for a time limit within which the Governor should come to a decision on the bill referred to him for his assent. The state has said that at that time the court did not consider the possibility of Governors holding back bills for an indefinite period.

This was indeed not the first instance in which a state government had complained against a Governor for delay in giving his/her assent to a Bill passed by the state legislature. Similar cases were filed with the Supreme Court by the governments of Telangana, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. In the case of the government of Telangana, on 24 March 2023, the Supreme Court had sent a strong message to the Governors of the states that they should return the Bills that they do not agree to “as soon as possible” and not sit over them. Although the bench did not assign any timeline to clear or return the Bills as demanded by the government of Telangana, the bench's “as soon as possible” remark was recorded as a judicial order. The phrase “as soon as possible” has a significant content and must be borne in mind, the court had noted.

The Supreme Court in its judgment in *State of Punjab vs Principal Secretary to The Governor* dated 10 November 2023, on a petition filed by the Punjab government against its Governor's action to hold back crucial bills, laid down the law that a Governor, in case he withholds assent to a Bill, should send it back to the state legislature “as soon as possible” with a message to reconsider the proposed law. If the legislative assembly reiterates the bill “with or without amendments”

the Governor has no choice or discretion and has to give his assent to it. The expression “as soon as possible” conveyed a constitutional imperative of expedition.

The ultimate decision on whether or not to accept the advice of the Governor as contained in the message belongs to the legislature alone. That the message of the Governor does not bind the legislature is evident from the use of the expression “if the bill is passed again... with or without amendment”, the court held. The court was of the opinion that a Governor who chooses to withhold a Bill without doing anything further would be acting in contravention of the Constitution.

The court clarified that the Governor cannot choose between letting the bill die after rejecting it and sending it back to the house for re-legislation. The Governor as the unelected head of state would be in a position to virtually veto the functioning of the legislative domain by a duly elected legislature by simply declaring that assent is withheld without any further recourse. Such a course of action would be contrary to fundamentals of a constitutional democracy based on a parliamentary system of governance.

The court’s reading of the scheme of article 200, which deals with grant of assent to bills, is in line with the core tenet of parliamentary democracy: that an elected regime responsible to the legislature runs the state apparatus. The Governor’s stand that the particular session of the assembly was illegal – because an adjourned house was reconvened by the Speaker on his own – was rejected. The court ruled that the earlier session had only been adjourned and not prorogued. The verdict should not give any further scope for controversy over the role played by the Governors in the lawmaking process that culminates with their granting assent to bills, and must end the tussle between elected regime and the centre’s nominees. There is still some scope for controversy if the Governors choose to refer the bills they disapprove of to the President. Such an eventuality should not be allowed to arise as has happened in the case of Kerala mentioned earlier.

The sum and substance of it all is that the Supreme Court has linked the withholding of assent with the sending of the bill back

to the assembly for reconsideration which is virtually no doubt the option of withholding assent. The judgement says that if the governor decides to withhold assent, he has to send it back to the assembly immediately for reconsideration, in which case he has no other option except to give assent. Needless to say that through this judgement the Supreme Court has protected the rights of the legislature in the matter of law making and in fact the entire constitutional system from the unwarranted interference of the unelected governors.

In Tamil Nadu a peculiar situation has arisen because after the Governor had withheld assent and returned the bills to the house, the Tamil Nadu assembly convened a special session to repass the bills and sent them back to the Governor for approval. This time the Governor once again withheld assent and returned the bills with just one line 'I withhold consent'. When the matter was taken to the Supreme Court it held that the Constitution does not provide the Governor "discretion" to withhold assent to bills re-passed by the state legislative assembly. 'Once they have been repassed,... Bills are put in the same footing as money bills. Then you (the Governor) cannot reject...', The three-judge bench headed by the Chief Justice said. The court also acknowledged the state's submission that the Governor, having withheld assent and sent back the bills once, cannot refer the reiterated bills to the President.

The Supreme Court has sent a strong message to the Governors saying that it was time they did a bit of "soul-searching". "Why should parties be made to approach the Supreme Court? We are a democracy in operation since the birth of the Constitution. These are matters to be sorted out between the Governors and chief ministers" the Chief Justice said. "The Governors should not be oblivious to the fact that they are not elected by the people".

The Judicial Pronouncements

The Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled that the legislative power of Governors is extremely limited and that they are bound by the aid and advice of the council of ministers. From the judgment of a seven-judge constitutional bench in *Shamsher Singh and Anr vs. State*

of *Punjab* (AIR 1974 2192) to the five-judge constitutional bench in *Nabam Rebia vs. Deputy Speaker and Ors.* [(2017) 13 SCC 326], the Supreme Court has consistently held that the Governor can normally act only on the aid and advice of the council of ministers and cannot exercise any executive powers as an independent authority. In *Nabam Rebia* (2016), in particular, the court came to the conclusion that the discretionary power given to the Governor is limited to the scope postulated in Article 163(1); its ambit is not open to broader interpretation; there should not be any conflict of interest; and its exercise should not be final and immune from judicial review. The court observed that “...such a nominee cannot have overriding authority over the representatives of the people, who constitute the House or Houses of State Legislature...”.

The Governor’s power to withhold assent or return a bill, with a message for reconsideration, is mistakenly seen as discretionary. In the constituent assembly it was explicitly clarified that returning a Bill was to be done only on the advice of the council of ministers and that it was an enabling provision for the government to recall a pending Bill in case it had second thoughts on it. But this is quite ambiguous; why would a government introduce a Bill in the legislature, in the first place, if it was not interested in its passage? Moreover, the government can always withdraw a Bill which has been introduced in the Parliament or the legislative assembly / council with its approval. Why, then, get the Governor involved in the process?

Article 200 and All That

According to article 200, when a Bill has been passed by the legislature of a state it shall be presented to the Governor and the Governor shall declare either that he assents to the Bill or that he withholds assent therefrom or that he reserves the Bill for the consideration of the President. In case of withholding assent, the Governor is required to return the Bill, “as soon as possible”, together with a message for reconsideration of the Bill. When the Bill is presented a second time to the Governor, he shall not withhold assent therefrom.

Governors did have a discretion to return bills before the first proviso in the draft article 175 (now article 200). This was amended by the Constituent Assembly in 1949. Though it was thought that the governor's exercise of discretion would act as a potential check on disruptive legislative tendencies by states, Dr B. R. Ambedkar, while introducing the amended proviso said "in a responsible government there can be no room for the Governor acting on discretion."

T. T. Krishnamachari, a Constituent Assembly member from Madras and later Finance Minister, approved of the amendment, saying "the Governor cannot act on his own, he can only act on the advice of the Ministry... When a Governor sends a Bill back for further consideration he does so expressly on the advice of his Council of Ministers". Mr Krishnamachari explained that if the bill passed by the legislative assembly needs modification or has garnered adverse public opinion, the government uses the Governor to return the bill to Lower House as quickly as possible for re- legislation. The first proviso to article 200 is thus "saving clause" and retains the discretion over the fate of the bill solely in the hands of the state cabinet.

The situation of 'withholding assent' may also arise in case of a private member's bill passed by the state legislature, which the council of ministers does not want to be enacted into law. In such an instance, it would advise the Governor to 'withhold assent'. However, this is an unlikely scenario as the council of ministers which enjoys a majority in the legislative assembly would not allow the passage of such a bill. Secondly, if the incumbent government whose bill has been passed by the legislature falls or resigns before it is assented to by the Governor, the new council may advise the Governor to 'withhold assent'.

The Governor may reserve the Bill if in his opinion it will so derogate from the power of the High Court as to endanger its position or is repugnant to a union law or it will contravene the provisions of the Constitution and, therefore, should be reserved for the consideration of the President. According to article 201, when a Bill is reserved for the consideration of the President, the President shall declare either that he assents to the Bill or he withholds assent. The President may direct the Governor to return the Bill to the

legislature with a message. When a Bill is so returned, the legislature shall reconsider it accordingly “within a period of six months” from the date of receipt of such message.

As regards the Governor acting with the aid and advice of the council of ministers, article 163 indeed provides for it. However, it further states that the Governor may act in his discretion insofar as he is by or under the Constitution required to exercise his functions as such. It further states that any question relating to whether any matter is or is not a matter in which the Governor is required to act in his discretion, the decision of the Governor shall be final and the validity of anything done by him shall not be called in question.

The discretionary powers of the Governor, even though unquestionable, are not limitless, as mentioned earlier. They are normally exercisable in respect of reservation of Bills for the consideration of the President; making recommendation for the imposition of the President’s rule under article 356; and seeking information from the Chief Minister with regard to the administrative and legislative matters of the state. In addition, the Governors also have situational discretion such as appointment of a Chief Minister when no party has a clear-cut majority; dismissal of the government when it fails to establish its majority in a floor test; and dissolution of the state assembly when the council of ministers resigns and there is no alternative. However, these powers have to be exercised very carefully, impartially and without prejudice in order to avoid charges of bias or political partisanship. A plain reading of the Constituent Assembly debates makes it amply clear that withholding assent to a Bill is not one of the discretionary powers of the Governors.

In the case of bills passed by the state legislatures the whole issue revolves around interpretation of the phrase “as soon as possible”. The Supreme Court has interpreted “as soon as possible” in the proviso to mean “as early as practicable without avoidable delay” in its 1972 judgment in *Durga Pada Ghosh vs State of West Bengal*.

Recommendations

The Sarkaria Commission (1987) on Centre State relations had suggested that it is only the reservation of bills for consideration of

the President, that too under rare case of unconstitutionality, that can imply as a discretionary power of the Governor. Save in such exceptional cases, the Governor must discharge his functions under article 200 as per the advice of ministers. It further recommended that the President should dispose of such bills within a maximum period of six months. In the event of the President “withholding assent” the reason should be communicated to the State government wherever possible.

The Punchhi Commission (2010) too had recommended that the Governors should take the decision with respect to the bills presented for their assent within a period of six months.

It is to be noted that article 201 provides a time limit of six months for State Legislatures for the reconsideration of a Bill after it is returned by the President, having been earlier reserved by the State Governor for his/her consideration. Perhaps the phrase “as soon as possible”, used in the first proviso to Article 200, similarly needs to be qualified to provide a time limit of either some months or subsequent sessions of the Legislature, such as “but not later than six months or the next two sessions of the State Legislature, whichever is more, unless it is reserved for the consideration of the President” on the grounds of unconstitutionality.

The Parliament will do well to accordingly consider fixing a time limit to qualify the phrase “as soon as possible”.

Concluding remarks

Frequent aberrations in the functioning of Governors as the link between the centre and the states have led to the departure from the federal structure of the Constitution and has disturbed the balance in the distribution of powers. Any deviation by the Governors from their defined role will only weaken the democratic system of government.

Governors must play their role with neutrality and desist from converting Raj Bhawans into the offices of political parties. Governors who were often ignoring the advice of the state cabinet should examine their role in the light of the constitutional provisions and act as the friend, philosopher and guide of the State government.

Should the Governors be appointed in consultation with the Chief ministers, is another issue that needs serious consideration.

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Indian Political Parties: A Huge Governance Challenge

When the framers of Indian Constitution drafted the World's largest written constitution, they did not make any reference to the role of political parties or their regulation. Presumably, they took it for granted that the political parties will function responsibly and may not pose a big problem in our functioning democracy. However, a look at the functioning of the parties since the first election in 1951-1952, will make us wonder why and how our political parties have been proliferating and functioning without much of high standards of accountability and responsibility over the years. Our parliament took notice of the first signs of their angularities whereby the frequent 'floor crossing' by elected representatives post 1967 were causing concern, and felt the need to regulate this adverse development—it contributed not only to the instability of the Governments in States in particular, but also highlighted the role of money power to buy legislators. Further, the cycle of simultaneous elections to parliament and State legislatures, about which lot of debate has taken place in recent times, got broken significantly because of the legislators switching loyalties for political and financial considerations.

When we went for the first elections after independence, there were about 53 political parties, some big and some small, which took part in the elections. Compared to this, the number of political parties over the years has proliferated, crossing 2500 in number. It is not that all these parties are taking part in our elections. Hardly about 200 political parties can be said to play some role in the State and Parliament elections. Of these, 7 parties have been classified as National Parties and about 50 parties have been classified as State Parties based on the percentages of votes polled in elections as

per the provisions of Symbols' Order formulated by the Election Commission and approved by the Supreme Court. The non-participating political parties in the elections have been functioning as lobby centres for political or non-political objectives. One of the possible reasons for the proliferation of political parties in India is the fact that they are exempt from payment of income tax under The Income Tax Act, 1961, provided the political parties registered with Election Commission filed annual income tax returns along with audited accounts. This tax benefit motivates some of the political parties to carry on their objectives (sometimes questionable) with respectability to achieve their goals political or otherwise. Another reason for the political parties mushrooming is to protect and promote caste, creed and language interests through the electoral process which become powerful factors under the First Past Post System elections.

In many countries, especially in the commonwealth countries, there is a specific law governing the formation of political parties, their operations, financial management, procedures for periodical meetings, internal elections to periodically fill the party posts providing for rotation of incumbents and settlement of intra party disputes between various factions within the party. A few of such regulations that exist scattered in different laws/regulations do take care of proper functioning on a limited scale within the framework of the Representation of the Peoples Act, 1950 and 1951 penal codes. There are however many areas of legislative vacuum as a result of which, the Election Commission is left to decide various legal issues such as defections/party splits, resulting in innumerable disputes thanks to the ingenuity of our elected representatives. One defective feature often pointed out with regard to the party splits/defections is the role of the Speaker in the legislature. Generally, the Speaker, though elected on a party ticket, is expected to be an impartial leader in conducting the proceedings of the House. If you look at the past experience in various defections of party members, often a fall out of opportunistic political alliance, it would be seen that the Speaker of the House has often been biased in his rulings in favour of the ruling party or the party that elected him as Speaker. It has been suggested

by some that the issues relating to defections should be examined by the Election Commission and the Commission's comments and recommendations forwarded to the President or the Governor as the case may be for a final decision instead of the Speaker, in order to remove any bias. However, political parties will not agree to such a change. Moreover, the law relating to defection, seems to have too many loopholes permitting frequent defections without any serious adverse consequences to the offending legislators. One remedy that should be considered seriously is to impose a ban on a person defecting from one party to another from contesting another election or from being nominated as Member of any House at the State or the Centre for a period of 5 years from the date of defection. This can substantially curb the malady of defections in Indian democracy which is often corrupting the proper functioning of legislatures.

While on this subject, it is necessary to refer to the recent practice of some candidates – after filing the nomination for contesting the election, they switch loyalty or withdraw nomination with a view to facilitate or support another candidate. This has to be prevented by a suitable provision in law in the proposed separate law for political parties. I must also refer to the prevalence of alliances among political parties both before and after the elections and the confusion and uncertainty among the alliance partners prevailing post elections due to the opportunistic alliance formed amongst the parties only to be in power. Such alliances are not only fragile but also tend to weaken the stability of the Governments in the formulation of policies for good governance. Compromises are often made amongst the parties with the sole objective to continue in power as a result of which there is a breakdown of government machinery in the day-to-day governance. It is not very uncommon to see in such a situation that Ministers belonging to different parties form alliances but are placed in the particular Ministry giving contradictory directions to the civil servants and causing confusion in the minds of civil servants. It is necessary to regulate by law such alliances to bring in some accountability and responsibility, so that such alliances are not subject to frequent tantrums of the allies. A statutory regulation by which alliances are made more accountable is indeed a necessity.

Another feature of the functioning of political parties and their candidates in India during the election period relates to the enforcement of Model Code of Conduct on political parties during the period of elections. The Model Code of Conduct comes into operation from the date of announcement of the elections by the Election Commission of India and is enforced till the declaration of results by the Commission. The Model Code of Conduct, as its name suggests, does not have the force of law as it is only an informal code evolved over a period of time by the Election Commission in consultation with the recognized political parties in order to ensure a level playing field among the political parties during the period of campaigning for elections. This has received judicial approval at the level of the Supreme Court. However, it has to be noted that there have been frequent violations of the Model Code of Conduct by almost all the political parties, though accusations are more often against the parties in power, some of which are minor and some others are of serious nature. Although the Election Commission has the power to reprimand the violators, withdraw the allotted symbol and countermand the election in some extreme cases, it is ironical that the Election Commission has no legal power to enforce the Model Code of Conduct by punishing quickly the violators contributing to violence and hatred except by issuing directions to ban an individual from campaigning or file complaints to the Police by filing First Information Reports (FIRs). What the Election Commission is doing at present is only to recover the loss to the exchequer if there is misuse of Governmental machinery, place curbs on the campaigning period, deferment or repoll of election, issue of warning, filing police complaints etc. Such soft actions do not have the required immediate impact in improving the election process during the elections. In most of the cases of violations, the complaints are filed by filing FIRs in the police stations which are often forgotten by the State Governments who are expected to follow up these cases for conviction or acquittal. It is indeed paradoxical that if the model code violators are members of the ruling party or their allies, such cases are rarely pursued vigorously and effectively and if the violators belonged to the opposition parties, the cases are pursued more vigorously. This does not result in having a level playing field for

all the parties/candidates. One way of tackling this issue is to enable the Election Commission by law to impose instantaneously monetary penalties and/or order disqualification of the voter/candidate for a limited period of say one to three years, depending upon the nature and severity of violations.

An undesirable practice prevalent among the Indian political parties is to generously promise freebies to certain specified sections of voters such as washing machine, grinding machine, computer, bicycle and such other articles. Such promises made by political parties without any financial accountability either before or after they get into power have misled the voters into various temptations, thereby voting due to undue influences. Such promises, in my opinion, amount to bribing or unduly influencing a section of the voters at the time of exercise of their franchise. While this matter was taken up to the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court directed the Election Commission to regulate this practice by issuing suitable guidelines. In my view, what is necessary is to altogether ban the promise of such freebies by political parties unless they indicate how the same will be funded by them if voted to power. In any case, it will be an ideal thing if the manifestos are allowed to promise only 'public goods' which benefit the general public such as river dams, a stadium or a school building instead of promising inducements to a section of vulnerable voters.

