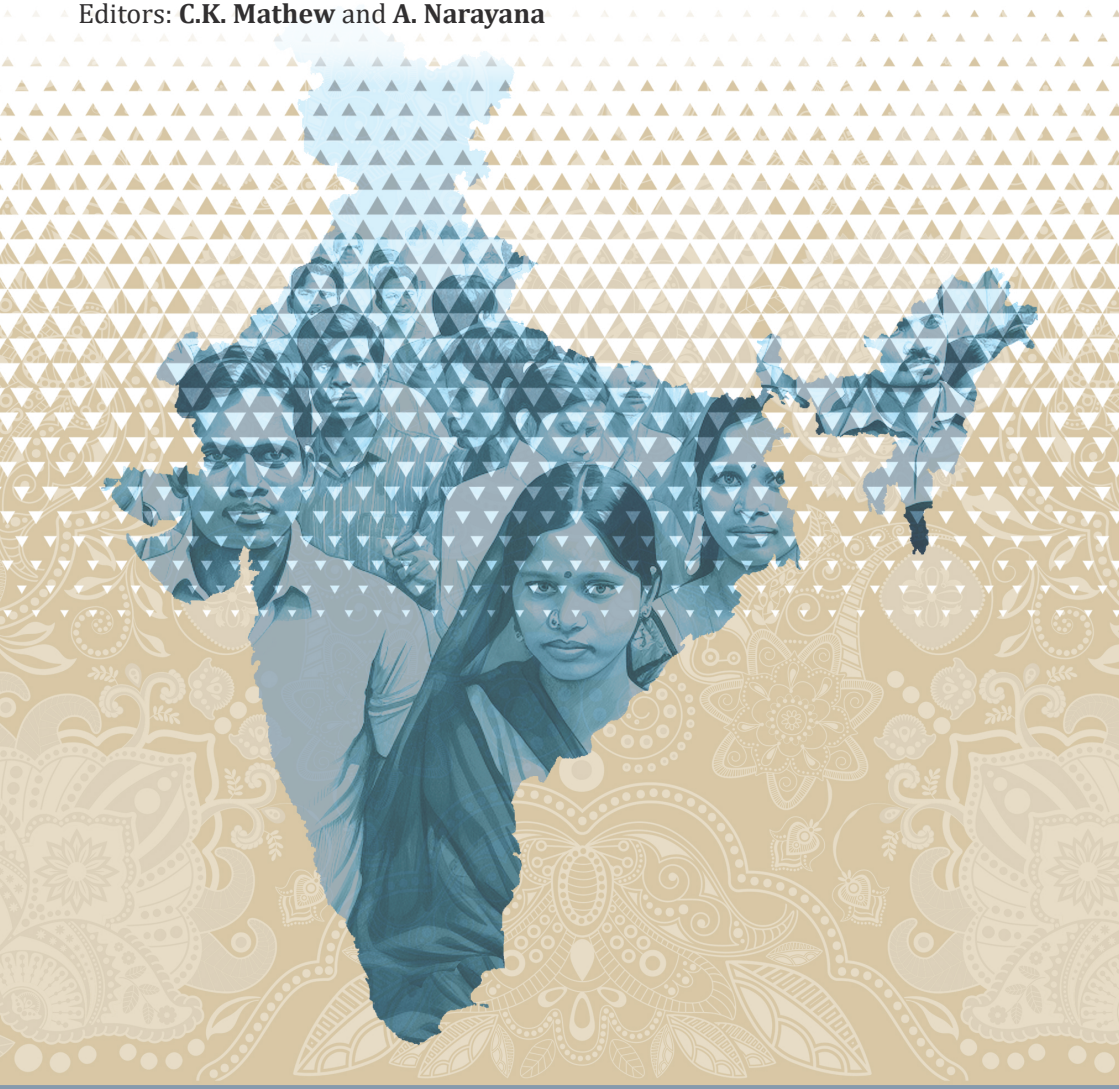
Azim Premji University

India Since Independence:

Essays on Transformation and Permanence

Editors: **C.K. Mathew** and **A. Narayana**



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Contributors' Profile

Ajitabh Sharma

A 1996-batch Rajasthan cadre IAS officer, Ajitabh Sharma is the chairman and managing director of the Jaipur City Transport Services Limited. He has vast experience and expertise in the management of public utilities. Ajitabh has worked as Chairman/Managing Director of many public utilities including the state irrigation board, renewable energy corporation and solar park development corporation.

Amarjeet Sinha

A former IAS officer, Amarjeet Sinha retired as Secretary to the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. He was also Advisor to the Prime Minister and is currently a member of the Public Enterprises Selection Board. He played a key role in designing Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (India's main programme for universal education) and the National Rural Health Mission.

Arvind Narrain

Arvind Narrain is a visiting professor of law at the National Law School of India University, Bangalore and Azim Premji University, Bangalore. He is the co-editor of *Law Like Love: Queer perspectives on law* as well as the Co-author of *Breathing Life into the Constitution*. He was also a part of the team of lawyers which challenged Section 377 of the IPC. He is a founder member of the Alternative Law Forum (ALF).

Ashok Thakur

A former IAS officer, Ashok Thakur served as Secretary Higher Education, Government of India and as Secretary General for UNESCO in India. He played a key role in establishing several prestigious national educational institutions including nine new Indian Institutes of Technology and 16 new Central Universities. Presently, he is an Honorary Professor in Public Administration in Punjab University.

Champaka Rajagopal

Champaka Rajagopal is an independent practitioner and researcher in urban policy, planning and governance. She is also a Professor Affiliae at the Urban School, SciencesPo, Paris and a visiting professor at Azim Premji University, Bangalore. Earlier, she was Head, Urban Development at Egis India Consulting Engineers Pvt Ltd, where she co-led and worked on the Development Plan for Greater Mumbai 2034, and the Revised Master Plan for Bengaluru 2015.

C.K. Mathew

C.K. Mathew is a former IAS officer and was the Chief Secretary to the Government of Rajasthan. Currently, he is a visiting professor at Azim Premji University, Bangalore. Also, an author, his recent works include Reviewing the Republic: Reflections on the Constitution of India. He also served as a senior fellow at Public Affairs Centre, Bangalore and as a special rapporteur of the National Human Rights Commission's special rapporteur for the Southern states.

Deepa Parameswaran

Deepa Parameswaran is a Research and Design Lead at Mantra 4 Change, Bangalore. She has over three years of experience as a teacher, content creator and architect. She started her journey in school education as a Teach for India fellow in 2018. She was with Sahyadri School, Pune (run by Krishnamurti Foundation India) as an English teacher for a year.

Kumaresh Mishra

A former IAS officer, Kumaresh Mishra has diverse administrative and academic experience. He served in the Prime Minister's office with three Prime Ministers. He was a Deputy Secretary General at the United Nations where he supported the organization of Habitat III Global Conference at Quito, Ecuador, that agreed on the New Urban Agenda. He was also the head of the International Cooperation Branch at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), The Netherlands

Lavanyaa Saxena

Lavanyaa Saxena holds a master's in public policy from National University of Singapore. She has three years of experience in education, urban and health policy. She has worked on stakeholder management and leadership development, consulting, project planning and applied-research. She developed a global professional network by participating in conferences held at Stanford University (California, US) and short-term study program at Keio University (Tokyo).

Meenakshi Hooja

Meenakshi Hooja, a former IAS officer, held several key positions including that of the Additional Chief Secretary, Rajasthan. She was a member of the Central Administrative Tribunal and a visiting fellow at Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford University. She was also a member of International Editorial Board of "Global Dialogue on Federalism in the 21st Century" being coordinated by Forum of Federations, Canada.

M.K. Devarajan

M K Devarajan was an Indian Police Service Officer and held several key positions in the police and intelligence establishment including that of the Director General of Police. He was also a Member, Rajasthan State Human Rights Commission. He holds a PhD and has been a member of National Police Mission since its inception in 2008.

A. Narayana

Narayana A. is a professor of Politics, Policy, and Governance at Azim Premji University. A former journalist, he also taught at the School of Communication in Manipal University, and the Indian Institute of Journalism and New Media. He is a member of the Karnataka State Education Policy Commission.

Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty

A former Indian Foreign Service Officer, Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty was the Secretary (Economic Relations) in the Ministry of External Affairs. He was also the Indian Ambassodor to Thailand and is currently a visiting fellow with the Observer Research Foundation. As High Commissioner to Bangladesh he drafted the initial concept proposal for the Land Boundary Agreement which solved the un-demarcated border, Enclaves and Adverse possessions.

Rishikesh B S

Rishikesh is an Associate Director at the School of Education, Azim Premji University. He has over 20 years of research & teaching experience. Earlier, he was an educational researcher for over two decades. He is on various Government Advisory Committees on education. Currently, he is a member of the Technical Secretariat established by the Union Ministry of Education to the Steering Committee for the National Curriculum Framework 2023.

Sarojini Ganju Thakur

Sarojini Ganju Thakur is a former IAS officer and she retired as Additional Chief Secretary, Himachal Pradesh. She was also the joint secretary, Union Ministry of Women and Child Development. She headed the Gender Section at the Commonwealth Secretariat at London. She is currently the chairperson of the Institute of Social Studies Trust, New Delhi, which works on women and work. She is also a consultant for UN Women, UNICEF and Transform Rural India Foundation.

Shanti Prasad Joshi

An electrical engineer, Shanti Prasad Joshi is the former Chairman of Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory commission. He has a master's in engineering from the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, and he held several key positions in Rajasthan State Electricity Board. He was honoured with meritorious service award by the Rajasthan Government.

Shobhita Rajagopal

A researcher and author in the fields of social development and policy research, gender training and advocacy, Shobhita Rajagopal was former Professor at the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur. She has also been engaged in an International transdisciplinary research network on 'Blood Narratives' at the University of Sussex, UK. Her recent publications include Open and Distance Learning in Secondary School Education in India: Potential and Limitations (Co-authored).

S.S.Mantha

S. S. Mantha is a former chairman of the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). He also served as President of the National Board of Accreditation, and as Chancellor of K.L. University. He was the Professor and head of Mechanical Engineering Department at VJTI, Mumbai, and he specializes in Robotics and Artificial Intelligence.

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Preface

The Azim Premji University has been encouraging the expression of diverse and disparate views on a variety of subjects in the past too. Over the last two decades of its existence, the Azim Premji Foundation under which the University operates has been consistently focusing on its vision of contributing towards a more just, equitable, humane, and sustainable society through extensive on-the-groundwork across the country as well as through its partners. In this context we may venture to say that the present collection of essays is an expression of that focus, while encouraging views and counterviews on various perspectives on the national endeavour, with the goal of working towards the Foundation's vision.

Amidst the Corona crisis of 2020 to 2022, another compendium of essays entitled *Understanding Post-Covid-19 Challenges in India* had been published in March 2022. The essays in that collection too had looked at certain key domains such as Health, School Education, Impact of Covid on vulnerable groups, urban development, the systems of recording deaths etc. While that collection tried to document how the nation navigated through a short period of the toughest challenge, this collection tries to offer a snapshot of more than 75 years of history since Independence.

It is hoped that this collection of essays will encourage its readers to think about the myriad activities that India as a nation has undertaken in its unending search for building a better society, the complexities that it has to encounter and the challenges that it has had to overcome, in trying to achieve that objective. The essays here are collected over a year's time following the 75th year of Independence, and as such some of the essays might not have captured the latest developments in the themes that they focus on. The readers' responses are welcome.

Acknowledgement

The editors of this compendium of essays would like to acknowledge and express their gratitude to all the essayists who have contributed their wisdom and shared their experience in the array of subjects that each of the articles included in this volume deal with.

Since Independence, there have been transformative changes in nearly every aspect of life in our country. Undoubtedly, we are rapidly progressing towards our goal of being one of the fastest growing economies of the world. Yet, there is much more to be achieved as we enter the last quarter of our century of freedom from colonial rule. The attempt made herein is to take a long and close look at certain significant areas of our country's economy and polity, as they progressed over the last seven and a half decades, while also analysing contentious issues that still confront us in the subjects under discussion here.

There are 16 writers who have contributed the 12 essays that find their place within the pages of this book. They come from amongst practitioners of policy formulation and implementation as well as from the world of academia, thus providing an ideal mix of theory and practice that is so essentially required for a proper understanding of India' s transformation since the heady days of Independence. While there is no need to mention each writer by name, we acknowledge them all for their knowledge and the manner of articulation of the complex issues that each of the subjects that they have dealt with.

A special word of thanks to Sudeesh Venkatesh who realised the significance of this compendium and decided on publishing it in soft and hard copy while also uploading it on the University website. It was his decision to invite the writers of these essays for a workshop where they could interact with the faculty and students of the University. Our gratitude to Anurag Behar for presiding over the seminar held in this connection. Prof. Sitharaman, heading the School of Policy and Governance, provided timely advice and counsel as the volume matured and came into being. The publications team of the University,

ably led by Sachin Mulay and supported by Chandrika Muralidhar ensured that this compendium was published as a classy high-quality volume that can be used as a reference book for students interested in India's development story. Palak Sharma and Silja Bansriyar toiled ceaselessly to ensure the design and final publication of this volume.

It is our fervent hope that the issues raised in this volume in the wide variety of subjects related to India's growth and development, will motivate readers to think deeply about these critical subjects leading to more discussion and fruitful debates that will, in the days ahead, positively impact participatory development and good governance.

C.K. Mathew

A. Narayana

India since Independence: Essays on Transformation and Permanence

Introduction

This publication is a collection of essays on the transformation that India has seen in some specific domains since Independence. The selection of themes here does not follow a specific pattern, but they cover the story of this transformation that the Republic has witnessed in some key areas. Starting with an exploration of the very idea of India that emerged because of the illustrious legacy of freedom struggle, the 12 essays in this collection cover key domains such as nationalism, civil and police administration, rural and urban development, education, women's empowerment, water and sanitation, energy and India's external policy towards its neighbouring countries.

A period of over seven-and-a-half decades may not be a long time to judge a nation on its achievements and failures, but it is certainly an occasion to take a dispassionate look at the years that have gone by and draw lessons for the future. As such the essays here do not offer a critical evaluation of successes and failures. Instead, they largely constitute some quick recollections of what has happened and what ought to have happened. These essays are contributions from practitioners in their respective domains, mostly retired civil servants, and scholars who have simultaneously engaged in professional practice in their area of expertise. Expectedly, therefore, these essays are not in the nature of a typical academic enquiry. Most of them give us a broad overview of issues that inform the process of policymaking. In addition to presenting an overview of the topics that they cover, the essays also give us a sense of how administrators and practitioners, occupying crucial executive and advisory positions, generally tend to view these issues. This, however, cannot be taken as a representative of how this category of observers may look at national affairs in general.

This is a ready reckoner for students, and anyone interested in the story of India, to get a quick, yet rounded understanding of how the

country has changed since Independence in these key areas. No story of change can be all positive. The story of India's transformation too has its upsides and downsides, as the contributors to this volume have identified and described. The net result of transformation, however, is positive going by the optimism that is exuded in almost all the essays here.

The first essay titled *The Idea of India after 75 Years of Independence* by Arvind Narrain sets the context for the volume by offering an incisive view of the nature of the Republic that emerged from the long years of freedom struggle and the Constitution of 1950. What is the 'Idea of India' now after 75 years of Independence? The answer that the essay has for this question is that the idea of India is encoded in the ideals which animated the freedom struggle. Today those ideals are available to us as encoded in the national flag, the Constitution, and the national anthem.

The next two essays are on the All-India Services, or what is known as the steel frame of the Republic. Meenakshi Hooja's essay titled *All India Services: An Overview* seeks to cover all the three services under the rubric of All India Services; it focuses primarily on the Indian Administrative Service. The second essay *Indian Police Since Independence: An Infant Still?* by M.K. Devarajan is specifically about the Indian Police Service.