Funding of political parties has been subject to a lot of discussion and debates as the existing system is said to contribute to the role of increasing money power in the elections. The law that existed prior to the introduction of Electoral Bond allowed (under the Companies Act, 2013) only the profit-making corporates to make donations to political parties provided the donations were less than the prescribed average of three years net profits. Under this system, the loss-making Companies and newly formed Companies which functioned for less than three years could not make donation to political parties. Further, cash contributions of Rs.20,000 was however allowed under the earlier law provided the details were reported to the Election Commission. With the introduction of Electoral Bonds in 2018, the cap on the quantum of donations and the requirement of specified

average of three years net profits was removed, as a result of which loss making companies and newly formed or shell companies could donate through the Electoral Bonds. It was also alleged by some that the system provided opportunities for foreign or tainted money to be donated in disguise. It was claimed on other hand by the Government that the system of Electoral Bond introduced transparency as the funds were transferred through the banking channel. This scheme was however held to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court recently as details of donors were not made available to the public and because the transparency in funding was not adequate.

In my opinion, the system of funding political parties, whether under the old scheme or the Electoral Bond Scheme, cannot be said to be healthy or fully transparent as it promoted an obnoxious nexus covertly or overtly between political parties and the corporate donors. The position now is that with the Supreme Court Judgement nullifying the electrical bond Scheme, we revert to the old law. There are three possible solutions to get over the defects in the system now in force. One is to remove any cap on the expenditure of contesting candidates altogether so that funding is left to the open market for the political parties and the candidates without any disclosure obligations. This would however result in elections becoming more expensive and thereby increasing the role of money power in contesting elections. The American system is more or less on these lines. It does not however enable an ordinary citizen to contest elections without massive financial resources and only facilitates rich persons to contest the elections without any problem. Is this not making democracy a mockery in a country such as ours? In countries like Thailand where public funding and private funding with ceiling exists, a mixed system is followed. This would result in more confusion in tracking the funds. If our intention is really to control the election expenditure with total transparency and also enable the ordinary persons to contest the elections, it would be desirable to constitute a National Election Fund by law which is allowed to be funded by corporate donors and others with 100% income tax exemption for the donors. Funds raised through public funding (as distinct from State Funding) would be allocated to the contesting candidates by evolving suitable

guidelines in consultation with the National and State parties. Under the proposed public funding, allocation to candidates for meeting election expenditure could be partly in cash and partly in kind.

There can no doubt be a criticism to such a scheme that it will enable spurious candidates contesting elections in order to garner money from the Election Fund. A possible suggestion to meet this criticism is that the elections to the State Legislatures and Parliament be restricted only to the members of a political party and no independents be allowed to contest elections so that all the contesting candidates will necessarily come under the party discipline/regulation. Another important desirable condition in the introduction of public funding of elections is that no political party will be allowed to use its own resources in the campaigning during elections and the parties are made accountable regarding the utilization of funds/materials allotted to the contesting candidates under the public funding scheme.

One of the serious flaws in the existing system of selection of candidates by the political party for contesting elections is the fact that such persons are often selected based on considerations of family connection, caste, creed and language dominantly present in the constituency. Such persons very often do not have national outlook nor expertise in public administration or legislative procedures. Although, there is at present a scheme to train the legislators, it is often found that the elected representatives under the present system focus more on local and social issues rather than national/developmental issues in parliament. It is worthwhile to quote here Edmund Burke: "Parliament is not a Congress of Ambassadors from a different and hostile interest which interests each must maintain as an Agent and Advocate against other Agents and Advocates, but parliament is a deliberative Assembly of one Nation with one interest, that of the whole where not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good resulting from general Reason of the whole. You choose a member, indeed but when you have chosen him, he is not a Member of Bristol, but he is a Member of Parliament." The above observations highlight the fact that the elected representatives should focus more on national issues and not on local issues. Similarly, the elected representatives of the State

Legislatures should also focus on the State interest as a whole rather than narrow local issues.

Close to the problem of improper selection of candidates, is increasing role of what I would call as “Progeny Politics” by filling up party posts and selecting candidates for contesting elections by picking up members from families controlling the party. In a democracy, no doubt, anyone and everyone has a right to play an active role but it cannot be confined to certain family members controlling the party. It is therefore necessary to provide in law that the post in the party or Government should be periodically rotated so that a coterie does not control the party.

In conclusion, it may be said that with the increase in the number of political parties, increasing role of money power and muscle power in the elections and frequent violations of model code of conduct leading to violence, hate speeches and communal riots during the elections in India, it is absolutely necessary to bring about a statutory provision for better regulation of political parties if we are interested in improving the quality of our representative democracy. *It is absolutely necessary that this is done without any further delay.* Time has indeed come for the people to assert and demand necessary regulation in the functioning of the political parties. To improve the quality of our democracy, it is necessary to recognise that the success of all rules and regulations will depend upon the vigilance of our people in promptly checking the misdeeds and improper decisions taken by the parties in power. It would, therefore, be appropriate to conclude with the following word of Woodrow Wilson: “Liberty has never come from the Government. Liberty has always come from the subjects of governments. The history of liberty is the history of resistance. The history of liberty is history of the limitation of government power, not the increase of it.”

VIKSIT BHARAT – New Paradigms in Governance: Empowering Citizens and Reaching the Last Mile

*“Remember the time before independence...yes, people had different methods of working but the goal was big – the freedom of India. In this Amrit Kaal we have to come together and work towards another big goal of a Viksit Bharat”
– Prime Minister Narendra Modi*

Introduction

In the period 2019-2024, a New Paradigm of Governance emerged. India's governance model focused on accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equitable and inclusive governance which is participatory, consensus oriented and follows the rule of law with emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness. Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the Governance landscape of India radically changed in scale, scope and learning paradigms. India succeeded in transforming technologically obsolete institutions into modern day digital institutions which benefitted millions of Indians. Today India's rural countryside has changed – banking Correspondents, e-Mitras and common service centers have bridged the gap between internet poor and internet rich.

As India celebrated its Amrit Kaal period, Prime Minister Modi has given a clarion call for adoption of Next Generation Reforms by bridging the gap between government and citizens. In his address at the Special Session of Parliament, Prime Minister Modi said,

“The first rays of the Amrit Kaal (golden era) are illuminating the nation with a new belief, fresh self-confidence, new enthusiasm, new dreams, new resolutions and a renewed strength of the Nation. Achievements of Indians are being discussed everywhere and with a sense of pride. This is the result of a collective

effort in our 75-year Parliamentary history. As a result, today, the echo of our accomplishments is being heard world-wide."

This vision of Next Generation administrative reforms of the Prime Minister has been diligently translated into reality by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances. Secretariat Reforms, Special Campaigns, Benchmarking of Governance and Services, Redressal of Public Grievances & Improving Service Delivery, recognizing meritocracy and replication of good governance practices formed the core of India's good governance model. Technology adoption in the Central Secretariat also gained significant momentum with Assistant Section Officers (ASO's)/ Section Officers (SO's)/ Under Secretaries undergoing reskilling in Emerging Technologies using Integrated Government Online Training (i-GOT) Mission Karmayogi. The Digital March of the Central Secretariat has had significant spill over effects to Attached/ Subordinate/ Autonomous bodies, all of whom adopted e-Governance practices.

State Secretariats adopted e-Office and 16500 services were operationalized as e-Services. Strong Digital Platforms formed the bulwark of the Digital Public Infrastructure push of India in the G20 deliberations as a global public good. Technology impact in governance was most visible in Jammu & Kashmir which provided an all-time high of 1080 e-services, adopted e-Office saving crores of rupees from abolition of the Darbar movement, developed the Jammu and Kashmir Integrated Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (JK-IGRAMS), convened regional conferences and national conferences on e-Governance.

Maximum Governance – Minimum Government

India's governance model in the years 2019-2024, has undergone radical reforms. e-Governance has simplified a citizen's interface with Government, brought government and citizens closer and enabled benchmarking of service quality. The Central government's e-governance models have benefitted in bringing transparency and openness to government processes. The widespread adoption of e-Office version 7.0 has created paperless offices in all Ministries/ Departments in the Central Secretariat, with 93 percent files being

handled as e-files and 94 percent receipts being handled as e-receipts. In 2023, Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) helped redress 21 lac Public Grievances and in 2024 till March 9.58 lac Public Grievances were redressed. The organizational reforms coupled with significant reforms in Personnel Administration like Mission Karmayogi, Lateral Recruitment, timely promotion policies, regional conferences for replication of good governance practices, recognizing excellence in public administration by scaling up the scheme for Prime Minister's (PM's) Awards for Excellence in Public Administration represent the new paradigm in India's governance model. New India's strong institutions are best symbolized by adoption of e-governance practices. The best manifestation of "Maximum Governance – Minimum Government" policy is a "Digitally Empowered Citizen" and a "Digitally Transformed Institution".

Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration and Civil Services Day

India observes 21 April every year as "Civil Services Day", the day is marked as an occasion for civil servants to rededicate themselves to citizens and renew their commitment to public service and excellence in work. The theme of the 16th Civil Services Day on 21 April 2023 was "*Viksit Bharat – Empowering Citizens and Reaching the Last Mile.*" The Hon'ble Vice President of India inaugurated the Civil Services Day events on 20th April.

The Conference deliberations were held during the 2 Plenary sessions - 'Empowering Citizens -Leveraging Public Digital Platforms', 'Promoting Circular Economy for Sustainable Development' and 4 Breakaway sessions 'Piped Water for all-Jal Jeevan Mission', 'Holistic Health care for All – Health & Wellness Centres', 'Improving Quality of Education-Improving Outcomes through Vidya Samiksha Kendras', 'Aspirational Blocks Program – Reaching the Last Mile' on April 20, 2023. The Conference was attended by more than 25000 delegates, with officials attending physically in Vigyan Bhawan and through the web-casting of the event in virtual mode. This was the highest ever participation in Civil Services Day events. The 16th Civil Services Day 2023 was a landmark event.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister conferred the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration 2022 instituted to recognize the efforts and exceptional work done by the civil servants to 15 Award Winners. On this occasion, Prime Minister Modi said:

"The Civil Services Day should become an opportunity to infuse new energy within us to make new resolutions. We should handhold the new officers with new enthusiasm. We should infuse them with enthusiasm to be a part of this system. We should take our colleagues forward while living our life to the fullest."

The 2022 PM's Awards were awarded for Innovations in Central Government, State Governments and District Level innovations. In the Priority Programs, District performances were evaluated for Har Ghar Jal Yojana, Health and Wellness Centres, Samagra Shiksha and Aspirational Districts Program. Hon'ble Prime Minister personally reviewed the scheme and the restructuring of the Scheme was undertaken as per his directions to ensure maximum participation with the focus on empowering citizens and reaching the last mile with a saturation approach. In 2022, an all-time high number of nominations were received from States/Union Territories (UTs) – 743 District Collectors submitted 2520 nominations for PM's Awards 2022. This was 97% of the total districts of the country who participated in the PM's Awards 2022 Scheme. Committees at various levels - Screening Committees chaired by Additional Secretaries, Expert Committee chaired by Secretary, Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) screened the applications based on the parameters of the scheme, presentations by District Collectors and other Head of Departments, around 5.5 lakh citizen feedback calls and 'on the spot' study conducted by two members teams of the rank of Directors/Deputy Secretaries for all shortlisted initiatives. An empowered committee chaired by Cabinet Secretary made the final selections from 32 shortlisted nominations. Of these, 15 nominations received the PM's awards for Excellence in Public Administration 2022. The award-winning nominations were also presented in the exhibition at Vigyan Bhavan.

Amongst the PM's Awards winners 2022 in the Innovations Category are :

Innovations – Centre

- 1) National Covid 19 Vaccination Programme of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare- COVID- 19 vaccines were made available free of cost at all Government Covid Vaccination Centres (CVCs). The programme was built on four strong pillars that included a structured governance mechanism, ramping up of vaccine production, efficient logistics management and implementation strategies for equitable vaccine administration and effective communication strategy for managing the infodemic generated vaccine hesitancy and eagerness.
- 2) PM GatiShakti National Master Plan of Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade to provide a Geographic Information System (GIS) enabled platform to facilitate planning and decision making for creation of next generation infrastructure and seamless multimodal connectivity for Ease of Living and Doing Business.

Innovations – State

- 1) *Mission Youth – an initiative of Government of the state of Jammu and Kashmir* to provide a vibrant medium for youth engagement and empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir. The innovation brought youth at the centre of Youth Policy, where the local youth provided inputs for initiatives and became a part of the transformative schemes.
- 2) *State Organ & Tissue Transplant Organization (SOTTO) of the state of Gujarat* has developed a strong ecosystem, with the State Organ & Tissue Transplant Organization (SOTTO) Gujarat at its pivot, to ensure that the most vulnerable and underprivileged have access to prohibitively expensive life-saving treatment.

Innovations – District

- 1) *Operation Parivartan – Eradication of illicit liquor of Solapur District, Maharashtra* for complete eradication of illicit liquor through rehabilitation of people involved in it. This initiative has positively affected the proportion of incidents of crime, social tensions, and domestic violence associated with illicit liquor.

- 2) *Project “SANVARDHAN” (VOCAL FOR LOCAL) of Rampur District, Uttar Pradesh* which aimed to tackle the issue of malnutrition in a mission mode. Deriving inspiration from the vision of Hon’ble PM, ‘Project Sanvardhan’ was started to fight malnutrition by developing multipronged strategy focusing on preparation of ‘Poshan Kit’. Locally produced raw material, aligned with the Prime Minister's motto of “Vocal for Local” is processed at local processing centre for the preparation of ‘Poshan Kits’ which has led to increase in income levels of farmers.
- 3) *New Age Learning Center (NALC) of Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh* wherein children of various age group are provided with fun and interactive learning under one single roof with special emphasis to provide end to end learning solutions at single delivery point by integrating the features of library, motivation Centre, personality development space, skill training Centre and fun learning unit to make the learning more comprehensive as well interesting at the same time.

The winners of PM’s awards in 4 District Priority Sector Programs were as follows:

1. *Har Ghar Jal Yojana* – Under this category, 2 awards were presented to the districts of Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu and Burhanpur, Madhya Pradesh.
2. *Promoting quality education with an equitable and inclusive classroom environment through Samagra Shiksha* - Under this category, 2 awards were presented to the districts of Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh and Mehsana, Gujarat.
3. *Promoting Swasth Bharat through Health & Wellness Centres* – Under this category, 2 awards were presented to the districts of Latur, Maharashtra and Anakapalli, Andhra Pradesh
4. *Aspirational Districts Programme* – Under this category, 2 awards were presented to the districts of Baramulla, UT of Jammu and Kashmir and Gumla, Jharkhand.

The DARPG has made significant efforts for dissemination and replication of the Award-winning nominations. This was

in accordance with Prime Minister Modi's vision of organizing experience sharing sessions by the award winners to a larger Nation-wide audience. The National Good Governance Webinar Series conceptualized in 2022-23 presented 24 nominations in 12 monthly webinars in which 15000 officials participated. The PM's Awards winners presented in the National Good Governance Webinar Series included Sakala of Government of Karnataka, e-Seva of Government of Andhra Pradesh, Sickle Cell Anemia Control Program of Government of Gujarat, Making Medicines Affordable in Chittorgarh district Rajasthan, Holistic Development through One District-One Product Scheme in Siddharth Nagar district Uttar Pradesh, Promoting Jan Bhagidari in Poshan Abhiyan in Asifabad district Telangana, Prajavani Janahita of Siricilla district Telangana, Sarkar Aapke Dwar of Changlang district Arunachal Pradesh, Reviving Sasur Khaderi of Government of Uttar Pradesh, Canal Top Solar Power Project of Government of Gujarat, New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) for Seamless End to End Delivery of Services without Human Intervention of National Capital Territory (NCT) Delhi, Seva Sindhu Portal of Government of Karnataka, River Linking Project of Jalgaon district Maharashtra, Innovative Participatory Drinking Water Approach in Rural Areas of Gujarat etc. The Themes covered included Improving Public Service Delivery, Initiatives in Health Sector, Aspirational District Program, Redressal of Public Grievances, Environment, Innovations, Jal/ Water Management, Namami Gange. The response to the National Good Governance Webinars indicated the enthusiasm and interest that the series had generated amongst District Collectors/ State Governments in the pursuit of good governance practices.

A compendium of the National Good Governance Webinar Series 2022-23 was released by the Hon'ble Vice President of India on 20th April, 2023 in the inaugural session of Civil Services Day events 2023. In 2023, DARPG has curated the weekly Sansad TV Television series Abinav Pahal in which award winning nominations are presented by the Award Winners. An innovation portal (<https://darpg-innovation.nic.in>) has been launched to document the award winning nominations.

National Conferences on e-Governance and National e-Governance Awards

Government implements the Awards Scheme for National Awards for e-Governance. This Scheme is recognized as amongst the most competitive and prestigious digital governance awards schemes in the country. In the year 2023, 425 nominations were received out of which 16 nominations were conferred the National e-Governance Awards. The National Annual e-Governance Conferences were held at Mumbai in 2020, Hyderabad in January 2022 and Katra in November 2022. The 26th National e-Governance Conference was held at Indore, Madhya Pradesh on August 24-25, 2023.

The key takeaways from the 26th National e-Governance Conference were the following:

- (i) The Conference drew inspiration from the words of Prime Minister Modi who stressed on the role of technology in making governance and justice delivery systems reach the poorest of the poor, the marginalized and women living in the hinterland. The vision of Prime Minister of India's Techade can be realized through a vigorous and all-pervasive digital governance push
- (ii) Closer synergy amongst researchers, academia, industry and start-ups in the field of e-Governance is the way forward for India to be an Atma Nirbhar Nation. The Vision India@2047 on Governance is truly e-Vision India@2047 marked by saturation and benchmarking of high quality e-services reaching out to the last man in the queue for service delivery in the true spirit of Antyodaya, focus on young policy makers and creating interactive fora between academia and start-ups.
- (iii) Open Digital Platforms are tremendous force multipliers, and critical for providing affordable, inter-operable technology to India's citizens. Digital Governance can enable massive reach and benefits in the conduct of Special Campaigns aimed at reducing pendency and institutionalization of *Swachhata* with the objective of providing good governance.