After presenting a long overview of the services and its values, Meenakshi Hooja concludes that the Indian Administrative Service has been losing one of its cardinal characters, which is its ability to offer impersonal and unbiased advice to the political executive. At the same time, she hastens to say, the fact that lakhs of bright and service-minded youngsters aspire to join the services every year is a reason for hope. The story of the Indian police seems to be a bit more worrisome but even here, there are reasons to be hopeful. The author observes that the basic structure and work ethos of the Indian Police have not undergone any major change since the time of the British. However, despite facing charges of abuse of power and human rights violations, the Indian police have a commendable record of managing

natural disasters and internal security challenges such as terrorism, Naxal attacks, and communal riots. The author also brings out some of the inherent infirmities in India's police system which weakens it from within and warns that unless correctives are applied to some of these pressing problems, there is even a danger of the police force resorting to a strike as it happened in the late 1970s.

The two essays that follow are about India's urban landscape. Kumaresh Mishra's essay titled *Indian Urban Scene: Growth and Challenges* gives an overview of Urbanisation since independence and lists some of the emerging challenges. Urbanisation over the years has changed India's long-standing characterisation as a predominantly rural nation. Urban population in India has been growing by 2.3 per cent each year according to the 2011 census. By 2031, 75 per cent of India's national income is estimated to come from cities. Providing the necessary urban infrastructure is a big challenge: most of the infrastructure that will be needed by 2050 has not been built yet. Despite the challenges, urban areas have contributed a great deal to India's growth story.

The second essay on Urban India by Champaka Rajagopal and Lavanyaa Saxena is focused on four major urban development programmes that have been launched since Independence. By analysing the design and financing patterns of these programmes the essay titled *More Public or Private? Tracing Shifts in Urban Policy Orientation* tries to delineate the changing characteristics of the Indian State. The authors identify a gradual transition in the State's dispensation in urban policy design, from a paternalistically oriented national government during the 1980s to a controlling and guiding State during the first decade of this century to one which embraces neo-liberal reforms and partial decentralisation during the next decade and then to corporatisation with arm's length control by the national government at present.

The next essay by Amarjeet Sinha shifts the focus from urban India to rural India. The essay titled *Rural India: Poverty Reduction and Livelihood Transformation* tries to understand rural poverty and livelihood from the perspective of women in Independent India.

The author shows how the recent programmes launched by both the Union and the State Governments to strengthen livelihood have contributed to a drastic reduction in poverty across the country. The author argues, however, that a business-as-usual approach towards growth will not deliver the kind of inclusive growth and well-being that is needed to sustain the gains of poverty reduction. He also says that notwithstanding the success of some of the poverty-alleviation programs, India needs to address inequalities more directly.

While Amarjeet Sinha's essay covers women's empowerment from an economic and poverty-alleviation perspectives, the essay that follows gives an overall trajectory of the struggle for gender equality in India. In this essay titled *India's Herstory: A Struggle between Rights and Patriarchy*, authors Sarojini Ganju Thakur and Shobhita Rajagopal although India's constitutional provisions, reinforced by national policies and international commitments, have helped India make progress in achieving the goal of gender equality, specifically in equality between men and women, yet certain kinds of gender inequalities have become wider and more visible over the years. This can be seen in the declining sex ratio at birth, and women's work force participation, and increasing violence against women. The nature of progress since Independence, say the authors, highlights a constant struggle between assertion of rights and long-standing patriarchal norms and mindsets.

The next two essays focus on the evolution of power and water sectors in India. Shanti Prasad Joshi's essay titled *Renewable Energy Development in India* brings out history of the renewable energy development and its potential. Renewable Energy development has been initially through multi-purpose river valley projects. From the beginning of this century, emphasis has shifted to wind and solar energy. Initially in the government sector through budgetary support and foreign assistance, the sector subsequently shifted to equity-debt financing and private sector participation. Wind and solar energy projects have been brought mainly by private sector. Enactment of laws and creation of organisations such as the Central Electricity Authority, State Electricity Companies, Regulatory Commissions,

promotional policies, enforcement of Renewable Purchase Obligation etc., has contributed to this development.

Ajitabh Sharma's essay *Water Management India: Progress, Disregard and Way Forward* examines water management policy and practices in India since Independence. Rising population, increasing urbanisation and a fast-growing economy has put immense pressure on the limited water resources of the country. The essay discusses the challenges that the country faces today in the water sector, and the way forward to overcome these challenges. The essay concludes that while the country has made remarkable progress in managing its competing sectoral water demand, the current approach of fragmented interventions is unsustainable. It further argues that an integrated approach hinged on water science, policy and coordinated action is the best chance for the country to tide over the current water crisis which is getting exacerbated due to the changing climate.

The next two essays are on India's education sector. While Deepa Parameswaran and B.S. Rishikesh capture the checkered history of the evolution of school education, Ashok Thakur and S.S. Mantha trace the trajectory of the growth of higher education.

The essay titled *School Education in India: A Story of Transformation and Stagnation* meticulously documents key elements of various milestones through which school education has passed through. It traces the post-independence policies, programmes and schemes starting from the Radhakrishnan Commission's report to the new National Education Policy 2020. While describing the journey as one of transformation and stagnation, the authors also say that the education policy making space continues to remain vibrant and democratic with high participation of all important stakeholders, which they consider a reason to be hopeful about in the future.

The essay on higher education titled *Growth of Higher Education: Challenges and Prospects* describes the Indian Higher Education system as large, complex, and growing. It has come a long way since Independence in terms of opening new institutions and enrolling students from all sections of the population and regions. Though it

had a head start compared to other developing countries in terms of the use of English as a medium of instruction and modern universities having been set up as early as the middle of the 19th century, it has not been able to reap the harvest to the extent expected. To achieve excellence in higher education, a lot more needs to be done, say the authors. To begin with, the autonomy of the institutions must be boosted, the role of the government and the regulators reduced, research and interdisciplinary studies need to be encouraged and linkages with the industry must be established. Firming up a policy with skilling as part of education, discarding bad practices like inbreeding, time-bound promotions, transparency in recruitment and promotion rules, providing adequate funding and reforming State colleges and Universities are equally important too.

Both the essays on education are hopeful about the National Education Polic 2020 which aims to address some of the persistent problems of Indian education sector. The success in its implementation, the essays say, will largely depend upon spending certain portion of the GDP to education, which in turn is contingent on how the economy fares in the years to come.

The last essay is titled *India's Neighbours: A Persistent Policy Challenge.* As the title indicates, the essay deals with India's external affairs vis-à-vis the countries surrounding its borders during the post-independence period. The author, Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, while giving a long overview of the developments in India's policies towards its neighbouring countries, argues that India has reinvented and reshaped its neighbourhood policy during this period. India has progressively opened to subregional and regional multilateralism, abandoning rigid bilateralism. India's persistent efforts to stabilise relations with its neighbours are based on the fundamental premise that a peaceful, democratic, politically stable and economically integrated neighbourhood is in India's long-term national interest. Empirical evidence from the European Union and the North American nations [Canada, Mexico, and USA] suggests that nations that have settled borders with neighbours and have developed stable political and economic relations with one another, have achieved higher levels

of development and prosperity. India's neighbourhood policy has also evolved, moving away gradually towards more liberal policies to foster connectivity and economic development.

The essays together tell us a story of 'continuity and change' that India has seen since Independence. While a reference to the idea of 'continuity and change' is read into any account of a historical overview, the word 'permanence' used in the title of this collection is not only in the same sense in which 'continuity' is used in such accounts. The term permanence here does not refer merely to the continuity of things which should have changed in an ideal situation. Rather it denotes the permanence of the founding ideals of the republic that the first essay has brought out in both a positive and normative sense. The ideals and values that the flag, the Constitution and the anthem collectively symbolise are the ideals which the nation has preserved so far, and at the same time, it is the ardent responsibility of all citizens to reconnect to those ideals and values at this juncture and work for their permanence in the national life.