The National e-Governance Conferences have had significant

spillover effects into the e- Governance in States/ Union Territories where they were held. The biggest transformation was witnessed in Jammu & Kashmir where the number of e-services were scaled up from 15 in 2019 to 225 in 2022 to 1080 in 2023. This represented a remarkable achievement. The dissemination of the award winning nominations through the National e-Governance Webinar Series is a new initiative of DARPG.

Regional Conferences

DARPG regularly conducts Regional Conferences for replication of good governance practices and e-Governance practices. In 2022-24, Regional Conferences were held at Srinagar, Bengaluru, Itanagar, Mumbai, Bhopal, Jaipur and Guwahati. Regional Conferences attended by 500 officers/ conference have helped in presenting the State's best governance practices in addition to PM's Award winning nominations. DARPG has also commenced curating the Regional e-Governance conferences which have enabled in dissemination of the best e-Governance conferences. The Regional Conferences enable the creation of fully digital public institutions, strengthen linkages between stakeholders, strengthen state portals and service portals for digital empowerment. The movement for saturation of e-services across the Nation has been significantly strengthened in this period.

Good Governance Index 2021

DARPG launched the Good Governance Index (GGI) framework to gauge the performance of the States/UTs following the recommendations of the Group of Secretaries on Governance and published the ranking for States and UTs for 2019 and 2021. The GGI framework assesses the state of Governance across the States and UTs and ranks States/UTs. The objective is to create a tool which can be used uniformly across the States/UTs to assess the impact of various interventions taken up by the Central and State Governments/UTs. The GGI 2019 encompassed 10 Sectors and 50 Indicators and GGI 2021 encompassed 10 sectors and 58 indicators. Each sector carries equal weightage and is composed of indicators carrying different weightages. The sectors of GGI 2020-21 are: 1) Agriculture and Allied

Sectors, 2) Commerce & Industries, 3) Human Resource Development, 4) Public Health, 5.) Public Infrastructure & Utilities, 6) Economic Governance, 7) Social Welfare & Development, 8) Judicial & Public Security, 9) Environment, and 10) Citizen-Centric Governance.

The GGI 2020-21 categorizes States and UTs into four categories, i.e., (i) Other States – Group A; (ii) Other States – Group B; (iii) North-East and Hill States; and (iv) Union Territories. GGI helps assess the status of governance in States & UTs. Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa to the composite score of 10 sectors under GGI 2021 assessment. Uttar Pradesh has shown a 8.9 percent increase over the GGI 2019 performance. The GGI 2021 says 20 States have improved their composite GGI scores over the GGI 2019 scores. This indicates that the overall governance in the States of India is moving in the positive direction. The biannual publication of Good Governance 2023 is under formulation and will be released in the coming months.

District Good Governance Index

District being a basic unit in field administration and governance, implementing various programmes and innovative projects for the well-being of citizens, measuring their performance becomes important for proper assessment and planning which will lead to the development of the districts and region as a whole. The District Good Governance Index (DGGI) represents next generation administrative reform in benchmarking governance at district level. This Index is prepared after extensive stakeholder consultations for benchmarking governance in all the districts of a State on a number of indicators under different sectors. The ranking brings healthy competition amongst districts to address existing gaps, plan to bridge these gaps and aid decision making tools.

District Good Governance Index of Jammu & Kashmir – The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances have conceptualized, formulated and released the DGGI for Jammu & Kashmir in consultation with the Government of Jammu & Kashmir. India's first DGGI was designed and developed for the UT of Jammu and Kashmir by Centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad as knowledge partner, and was launched by the Home Minister of

India on 22 January 2022. The DGGI is a framework comprising of performance under ten governance sectors having 58 indicators with 116 data points. The DGGI helps to identify the impact of various government interventions at District-level and provides a futuristic roadmap for improving District-level governance and service delivery with targeted interventions.

District Good Governance Index of Gujarat – The DGGI for Gujarat provides significant data insights to the State of Gujarat and other stakeholders in their efforts to address existing gaps, plan to bridge these gaps and aid as decision making tool. The ranking is expected to bring about healthy competition amongst districts in the quest to provide citizen centric administration and governance. DGGI Gujarat is first for any big state of India, as the Index benchmarks governance in all the 33 Districts of Gujarat on 65 indicators under 10 sectors. The DGGI Gujarat was released by Chief Minister, Gujarat in the valedictory Session of the three day ‘10th Chintan Shibir’ – a brainstorming session for senior and junior government officials of Gujarat – at Kevadia in Narmada district of Gujarat on 21st May, 2023.

District Good Governance Index of Arunachal Pradesh – DGGI Arunachal Pradesh is first DGGI for a north-east State of India. The Index benchmarks governance in all 25 districts of Arunachal Pradesh on 65 indicators under 8 sectors. The ranking brings about healthy competition amongst Districts and provide guidance to the State Government as well as District administration of Arunachal Pradesh in their efforts to address existing gaps, plan to bridge these gaps and aid as decision making tool. The District Good Governance Index of Arunachal Pradesh was released on 8th June 2023.

Good Governance Week

The Nation-wide weekly celebrations of Good Governance were organized by DARPG in 2021, 2022 and 2023. The hallmark event of Good Governance Weeks 2021 and 2022 was the weeklong Nation-wide campaign ‘Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore 2022’ aimed at redressal public grievances and improving service delivery.

Prime Minister Modi in his message on the eve of Good Governance week 2021 said

“In the Amrit Period of Independence, we are marching ahead rapidly to create a transparent system, efficient process and smooth governance to make development all-round and all-inclusive. In this context, the theme of the week – Prashasan Gaon ki Ore assumes even greater significance.”

The second nationwide campaign ‘Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore’ was conducted from on December 19-24, 2022. Guided by the principle of Citizen-First, the Government strived to make the eco-system transparent and faster by simplifying procedures and processes at every level. Various citizen centric initiatives including redressal of public grievances, online services, disposal of service delivery applications and more, sought to expand the outreach of service delivery mechanisms and make them more effective. The emphasis was on projecting the immense potential of technology to bring citizens and government closer, as a powerful tool to empower citizens as well as a medium to optimise transparency and accountability in day to day functioning. The Government’s endeavour was to increase the impact of governance and reduce the interference of government in every citizen’s life, to increase opportunities and remove obstacles from the citizen’s path.

The message of Prime Minister Modi was conveyed by Dr. Jitendra Singh, Minister of State for Personnel, Pubic Grievances (PG) and Pensions, in an event attended by District Collectors, Chief Secretaries/ Additional Chief Secretaries and AR Secretaries of 36 States/ UT’s and Senior Officials from Central Ministries/ Departments. During the *Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore* Campaign, District Collectors organized special camps/events at Tehsil Headquarters/Panchayat Samitis to resolve public grievances and for improved service delivery. The campaign was monitored centrally on a real time basis through a Dashboard created for this purpose on the ‘Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore’ Portal. In 2023, the Good Governance Week events included a series of workshops on Good Governance, Secretariat Reforms, Institutionalizing *Swachhata* and Reducing Pendency, Capacity Building programs, Innovations in State Governments, and Pensioner centric reforms.

The National e-Services Delivery Assessment 2021

The National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) was undertaken to boost the e-government endeavours

and drive digital government excellence. The study Report assesses States, Union Territories (UTs), and focus Central Ministries on the effectiveness of e-Governance service delivery. NeSDA helps the respective governments to improve their delivery of citizen centric services and shares best practices across the country for all States, UTs and Central Ministries to emulate.

The Department has undertaken NeSDA 2019 and 2021. The preparation of NeSDA 2023 is currently in progress. In the assessment of State portals, Kerala remains a front runner and the progress made by Tamil Nadu, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh in NeSDA 2021 is commendable. In Service portals, Rajasthan, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir and Meghalaya have topped the rankings. All States/ UT's have shown improvements in the promotion of integrated service portals and the number of services being offered on their State portals. India's e-Governance policies have shown improvements and citizen satisfaction levels have risen. In many ways Technology succeeded in Bringing Government and Citizens closer. The NeSDA 2021 report assessed 1400 e-Services across States and UT's and reported that India's e-Services had grown by 60 percent in the period 2019-2021. 69 percent of the mandatory e-services have been delivered by States/ UT's in 2021 up from 48 percent in NeSDA 2019. 74 percent of the respondents of the nation-wide citizen survey are satisfied/ very satisfied with the e-services.

DARPG is collaborating with States and Union Territories to ensure timely implementation of the recommendations of the NeSDA 2021 for rolling out of all mandatory e-services by States and Union Territories in a time bound manner. The DARPG is also coordinating with States and Union Territories to strengthen the State Portals and Service Portals to enhance the ease of living of citizens. The objectives of the monitoring/ collaboration are to adopt the 56 mandatory services and to saturate e-service delivery by all the States/UTs. DARPG has designed the NeSDA-Way Forward, Status of Implementation Dashboard in line with the focus areas of e-Governance. While Central and State Governments are taking utmost care and importance to improve their service delivery through digital channels, this enhanced dashboard aims to create the baseline for online

service delivery and build an inclusive digital ecosystem. The monthly reports institutionalise the nation's endeavours for improved delivery of e-services and prepare States/UTs for NeSDA 2023. The objectives of the monthly progress are saturation of e-services, to promote faceless and suo-moto entitlement-based delivery of services, identification of bottlenecks in the implementation of recommendations process and dissemination of best practices. Starting from April 2023, 12 monthly editions have been released till April 2024. In this period, April-December 2023, the Nation's e-services increased from 11500 to 16500. It is expected that the number of e-services will reach saturation by 2025.

Effective Redressal of Public Grievances

Prime Minister Modi has said "*Effective Redressal of Public Grievances*" is one of the most important aspects of Indian democracy, accorded highest priority to the subject with focus on citizen engagement. The Prime Minister's commitment to an effective grievance redressal mechanism emanated from his early years in Government as Chief Minister Gujarat when he launched the State Wide Attention on Grievances by Application of Technology (SWAGAT) portal in 2003. The SWAGAT portal of Gujarat celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2023, was a pioneer in introducing citizen interaction, categorization of grievances and effective redressal of public grievances.

The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances is the nodal agency in respect of policy initiatives on public grievance redressal mechanisms and citizen centric initiatives.

Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) is an online platform available to the citizens 24x7 to lodge their grievances to the public authorities on any subject related to service delivery. It is a single portal connected to all the Ministries/ Departments of Government of India and States. Every Ministry and all States have role-based access to this system. CPGRAMS is also accessible to the citizens through standalone mobile application downloadable through Google Play store and mobile application integrated with Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance (UMANG). The citizen can access the system online through the portal

www.pgportal.nic.in. The efficacy of the CPGRAMS portal has been an important thrust area of the Nation's Grievance Redressal Systems.

The grievances received by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances are forwarded to the concerned Ministries/ Departments/ State Governments/ UTs who deal with the substantive functions linked with the grievance for redressal under intimation to the complainant. India's policy for grievance redressal has placed emphasis on timely grievance redressal and quality of grievance redressal. The upper limit of 30 days were introduced, along with staggered redressal of grievances priority wise, with an appeal mechanism in cases where the citizen is not satisfied.

Under CPGRAMS 7.0 grievances are routed to the last mile grievance officer level. The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances has issued guidelines to all Ministries/ Departments to sensitize grievance officers for effective redressal of public grievances. There exist several digital portals in Government of India for effective redressal of public grievances – CPGRAMS, Rail Madad and e-Nivaran all of which are linked to CPGRAMS. All Ministries/ Departments have designated nodal Grievance Redressal Officers for effective redressal of grievances. Periodic reviews by the Hon'ble Prime Minister have enabled ushering-in of transformational reforms in CPGRAMS as represented by the 10 Step reform program of CPGRAMS launched in 2022.

The implementation of CPGRAMS 10-Step reforms has resulted in a linear increase in the number of public grievances being redressed every month to over 1 lac cases, and reduction in timelines for disposal to 16 days in central ministries/ departments for the past 22 months. The CPGRAMS portal has mapped 1.01 lac Grievance Redressal Officers, and 25 lac citizens have registered themselves to file over 20 lac grievances/ year. The grievance redressal time has come down from 28 days in 2019 to 10 days in March 2024. Considerable success was achieved in effective redressal of public grievances during the COVID-19 pandemic with launch of the COVID-19 Grievance Redressal Dashboard and portal on the CPGRAMS portal. This was a period in which 1.25 lac COVID-19 public grievances were redressed with an average disposal period of 1.45 days.

The status of the grievance filed in CPGRAMS can be tracked with the unique registration ID provided at the time of registration of the complainant. CPGRAMS also provides appeal facility to the citizens if they are not satisfied with the resolution by the Grievance Officer. After closure of grievance if the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution, he/she can provide feedback. If the rating is 'Poor' the option to file an appeal is enabled. The status of the Appeal can also be tracked by the petitioner with the grievance registration number. Since July 2022, DARPG has also reached out to the citizen filing a grievance through CPGRAMS by contacting him through an outbound call centre and soliciting his feedback on his closed grievance.

Grievance Redressal Machinery in the States

The State Governments have evolved advanced mechanisms for redressal of public grievances. States have operationalized public grievances cells which receive complaints from citizens and forward those to the concerned departments and follow them up. Several Chief Ministers hold regular citizen interactions through physical meetings/ virtual meetings for hearing and redressal of public grievances. In several States, Senior Officers visited districts and villages as part of Good Governance Week celebrations in 2021 and 2022 when Nation-wide campaigns for Effective Redressal of Public Grievances were conducted. The impact of multiple grievance redressal platforms functioning in unison in the Good Governance Week from December 19-25, 2022 was quite significant, with 315 lac service delivery applications being disposed and 6 lac Public Grievances being redressed. The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances has collaborated closely with States in several initiatives for effective redressal of public grievances.

The areas of collaboration included:

- i. Institution of an award category for Improving Service Delivery and Redressal of Public Grievances under the Scheme for Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration 2020.
- ii. National Workshop on Technology Platforms in Public Grievance Redressal on 18 February 2021 and the National

Workshop on Sevottam in November 2022 and May 2023.

- iii. One Nation – One Portal initiative by integration of CPGRAMS with State Grievance Portals and reverse integration.
- iv. Sevottam Capacity Building Programs for Grievance Redressal Officers.
- v. Publication of Monthly Reports from 2022
- vi. Collaboration with Government of Jammu & Kashmir for revamping the Awaaz e-Awam portal and relaunch as JKIGRAMS.

In pursuance of the decisions taken by the Prime Minister on 16 April 2022, CPGRAMS reforms were implemented by DARPG for improving quality of grievance disposal and reducing the disposal time. A comprehensive 10-Step CPGRAMS Reform program was adopted after several rounds of consultations with key stakeholders. DARPG established collaborations with Common Service Centre (CSCs), Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-K), National Institute of Smart Governance (NISG), National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad (NID), Quality Council of India, Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), Centre for Good Governance Hyderabad and Haryana Institute of Public Administration (HIPA) Gurgaon through Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and work orders.

The 10-step reforms of CPGRAMS are outlined as follows:

- i. Universalization of CPGRAMS 7.0 – Auto-routing of grievances to the last mile.
- ii. Technological Enhancements – Automatic flagging of urgent grievances leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI)/Machine Learning (ML).
- iii. Language Translation – CPGRAMS Portal in 22 scheduled languages along with English.
- iv. Grievance Redressal Index – Ranking of Ministries / Departments on their Performance.
- v. Feedback Call Centre – 50-seater call centre to collect

feedback directly from every citizen whose grievance is redressed.

- vi. One Nation One Portal – Integration of State Portal and other Government of India (GoI) portals with CPGRAMS.
- vii. Inclusivity and Outreach – Empowering the remotest citizen to file grievances through CSC's.
- viii. Training and Capacity Building – Conducted by Institute of Secretariat Training and Management (ISTM) and State Administrative Training institutes (ATIs) under SEVOTTAM scheme for enabling effective grievance resolution.
- ix. Monitoring Progress – Monthly reports for both the Central Ministries/Departments and States/UTs.
- x. Data Strategy Unit – Established at DARPG for insightful data analytics.

Two Programme Management Units (PMUs) were established at DARPG – (a) PMU with Quality Council of India (QCI) team for preparation of the CPGRAMS Monthly Reports for Central Ministries and States and (b) PMU with CGG Hyderabad team for preparation of Grievance Redressal Index in addition to the Data Strategy Unit with Data Analytics specialists in collaboration with National Institute of Smart Governance. The Public Grievances Division of DARPG was strengthened with comprehensive redeployment and all vacant posts being filled up. DARPG collaborated with 22 State Administrative Training Institutes for implementation of the Sevottam Program following extensive discussions with HIPA Gurgaon.

In pursuance of the deliberations in the Chintan Shivir, DARPG has further enhanced the processes for establishing greater citizen connect – the steps include improvements in call centre engagement with citizens, speech records being examined in senior level meetings, training programs for operators, sharing speech records of appeals filed through call centre with appellate officers, introduction of chat bot, introduction of outgoing call centre and addition of new call centre operators.

The CPGRAMS reforms received considerable national and international appreciation. The India Today featured CPGRAMS

reforms as amongst 100 big tech ideas for the revolutions needed in 10-key sectors to make India a developed Nation by 2047. In April 2024, “CPGRAMS: A Foundation for SMART Government” was presented at the 3rd Biennial Meeting of the Pan-Commonwealth Heads of Public Service/ Secretaries to the Cabinet on “Institutionalization of SMART Government to enhance public service delivery” and was recognized as a state of the art grievance redressal system that has engaged and empowered citizens across India which has had a transformative impact on the transparency and accountability of government. The evolution of India’s vision to use AI for further policy, process and people-related changes, to operationalize the CPGRAMS mobile app and adopt the CPGRAMS 7.0 version in all States/ UT’s was also recognized in the Outcome Statement of the Commonwealth Biennial Meeting.

Best Practices in State Grievance Portals

SPANDANA (Andhra Pradesh): The Government of Andhra Pradesh grievance redressal portal operationalized at www.spandana.ap.gov.in is one of the most comprehensive grievance redressal portals of India. The common platform through SPANDANA portal integrates all levels. The process flow of SPANDANA envisages grievances received from multiple sources – on the portal, through toll free numbers, through petitions received through e-mails, and redressal through grievance cells in district, division and tehsil levels. Village level volunteers receive door step SPANDANA applications and deliver to the GRAMA SACHIVALAYAM for redressal. Mondays are designated as grievances day and the integration of all offices at District, Sub-Division & Mandal is through video conferencing on grievances day. A 14-digit unique ID is issued through the SPANDANA website. The citizen can track his grievance through the tracking ID provided in the acknowledgement slip. The Action Taken Report is uploaded on the portal and sent by SMS to the citizen. A dedicated toll-free call centre (18002331077) has been operationalized for feedback and 100 percent quality audit on redressal is undertaken. The option for reopening of grievance in case the citizen is not satisfied with the quality of disposal.

SWAGAT (Gujarat): The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Gujarat operates an Information and Communications Technology (ICT) based

program since April 2003 for effective, transparent and speedy redress of the grievances of the citizens at various levels of the government throughout the State including that at the highest levels by direct interaction with Hon'ble Chief Minister. The SWAGAT portal is a combination of digital and communication technology in the form of a program to resolve public grievances effectively. Under SWAGAT, citizens can register their grievances at village, taluka and district levels. Citizens can view the status of their application online, using their allotted password and login ID at any internet access point. The software application enables an online review of sub-district, district SWAGAT and State SWAGAT outcomes and disposal of grievances is also monitored by the software. Cases for attention of Chief Minister are selected as those that are long standing, acute humanitarian issues, difficult to resolve at other levels in Government and those that have policy implications. Applications are registered in 3 categories – (i) Policy Matters where a limitation or gap in the policy requires attention (ii) Long Pending grievances where the application has remained unresolved after initial application (iii) First time grievances which are sent to lower levels. There exist four levels of SWAGAT – on every 4th Thursday of the month the SWAGAT hearings are held in the State Capital Gandhinagar by Hon'ble Chief Minister of Gujarat through video conference. The District SWAGAT is held in all 33 districts and the Sub-District SWAGAT and GRAM SWAGAT are also held as per prescribed schedules. The four levels are well integrated by software. SWAGAT has enhanced the accountability of Government, encouraged systemic changes as decisions lead to policy reform, has resulted in high citizen's satisfaction, along with total transparency and monitoring system as also awareness at highest levels of authority on public grievances. SWAGAT received the 2010 United Nations (UN) Public Service Award in improving transparency, accountability and responsiveness in Public Service.

JK-IGRAMS (Jammu & Kashmir): JK-IGRAMS along with LG's monthly mulaqaat with citizens and review with officers provides the institutional framework to citizens that is accessible to all in Jammu & Kashmir. The JK-IGRAMS portal is www.jkgrievance.in and key features include decentralization of grievance system by mapping

subordinate offices up to block level, setting up of 2 call centers in Jammu and Srinagar for registering grievances, Collectors have been made epicenter and all Districts/ Blocks linked to CPGRAMS, Grievance Analysis teams deployed to study and share findings for monthly mulaaquat with Lieutenant Governor (LG) J&K. The impact increased disposal from 41 percent to 74 percent in 4-months' time in all categories. The dedicated call center provides a unique JKIGRAMS number which is forwarded to the grievance officer and online status is available to the citizen for effective follow-up. Various analytical reports and other Management Information System (MIS) options on the portal assist administration in data filtering.

SAMADHAN (Uttar Pradesh): SAMADHAN is an integrated web-based application system which brings all grievance redressal mechanism to one platform and enables instant and easy communication between Government and Citizens resulting in speedy redressal of their grievances from anywhere and anytime. It also provides facility for submission of grievances online by aggrieved citizen. The Grievance input mechanism has Janta Darshan by Chief Minister at State level and District Collector at District level. The SAMADHAN portal integrates different channels and portals including the Public Grievances (PG)-Portal, Anti Bhu Mafia Portal, Anti-Corruption portal, Chief Minister (CM) Helpline etc. The citizen relationship management contains online registration and tracking of grievances, project management and monitoring, analytical reports, calls/ Short Message Service (SMS)/ e-mail, integrated & single platform, send reminders and giving feedback. Feedback is obtained through the CM Helpline call center and the complainant can also provide online feedback through the portal. Negative feedback is reviewed by one level higher; through grading opinion, if senior officer finds disposal of the grievance insufficient/ not satisfactory then he/ she can revive the disposed complaint.

Special Campaigns:

The Special Campaign 2.0 was implemented in Central Government from October 2-October 31, 2022 with the objective of institutionalizing swachhata and minimizing pendency in government. Under Special

Campaign 2.0, 4.18 lakh public grievances were redressed, cleanliness campaign was carried out in 99,706 office spaces, 29.10 lakh files were weeded out, 88.25 lakh square feet of space was freed, and scrap disposal earned Rs. 364.50 crores. The special campaign 2.0 brought in a number of success stories in digitization, efficient management of office spaces, enhancement of office premises, environment friendly practices, inclusivity, protocols and mechanisms being put in place and waste disposal. Departments/ Ministries gave special attention to attached/ subordinate/ filed offices including in the remotest parts of India in month long campaign period from October 2-31, 2022. Special Campaign 2.0 was 17 times larger than Special Campaign of 2021 in terms of cleanliness campaign sites. The Special Campaign 2.0, was holistic in size and scale, witnessed widespread participation from thousands of officials and citizens who came together to create a movement for Swachhata in Government Offices. Cabinet Ministers, Ministers of State participated in the Special Campaign 2.0 providing leadership and guidance in implementation.

The Department of Posts has conducted the cleanliness campaign in 24,000 Post Offices, the Ministry of Railways has conducted in 10,716 Railway Sites, Department of Defense in 5,922 campaign sites and Ministry of Home Affairs in 11,559 campaign sites. 16 Ministries/ Departments have conducted the Special Campaign 2.0 in over 1000 campaign sites, 31 Ministries/ Departments had conducted in the Special Campaign 2.0 in over 100 campaign sites. The progress of Special Campaign 2.0 was monitored on a dedicated portal www.pgportal.gov.in/scdpm22 on a daily basis. 215 Nodal Officers/ Sub-Nodal Officers were appointed in all Ministries/ Departments. The Special Campaign 2.0 was reviewed on a weekly basis by Secretaries to Government of India. The progress of the Special Campaign has been widely reported in social media with over 67,000 social media tweets by Ministries/ Departments. 127 PIB Statements were issued by Ministries/ Departments. Over 300 best practices in conducting the Special Campaign 2.0 as a citizen centric movement, to bring citizens and government closer and create an aesthetically pleasant work environment were reported by Ministries/ Departments.

The Special Campaign 3.0, held from October 2-31, 2023 was

India's largest campaign for Institutionalizing *Swachhata* and Reducing Pendency in Government Offices and has witnessed many best practices and milestones. A saturation approach was adopted and the swachhata campaign covered 2.56 lac office spaces in remotest parts of India, freed-up 159 lac sq. ft of office space for effective use, 48.42 lac files were reviewed and Rs. 547 crores of revenue earned from disposal of office scrap and condemned vehicles. The Special Campaign 3.0 gained significant traction on social media with over 1 lac social media posts by Ministries/ Departments, 900 tweets from the DARPG twitter handle, 1200 infographics on #specialcampaign3 and issue of 282 Press Information Bureau (PIB) Statements. In the period 2021-2023 Government has conducted 3 successful Special Campaigns which have helped in institutionalizing *swachhata* and reducing pendency in government. The cumulative progress achieved in the 3 Special Campaigns was 4.02 lac office spaces being covered, 351 lac square feet of office space being freed, 96.08 lac files being weeded out and Rs. 1153.50 crores of revenue being earned.

Special Campaigns 1.0-3.0 also had significant impact in reducing pendency and enhancing digitization in Central Secretariat. Given the effectiveness of special campaign model, Government has decided that all Ministries/ Departments will devote 3 hours/ week for *swachhata* activities. DARPG publishes the monthly Secretariat Reforms covering the various aspects of Special Campaign – (a) *Swachhata* initiatives and Reducing Pendency (b) Initiative for Increasing Efficiency in Decision Making (c) adoption of e-Office in central secretariat. The Special Campaign model and Secretariat Reforms were replicated by the Government of Maharashtra as Mantralaya Reforms.

Initiative for Increasing Efficiency in Central Secretariat

In 2022, the Central Secretariat continued to implement the Initiative for Increasing Efficiency in Decision Making in Government. Under this initiative, a four-pronged approach was adopted by the Central Government with DARPG as the nodal department.

- i. Delayering- Review of Channels of Submission for creating flatter organizations – the channel of submission was reduced to not more than 4 levels from 7-8 levels

- ii. Delegation of Financial/ Administrative powers to lower functionaries
- iii. Adoption of Desk Officer System to ensure single points of file disposal
- iv. Adoption of e-Office version 7.0 and Digitalization of all receipts in the Central Registration Units.

Some of the key highlights are as follows:

All Ministries/ Departments of Government of India have reviewed their channel of submission and adopted layering (60 fully layered; 19 partially layered). With this, the channel of submission for most of the subjects has reduced to up to 4 levels. Financial delegation for miscellaneous and contingent expenditure was made to DS/ Director level officers. Officers were divided into separate categories. Layering entailed reducing number of levels, and level jumping was adopted amongst officers and staff with the guidelines that no officer falling in a particular category will put up files to another officer in the same category, which means they work in parallel, horizontal organizational structures – Additional Secretaries/ Joint Secretaries were placed in category II and Deputy Secretary/ Under Secretary were placed in category III across Ministries/ Departments. Several areas of financial delegation which were not revisited for several years were reviewed.

The Initiative for Increasing Efficiency in Decision Making has created flatter organizations; in 2020 the average distinct levels for active files was 8.01 which came down to 5.54 levels in December 2023 and further down to 4.11 levels in November 2023. The average distinct levels for active files stands at 4.4 in March 2024.

All Ministries/ Departments have upgraded to e- Office version 7.0. 95 percent of the new files opened in March 2024 were e-files. A significant reduction in e-files to p-files ratio has been witnessed. E-Office has also created the option of inter-ministerial e-file movement and monitoring of e-receipts. 95 percent of receipts were digitized in April 2024. e-Office version 7.0 has facilitated inter-ministerial e-file movement. Use of heavy-duty scanners in central registration units was adopted, and fresh receipts were replied to in

digital form. The digitalization of Central Registration Units along with e-Office has resulted in significant reduction in paper consumption in several Ministries/ Departments. Flatter organizations have enabled faster decision making.

To enable a work from home environment in the pandemic, the Central Secretariat Manual of Office Procedure 2019 provided Virtual Private Network Facility up to Deputy Secretary level and laptops were provided up to Under Secretary level. Desk officer system is operationalized in 40 Ministries/ Departments where it was feasible. The Ministry of External Affairs has operationalized 223 desk officers with specific assignment of responsibilities. The adoption of desk officer system had significant benefits in service related areas.

The Government's initiative for "Increasing Efficiency in Decision Making" represented one of the most complicated and far-reaching administrative reforms witnessed in the Central Secretariat. It brought a silent reform in work culture, reduced hierarchies and resulted in significant adoption of new technology. It has also enabled responsive communication and enhanced efficiency in processing of receipts. The initiative has been incorporated into the Central Secretariat Manual of Office Procedure 2022 and duly institutionalized. The DARPG has collaborated with the Government of Maharashtra in updating the Manual of Office Procedure and replicating the digital Secretariat model into one of the largest State Secretariats of India. The adoption of e-Office has enabled creation of permanent digital repositories of file records, enhanced transparency and increased accountability levels in Government.

Vision India@2047

The DARPG is amongst the Ministries/ Departments of Government that is formulating its Vision India@2047. The DARPG constituted an Advisory Group under the chairmanship of Minister of State for Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Personnel, PG and Pensions with 15 Sector Specialists including National Experts from Senior Civil Servants, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) Central and State Universities, and Public Policy Research Organizations. A working group under the chairmanship

of Secretary DARPG was constituted for formulation of the Vision India@2047 under the overall supervision of the Advisory Group. The Indian Institute of Public Administration served as the Knowledge Partner of DARPG in formulating its Vision India@2047. The Advisory Group held 3 rounds of Meetings and Working Group held 7 rounds of meetings. Based on deliberations of working group and Advisory group DARPG prepared a Vision India@2047 document with the theme of Bringing Citizens and Government together.

National Centre for Good Governance

The National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) has the mandate to promote good governance by conducting training/ capacity building programs at National/ International level on public policy and governance. It serves as a think-tank for governance and policy reform initiatives and carrying out studies on issues relating to governance, organizing consultations, workshops, seminars to promote improved governance.

In the period 2019-2024, the NCGG has emerged as one of India's largest capacity building institutions for International Civil Servants. The NCGG has scaled up its international capacity building programs from 5 programs/ year in 2018-19 for one country to 47 programs/ year in 2024-25 for 17 countries. The NCGG has successfully created a global outreach and interest in India's governance model, with webinars covering 54 countries and a national outreach through the National Good Governance Webinars. Further the NCGG has successfully established collaborations with a number of apex public policy institutions in India and capacity building programs for State Civil Servants have also been held. The NCGG has several requests for collaboration from Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) countries (Maldives/ Gambia/ Tanzania/ Iran) and ASCI/ IIM's for setting up Centres of Excellence for scaling up State capacity.

From 2014, 2660 civil servants from Bangladesh, 1000 civil servants from Maldives, 118 civil servants from Gambia, 97 civil servants from Myanmar, 95 civil servants from Sri Lanka and 150 civil servants from Cambodia have undergone capacity building programs at NCGG. 71 capacity building programs were conducted for Bangladesh, and

33 capacity building programs were conducted for Maldives civil servants in this period. The NCGG has developed and conducted one-week programs for Permanent Secretaries, two-week programs for Secretary Generals-District Collectors-Deputy Secretaries. The focus areas for capacity building programs included administrative reforms and effective redressal of public grievances, digital public infrastructure as a global good, open network for digital commerce, bringing transparency to government procurement, Making of Aadhar: A tool for Governance, Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, India's Fiscal Policy Reforms, Poverty Alleviation Initiatives in India, NITI Aayog – Vision India@2047, Mission Karmayogi, Capacity Building of Officials – Indian initiatives, Anti-Corruption strategies, Lok Pal in India, Pricing of Goods in India, PM Gati Shakti, India's COVID-19 vaccine journey etc. Country specific subjects included bilateral relations with India, leadership and motivation, ethics in administration, group discussions and presentation. The Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions interacted with the delegates and exchanged views on the Government's "Maximum Governance – Minimum Government" policies.

The High Commission of the Republic of Gambia acknowledged the NCGG after the successful completion of the program for Permanent Secretaries on 27 May 2022 as:

"The Special Training Program will be of immense help to the Senior Government Officials as they work on the implementation of the National Development Plan of the new Government."

The Civil Services Commission of Maldives following the India-Maldives workshop on Good Governance on 24 February 2023 said that:

"We have received very good feedback from the participants of the workshop. They found the workshop to be very informative and speakers to be very inspirational and shared valuable guidance pertinent to current times."

During the capacity building programs a lot of emphasis has been placed on group work, and creation of horizontal linkages in organizations in line with the Chintan Shivir model of Government of India. The focus has been on adopting in technology in governance to reduce the interface between citizens and government.

The NCGG has also conducted domestic capacity building programs for State Civil Service officers for the States of Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh and the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir. 75 officers of the Gujarat Administrative Service, 310 officers of the Jammu & Kashmir Administrative Service and 150 officers of the Arunachal Pradesh Administrative Service have attended capacity building programs at the NCGG.

For further dissemination of India's Good Governance practices, the NCGG conducts a number of international webinars called the "ITEC-NCGG" webinars on a range of subjects. The 2020 webinar series called "Good Governance Practices in a Pandemic" witnessed participation of over 400 officials from over 50 ITEC member countries.

Conclusion

I have tried to collate the vast gamut of work undertaken in ushering in the technology revolution in governance from 2019-2024 that has enabled millions of Indians to reap the benefits of transparency in governance, faster timelines of disposal and quality decision making. It can be said that the imposing 182-meter Statue of Unity of Sardar Vallabhai Patel provides inspiration for the Nation's relentless commitment to excellence in the Amrit Kaal Period.

To conclude, I quote the words of Hon'ble Prime Minister from his address to the United States (US) Congress in June 2023:

"When I first visited the US as Prime Minister, India was the tenth largest economy in the world. Today, India is the fifth largest economy. And, India will be the third largest economy very soon. We are not only growing bigger but we are also growing faster. When India grows, the whole world grows. After all, we are one sixth of the world's population. In the last century, when India won its freedom, it inspired many other countries to free themselves from colonial rule. In this century when India sets benchmarks in growth, it will inspire many other countries to do the same. Our vision is Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas."

Jai Hind.

**A Green Economy through the Unique
Biodiversity of Uttarakhand**
*Societal Projects with a Possibility of Impact
Investment*

Abstract:

Uttarakhand is endowed with many life-sustaining natural resources such as glaciers, forests, rivers and minerals. Forest resources are an integral part of the state wealth, providing critical ecological services to the vast population of our country extending beyond the state boundary.

Such natural endowments give a great opportunity and responsibility to the state of Uttarakhand to follow the path of green economy in managing its resources while leveraging its unique biodiversity aligned with sustainable usage practices and promotion of these resources. Using Uttarakhand's unique biodiversity for societal projects at community level is one way to attend this.