C.K. Mathew

A. Narayana

3 November 2023

Essay I: The Idea of India after 75 years of Independence

Arvind Narrain

Abstract

This essay explores the 'Idea of India.' The essay argues that the elusive framework that holds India together since Independence despite its mind-boggling cultural diversity and serious political differences emerges from the values enshrined in the trinity of the national flag, the Constitution, and the national anthem. This character of the Republic built on the legacy of the freedom struggle, and captured in the flag, the anthem and the Constitution, is invaluable not just because of its uniqueness but, more importantly, because of its specific fit for a country of India's complexity and diversity.

Introduction

What is the Idea of India? According to Tagore who was perhaps the first person to use this evocative phrase, in a letter to a friend in 1921, "the idea of India is against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others, which inevitably leads to ceaseless conflicts".[1]

Sunil Khilnani made the phrase popular in his book called the 'The Idea of India'. He posited the 'Idea of India' as being anchored in 'resisting certain powerful seductions – the temptations for a clear, singular definition of nationhood, for the apparent neatness of authoritarian politics…' For Khilnani, the purpose of his book was to 'excavate the conception that provided the intellectual and practical underpinnings of modern India, that gave it its distinctive identity over the past half-century, and that kept it, unlike so many other new states, democratic, tolerant, and open-minded.'[2]

The phrase itself is evocative, gesturing to the warp and the weft out of which India is spun. 'The Idea of India' evokes the language of dreams, of imagination and of future possibilities. After 75 years of India's independence which has seen India being governed by multiple political parties with diverse ideologies, is there indeed something which overarches these political differences? Is that something which in spite of pulls and pressures provides a basis for conversation, dialogue and a way of pulling together.

This paper argues that that elusive framework which allows us to continue being together in spite of our differences should emerge from the trinity of the national flag, the Constitution and the national anthem.

The National Flag

To mark the 75th year of India's independence, the Union Government initiated the *Har Ghar Tiranga*, a campaign meant to 'encourage people to bring the *Tiranga* home and to hoist it' The purpose of bringing the flag home is to build a 'personal connection to the *Tiranga*' and also an 'embodiment of our connection to nation building' as per the website of the *Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav* celebrations.[3]

Most of the website provides technical information on the flag, without venturing into the territory of what the flag symbolises. The only gesture to the history behind the flag is a section titled, 'unsung flag martyrs', which through its pen sketches shows that there were ordinary Indians from all parts of the country who defied the British to hoist the flag and paid the price with their lives. The Union of India through this publicly available documentation on its website is seeking to bring attention to this dimension of the freedom struggle.

To take just one example Nallavenkataraya, who was a resident of Mysore State, aged 34 attended a large public meeting in a garden at Vidhuraswatha village in Kolar, Mysore, held by the local Congressmen in defiance of the order which prohibited the hoisting of the National flag and holding of public gatherings. The gathering was first lathi-charged and then fired upon to disperse; Nallavenkataraya died in this

police firing on 25 April 1938 along with 34 other freedom fighters. This was referred to as Karnataka's Jallianwala Bagh.[4]

Other than this glimpse into the narratives of blood and tears which is part of the history of the flag, the website is surprisingly silent on what is the 'idea of India' for which blood was shed. Or put simply, what does the national flag symbolise?

To understand what the National Flag symbolises, it is instructive to go back to the Constituent Assembly Debates, where the national flag was debated upon and finalised. The Constituent Assembly Debates on 22 July 1947 in which 24 members from Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Adivasi backgrounds spoke on the resolution moved by Jawaharlal Nehru on the National Flag, crystalises the meaning of the flag for all Indians.[5] The resolution itself in Nehru's words was a 'technical resolution' with no 'glow or warmth in the words'. It read:

> Resolved that the National Flag of India shall be horizontal tricolour of deep Saffron (Kesari), white and dark green in equal proportion. In the centre of the white band, there shall be a Wheel in navy blue to represent the Charkha. The design of the Wheel shall be that of the Wheel. (Chakra) which appears on the abacuse (sic) of the Sarnath Lion Capital of Asoka. The diameter of the Wheel shall approximate to the width of the white band. The ratio of the width to the length of the Flag shall ordinarily be 2:3.

In moving the resolution Nehru narrates the 'history' behind the adoption of the flag in a speech which Sarojini Naidu described as 'epic in its quality of beauty, dignity and appropriateness' and 'sufficient to express the aspirations, emotions and the ideals of this House'. The flag according to Nehru was a symbol of the freedom struggle waged by Indians against British rule. The struggle itself was the 'concentrated history of a short span in a nation's existence', of a 'brief period we pass through the track of centuries'.

The flag symbolises the objective of Indian freedom. However, Nehru sounds a note of caution to excessive triumphalism by stating that, 'we have not attained the objective exactly in the form in which we

wanted it' and goes on to note that, 'it is very seldom that the aims and objectives with which we start are achieved in their entirety in life in an individual's life or in a nation's life.'

As much as the flag is a 'symbol of freedom', it will also be a reminder that 'there will be no full freedom in this country or in the world as long as a single human being is unfree. There will be no complete freedom as long as there is starvation, hunger, lack of clothing, lack of necessaries of life and lack of opportunity of growth for every single human being, man, woman and child in the country.'

In a typical Nehruvian gesture, he points to the future stating that 'we may not 'accomplish' full freedom but we 'hope that our successors when they come, have an easier path to pursue.'

He disavows any 'communal significance' to the flag and says that 'some people, having misunderstood its significance, have thought of it in communal terms and believe that some part of it represents this community or that.' He prefers to see the colours of the flag, 'dark green', 'deep saffron' and a 'white band' within the register of aesthetics and describes it as 'beautiful'. However, the 'beauty' has its roots in India with the flag representing the 'spirit of the nation, the tradition of the nation, that mixed spirit and tradition which has grown up through thousands of years in India.'

The flag draws its inspiration from the past, from the 'trackless centuries' before the freedom struggle. The 'chakra emblem' is associated with Ashoka, 'one of the most magnificent names not only in India's history but in world history.' For Nehru, to go back to Ashoka 'at this moment of strife, conflict and intolerance' is to 'go back towards what India stood for in the ancient days.'

Ashoka is not only associated with peace but also with 'internationalism'. As Nehru puts it, 'India has not been in the past a tight little narrow country, disdaining other countries.' He invokes this Ashokan legacy to 'receive and adapt', and states that 'it is folly for any nation or race to think that it can only give to and not receive from the rest of the world. Once a nation or a race begins to think like that, it becomes rigid, it

becomes ungrowing; it grows backwards and decays.' He concludes by stating that:

> ...Flag that I have the honour to present to you is not, I hope and trust, a Flag of Empire, a Flag of Imperialism, a Flag of domination over anybody, but a Flag of freedom not only for ourselves, but a symbol of—freedom to all people who may see it.

The speech resonates with members of the Assembly and particularly with religious minorities, Adivasi and Dalit representatives.

V. I. Muniswami Pillai, welcomes the 'introduction of the Sarnath Lion Capital of Asoka', saying that:

> The Harijan classes and all those communities who are in the lowest rung of the ladder of society, feel that the constitution which is on the anvil of this supreme body is going to bring solace to the millions of the submerged classes.

H. J Khandekar, as the 'President of the All-India Depressed Classes Union', supports the resolution saying that:

> If the honour of the Flag, maintained by us even up to this day is besmirched any time, my Community along with other inhabitants of the country will sacrifice themselves to save the honour of the Flag.

Chaudhri Khaliquzzamam, a Muslim member from the United Provinces supports the resolution moved by Nehru and says that:

> I think that from today everyone, who regards himself as a citizen of India—be he a Muslim, Hindu or Christian,—will as a citizen make all sacrifices to uphold and maintain the honour of the flag which is accepted and passed as the flag of India.

Dr. H.C. Mookherjee, speaking on behalf of the Christian community, says that:

> It has been held that because we profess Christianity, -essentially an Asiatic religion- and because we have certain contacts with foreign missions, therefore the Indian Christian community has what is known as a Christian mentality. It is not so, and I stand here to say that it is an incorrect idea. It is a misconception and I want it to be clearly understood that today I on behalf of my community, am pledging our allegiance once more to the Flag.