Keeping a focus on this agenda, this paper tries to explore the opportunities and readiness of the state to create such societal projects that have the possibility to attract the impact investment to usher bottom-up green economy in this biodiversity rich state. For this study, **'Uttarakhand Vision 2030'**¹ prepared by **Institute for Human Development** for Planning Department, Government of Uttarakhand (2021) was found most appropriate to be used as a base document to evolve discussions to write this paper. Apart from this, the paper has used the empirical study done by author as a development practitioner and policy maker on green livelihoods promotion.

¹ Uttarakhand Vision 2030 published by Institute for Human Development, New Delhi for Planning Department, Government of Uttarakhand, published on 07.12.2021
https://20pt.uk.gov.in/department7/library_file/file-28-05-2022-06-59-26.pdf

‘Uttarakhand Vision 2030’ has identified horticulture/hill agriculture along with aromatic plants, medicinal Plants with link to AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy), biotechnology and tourism as growth drivers. The selection of these sectors has been backed by a detailed sub-sector analysis. Along with this, the sectors like Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Information Technology and Small Hydropower have been identified as the growth enablers. Based on the readiness of the state to drive the growth and investments in these sectors, this paper has particularly explored such potential value chains that have the potential to build up the key sub-subsectors (e.g eco-tourism under tourism sector) that are aligned to the agenda of this paper. Apart from the above, the other key emerging sectors like green building, which this state has a unique advantage to promote in the green economy space, and the important enablers needing appropriate support from the State Government to attract impact investments, such as, renewable energy, water conservation, water harnessing and harvesting and solid waste management have been discussed and deliberated.

In addition to the above, the paper also tries to delve into institutional infrastructure of the community and the quality of collaboration ecosystem of state, market, civil society and knowledge institutions as prerequisites for the growth drivers to function and contribute to the green economy. The critical role of financial institutions and investors to push such growth drivers and enablers diligently have also been highlighted as important contributors to effectuate such green growth in this biodiversity rich state.

Background

- The predominantly mountainous State of Uttarakhand covers an area of 53,483 sq km, which is 1.63% of the geographical area of the country. As the State lies in the Himalayan range, the climate and vegetation vary greatly with altitude, from glaciers at the highest elevations to subtropical forests at the lower elevations. Ice and bare rocks cover the higher elevations. The average annual rainfall is 1,500 mm

and the annual temperature varies from 0 degree Celsius to 43 degrees Celsius. Many major rivers including Ganga, Yamuna, Ramganga & Sharda drain the State along with their tributaries. The State has 13 districts; 90% of them are hill districts. The State does not have any tribal districts. As per the 2011 census, Uttarakhand has a population of 10.09 million, which is 0.83% of India's population. The rural and urban population of the State constitute 69.77% and 30.23% respectively. The Tribal population is 2.89%. The population density of the State is 189 per sq km, which is lower than the national average. The 19th Livestock Census 2012 has reported a total livestock population of 4.79 million. The human and livestock population is largely dependent on forests due to agrarian economy and pastoralism.

- Uttarakhand is rich in forest resources, biodiversity and carbon stock. As per India State of Forest Report (2021)², the Forest Cover in the State is 24,305 sq km which is 45.5 % of the State's geographical area. Forest biodiversity has 43 Forest Types. Uttarakhand shelters around 4,000 species of plants, belonging to 1198 genera, under 192 families. Of these, 161 species are recognised as rare or threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The state is home to about 102 species of mammals, 623 types of avifauna, 124 varieties of fish, 19 types of amphibians and 69 categories of reptiles. There are six National Parks, seven Wildlife Sanctuaries and four Community Reserves constitute the Protected Area network of the State covering 3.24% of its geographical area. As per India State of Forest Report (2021), total Carbon stock of forest in the State including the TOF (Trees Outside Forest) patches which are more than 1 ha in size is 370.91 million tonnes (1,360.00 million tonnes of CO equivalent) which is 5.21% of total forest carbon of the country.

² State of Forest Report (2021): Chapter 11.29 (Uttarakhand)
<https://fsi.nic.in/isfr19/vol2/isfr-2019-vol-ii-uttarakhand.pdf>

- The economy of households in this mountainous state thrives on basket of livelihood options. A number of formal, informal and traditional community institutions that are operational in Uttarakhand have their immense stake in the local biodiversity. These are Panchyati Raj institutions, Van Panchayats, Biodiversity Management Committees, Mahila Mangal Dals, Yuvak Mangal Dals, Joint Forest Management Committees, Eco Development Committees and Self Help Groups (SHGs). Over the period of last 30 years, SHGs led Federations/ Producer Companies/ Cooperatives formed through the State Government, Central Government and Externally Aided Project initiatives have been mostly promoting farm based collective business ventures. These institutions have been actively participating with their agriculture /horticulture/ allied sector products in the market. At present the three major social projects harnessing biodiversity for livelihoods through community collectives are Rural Enterprise Acceleration Program (REAP), State Rural Livelihood Mission (USRLM) and Uttarakhand Forest Resource Management Project (UFRMP). These three projects are working with more than 62 thousand SHGs. In addition to this, small grant funds to the Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) from various sources have created more than 10 thousand SHGs focussed on local resource based livelihoods promotion.

Way Forward

Keeping in view of the above, the sub sector and value chains explored under the **growth drivers** and the **growth enablers** that are critical to harness the unique biodiversity of Uttarakhand for social projects at community level with a possibility to attract impact investment to promote green economy are discussed sector-wise as under:

Growth drivers:

Agriculture, horticulture, forestry and livestock

Uttarakhand has a high diversity in crop races, cultivars and

livestock supported by wide wild variants of the on-farm crops in the wild forest area (70% of the total area). Climatic conditions of mountain regions are favorable for diversification in existing traditional agriculture, floriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry. Medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) cultivation is an emerging sector to increase income of marginal farmers as a substitute to low yielding traditional crops. Apart from high demand of high value crops like off-season vegetables, spices, flowers, medicinal & aromatic plants and mushrooms etc., the emerging demand for superfoods, nutraceuticals, health supplements and medical grade apparel could be a game changer for farmers of Uttarakhand.

Keeping in view above, the key area identified to work and improve upon which can attract investments are:

- Logistics (packaging and transportation infrastructure) and marketing support in terms of expertise in agriculture, horticulture and livestock products of Uttarakhand having niche identity to achieve the scale with quality such as unique spices, fruits, vegetables, organics, Geographical Indication (GI) products and others. Partnerships with retail chains, e-commerce and export markets wherever possible.
- Extend cultivation of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAP) in unused land and absentee land-hold. This will help reduce man-wildlife conflict. Build institutional support for Research & Development (R&D) on MAP. Establish high-tech nursery for MAP.
- Achieve scale in natural honey production from biodiverse sources (farm, off-farm & wild) – a prominent vector entity in biodiversity conservation.
- Focus on expansion of industrial hemp, oilseeds with high nutraceutical value such as Perilla (rich plant source of omega 3 fatty acid), Sea-buckthorn (rich source of vitamin C), etc.
- Promote freshwater fish in different riverine ecosystems. e.g. trout farming with research in high quality fish seeds.
- Use Chir pine leaf needles to generate electricity and/or biofuel at a scale that can drastically help prevent forest fire.

- Investment in blockchain technology to make organic certification more affordable to small farmers. Bring efficiency and effectiveness in crop insurance scheme by use of appropriate digital technology.
- Invest in technology to bring market closer for payment of ecological services – water and carbon sequestration. Bring value addition activities of Non-Timber Forest Produce at local level.
- Invest in R&D with Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) support to bring the most useful healing practices of traditional healers to the market.
- Research and investment with the community for superfoods, nutraceuticals and supplements.
- Investment in medical grade clothing made from industrial hemp and nettle and other natural fiber and promotion of sericulture (both Oak tassar & Mulberry based silk) based apparels.
- Research and investment in bamboo cultivation for green construction and furnishing.
- Promote craft and food craft to mainstream traditional agri and allied crops in hospitality sector (cuisine and gift) with unique branding.

Ecotourism

Uttarakhand is endowed with natural locations, pleasant climatic conditions, lakes, snowcapped mountain peaks, age old pilgrimage and religious places, glaciers and origins of rivers and rivers, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries and many historic places with traditional fairs and festivals. For the purpose of writing this paper, only ecotourism has been kept in focus for discussion.

The challenge of Uttarakhand is in handling mass religious tourism on one hand and niche tourism on the other hand. Nature based tourism or ecotourism focusing on societal good has great potential to leverage the local economy while contributing to the sustainable growth of the state. Given the massive potential of ecotourism, there is a need to diversify tourism activities (both on farm, off farm and wild) while mapping the same with different products and services

under ecotourism that cater to local livelihood enhancing options. Ecotourism needs massive community involvement to maintain the authenticity of the property and the services that flow from it.

There is a need to develop & create clearly demarcated ecotourism circuits. The circuits will be based on physical and environmental characteristics like land use cover, scenic beauty, species diversity (abundance and density of unique and endemic species), protection of species and socio- economic factors like accessibility (distance from roads and possibility for human mobility), community's settlement size and willingness to participate. Infrastructure, connectivity, skill development and accreditation of the services would be a key to offer a distinct ecotourism experience on this count. Experiential attributes to a place can be the prime mover in creating a distinct brand proposition under different sub-themes.

An integrated approach to planning these circuits, along with a comprehensive area development approach to ensure the availability all the requisite facilities (infrastructure for reach, connectivity and amenities) in these circuits, is essential (Ref: Uttarakhand vision 2030). For this, coordination between two key departments (Tourism and Forest) and with the other departments holds the key for attracting investment. Apart from the above, the initiatives that can attract investments are:

- Skill development on eco-tourism activities such as wildlife tourism, birdwatching, heritage walk, trekking, nature trail walks for 'nature bath' and tea tourism etc.
- Market research and investment in fast-moving usable souvenirs (e.g. flasks and straw from bamboo vis-à-vis traditional bamboo baskets) from local bio-resources.
- Mentoring, handholding and investing in skilled youth for entrepreneurship in ecotourism value chain. Partnerships with Indian and foreign tour companies dedicated to ecotourism and getting their suggestions.
- Training youth of ecotourism destinations in Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy.

- Promotion of homestays and agri-tourism in ecotourism circuits with proper regulation for standard operating practices (SoPs).
- Waste management in eco-tourism both at community and individual level.

Green construction

It is increasingly becoming evident that due to climate change and COVID 19 like situations, people from the cities, especially the capital city of India, Delhi, would like to reside in the small towns and nearby villages of Uttarakhand hills. This is a big opportunity to equip the state with policies and practices of green building as this brings a vast array of practices, techniques, and skills to reduce and ultimately eliminate the impact of construction on the environment and human health. This will emphasize renewable resources, e.g., using sunlight through passive solar, active solar and photovoltaic equipment, and using plants and trees through green roofs, rain gardens, and reduction of rainwater run-off. Keeping in view all these, green infrastructure planning and skilling of the local youth in green building would be important. This will give many sustainable green jobs. Use of latest technologies in planning and executing picturesque landscaping and reviving traditional architecture in homes with the efficient use of traditional material (wood and bamboo) will add a tremendous value to the esthetics of the state while creating local employment. Areas which need attention to attract investments are:

- Proactively plan and execute green building policies especially in prospective green township areas in the state.
- Provide best practices, techniques, and skills to local youth on green jobs pertaining to green building.
- Promote local entrepreneurship (individual or collective) around various green building products and services.
- Link green building initiative of Uttarakhand with other high-end investments such as Green Med City and Health City, Green Film City, Eco-friendly Education City for HiTech Disciplines, etc.

Key enablers needing prime attention for building the ecosystem for impact investment

Renewable energy

Renewable energy plays a key role in driving the economy in a decentralized manner that empowers the community by enabling them to lower their input cost in the production process. Uttarakhand is endowed with multifarious sources of renewable energy. These are micro-hydel – both for own use and opportunity to sell, solar PV – both for own use and opportunity to sell power to the grid, plenty of biomass (including Chir pine leaf needles) for gasifiers and a good bovine livestock for biogas plants including profuse scope of gravity energy in ropeways for rural goods transportation. Although works have already been done by the related Government departments, this is far from adequate to support the rural value chain that has unique potential to give an authentic brand value as green social enterprises.

The share of renewable energy in the total energy demand of Uttarakhand has been planned for expansion, from the current 3.2 per cent to 15.1 per cent by 2030. This has mostly relied on expansion of mini hydro and solar capacity additions. This needs an adequate in-depth study of solar irradiance, land availability, and water resources (Uttarakhand Vision 2030). Initiatives that can attract investments are:

- Mapping of various forms of renewable energy usage points/ clusters in targeting the youth for training with customized technologies for local use in various economic activities. Awareness building in public on economic and environmental benefits of renewable energy and energy conservation.
- Provide/Procure renewable energy equipment at community level such as Gram-Panchayat, SHG Business Federation, Cooperative, etc.
- The value chain integration of renewable energy in the branding exercise of Uttarakhand with green label would be an important step to take forward this sector.
- Invest in state-of-the-art technologies in renewable energy in times to come.

Water: Conservation, harnessing and harvesting

The water sources are under severe strain in the state with continuously declining per capita water availability, increased over-exploited areas, accelerated demand for water with Industry, change of consumption and distribution pattern with the growing economy, growing quality and equity concerns, etc. Climate change has affected very large temporal and spatial variation in rainfall. This, along with change in land use pattern, has led to drying of many water points in the recent past at an alarming rate.

Water, besides being our survival necessity, is the lifeline for harnessing on-farm biodiversity for livelihood sustenance. Till date many central, state and externally aided projects have invested in water and watershed management programs of Uttarakhand since 1985 with varied results.

Awareness in the community to conserve catchment area by freeing it from open grazing is the key to sustain perennial sources of water in the watershed area apart from the soil and water conservation through mechanical and bio treatment. The spring-shed and watershed treatment method followed by the state is still gross which incurs a huge cost. There is an urgent need to bring down this cost with the use of state-of-the-art technologies to achieve a scale in spring-shed treatment. Equally important is to save water – most importantly in all tourism destinations. It would be equally important. The interventions that can attract investments are:

- Smarter way to augment and use water – use of latest technology for scientific analysis of spring water dynamics through spring-shed approach in hilly districts.
- Smarter way to save and re-use water through high tech methods.
- Rainwater Harvesting both for rural and urban households to maximize the capture of run-off for surface storage as well as under-ground recharge.
- Skilling to create water entrepreneurs/ service providers at local level for water survey and water augmentation (e.g. geo-hydrology graduates along with barefoot technicians), water conservation and usage systems (water entrepreneurs).

- Need to explore the role of the community in market-based models of water conservation including under ‘Payment for Ecological Services’. Also search out market models for skillful harnessing of water, safe water supply, judicious water usage, and other value additions in water management systems.

Recycling of solid and liquid waste

Tourism in Uttarakhand cannot be thought without its waste management imperatives. Uttarakhand has a sedentary population of 1.2 crores (2011 census), and approximately one third of the population is urban. According to Urban Municipal Waste Management Action Plan for State of Uttarakhand (2017)³, the state as a whole (urban and rural) is generating approximately 3000 MT (metric tons) of solid waste every day. Of the waste generated, only 40-50% is collected and disposed, mostly not very scientifically. According to the same Plan, Uttarakhand’s municipal waste generation is estimated to rise to approximately 7500 MT per day by 2041 (both urban and floating population), resulting in an estimated 2.7 million tons of municipal waste being generated every year. There is a need for investing massively in a carefully planned manner to meet the infrastructure support needed to effectively handle different types of solid wastes in the state. This needs to be coupled with awareness, education and mobilisation of public and creation of capacity is much needed for local civic bodies to participate and develop their stake in solid waste management. For this, the areas needing investment for improvement are:

- End use disposal facility for mixed plastics without incineration or burn technology.
- Facility to utilize laminated polymers through recycling into utilities.
- Infrastructure inputs like compactors for cheap transportation from high hills.

³ Urban Municipal Waste Management Action Plan for State of Uttarakhand (2017) https://udd.uk.gov.in/files/20170825_SWM_action_plan_revised_final_draft_with_comments_sent_to_state-August-II.pdf

- Technology to handle sanitary waste at community level.
- Investment for compliant sanitary landfills in the plains.
- Investment in mass education of children for managing solid and plastic waste.
- To promote public awareness about the need for maintaining cleanliness, public health.
- To promote public private partnerships with local civic bodies for waste management. Build the capacities of civic bodies for this.
- Support local social enterprises engaged in solid waste management

Information Technology

Digital economy goes hand in hand in creating opportunities for Uttarakhand to sustainably leverage its rich natural and human resources towards green, decentralized and self-reliant economy. Information technology is increasingly becoming indispensable for the communities to interact with the market in a free, fair and transparent manner both as suppliers and on the demand side. Infrastructure such as access to broad-band, digital education and skillsets are important bottlenecks as of now in the state. 5% Gram Panchayats in Uttarakhand still do not have access to internet network such as 3G mobile connectivity and other private connectivity. The topography of hill and the valley really make internet connectivity inaccessible to the remote villages. The network is mostly available uninterrupted in major cities in the foothills and in the towns in the hills.

This disparity is more a cause of migration of mountain households to the foothill towns and cities. There is a need for attaining a reliable network coverage infrastructure that can meet the information access and networking needs of general public, the learning aspirations of mountain children and the career progression aspirations of mountain youth. This digital divide was starkly evident in access to education and skills during the COVID 19 times.

The interventions for which there is a need to attract investments are:

- Make the state of Uttarakhand fully digitized and networked.
- Connecting or strengthening village institutions such as Village Panchayat, SHGs and other relevant organizations with internet facilities. At least the common Service Centre needs to be well connected and fully equipped.
- Promote use of Information Technology (IT) in various sectors; in key sectors and enabling sectors as mentioned above.
- Promotion of awareness programs and capacity building & training of local youth in the IT sector.

Institutional infrastructure and collaborative ecosystem

In addition to the above, the institutional infrastructure and collaborative ecosystem would play a major role to build traction for growth drivers. The collaborative partnership among five sets of institutions would be: Government, Corporate Sector and the market, Civil Society, Capital Market and Knowledge Institutions – all of these would be required for this. The government has the power to make policy to direct resource allocation in various sectors, spatial locations and for the benefit of certain segments of the population. The corporate sector, because of its fundamental concern with cost efficiency and return on investment, plays a role in the production, sale and distribution of goods and services, including providing necessary technical support. Civil society institutions (CSI) mobilize and organize the people, develop norms of working, and train the people on aspects of restoration and livelihoods. The knowledge organizations, such as think tanks, universities and other research bodies are required because of the need to draw on concepts, theory and technical knowledge.

Role of Banks and Investors

If we analyze the possible source of investments in community enterprises, neither the government nor the corporate sector is the largest player. Despite a large amount of self-financing by farmers and micro-entrepreneurs, vast amounts of financial resources

would be required to scale up their initiatives. For this, one would need mainstream capital from banks and investors. The inflow of mainstream finance would focus on the financial viability of such investments and this may have to be tempered with social and environmental concerns, which do not appear in balance sheets.

Concluding points

- i. Policy framework advocated by the Government in **Vision Uttarakhand 2030** document makes it a good case for making Uttarakhand investment friendly for impact investors.
- ii. Role of Civil Society Organizations and Community Organizations, crucial in mobilizing social capital to create economy of scale and mitigate the business risk, is important to organize a better collective bargaining power.
- iii. The role of the Government would be crucial to enable interdisciplinary, interdepartmental and collaborative economic decision-making involving State, Market and Civil Society stakeholders to develop traction for investment from banks and financial organizations. There is vast scope for improvement for such convergence of infrastructure, skilling and entrepreneurship to revive the local economy.
- iv. There are a number of externally aided projects in Uttarakhand dedicated to livelihoods promotion. Some of the livelihoods promotion fund can be augmented to invite impact investment (as Social Venture Fund) in needful areas to leverage much needed capital, expertise and talent from the market (from impact investors and social entrepreneurs) to take the present community initiative on livelihoods to a greater height. A proactive thought needs to be given on this.
- v. There is a need to map the supportive programs and policy instruments of State and Central Government including the externally aided projects that can give a conducive environment to hedge some of the critical risk for inviting impact funding.

The views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the State Government.

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India's Development Challenges *A Historical Perspective and Way Forward*

Viksit Bharat@2047 needs be viewed as a national project, encompassing optimal convergence across the entire spectrum of social and political beliefs and affiliations, with willing cooperation between the centre and the states. Else it would end up only as none-too-unfamiliar brouhaha ...

As we crystal-gaze into the 100th year of India's independence, with the next 25 years deemed as the 'Amrit Kaal', country has set for itself the goal of Viksit Bharat, a "developed" economy by 2047.

What it means to be *viksit*

Prime Minister's Independence Day address, encapsulating panch prun (five pledges), essentially entail a rewriting of the social contract. These five resolutions imply: making India a developed country, eradication of a servile mentality, pride in our traditions, dedication to unity, and awakening of a sense of duty in every citizen. In over-arching practical terms, it means, as N.K. Singh elaborated, achieving rates of economic growth, enabling an approximation of per capita income in terms of the definition of either the International Monetary Fund with a reference point of \$20,000 nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP), or the World Bank with a reference point of \$12,696.

According to the World Bank, a country is categorized as high income, if its per capita income is at or above \$13,205. In the medium term, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected India's growth to average 6.5% per annum during Financial Year (FY) '23-FY '28. Its per capita income is expected to cross \$13,000 by FY

‘45, putting it in the ranks of developed economies. By FY ‘48, it is expected to reach a level of \$15,602.

Simultaneously, India, currently a middle income country, needed to move its Human Development Index (HDI) score from the current medium tier of 0.645, closer to 0.8, to be in the high tier. India’s record on the HDI metric, compiled by the United Nations to quantify a country’s average achievement in health, education and income, remains at the lower end. In turn, it enjoins upon the country a relentless and concerted emphasis, inter alia, on education and healthcare, innovative implementation of the 2020 New Education Policy and adhering to the commitments made in the 2017 National Health Policy.

India – not unknown to wealth and *vikas*

India was historically the richest country – in terms of wealth and wisdom. Home to the Harappan Civilization, one of the first organized societies, India is known to have built one of the first planned cities in 3000 BC, with the Indus Valley Civilization. It is believed that during the rule of the Mughal emperor Akbar, India was world’s richest country. Angus Maddison tracked economic growth of nations up to 2000 AD, published by The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): India’s GDP in the 1st century AD was estimated at 32.9%. A millennium later, in 11th century AD, it continued to be the biggest economy with a share of 28.9% in global GDP.

Over the next seven centuries, prior to the beginning of colonial rule, its share in global GDP declined to 16%, which was still higher than its share in world population. With the onset of colonial rules and its concomitant wealth drain, India’s share in world GDP dropped to a mere 4% by 1950. Today, its share in world output remains at 4% in nominal terms, while its share in world population has increased to 18%, and rising. Again, India’s share in global manufacturing, which was also more than 20% prior to its de-industrialisation under colonial rule, plummeted to 2% by 1947. By 2019, it managed to increase it only to 3.1%.¹

¹ Rajiv Kumar: Businessline – 24 September 2022

Country has got a lot right

A lot has been done in last few years in the country, while, of course, a huge vast remains on its radar to push and move forward, to achieve its avowed status of *Viksit Bharat*, 2047.

Economy on the upswing: Ten years ago, India was world's 10th largest economy, with GDP of \$1.7 trillion. India overtook United Kingdom (UK) by way of GDP in 2023, and is well poised to surpass Japan in 2026, and then Germany too in 2027, ranking third after America and China. The economy from the tenth largest ten years ago to the fifth largest today is the fastest growing major economy for the third year in a row.

The journey towards a \$10 trillion capital market is expected to result in substantial wealth creation, benefiting a broad spectrum of the society. Rising wealth means more geopolitical heft. India's clout is showing up in new ways. American firms have 1.5 million staff in India, more than in any other foreign country.

Since 1990, India has seen its GDP grow ten-fold, to \$3.2 trillion, and average income per capita rise more than five-fold, to \$2,200. As a common reaction, comparison is drawn – China vs India: For centuries, between 1500 and 1980s, India and China had broadly the same per capita Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) income. China grew much faster; today, its economy is five times bigger and richer.²

India is the world's sixth-largest economy—as China was in 2000. And its output today stands broadly where China's stood two decades ago. China went on to manage an average annual growth rate of about 9%. India grew by just under 7% per year over the same period. China's share in world exports in 1970 was 0.6%, much like India's at the same level. While China's share by 2022 jumped to 11.9%, India's share in 2022 increased only to 2.5%. In the 2000s China accounted for nearly a third of global growth—more than America and the European Union combined. By the 2010s, China's contribution had roughly doubled. From the turn of the millennium to the eve of the pandemic, China grew into the largest consumer

² Surjit S Bhalla: Times of India, 15 August, 2022

of most of the world's major commodities, and its share of global goods exports rose from 4% to 13%.³

The Indian banking sector had a high level of non-performing assets (NPAs) in the past, which have significantly reduced. Its banking sector is healthy, with public sector banks achieving record profits of Rs 1.4 trillion. India's debt to GDP at 55% remains amongst the lowest in large economies globally. It has anchored its inflation, accumulated a pile of foreign exchange reserves, and kept external debt well within manageable limits. This is no small turn-around for a country that was considered one of the “fragile few”, a decade ago.⁴

India has become a relatively safe haven among emerging markets in stormy times. For instance, its market capitalization crossing the \$5 trillion mark (on 21 May 2024) has some particularly heartening features: the fall in the share of foreign institutional ownership from 19.13% to 16.51%, has been accompanied by corresponding rise in domestic ownership. Twenty years ago, Indian markets crashed when foreign institutional investors (FIIs) exited. Today, market resilience provided by domestic investors has meant FIIs can exit without paying a steep penalty, and many are doing so.⁵

India has turbo-charged the world's third-largest start-up scene, after America's and China's. Start-ups have grown remarkably over the last six years, with India emerging as the third largest ecosystem for start-ups globally. Over four years, since FY 2017-18, India recorded a 66% year-on-year growth in the number of additional unicorns added annually. As of August 2022, it had 107 unicorns with a total valuation of \$ 341 billion.

Infrastructure of the future: Acceleration in infrastructure investment, especially transportation and logistics, is directly boosting growth while steadily improving competitiveness of enterprises. India has 149 airports, double the number a decade ago, and is adding 10,000 km of roads every year. After massive upgrades in roadways,

³ The Economist, How strong is India's economy? A special report, April 27th-May 3rd 2024

⁴ Sanjeev Sanyal: Hindustan Times, 5 June, 2024.

⁵ Swaminathan S A Aiyer: The Economic Times, 22 May 2024.

the focus is now on rail, air, water transport along with the 'Gati Shakti' initiative, which is aimed to improve intermodal visibility and synergies.

Sustainable energy: Government has set a target to be net zero by 2070 and reduce carbon intensity by 45% by 2030 vis-à-vis 2005 levels. It has been adding an annual average of 15 gigawatts (GW) of solar energy capacity, and has set a target of 50% of power generation capacity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030.

World's Information Technology (IT) and services hub: India's IT-services and outsourcing industry has doubled in size over the past decade, with annual revenues amounting to \$230 billion, making India the world's fifth-biggest exporter of services (against only 16th in goods). Its strong services exports, largely from the IT services and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) services, have grown by 14% over the last two decades. While India pushes ahead with its manufacturing sector, the services sector, contributing over 50% to its GDP, and one of its largest recipients of foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, would continue to be an important pillar of growth for the Indian economy.

India's services exports, having reached 10% of GDP, its IT firms have marketed "global capability centres" (GCCs) hubs. They are hubs for innovation and collaboration between the parent company and its offshore arms, increasingly focusing on high-value activities like IP creation, expertise in emerging technologies, digitization mandates and establishing Centres of Excellence. The phenomenal rise of GNU Compiler Collection (GCCs) of multinationals is India's greatest economic achievement.⁶

According to a report by Goldman Sachs, GCC revenues in India have surged nearly four-fold at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 11% over the past 13 years, reaching \$46 billion in FY '23. Ernst & Young Global Limited (EY) estimates India's GCC market size will reach \$110 billion by 2030. A 2021 Nasscom-Deloitte report revealed that, between 2015 and 2020, GCC employment

⁶ Swaminathan S A Aiyar: Times of India, 26 May, 2024.

rose 75% to 1.3 million, and their number rose to more than 1400, while their gross output was estimated as \$99-103 billion in 2019-20, employment at 5.2-5.5 million, and taxes paid at \$ 4-5 billion.

Digitalization - a force multiplier: An Economic Times leader in its 21 May 2024 publication headlined *“The AI Piggyback Ride India Badly Needs”*, explaining how Sundar Pichai shares Satya Nadella’s vision of India in the Artificial Intelligence (AI) age. The Google and Microsoft bosses see their country of birth pushing the frontiers of AI through a gigantic user base generating content to train LLMs (large language models) aided by the world’s biggest pool of engineers.

Government of India has been progressively digitizing its interface with citizens and thereby making it easier to get licenses, certificates, payment of taxes and bringing efficiency in governance outcomes. Over the period 2014–19, in absolute United States of America (US) dollar terms, the digital economy growing by 15.6%, 2.4 times faster than the growth of the Indian economy, and a large telecom subscriber base of 1.2 billion and 837 million internet users combined with government’s focus on building digital platforms have laid foundations for a digital economy. It has enabled the development of a robust digital payment ecosystem and strengthened governance.

India has deep penetration of broadband, the highest in the world. Mobile broadband subscribers increased from 345 million to 765 million over the past five years. The next wave of smartphone adoption is happening in rural India. It is now expected that India would have the second largest universe of online shoppers by 2030, estimated at 500-600 million.

Looking beyond the arithmetic of growth

The success of the IT and engineering service sector in India, and the creation of a world-class \$200 billion industry has had the collateral benefit of creating millions of well-qualified technology practitioners who have in the past built products for global tech corporations and developed solutions to power 70% and more of the largest corporations in the world.

As the cost of technology has dropped, India has rolled out a national “tech stack”: a set of state-sponsored digital services that link ordinary Indians with an electronic identity, payments and tax systems, and bank accounts. The rapid adoption of these platforms is forcing a vast, inefficient, informal cash economy into the 21st century.

The India Stack is now the global benchmark for most countries. Riding on the Stack and the wide-scale adoption of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) by 260 million unique users, India today accounts for the highest volume of real-time digital payments among businesses globally, with a share of over 40% of all such transactions.

The economy has been boosted as informal activities like village money-lending and pushcart sales shift to banks and stores. Payments for some 300 schemes for needy Indians, from job support to fertiliser subsidies, are sent straight to people's bank accounts. In the year to March, payments reached \$81 billion, or 3% of GDP, up from 1% four years earlier. Nearly 950 million people have benefited, at an average of \$86 per person per year.⁷

Challenges to attain Viksit Bharat status

India's current strengths such as high services exports, a growing digital ecosystem, availability of a large working age population, track record in creating renewable energy capacity, low private debt to GDP ratio, and defining reforms agenda and mega trends such as a growing entrepreneurship and start-up ecosystem, making Indian manufacturing globally competitive, funding and facilitation of infrastructure development, improving the competitiveness of the economy, will play a critical role in sustaining growth over the next few decades.

India could attain developed-country status in 2047 if, by then, it is in the high-income-group. For this its Gross National Income (GNI) per capita would have to grow from \$2,170 to \$12,700 at constant 2021 prices, which would require per capita income growth at 7% per annum, in real terms for the next 25 years. Given

⁷ The Economist: April 27-May 3, 2024

population growth, national income growth over the period, would have to be about 8% per annum. Even if India becomes a high-income-country in 2047, its per capita income will still be one-sixth to one-fourth that of the US and Europe.⁸

India has also to ensure it stays clear of the middle income trap. A number of developing countries have experienced rapid growth and reached middle-income status, but very few have gone beyond. Recent economic history has shown that only five countries—Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore—have successfully transitioned the middle-income phase and moved into the high-income category.

Demographic dividend: Technological leaps, the energy transition and geo-political shifts are creating new opportunities—and new tools to fix intractable problems. In the global knowledge economy, a global talent race has already started for high-skilled workers. Demographics and wage differentials have become a strong impetus for global migration.

As often stated, India has but a small window of opportunity, to derive optimal gains from the demographics it is uniquely blessed with. Currently, about 67% of India's population falls in the working age group. India topped the remittance global chart in 2023 with an inflow of \$125 billion, or 3.4% of GDP. With a median age of 28.4 years, it is a young India which not only reinforces its competitive advantage in the services and manufacturing sectors, but also unleashes the consumption power of a young population towards discretionary expenditure.

By 2030, India's working-age population is expected to exceed 1 billion. With the population in the developed world rapidly ageing, this presents a unique opportunity for India to support the global workforce with its skill-based talent, which also includes the largest pool of English-speaking graduates with an annual addition of 2.14 million (47% women) and 6.2 million healthcare professionals – doctors and nursing staff.

⁸ Deepak Nayyar: The Mint, 9 September 2022

There is both an immediate and long-term supply crunch of healthcare workers globally. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has identified 300,000 jobs in the health sector alone in countries such as Australia, Germany, Canada, Japan, Sweden and Singapore. By 2025, the U.S. is estimated to have a shortage of approximately 446,000 home health aides and 95,000 nursing assistants. India and UK signed the Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement in May 2021, allowing thousands of skilled professionals, students, researchers, and migrants, for professional and economic reasons, to work and live in each other's country for up to two years.

Chinks in the armour

While the long-term growth drivers are favourable, India will face many transformational hurdles in how it modernizes, remains inclusive and manages risks. While the digital classes in Delhi and Bengaluru cheered the moon landing and the G20 summit, and the country savoured the euphoria of *praan pratishtha* at the grand Ayodhya Ram temple, mundane matters of daily bread and butter weighed the minds of people in deep India. Its swelling GDP and the coveted status of world's fifth largest economy seemed to be closely tracked by soaring unemployment rising up from 3.2% to 7.6% over the past decade, and the share of educated young people among the unemployed going up from 54.2% to 65.7% over the two Covid years.

“We’re back to *Bijli, sadak, paani*. The *acchhe din* of “development” appears to have lost momentum, a slogan that prevailed in the parliamentary election of 2014. The fact is that rapid urbanisation in the post-liberalisation era has altered the dynamics of middle class urban voter demands. As the country celebrated high levels of consumption, it raised the aspirations of those at the bottom of the pyramid. The focus now is on maximising wealth and comfort, and that includes a standard of civic amenities.”⁹

The structural constraints to growth are many: dilapidated infrastructure, low levels of entrepreneurship and job growth, climate

⁹ Kanika Datta Business Standard, 9 May 2024

change, gender inequality, social tensions and conflict. If not managed well, structural constraints could choke off growth; well-managed, they can open new doors.

Employment and job creation are major challenges. As per an International Labour Organisation and Institute for Human Development report, 83% of the unemployed are youth below the age of 29. At the same time, there is a severe shortage of workers for skilled and semi-skilled jobs.

Healthcare and HRD need a lot more to be done: Public spending on health in India at 1% of GDP has remained broadly unchanged in the last thirty years and it is nowhere close to the target of 2.5% set out for 2025 in the National Health Policy, 2017. India's public health spending pales in comparison with its peers (5.3% by Russia, 4.5% by Brazil, 3.6% by Thailand, and 2.9% by China). Likewise, India's public spending on education at 4.6% of GDP remains far below the target of 6%, which was first articulated in the National Policy on education, 1968, and reiterated in all subsequent education policies, including the one in 2020. The target of 6% was set to be achieved almost four decades ago, in 1986.