Jaipal Singh, speaking on behalf of the '30 million adibasis', says that he has 'great pleasure in acknowledging this Flag as the Flag of our country in the future' and goes on to say that, 'members of the House are inclined to think that flag hoisting is the privilege of the Aryan civilised', but 'adibasis have been the first to hoist flags and to fight for their flags'. Frank Anthony speaking as an Anglo- Indian says that:

> Today this Flag is the Flag of the Nation. It is not the Flag of any particular community; it is the Flag of all Indians. I believe that while this is a symbol of our past it inspires us for the future.

Jai Narain Vyas from Jodhpur State says that:

> This is our national flag. It belongs to all the communities of India—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Parsis. Let it fly everywhere in India and on the Viceregal Lodge, on the hamlets of the peasants and on the palaces of the princes.

S. Nagappa from Madras say that

> Everyone, whether he be a Muslim, Hindu or Christian, will own this Flag. He has to defend it and stake even his life, if need be then alone will the honour of our country be high in the eyes of the world.

The Rev. Jerome D'Souza from Madras expresses the hope that:

> Above all, in every case of fraticidal warfare, of strife among ourselves, when injustice is done, when tempers rise, when communal peace is broken up, may the sight of this Flag help to soften the harsh and discordant voices, and help us to stand together, as we have gathered today in unanimity, in happiness is brotherly feeling to salute this, our National Flag.

The final word rests with Sarojini Naidu who expresses her happiness that 'the representatives of the various communities that constitute this House' have pledged 'their allegiance to this Flag.'

She asks the prescient question as to 'Who shall live under that Flag without thinking of the common Indian? Who shall limit its functions? Who shall limit its inheritance? To whom does it belong?' She answers it by saying that 'It belongs to India. It belongs to all India.'

The debates in the Constituent Assembly on the flag resolution, both in terms of who participated and also in terms of what they said, sheds light on the 'Idea of India'.

First, the universal sentiment of those who spoke in the Constituent Assembly was that across the religious, caste, adivasi and gender diversity of India, all were united in the sentiment that the flag belongs to them all. To honour the national flag is to recognise fundamentally the equal right of all Indians under the Constitution.

Second, the debates around the national flag indicate that the idea of freedom must have content, beyond just an invocation of a national feeling. As Nehru argues, there will be 'no complete freedom' as 'long as there is starvation, hunger, lack of clothing, lack of necessaries of life and lack of opportunity of growth for every single human being, man, woman and child in the country.' Freedom from want is a critical dimension of freedom. If India is one of the most unequal countries in

the world,[i] then any celebration of freedom must include an awareness of economic unfreedom and the need to redress it.

The scale of the problem of inequality became apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic. As an Oxfam Report noted, during the pandemic, 'the wealth of [Indian] billionaires increased by 35% during the lockdown.'[6] This was at a time of unprecedented misery for millions of people, who saw their livelihoods shrink. Recently the Global Hunger Index has come out with a report in which it ranked India 111th out of 125 countries that could be ranked.[7]

Connecting back to the debate on the national flag, the idea of freedom must encompass freedom from want. Nationalism must have an economic content. To do so means that the problem of inequality and the problem of hunger has first to be acknowledged.

Third, the flag for Nehru symbolises 'internationalism' and a nation which is not a 'tight little narrow country, disdaining other countries.' The flag symbolises not only freedom for India but also 'a symbol of—freedom to all people who may see it'.

Finally, if the flag is a symbol of freedom, it is also a symbol of what the author of our national anthem, Rabindranath Tagore would have called 'tireless striving'. In his poem, *Where the mind is without fear*, Tagore speaks of 'tireless striving which stretches its arms towards perfection'.[8] Nehru in his speech on the flag resolution cautions against excessive triumphalism, when he says that, 'it is very seldom that the aims and objectives with which we start are achieved in their entirety in an individual's life or in a nation's life.'

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i See Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*, Belknap Press, London, 2020. P.20. In Thomas Piketty's analysis, the crisis the world is facing (social, economic and environmental) is due to the socially unsustainable levels of inequality. 'The top decile's share [of income] has risen almost everywhere. Take for example, India, the United States, Russia, China, and Europe. The share of the top decile in each of these five regions stood at around 25-35 percent in 1980 but by 2018 had risen to between 35-55 percent.' ... 'In India the change from 1980 to 2018 is among the largest moving from 32 to 55 % with 10% of the population now earning over 55% of all income.'

This idea of freedom as an ideal which we are constantly aspiring to reach, as a work in progress is also echoed by the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, Babasaheb Ambedkar. As he put it in his famous concluding speech in the Constituent Assembly

> On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognising the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value, How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life?[9]

We need an Ambedkarite awareness that we live in a period of 'contradictions' with political equality but not 'social equality' or 'economic equality'. We may have one person one vote, but we don't yet have one person one value. The metaphor of the national flag as symbolising a journey is an important one and one needs to ask if independence in 1947 could be celebrated by pointing to the road we had to travel, surely there is no space for immodest triumphalism today either?

Finally, the flag should be a symbol of freedom, and most importantly freedom from fear. As Gandhiji points out in Hind Swaraj, 'those alone can follow the path of passive resistance who are free from fear, whether as to their possessions, false honour, their relatives, the government, bodily injury, death'.[10] To cultivate fearlessness is to learn to speak and act, without worrying about what the government, your family or your society may say. We need to cultivate fearlessness as a form of freedom.

We need to learn from the founding fathers and the founding mothers on what it means to truly honour the national flag.

The Constitution

Much as the flag is an important part of who we are, equally important is the Constitution of India. All our leaders at the level of the State and the Centre, the President and the Prime Minister, the Judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court take oath under the Constitution. They take an oath to 'bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India'

What is the nature of the Constitution which our leaders have promised to follow? It's a long document comprising 395 articles and 12 schedules. One way of understanding what is this document is by understanding the Preamble which symbolises the heart of the Constitution, or as Upendra Baxi put it, 'the Constitution is a massive footnote to the Preamble'.[11] The Preamble, provides a master key to understand the Idea of India.[ii]

The discussion on the national flag in the Constituent Assembly touched upon some of the ideals in the Preamble including the idea of equality, freedom, secularism and democracy. This section will seek to elucidate two key ideas which are central to the constitutional imagination of India, namely dignity and liberty.

The idea of dignity we owe to Babasaheb Ambedkar and liberty we cannot understand, without looking at the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi.

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ii **WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA,** having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a **SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC** and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;

and to promote among them all **FRATERNITY** assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation;

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION**

Dignity: Babasaheb Ambedkar's contribution

Why is the word dignity in the Preamble? Going back to the precursor to the Preamble, the Objectives Resolution moved by Nehru, there is no mention of dignity, yet it finds a place in the Preamble.[iii]

We get a sense of what the word meant in the debates in the Constituent Assembly when it was proposed by Pattabhi Sitaramayya that in the phrase, 'fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation', the phrase, 'unity of the nation' should precede, 'dignity of the individual'. This proposal was rejected by B.N Rau who argued that the reason for putting the dignity of the individual first was that 'unless the dignity of the individual is assured, the nation cannot be united.'[12] The lexical priority of the individual was really about the philosophical centring of dignity in the Indian Constitution.

Akash Singh Rathore persuasively argues that dignity is there in the Constitution because Ambedkar insisted it be there. For him, it was important to recognize the idea that individuals are not means to an end but are ends in themselves. He insisted that the fundamental unit on whom rights were conferred was the individual.[13]

Why was dignity important to Babasaheb? One can perhaps read it autobiographically and make the point that Babasaheb's entire life was a struggle against humiliation and there was an existential dimension to his espousal of the concept of dignity.

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iii https://www.constitutionofindia.net/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/1/1946-12-13

I beg to move:

'(1) This Constituent Assembly declares its firm and solemn resolve to proclaim India as an Independent Sovereign Republic and to draw up for her future governance a Constitution;

…

(5) WHEREIN shall be guaranteed and secured to all the people of India justice, social, economic and political; equality of status, of opportunity, and before the law; freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith worship, vocation, association and action, subject to law and public morality; ….'

In one of his few autobiographical accounts, he writes about his experience of discrimination.

For instance, I knew that in the school I could not sit in the midst of my classmates according to my rank [in class performance], but that I was to sit in a corner by myself. I knew that in the school I was to have a separate piece of gunny cloth for me to squat on in the classroom, and the servant employed to clean the school would not touch the gunny cloth used by me. I was required to carry the gunny cloth home in the evening and bring it back the next day.

> While in the school I knew that children of the touchable classes, when they felt thirsty, could go out to the water tap, open it, and quench their thirst. I could not touch the tap; The presence of the school peon was necessary, for he was the only person whom the class teacher could use for such a purpose. If the peon was not available, I had to go without water. The situation can be summed up in the statement—no peon, no water.[14]

One can speculate that Babasaheb's way of responding to this experience of humiliation, of being made to feel alone and powerless and of feeling stripped of his humanity is to insist that dignity be a part of the Constitution.

This notion of dignity in the Indian Constitution has travelled far since its incorporation in the Preamble with the Supreme Court developing an extensive jurisprudence, right from prisoners' rights to LGBT rights.

In *Sunil Batra vs Delhi Administration,*[15] Sec 30 of the Prisons Act, 1894 which stated that all prisoners awarded a sentence of death shall be placed in a cell different from all other inmates was challenged. The court ruled that the provision did not allow police authorities to place prisoners under solitary confinement, stating that "punishments in civilised societies, must not degrade human dignity".[16]

In *Francis Corallie Mullin vs. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi,*[17] the Supreme Court while hearing a *habaes corpus* petition filed by

a detenue contending among other things that she was not allowed to meet her lawyer or her family. The Court held that, 'the right to life includes the right to live with human dignity and all that goes along with it, namely, the bare necessaries of life such as adequate nutrition, clothing and shelter and facilities for reading, writing and expressing one-self in diverse forms, freely moving about and mixing and commingling with fellow human beings.[..] it must, in any view of the matter, include the right to the basic necessities of life and also the right to carry on such functions and activities as constitute the bare minimum expression of the human-self.'

The idea of dignity being associated with autonomy and choice was enunciated in *Puttaswamy vs Union of India.*[18] The Court held that, 'dignity is the core which unites the fundamental rights because the Fundamental Rghts seek to achieve for everyone the dignity of existence. Privacy with its attendant values assures dignity to the individual and it is only when life can be enjoyed with dignity can liberty be of true substance. Privacy ensures the fulfilment of dignity and is a core value which the protection of life and liberty is intended to achieve.'

In *Navtej Singh Johar vs Union of India,*[19] the court said that Section 377, which criminalised same-sex relations, violated the rights to dignity, privacy and sexual autonomy and choice. As Justice Misra put it,

> When biological expression, be it an orientation or optional expression of choice, is faced with impediment, albeit through any imposition of law, the individual's natural and constitutional right is dented. Such a situation urges the conscience of the final constitutional arbiter to demolish the obstruction and remove the impediment so as to allow the full blossoming of the natural and constitutional rights of individuals. This is the essence of dignity, and we say, without any inhibition, that it is our constitutional duty to allow the individual to behave and conduct himself/herself as he/she desires and allow him/her to express himself/ herself, of course, with the consent of the other. That is the right to choose without fear.

The notion of dignity has travelled a long distance since Ambedkar's early espousal of it. It is today the center point of the espousal of a range of rights by different marginalised and oppressed communities.

Liberty: Gandhiji's Contribution

To understand liberty in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, we must go to the words and actions of that great lover of liberty, Mahatma Gandhi. Freedom of speech and expression is an essential dimension of political freedom, according to Mahatma Gandhi. As he put it while writing in Young India in 1922:

> We must first make good the right of free speech and free association before we can make any further progress towards our goal. [...] We must defend these elementary rights with our lives. Liberty of speech means that it is un-assailed even when the speech hurts; liberty of the press can be said to be truly respected only when the press can comment in the severest terms upon and even misrepresent matters.... Freedom of association is truly respected when assemblies of people can discuss even revolutionary projects.
>
> Civil liberties consistent with the observance of non-violence are the first step towards Swaraj. It is the breath of political and social life. It is the foundation of freedom. There is no room there for dilution or compromise. It is the water of life.[20]

Gandhiji did not just write eloquently about the freedom of speech and expression as an integral and key aspect of the idea of freedom but was prepared to go to jail in its defence.

In opposition to the colonial regime, especially after the Rowlatt Bill was introduced and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre had been committed by General Dyer, there were strong condemnations by Gandhi of the injustice of the British action in his own paper.

In an article titled, 'Tampering with Loyalty', he noted that he 'shall not hesitate at the peril of being shot, to ask the Indian sepoy individually to leave his service and become a weaver. For has not the sepoy been used to hold India under subjection, has he not been used to

murder innocent people at Jallianwala Bagh…has he not been used to subjugate the proud Arab of Mesopotamia. [..] The sepoy has been used more often as a hired assassin than as a soldier defending the liberty of the weak and helpless. [..]'

He goes on to say:

> [..] sedition has become the creed of the Congress. Every non-cooperator is pledged to preach disaffection towards the government established by law. Non- cooperation, though a religious and strictly moral movement, deliberately aims at the overthrowal of the government and is therefore legally seditious in terms of the Indian Penal Code.[21]

In an article called the *'Puzzle and its solution'* he writes:

> We are challenging the might of this Government because we consider its activity to be wholly evil. We want to overthrow the Government. We want to compel its submission to the peoples will. We desire to show that the Government exists to serve the people, not the people the government. Free life under the Government has become intolerable, for the price exacted for the retention of freedom is unconscionable great. Whether we are one or many, we must refuse to purchase freedom at the cost of our self-respect or our cherished convictions.[22]

The British respond to this criticism of their policy by charging Gandhi with the offence of sedition as defined in Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code. Gandhi was tried under Section 124-A of the IPC on the charge of *'exciting disaffection towards the government established by law in India'.*

When Gandhi is arrested and produced before the Court instead of entering a plea of 'not guilty', he pleads guilty and goes on to make a statement which puts the entire colonial system on trial. After indicting the government for the Rowlatt Act, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and colonial economic policy he puts forward a staunch defence of the freedom of speech and expression.

> Section 124-A under which I am happily charged is perhaps the prince among the political sections of the Indian Penal Code designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen. Affection cannot be manufactured or regulated by law. If one has no affection for a person or system, one should be free to give the fullest expression to his disaffection, so long as he does not contemplate, promote or incite violence... I have no personal ill will against any single administrator; much less can I have any disaffection towards the King's person. But I hold it to be a virtue to be disaffected towards a government which in its totality had done more harm to India than any previous system.[23]

Though the judge convicted Gandhi, his statement indicates the impact Gandhi had upon him. J. Broomfield noted:

> The law is no respector of persons, nevertheless, it will be impossible to ignore the fact that you are in a different category from any person I have ever tried or am likely to try. It would be impossible to ignore the fact that, in the eyes of millions of your countrymen, you are a great patriot and a great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble and of even saintly life. I have to deal with you in one character only. It is not my duty and I do not presume to judge or criticise you in any other character. It is my duty to judge you as a man subject to the law, who by his own admission has broken the law and committed what to an ordinary man must appear to be grave offence against the state.[24]

As one of the contemporary accounts of the trial noted, 'for a minute everybody wondered who was on trial. Whether Mahatma Gandhi before a British Judge or whether the British Government before God and humanity.'[25]

In the sedition trial, Gandhi converted the charge against him of 'causing disaffection' into a powerful statement on why 'exciting disaffection' against the government was 'the highest duty of the citizen'. In short, as Sudipta Kaviraj observes, the trial of the rebel was

turned into something that appeared more like a trial of the State.[26] In the trial of the State what is contested most seriously is the link of the State to justice. As Gandhi demonstrates in eloquent prose, not only has the 'law been prostituted to the exploiter' but even more grave is the 'crime against humanity' of an economic policy that has succeeded in reducing people to 'skeletons in villages' 'as they sink to lifelessness'. The concept of justice both economic and political is what is at stake and Gandhi demonstrates that the British state has forfeited its claim on his affection having completely violated its commitment to the Indian people.