India's under-educated young: Across India, the average college student displays a frightening level of incompetence. How on earth will we become a viksit country, when, as surveys indicate, more than half of Indian graduates are unemployable? The average Indian student wants a good life. They get lost in this world of consumption and fleeting desires. *'Bas, I want some nice easy job,'* is all they offer when asked about their career goals.¹⁰

Education remains terrible. Although school enrolment has risen to over 90% for children under 16, many leave barely literate. Innumerable school teacher recruitment scandals from Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to West Bengal, the large number of teacher vacancies, and high absentee rates of public school teachers, are all a damning indictment of how well we have safeguarded the interests of the country's children. It is well-known that public school teachers, who are much better paid than their private counterparts, send proxies

¹⁰ Chetan Bhagat: Times of India, 12 May, 2024

to stand in for them, or simply do not show up, especially in north India states.

The situation is scarcely better in higher education, exemplified by the Vyapam scandal in Madhya Pradesh, which is the poster child for rigged admission and recruitment tests. Even IITs report a 40% faculty vacancy rate. Between 2000-01 and 2017-18, India added 27,220 new colleges, averaging to 4.44 new colleges every day for 17 years. Many are private colleges run by politicians and are a major locus of black money.¹¹

Ease of Doing Business remains elusive: India has long dreamt of becoming a factory for the world. But manufacturing's share of output has remained stuck at 17-18% over the past decade as corporate investment by all firms has idled at the equivalent of 9-12% of GDP. The country accounts for a paltry 1.9% of global exports of goods. In a steadily globalizing world, India has a lot to seek from global businesses to reap its potential gains by way of modernized competitive market as well as supply source for global value chains, to become a coveted hub for the leading high tech corporates as well as consumer products manufacturers, distributors, and ancillary service providers.

The government's early preparations for the new World Bank Index Business Ready (B-Ready), replacing the defunct Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) Index, reflected the renewed focus on FDI as an enabler of economic growth. This is a healthy, proactive approach towards fixing the doing business milieu. But in practical terms, much remains to be done.

It is admitted that, barring some companies being attracted by the specialized PLI framework, not much has ensued by way of the expected FDI surge into India from the oft-touted China+1 enterprises. A large number of companies are reported to have moved out of China; only a couple of them came to India. Most others preferred Vietnam, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Cambodia.

Perceptions matter. Countrymen as well as foreigners have generally found the government machinery and institutions inept and

¹¹ Devesh Kapur: Times of India, 15 August, 2022

intimidating. Many of the basic elements of “ease of doing business” – whether corruption, contract enforcement, or the predictability and certainty in government policies and regulations – continue to be fraught. Indian governance instrument, viewed as a ‘labyrinth of bureaucracy’, multi-layered and bloated, seems to deter them. It is not just arduous land-acquisition processes and inflexible labour laws, and cost-intensive logistics. The micro level red tape in state and central administrations needs a huge lot of patience and time, and adds to the cost of doing business.

Specific recent instances may be recalled. Except for the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for manufacturing mobile phones in India, multinationals seem reluctant to establish a significant manufacturing base in the country. Even in the case of India-manufactured iPhones, most of the components are produced elsewhere. Notably, two of Apple’s vendors, Wistron and Pegatron, have withdrawn from India: Wistron’s departure concerns difficulties in managing supply chains and labour policies, both endemic problems in India’s manufacturing ecosystem.

The Vietnamese electric vehicle maker Vinfast moving out of proposed plan for a plant in Thoothukudi (Tamil Nadu), and the leading Taiwanese chip making companies, flagged India’s ‘cumbersome’ administrative structure, high tariffs on electronic component imports, and inadequate infrastructure. This indictment was also endorsed by the Taiwanese Foreign Minister.

India@100 - What’s ahead for urbanisation: While a defining factor in India achieving its development goals will prove to be the pace at which it urbanises, India’s cities are plagued with endemic problems endured by people for long, with flooding and inundation, unkempt habitats, filthy and clogged roads, piles of refuse and waste, sewage mis-management, declining water table, and foul air – all that severely impacts life and impairs the ease of living. Poorly managed cities are political time bombs. With 40% of India’s population heading to the cities by 2036, according to the World Bank, the stresses on urban infrastructure will multiply manifold. By 2022, India’s projected rate of urbanisation was expected to be 35.9%, and by 2047, this is expected to increase to approximately 50.9%.

With an expected urban population of close to 630 million by 2030, the emphasis should not be on urbanisation alone, but on planned urbanisation. The urbanisation rate must be regulated to prevent a population surge only in larger cities. In asymmetric patterns of urbanisation, the states that saw economic growth urbanised at a faster pace. For instance, Kerala in 2022 had a projected urban population of around 73.19%, which was expected to increase to over 96% by 2036. In comparison, states like Assam and Bihar had population of just 15.4% and 12.2% respectively, which, which was expected to marginally increase to 17.16% and 13.2% by 2036. Union Territories like Delhi and Chandigarh are projected to be 100% urbanised in the same time period.¹²

The country seems to have resigned itself to the precarity of human life in Indian cities dotted with death traps: it could be an open manhole, overflowing storm-water drains, dangling power lines or, as was the recent case during a sudden dust storm in Mumbai, crashing billboards, when a hoarding came crashing down in Ghatkopar, killing 14 people and injuring 70. Take the case of a score and more of lives lost in deadly fire engulfing a gaming zone in Rajkot (Gujarat), and the heart-rending blaze at an east Delhi Newly Born Baby Care hospital that killed seven babies. Don't so often such incidents of fires, stampedes, repeated flooding of cities, collapsing buildings indicate utter laxity, in fact, venality of civic authorities that doesn't stir the conscience of the nation.

Mishaps like this are a result of poor urban governance. Indian cities are expected to host over 800 million people by 2050. Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy's 2023 Annual Survey of India's City-Systems: *Shaping India's Urban Agenda* reveals that our urban governance is ill-prepared to deal with impacts of unprecedented expansion: 39% of state capitals lack active master plans, essential tools for charting long term urban development and growth. And, then there are issues with poor policy implementation and transparency, not to talk of rampant corruption.

¹² Devesh Kapur: Times of India, 15 August, 2022

An extremely emotive issue of immense importance: yes, a real hot potato, the highly sensitive issue made of reservations in jobs and educational institutions, that defies any logical dialogue or discussion, whereas some analysts and thinkers advocate the imperative of a clear, dispassionate discussion. It is argued that India in 2047 should ensure opportunities for all citizens by moving away from the ‘scarcity mentality’ of reservations to adopting an abundance mentality focused on employment, education and employability.¹³

The obvious pitfalls are also pointed out: Today’s kings are politicians. They need votes. The vote-bank made of castes and communities and religions, are seeking such material reciprocity. Maratha lobbies are demanding reservation, and see themselves as a backward, not forward, community. Similar movements are being seen across India, with erstwhile dominant caste groups, such as Jats of Haryana and Patels of Gujarat, declaring themselves backward and even oppressed.

There is no bigger lie that politicians peddle than the promise that more government jobs along with higher reservations will somehow solve the unemployment problem, while simultaneously improving social justice. The result is millions of young people spending some of the best years of their lives in rote learning to clear exams where the few will be successful. It’s not just the opportunity cost of the lost years or the money spent in coaching classes but also that all this effort does little to equip them with skills that could be helpful in other endeavours.

Instead of providing quality education, including generous scholarships to the socially and economically disadvantaged, successive Indian central and state governments have resorted to doling out quotas.¹⁴

Administrative revamp – the key to make paanch prun a success

Following the Prime Minister’s enunciation of paanch prun from the ramparts of Red Fort on 15 August to fulfil the aspirations of

¹³ Manish Sabharwal & Kartik Narayan: Economic Times, 21 May 2024

¹⁴ Devesh Kapur: Indian Express, 10 June, 2024

the freedom fighters by the year 2047, the statue of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was installed at India Gate in place of the statue of British Emperor George V. The Rajpath or Kingsway was renamed as *Kartavya Puth*. British India's Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) and Indian Penal Code have just been replaced by new laws, which will be more in tune with times and not be relics of the occupying British Raj. However, the second pledge will be truly completed if PM Modi is able to dismantle the decaying bureaucratic architecture put in place by the British Raj. The All-India Civil Services, a successor to the Imperial Civil Service and Imperial Police are the true inheritors of the Raj.

A vision for a 'future-ready' India: Ten Sectoral Groups of Secretaries were mandated to identify the achievable targets, timelines and milestones for commemorating the 2047 centenary year of independence. The key areas already identified include agriculture, commerce, infrastructure, industry, urban landscape, security and defence, technology and governance.

Yes, governance is indeed the single most important element in any scheme that aims at achieving what "We, the people" set about defining our goal and aspirations 75 years ago, and all that, we now determine, needs be done for India to accomplish by the 2047 centennial. It is governance, for it to be able to deliver, that itself calls for a targeted thrust, for its contours as well as culture to be transformed. The task is not easy; it's daunting and onerous. It has eluded almost all the Prime Ministers. A Japanese proverb puts it starkly: "Vision without action is merely a dream."

The 2017 Economic Survey identified weak state capacity as a key challenge that India needed to address: "A distinctive feature of the Indian economic model is the weakness of state capacity". Our low capacity means the Indian state should seek to do far fewer things, but by focus do them far better. "Higher spends is not the answer; new government should focus on effective governance instead.¹⁵ "Higher public spending by itself will not solve our massive social and developmental problems. Rather, we need to focus much more on improving the *effectiveness* of the Indian state. Political leaders'

¹⁵ Karthik Muralidharan: Times of India, 9 June, 2024

effectiveness is limited by the government machinery that they rely on to serve voters. This is why it should be a top political priority for the new government to upgrade the Indian state by investing in better public systems. Building more effective public systems will require close collaboration, cooperation, and trust across central, state, and local governments”.

Effective governance – India’s Achilles’ heel: Agile and adept at conceptualising bold and ambitious plans and policies, the executive has had but a lacklustre record in their implementation. Effective implementation is predicated on effective governance, which remains the single most important requirement for India; and that’s where the country has floundered for long.

India’s state, reckoned to be more welfarist than developmental, ends up trying to do too much, doing things badly. Some have called it the ‘flailing’ state – that is, its head and limbs are not well coordinated. Known for its penchant for grand schemes and plans, its execution is indeed weak. Some even argue, India has developed despite the state, and that India grows at night when the government sleeps!

India runs a boutique government, small relative to its needs, but very expensive relative to its income. The ratio of the average wage of an Indian general government employee to per capita GDP at around 4 is amongst the world’s highest; in most of Asia that ratio lies between 1 and 2.5. Even South Korea, Thailand and Malaysia have a ratio of general government wage to per capita GDP of around 3-4. In much of the Arab world and Turkey, it is around 2-3.

India’s boutique government may be small, but it’s hugely expensive. The size of the civil service by itself may not be large, its composition needs a huge restructuring: it has too many parasitic administrative officers and staff, and too few technocratic experts – teachers and health workers, for example. Devesh Kapur argues that the size of the state is small because it has too few judges, teachers, doctors, and so on.

Three-fourths of all government civil employees are unproductive support staff – peons, *daftaries*, drivers, clerks, *et al.*, while key public services such as education, healthcare are starved of people. An

over-manned establishment with droves of bureaucrats at all levels of government, each wing with a large vertical hierarchy, implies not just a huge drain on country's resources; bloated bureaucracy clogs the channels of communication, leads to delays and diffusion of responsibility. The greater the degree of overstaffing, the less the work done.

Those at the lower-end, who make more than 90% of the government labour force, end up with a much higher wage bill than in the private sector. India spends too much on its government; it pays too high a salary at many lower levels of government. Likewise, India spends too much at central and state levels, very little (3%) at the local administration level.

The 1931 census counted just about one million of all employees on rolls of the colonial state, in a population of 353 million. At the Central Government, there were 11 Secretaries, 10 of whom from Indian (Imperial) Civil Service (ICS). Outside the secretariat, there were 30 main departments, of which five were headed by ICS men.

According to the combined Government of India (GoI) Civil List of 1946, the total strength of the ICS at the Centre and in the British Provinces was 1,094. As a result of partition, the total came down to 642 in 1948, which included ICS officers seconded to the judicial and political services. The number of secretariat departments at the Centre was 18 in 1947. In 1951, there were 25 Secretaries to the Government of India, one Special Secretary, one Additional Secretary, 35 Joint Secretaries and 74 Deputy Secretaries.

The sanctioned strength of civil employees under Central government increased from about 1.5 million in 1948 to 1.7m in 1959; it increased to 2.9m in 1971, 3.7m in 1984, rising to 4m by 1991. No less striking has been the rise in state level bureaucracy. The number of secretariat departments at the Centre was 18 in 1947; today it is difficult to count the Secretary level incumbents, as also Additional Secretaries and equivalent, not to talk of a battalion of Joint Secretaries. The police service kept pace with the expansion of the central para-military forces. What has happened in the same way in the states is a legion.

Government structure remains bloated, alienated: India retains an effete governance structure – feudalistic and *status quoist*. Even after 75 years of independence, the general popular perception of bureaucracy that endures is of civil servants being inaccessible and arrogant. Over years, it has proliferated, added flab, become oversized and incoherent, suffering from politicization and leadership-deficit from within. The gulf between the rulers and the ruled is indeed wide, and keeps increasing. Not only the *netas* yearns to flaunt his/her trappings and insignias, the *babu* too is ever zealous to be at a higher pedestal than the common man. India's *netas* and *babus* vie to out-do one another in securing artefacts and symbols of authority and awe, be it Raj Bhawans, sachivalayas, or other establishments.

Civil service today is a leviathan, circumscribing the whole panoply of the state, engendering popular portrait of a Gulliver tied hand and foot by his Lilliputian captors. The so-called public servants have instead behaved as the *mai baap sarkar* for the people who remain resigned to feel they are supplicants. Lower functionaries like the *patwari*, police constable, a bank clerk, a peon, a lower division clerk in a government office, or an excise and sales tax inspector has smothered the common man. Officers, far removed from the life and concerns of *aam aadmi*, flaunt their superiority in the pomposity of their strutting and posturing, their official vehicles announcing their legislative/professional status, often with gun-toting PSOs leaning out from accompanying security vans.

Addressing the National Developmental Council in February 1999, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee highlighted four areas of governance that needed specific attention: (i) *'people often perceive the bureaucracy as an agent of exploitation rather than a provider of service'*, (ii) *'corruption has become a low risk and high reward activity'*; (iii) *'frequent and arbitrary transfers combined with limited tenures are harming the work ethics and lowering the morale of honest officers'*, and (iv) *'while expecting discipline and diligence from the administration, the political executive should self critically review its own performance'*.

Nirmal K. Mukherji, the last of the Indian Civil Service to retire as Cabinet Secretary pleaded in his 5-point charter for a slim bureaucracy: (i) the federal component in the administrative

arrangement should be multi-layered to correspond with the levels of representative structure and accountability and should be squarely vested at each level; (ii) the heavily over-centralised powers and functions be revised through massive devolution to state and local government levels and it should show up in slimmer central and state bureaucracies; (iii) deregulation and privatization under the new economic regime are 'inescapable slimming diets' for bloated bureaucracies of the Centre and the States; (iv) bureaucracy of the future should be understanding and humane in the face of social churning underway in the country, more so the rise of 'a new species of middle and upper middle classes characterized by yearning for lifestyles like those of affluent countries'; and (v) the present 'rigid and change-resistant' bureaucracy is inconsistent with the emerging information and communication revolution.

The world today deliberates the Henry David Thoreau dictum, "That government is best that governs least". Emerson, some years later said, "The less government we have, the better". The US Vice President Al Gore's report of his National Performance Review, titled *From Red Tape to Results: Creating a Government That Works Better and Costs Less* singled out industrial-age bureaucracies as "the root problem" in the crusade to reinvent government. The report contained scores of specific recommendations which, according to its claim, could reduce the Federal work-force by 252,000 and result in savings of about \$108 billion over a 5-year period, by cutting unnecessary spending, by steering more and rowing less.

Premier Zhu Rongji axed two million government jobs as a measure of administration reforms in China. A Presidential Review Commission appointed by President Mandela found inherited bureaucracy "fundamentally flawed" and recommended far-reaching proposals for reconfiguration and abolition of a number of ministries in South Africa. As late as 1960, the Korean civil service was widely viewed as a corrupt and inept institution. General Park Chung Hee reorganised the civil service and replaced the spoils system by a merit-based system. By the late 1970s the Korean bureaucrat became reputable in the developing world.

Not only antithetical of Prime Minister's own avowed precept

of “minimum government, maximum governance”, massive hiring renders the elephantine bureaucracy slower and infirm; it burdens the exchequer with huge avoidable revenue expenditure by way of pay and pension alone. Governments, instead of enlarging the pie, resort to populist measures, including undue increases in staff strengths. Instead of the state creating employment opportunities, it becomes a provider of employment. It whets appetite for the clamouring mob aspiring for more *sarkari naukari*. Crores of young people, including hundreds of Engineers, Master of Business Administration (MBAs) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhDs) apply for miniscule number of even entry level government jobs in railways, police, etc., many of whom have no interest in doing low level jobs, causing disciplinary problems, in addition.

Gradually the services have become top heavy due to time bound promotions. Over the years, there has been merry tinkering with the structure owing to ‘rationalisation/restructuring’ of cadres, a facile euphemism invented by clever *babus* to swell their ranks. Many posts have been marginalised; many heads of departments (‘principal’ and not so others) tread on toes of each other.

Need to push local governance: The obstacles are greater at the state and local levels. The problem of “governance mismatch” are acute in big cities, where elected mayors are ceremonial. Broadly speaking, the quality of Indian government is proportional to the scale on which it is exercised. The Indian reforms of the 1990s were restricted to the national level; regulations on land and labour, which are state matters, went mostly untouched.

Government needs to be restructured by transferring subjects and institutions to the state government and Panchayati raj bodies. With the May 1993 notification of the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, power needs to be transferred to the local institutions, including village panchayats, zila parishads, and municipal bodies, simultaneously ensuring that, in the specific fields transferred to local government, there is no parallel state-level organisation in the district.