This engagement with the injustice of Gandhi's prosecution indicates that a government eager to get rid of the colonial legacy should have repealed the sedition provision from the Indian Penal Code. In the light of the enactment of the Constitution with liberty in the Preamble and freedoms guaranteed under Article 19, sedition should have died a natural death. Instead, the section continues to be in force and all governments have been happy to use it to prosecute opinion critical of itself. Thus, one important dimension of the struggle for liberty in post-independence India remains a battle for the repeal of the sedition law.

In *Kedar Nath Singh vs. State of Bihar*[27] the Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of the provision but has clearly delimited the use of Section 124A to only speech which had the tendency to incite violence. As the Supreme Court stated:

> But the section has taken care to indicate clearly that strong words used to express disapprobation of the measures of Government with a view to their improvement or alteration by lawful means would not come within the section. Similarly, comments, however strongly worded, expressing disapprobation of actions of the Government, without exciting those feelings, which generate the inclination to cause public disorder by acts of violence, would not be penal. In other words, disloyalty to Government established by law is not the same thing as commenting in strong terms upon the measures

> or acts of Government, or its agencies, so as to ameliorate the condition of the people or to secure the cancellation or alteration of those acts or measures by lawful means, that is to say, without exciting those feelings of enmity and disloyalty which imply excitement to public disorder or the use of violence.[28]

In *Balwant Singh vs Union of India*[29] the Supreme Court adjudicated the question as to whether the raising of slogans including, 'Khalistan Zindabad' in a crowd the day Indira Gandhi was assassinated amounted to sedition. The Supreme Court noted: 'We find it difficult to hold that upon the raising of such casual slogans, a couple of times without any other act whatsoever the charge of sedition can be founded'. The Supreme Court goes on to chastise the policemen who filed the case noting that, 'It does not appear to us that the police should have attached much significance to the casual slogans raised by two appellants, a couple of times and read too much into them.'

The Court concluded that, 'the prosecution has admitted that no disturbance, whatsoever, was caused by the raising of the slogans by the appellants and that although the appellants raised the slogans a couple of times, the people, in general, were un-affected and carried on with their normal activities. The casual raising of the slogans, once or twice by two individuals alone cannot be said to be aimed at exciting or attempt to excite hatred or disaffection towards the Government as established by law in India, Section 124A IPC, would in the facts and circumstances of the case have no application.'

The 11 May 2022, order of the Supreme Court, in the case filed by Army veteran Major-General S.G. Vombatkere (Retired) as well as PUCL and several other petitioners challenging the constitutional validity of Section 124A of the IPC has come as a ray of hope that sedition will cease to be on the statue books.[30]

The Court in the operative part of the order, expresses the 'hope' and expectation that, 'the Centre and State Governments will refrain from registering any FIR, continuing investigation, or taking coercive steps

under Section 124A IPC when it is under reconsideration. It will be appropriate not to use this provision of law till further re-examination is over'.

Further the Court has held that those already booked under Section 124A IPC and are in jail can approach the concerned courts for bail. It has also been ruled that if any fresh case is registered appropriate parties are at liberty to approach courts for appropriate relief and courts are requested to examine the relief sought considering the order passed by the court.[31]

In August 2023, the Centre announced the replacement of the Indian Penal Code with the *Bharatiya Nyaya Samhita* Bill-2023. Contrary to the Government's claim that the new law has done away with Section 124A of IPC, analysists feel that the offence of sedition has been retained in the Bill, albeit with a new name.[32] Meanwhile, on 12 September 2023, the Supreme Court referred the batch of petitions challenging the Section 124A to a Constitution Bench. The court rejected the centre's request to defer examining the validity of the Sedition law pending consideration of the new Bill before the standing committee of Parliament. The court held that the legality of the Sedition law still needs to be examined as the new law will be applicable only prospectively and the past cases will be prosecuted under the IPC.

These judicial pronouncements constitute an important step forward and one hopes that finally this legacy of colonial rule is removed from independent India.

The National Anthem

What is the idea of the nation which the national anthem evokes?

One should start with the author of India's national anthem, Rabindranath Tagore. The national anthem is the first stanza of a five-stanza song written by Tagore.

It reads:

> You are the ruler of the minds of all people,
> Dispenser of India's destiny.
> Thy name rouses the hearts of Punjab,
> Sindh, Gujarat and Maratha,
> Of the Dravida and Orissa and Bengal;
> It echoes in the hills of the Vindhyas and Himalayas,
> Mingles in the music of Jamuna and Ganges
> and is chanted by the waves of the Indian Ocean.
> They pray for your blessings and sing your praise.
> The saving of all people waits in your hand,
> You dispenser of India's destiny.
> Victory, victory, victory, victory to you.

The second stanza of the song goes as follows:

> Your call is announced continuously,
> we heed Your gracious call,
> The Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, Parsees, Muslims, and Christians,
> The East and the West come, to the side of Your throne,
> And weave the garland of love.
> Oh! You who bring in the unity of the people!
> Victory be to You, dispenser of the destiny of India![33]

The national anthem, the first stanza of the poem, invokes a feeling of how diversity is at the heart of nationalism. The references are to the cultural and social diversity of India right from Sindh and Gujarat to Orissa Bengal and the Dravidian lands. It is a reference to the geographic diversity of India right from the mountains of the Himalayas and Vindhyas to the great rivers of India from the Jamuna to the Ganga to the Indian ocean.

The second stanza, by referring to the various religious communities who inhabit the land, also sets up the idea of an inclusive nation.

Uniquely, the author of the national anthem was also one of the strongest critics of nationalism. He wrote that 'with the growth of nationalism, man has become the greatest menace to man'.[34] Tagore went on to write three articles on nationalism in Japan, India and the West, all of which read as dire warnings against the dangers of nationalism. He saw the 'idea of the nation' as 'one of the most powerful anaesthetics that man has invented', under the influence of which 'the whole people can carry out its systematic programme of the most virulent self-seeking without being in the least aware of its moral perversion—in fact being dangerously resentful if it is pointed out'.[35]

However, Tagore, despite his critique of nationalism, was not opposed to the idea of building a common sentiment amongst the people. While opposing Japanese nationalism, he continued to affirm the commonality among the citizens of Japan based on their common reverence for the beauty of their land:

> This spiritual bond of love she [Japan] has established with the hills of her country, with the sea and the streams, with the forests in all their flowerly moods and varied physiognomy of branches; she has taken into her heart all the rustling whispers and sighing of the woodlands and sobbing of the waves; … this opening of the heart to the soul of the world is not confined to a section of your privileged classes, it is not the forced product of exotic culture, but it belongs to all your men and women of all conditions. … It is a civilisation of human relationship.[36]

We can read Tagore's patriotism as the call for a 'civilisation of human relationship' built on a common reverence for the beauty of the native land. One of India's best-known cultural theorists, Ashis Nandy, elaborates on the 'large, plural concept of India' and reaffirms the universalism in Tagore's 'moral universe' in his book *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism*. He quotes Tagore as saying, 'Because we have missed the character of

> India as one related to the whole world, we have in our action and thought given a description of India which is narrow and faded.'[37]

Nandy writes:

> [Tagore's] version of patriotism rejected the violence propagated by terrorists and revolutionaries…, and it dismissed the idea of the nation-state as being the main actor in Indian political life. His critics rightly guessed that Janaganamana could only be the anthem of a state rooted in the Indian civilization, not of an Indian nation-state trying to be the heir to British-Indian empire.[38]

The national anthem is not based on the creation of an enemy, but rather on an invocation of diversity; the country's unity lies precisely in this diversity. If the national anthem is read with Tagore's corpus, what you get is an aspirational image of the nation as it should be. From Tagore we learn that our nationalism can't be narrow and exclusive but open and inclusive, based on the love of land and the love of all the people who inhabit the land.