The crucial barrier to faster development is a lack of ‘state capacity’. While the Indian state succeeds when on “mission mode”, achieving clearly defined goals, it struggles with mundane, every

day aspects of governance.¹⁶ Of the 18 similar countries looked at by Muralidharan, he found India was the least decentralised when it came to fiscal affairs. Deng Xiaoping, modern China's architect (1978-1989) introduced reforms that rewarded local officials for their economic performance. India could use something similar, especially if states granted their local authorities more resources and power. India's 260,000 municipalities and panchayats account for 3% of state spending against 15% for China and the US.

A study by the Reserve Bank of India showed, local taxes account for just about a third of a municipal body's revenues. The rest comes from fund transfers for the Centre and states. Some 70% of these resources get eaten up in salaries, pensions and administrative costs. The ability to deliver services is non-existent. Add in unchecked and blatant petty corruption.

Recast government

If anything is associated with bigness, it is government bureaucracy. A US newspaper feature writer described bureaucracy as "a brontosaurus of unimaginable size, appetite, ubiquity and complexity". The organisations which get things done will no longer be hierarchical pyramids with the real control at the top. They will be systems-interlaced webs of tension in which control is loose, power diffused and centres of decision plural. They will be more horizontal; the way they are governed is likely to be more collegial, consensual and consultative.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, rising expectations, ongoing rapid technological evolution, and accelerated globalization demanded an overhaul to the kinds of services governments offered. The pandemic increased that urgency and added new pressures: public expectations of government intervention on multiple fronts, from preventive healthcare to fiscal stimulus and business stabilization. The resulting blow on budgets forced governments to do more with less.

A BCG (Boston Consulting Group) on the end of middle management explains how the traditional role of the middle

¹⁶ Karthik Muralidharan: Accelerating India's Development

manager—an integral position in organizational hierarchies for decades—no longer exists. Traditional management layers often slow down decision-making processes and dilute strategic messages. Eliminating middle management roles promises to increase efficiency, agility, and employee engagement.

IAS has a lot to reflect on: Following Prime Minister Modi's recent outburst in parliament that elicited much public attention, and surprise, purportedly hinting at the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) pervading India's administrative structure, it has been asked why IAS alone gets the stick. The answer seems to clearly lie in IAS, a virtual clone of the ICS, that looms large in country's governance structure, which, though *'it had some outstanding individuals', as Jawaharlal Nehru believed, was 'a symbol of inequality, casteism and amateurish dilettantism in our administration'*.

An Op-Ed piece in a national daily recently raised a seminal question, Has IAS Failed The Nation. It was emphatically answered by former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Duvvuri Subbarao, IAS. With utmost candour, he confessed how 'my generation of civil servants and subsequent cohorts have bequeathed a flawed legacy'. IAS has indeed failed the nation, he added: over last fifty years, it has brought ignominy for itself, of ineptitude, indifference and corruption and, worse, loss of moral compass.

Not that there haven't been many others with IAS lineage to have diagnosed and detected its infirmities and fault-lines. Among the latest is former Cabinet Secretary Prabhat Kumar, who instantly elicits lustrous approbation for his probity and versatility, sagacity and erudition, and steers a prominent think-tank, IC Centre for Governance, a little republic of gerontocrats, comprising mostly of veterans from the clan, understandably vainglorious, having excelled while in active service. He argues in his book, *Public Service Ethics* that country's rusted steel frame is today viewed as "a well operated gang of corrupt and incompetent members".

To Subbarao, the biggest problem with the IAS is 'a deeply flawed system of incentives and penalties', everyone getting 'promoted by efflux of time'. In his book, *Courts and Their Judgements*, Arun Shourie puts it so aptly, "This (civil service) is the only place in which, by the

sheer efflux of time, an ass becomes a horse”. All across the entire civil service, the main criterion is the date of birth and rank attained after passing just one examination years ago. Once having entered the hallowed portal, civil servants remain ensconced in lifelong security, clinging unsteadily to the lifeboats. Evidently, a more professional, performance-based civil service with promotions based on regular testing rather than a time-bound lifelong sinecure is needed to maintain a meritocratic culture.

Finding that the service provided almost automatic promotion with each of the direct recruits (irrespective of his/her level of competence) managing to climb to the top of the ladder, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had directed that *‘the tyranny of seniority’* be done away with in filling senior posts. Rajiv Gandhi suggested that, in a batch, joint secretaries empanelled should not be more than 75%; the additional secretary and secretary level panels should not be more than 25%. The top civil servants pursuing the group interest made sure to scuttle it (Sanjoy Bagchi, IAS).

The *steel frame*, a sobriquet that ICS/IAS acquired, has steadily degenerated into a creaking bamboo frame, belying Sardar Patel's expectations. There appeared palpable cynicism across the citizenry at lack of not just the cardinal tenets of ‘incorruptibility’ and ‘integrity’, but what indeed is a telling failure of senior bureaucracy – to offer free, frank, impartial advice.

Greed has taken its toll. A vice-like grip maintained by IAS has ensured its total monopoly at top layers of bureaucracy. IAS has now close to total dominance over even Constitutional institutions: Election Commission, Information Commission, so also the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) and Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), besides regulatory bodies. Mulcting many an ex-cadre position, the clan got identified with *‘bureaucratic imperialism’* (Jagmohan), encroaching upon areas belonging to technocrats, educationists and other groups. IAS officers forged alliances with politicians to brighten their own careers. ‘This is now a mutually reinforcing system with each aiding and abetting in getting the maximum out of the spoils system’ (Madhav Godbole, IAS).

Post-retirement sinecures are an overwhelming lure. Today,

too many babus spend their career's sun-set years kowtowing for post-retirement sinecures. The adage goes, *IAS never retires*. There are a number of commissions, regulatory bodies and tribunals at the Centre and in the states as also other slots as ambassadors and governors, where they continue with the perks and trappings that trap them. The new bureaucratic elite are the regulatory bodies, almost all headed by retired senior government officials, not by technical competent experts, as it is the case in most other parts of the world.

Acute leadership-deficit plagues the civil services. Taking a stand for a junior colleague, who may be unduly pilloried by political leadership, is rare to be seen. The bureaucrat not only indulges the politicians' whims and practices, he often does so also in order to have his own peccadilloes condoned. A retired Chief Secretary, also Union Cabinet Secretary, TSR Subramanian has recounted what Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav said at a state level IAS officers' conclave in 1990: "Why do you come and touch my feet? Why do you come and lick my shoes? Why do you come to me for personal favours? When you do so, I will do as you desire and then extract my price from you".

Politicisation poison in administrative body: To survive the rough and tumble required political skill. 'From the first day of independence, the administration was indeed in politics', observed Mangat Rai (ICS, Punjab). Services at all levels were exposed to a new style politics of official position. A new breed of public servants mushroomed which did not have attachment to service ethics, but to political personality who played the patron.

L.K. Jha (ICS) in a 1983 paper, *The Role of Bureaucracy in a Developing Democracy* analysed the factors contributing to the 'declining standards of administrative performance', "There then begin to emerge within the civil service persons who "curry favour" with ministers, anticipate their views, and make recommendations to please them'.

The higher the seniority level, the more the vulnerability and timidity observed among the bureaucracy. Constituted to examine the Emergency excesses, the Shah Commission concluded that '*some members of the Service, who were asked to bend, actually crawled*'. As Chaucer said centuries ago, '*if gold shall rust, what will iron do?*'

Grown to be experts in “battles of attrition”, adroit in playing games and managing the system, like Permanent Secretary Humphrey in *Yes Minister* tied Minister Jim Hacker in knots, astute members of what now constitutes an omnipotent trade union, the IAS force decisions the way magicians force cards on their audience in the three-card trick: ‘Choose any card, choose my card’.

Imperative of reforms in governance

Difficult it is to resolve the enigma of Prime Minister Modi upbraiding the elite cadre as he keeps extending tenure of super *babus* and appointing many in key positions after retirement in face of government's own policy that forbids extension of service/re-employment except “in very rare and exceptional circumstances”. He extended the prescribed tenure of all Cabinet Secretaries ever since his first installation as PM in 2014. Government has routinely appointed retired officers in Election Commission, Information Commission, as Chief Vigilance Commissioner, CAG, and others from the same fraternity, besides joining all powerful Prime Minister's Office (PMO) as advisers.

Cognizant of deficient delivery having been an Achilles' heel, Modi sarkar initiated several reforms, including systemic review of civil servants post-30 years of service or 50/55 years of age, opening a small window of lateral entry of professionals in central ministries, and for Central services officers in senior positions.

As the Fulton Report suggested 50 years ago about the UK's Civil Services, “the philosophy of the amateur is ill-equipped for the age of atomic energy and jumbo jet”. Back in 1957, with the idea of creating a pool highly qualified managers from both the public and private sectors, the government set up an Industrial Management Pool with a view to boosting the quality of the bureaucracy at the senior level.

As the Indian state took up a development role after independence, the colonial-era civil service came under strain. To some extent, the strain was mitigated by the entry of specialists in key ministries. Scientists such as Homi Bhabha, statisticians such as P.C. Mahalanobis and Pitambar Pant, and economists such as K.N. Raj and I.G. Patel were inducted in the government. The civil service wasn't

very welcoming of expert advice. The Planning Commission chief D.R. Gadgil identified the incompetence of the generalist and the “degradation and frustration of the experts and specialists in government service” as key reasons behind governmental failures.

Government has, of late, taken baby steps to induct lateral entrants. But unless such entrants are posted in large numbers across ministries and departments, they will have to struggle hard against the entrenched bureaucracy. It has fixed the tenure of joint secretaries at three years. This appears not a sufficient span of time for an ‘outsider’ to get well inculcated with the complex governance systems and be able to contribute meaningfully.

Some aspects highlighted by Niti Aayog in regard to administrative reforms need to be seriously followed up:

(i) There is little logic and rationale of having as many as 60+ Group ‘A’ services. The central services were 30 in 1971, which increased to 49 in 1984; in 2003, their number rose to 66. The number of civil services need to be drastically reduced. As former Cabinet Secretary Nirmal Mukherji advised, the IAS shop be shut. There may well be just one stream for civil services, and another for technical, scientific and engineering services.

(ii) The upper age limit for Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) candidates needs to be brought down from current 30-32 years to 27 or below. Former Cabinet Secretary K.M. Chandrasekhar in his book, *As Good as My Word*, talks of distortions that have crept in the country’s administrative apparatus, for example, today’s probationers are much older, several of them married, with children, too – the outcome of repeated increases in the age of entry for the services. The progressive increase in the age for recruitment, enabling older persons to join the service often tends to bring their baggage of experience and attitudes into their new world of work.

Finding that today civil service candidates are much older than earlier, spending too much time preparing for the entrance exam, up to 10-12 years in some cases, some aspirants availing more than half a dozen chances, former Secretary in central government, Satya Mohanty ¹⁷ believed that India’s civil services recruitment market

¹⁷ The Mint, 20 April 2022

has suffered degradation, that 'not-so-good quality has driven out much better quality'.

(iii) There may be a broad-based administrative pool of promising middle level officers selected by an egalitarian, autonomous panel, also fill senior positions by short-term contracts, enabling lateral entry of technocrats, professionals and entrepreneurs, to supplement and strengthen the system dominated by the general elite. Rather than hire civil servants for a lifetime, the Union Public Service Commission could recruit them for a fixed term of say, 10-15 years and appraise them after term is over, where the below-average performers are returned from service. Above average performers could be provided training in their chosen areas of specialization and posted accordingly.

Shedding the feudal baggage: Isn't there a case for doing away with vestiges of feudalism like huge residential bungalows, servant quarters, retinue of personal staff, bungalow peons? Why shouldn't Government at the Centre and in states pay composite remuneration to public servants, legislators, and others on their rolls as it is done in most of the countries as well as in global business and industry, in the United Nations and other similar world bodies?

Government has no business to be in business; government has no business to be world's biggest property builder or transport owner and operator. Why should Government saddle itself, except in really few rare cases, with the job of building and allotting residential accommodation, buying/leasing and arranging transport and telephone facilities, etc.? Privileges and perks to legislators and government employees so arranged by it in many cases amount to far in excess of salary.

Insulating the system from political interference: In order to build the spinal cord of the bureaucracy, the Fifth Pay Commission advocated the constitution of a high-powered civil services board both at the Centre and the states, to address the vexed questions of postings and transfers, and minimum tenures. No heed is paid to this advice. Invoking Article 32 of the Constitution, a writ petition by a large number of retired civil servants in the Supreme Court succeeded in securing significant support. The apex court directed for an Act to be passed by Parliament laying down the duties and

responsibilities of bureaucracy; a minimum period of posting in each post; a civil services board to be appointed; and orders issued to bureaucrats to be duly recorded. It has been forgotten. No action has been taken.

Need to end the ‘transfer industry’: The average tenure of an IAS officer in Uttar Pradesh (UP) in last few years was just four months! Mobility rates in India are indeed too rapid for effective administrative performance, and that this single phenomenon contributes significantly to noteworthy pathologies in administration. The pervasive malaise of instability and uncertainty in case of tenure of officers in the states turning into a “transfer industry” jeopardises country’s basic governance.

Focus on becoming a ‘bionic organization’: shifting repetitive tasks and simple decision- making to machines. End-to-end digitization of customer support processes will drive efficiency savings and, more importantly, contribute to resilience.

Present a single face of government for service delivery: The administration at the higher levels does not constitute delivery system for goods and services; this is confined at the lower levels. It is constantly contending with the restructuring of response and reaction to change. Now when IT infrastructure has itself promoted in almost all offices and activities, citizens in a community could deal with just one office locally regarding all tax matters and payments to utilities like electricity and water.

Officers to be on the ground, in the field: It was said that the ICS administered the districts more from the saddle than an office chair. It was widely regarded as mandatory for good Collectors “to get out of the office”. As E.H.H. Edye (ICS, UP) remarked, “a Collector’s value is in inverse ratio to the wear on the seat of his trousers”. Prime Minister Modi has all along emphasised that officers must involve themselves in the progress of projects and programmes relevant to their sphere of work, and visit the work sites. Many services valued and practised the culture of 24X7X365 inspections along with effective follow up, which seems to be gradually fading away like some other benign and useful management tenets.

Spare time and facilitate redressal of public grievances/problems: There was a time, within living memory, when an hour or so was kept available for people to meet all echelons of power. Where is that open time for airing of grievances and seeking redressal? Officers have built around themselves ivory towers of a retinue of personal staff to insulate themselves from *aam aadmi*. The white sahibs introduced and rigorously followed these simple and effective interaction mechanisms; their brown successors have chosen to build around themselves Chinese walls to insulate themselves from the people in India's vibrant democracy.

Need to bolster primacy of vikas: With the goal of becoming a developed country in 2047, a real challenge for government is to raise per capita incomes, and for politics to jettison competitive populism. Recognizing that India's best strategic and foreign policy would in fact imply its 8+% growth rate, some key ministries/departments would deserve to be invested with stable technocratic leadership: like Government has provided for a minimum of two year tenure for Secretaries for External Affairs, Defence, and Home, it would be logical to extend similar dispensation for Secretaries/top bureaucratic leadership for crucial domains such as Agriculture, Human Resource Development (HRD) (including skill development), Health, Urban management and development, and Logistics (especially Railways).

Essential and urgent it has become to relook some of the features and aspects in country's administrative structure, what the last ICS Cabinet Secretary Nirmal Mukherji advised: "the postulate that the Constitution is meant to be worked by a ring of service that will keep the country under control, is entirely untenable, if only because it places the bureaucracy ahead of democracy. Equally indefensible is the view that the IAS is needed to keep India united. Things have changed since the Sardar's days and any discussion about All India Services should reflect the change".

To be rooted to country's core culture: The most important causal variable for the success of a nation is its culture. Culture is the strong foundation on which the superstructure of aspirations, dreams and hopes, and their conversion to reality rests. Albert Einstein reputedly had a poster in his office that declared, "Not

everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted, counts.” Culture has long been grouped into the realm of those things that can’t be counted.

Culture is what our aspirations are; ...how tolerant we are in dealing with people who have differing views; how we rise above the strangling hold of religion, creed and caste that has been the bane of our nation; and many other such attributes. (N.R. Narayana Murthy, Foreword in *India's Pathways to Success* edited by Ganesh Natarajan and Ejaz Ghani.)

Like it's no era of war, it's no era of discord and disharmony: Reform of the state is not an easy process, especially in a democratic set-up with a five-year electoral cycle. The biggest threat to India's growth story is its messy, incendiary politics. Notwithstanding its success in building a nation from an extraordinary diversity of religions and ethnicities, India is hailed as *a robust democracy*. *Of late, there have been apprehensions of nationalist dogma filtering into mainstream discourse by a slow-drip process.*

As Prime Minister Modi famously avowed, *today, it's no era of war* – let him similarly acclaim, it's no era of bigotry or disharmony. India poised to be a Viksit Bharat, it must leave aside the venom and invective of the election season, and abjure any strident communal or divisive rhetoric. The country must not swerve or stray from the path that Swami Vivekanand laid out, “Liberty is the first condition of growth...just as man must have liberty to think and speak, so he must have liberty in food, dress, and marriage, and in every other thing, so long as he does not injure others”.

Machiavelli's Prince knew that there was “nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things”. The history of 'reinventing government' shows it is not easy.

Deliberated by numerous committees and commissions, country's administrative reform has remained a staple of perennial debate, yielding little tangible change on the ground. Recounting what he considered to be his greatest failure as Prime Minister, Nehru lamented, “I could not change the administration, it is still a colonial

administration.” Country’s governance structure remains stubbornly effete, parasitic and politicized. Body social is cramped with crisis of character, politics with compromises.

Need for India today is of creative destruction, for re-inventing its critical institutions. When rot runs deep, as French President Macron maintained, "Makeshift repairs would not do; if you keep the same structures, habits are just too strong".

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