Conclusion

What then is the 'Idea of India' now after 75 years of Independence? The Idea of India is encoded in the ideals which animated the freedom struggle. Today those ideals are available to us as encoded in the national flag, the Constitution and the national anthem.

The national flag is a symbol of 'freedom' and not 'domination'. The freedom of the 'flag' includes freedom from 'want'. The flag symbolises 'tireless striving', an 'international outlook' as well as a sense of unity. The Constitution reminds us that the ideals of the freedom struggle can only be realised by protecting 'dignity' of the individual, is the building block for the 'unity of the nation'. The Constitution also encodes a fundamental dimension of freedom, namely the freedom of speech and the freedom to criticise even the government in the

harshest possible terms. These are the Preambular terms of 'liberty' and 'dignity' which Gandhiji and Ambedkar fought so hard for. The national anthem posits that the elusive unity which we are searching for is there in the common love of the land, rivers and mountains which animates those who reside in India. Tagore also warns us of the dangers of the 'anaesthetic' of nationalism and how it can be 'perverted' to become the 'most virulent self-seeking'.

It is up to us to decode the meaning and follow through on the ideals encoded in the Constitution, the national flag and the national anthem. That would be an appropriate way of celebrating Independence year after year.

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Essay II: All India Services: An Overview

Meenakshi Hooja

Abstract

The All-India Services are envisaged to play a vital role in administration, policy making and governance in the country. The All-India Services which have their genesis in the colonial period have evolved and served Independent India. Over the years, with the changing political atmosphere, especially in federal relationships, it has become difficult to maintain the cardinal principles of neutrality and objectivity in offering free and fair advice to the political executive. However, by and large the services have lived up to expectations and played a vital role in the overall development of the country. This is borne out by the fact that the services continue to draw many aspirants, which is indicative of the faith that the Government and society places in them.

Introduction

The All-India Services (hereinafter referred to as AIS) are envisaged to play a vital role in public administration, policy making and overall governance at the Union, State, and District levels. They have always attracted and continue to attract numerous bright candidates for the competitive examinations held for recruitment because of the opportunities for postings and assignments at high levels that they offer, and the prestige the officers enjoy in society.

The roots of the Indian system of public administration and governance can be traced back to the Mauryan period (BC 321 to 181) and especially during the reign of Ashoka (BC 265 to 238) when it is said to have achieved its pinnacle. Over time, these arrangements and systems introduced during the Mauryan period were changed and modified as different reigns and empires came up. However, many of them continued. The Mughal rule, beginning with Babur

(1526 AD) brought about more changes and additions and greater institutionalisation. There was perhaps no regular Civil Service, but appointments were made to different posts for carrying out the assignments, as is the case now.

The English East India Company which in 1600 obtained trading rights in India from the Mughal emperor started challenging the Mughal Empire and became a territorial and governing force to reckon with after the Battle of Plassey (1757 AD) and Battle of Buxar (1764 AD). The setting up of the Bengal Presidency and appointment of the Governor by the 1773 Regulating Act paved the way for a deep-seated administration which included Provinces and Districts, Councils and Boards of various Departments and most importantly the District Administration and the office of the District Collector and District Magistrate. For this purpose, the Court of Directors functioning under the Board of Control appointed officers to the Civil Services (as distinguished from the military services). The higher-level officers were the covenanted civil servants, mostly British, holding high positions in administration and Judiciary. Regular policy of recruitment, training, salaries, roles and responsibilities were worked out over time. In this regard, Lord Cornwallis, Governor General of the Presidency of Fort William (later Bengal) is often called the father of Indian Civil Services. Indians were given positions and roles in the non-covenanted civil services, which were lower in hierarchy. The officers of the HEICS (Honourable East India Company Services) played a major role in all aspects of governance including expansion of the British empire. With more rules, regulations and procedures being notified, the administration and the civil service got more institutionalised during this time.

A major change came with the direct British Rule following the Government of India Act (1858) and the British Government taking over the reins of India. Even before that, as suggested by Lord Macaulay, the British Parliament had generally accepted a merit-based system of competitive examination system to replace the patronage-based recruitment of the East India Company.[1] The recruits to the top positions of the civil services were now to be recruited through

competitive examinations and for this purpose the Indian Civil Service (ICS) was set up.

Initially, only the British were admitted to the ICS but overtime it was thrown open to Indians. Satyendra Nath Tagore (1842-1923) was the first Indian to join the ICS in 1863, and since then many Indians entered the coveted service. The ICS and its officers held almost all the higher posts at the Secretariat, Province and Districts levels as well in the Judiciary. They were a dominating force and were widely regarded by the British as the people sustaining and holding the empire together.

Later, with the national movement and the advent of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the role of the ICS changed. Under the Government of India Acts 1919 and 1935, they had to work under Indian ministers and councillors. However, with the Second World War much of recruitment to ICS stopped. As Independence drew near, the issue of a successor administrative setup to the ICS became important.

All India Services Since Independence

As Independence of India became more certain, many of the British ICS officers chose to return home, and at Independence many Muslim ICS officers moved over to Pakistan. The question before the Indian Interim Government and the Constituent Assembly was thus - how to set up a new administrative structure, specially keeping in view the carnage caused by the Partition and the need for maintaining integrity of the country with an effective functioning civil service.

Jawaharlal Nehru had always been a critic of the ICS, though his attitude changed with time. As the first Prime Minister of Independent India, he understood the need for a strong administrative set up. However, the continuation of the ICS officers, who were looked at with deep distrust in general, was accepted by Nehru only after forceful arguments by Sardar Patel, Minister of Home and States in the Interim Government headed by Nehru. In the cabinet meeting in 1948 and in the subsequent debates in the Constituent Assembly Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel strongly argued in favour of All India Services that

would be centrally recruited and controlled like the ICS model and they would work at the Centre and in the States to bring about unity and cohesion in the administrative set up.

There was always a doubt as to how former ICS officers and now IAS could work along with the Ministers, as there was still public anger against the ICS, most visible symbol of the British empire. There was also a strong desire for provincial civil services to play this role. However, the requirements of continuity and expediency of work led to a general agreement on the setting up of the AIS. One of the views was that loyalty to the British regime was considered the best sign of loyalty to the future Indian State. Many saw the advantages of the neutrality displayed by the ICS officers and the Nationalist thoughts of many Indian ICS officers were also acknowledged. Finally, it was decided to introduce the AIS. The Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS) were set up under the All-India Services Act of 1951 and the Indian Forest Service (IFoS) constituted later in 1966 under the same Act.

Structure and Functions of All India Services

The AIS officers, after their selection through Common Civil Services Examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission are allotted to States / UTs as their parent cadre. According to the present policy, States have been grouped into five zones. Candidates give their preference of zone. The States/ UTs are allotted based on merit rankings in the examination and the candidates' preference. The Department of Personnel and Training is the cadre controlling authority for IAS, the Environment Ministry for IFoS and the Home Ministry for IPS.

One of the cardinal principles of allotment has been to maintain a combination of outsiders, those who are not residents of a State, and insiders, who are residents of the State in the cadre. The objective behind this seems to have been that an outsider's perspective and thinking, along with those who are more familiar with the State and its languages and customs leads to integration of diverse, fair, and

objective approaches towards governance and administration that enrich the State and its people.

Cadre allotment is one of the key issues for the Services. If an officer does not get a home State or a State of his or her preference, it affects him/her and more so their family, especially if they are far away from home. However, by no means can one conclude that the performance of officers is affected by the allotment. The combination of home and outside officers has been by and large successful in strengthening the contribution of the service.

The process of working in the Government of India (hereafter referred to as GOI) is on deputation, as the cadre always includes a quota of deputation reserve. For the key posts of Joint Secretary in the Government of India, there is a process of empanelment and the postings in various Ministries and Departments are given to those who are so selected. Though efforts are continually made to make the procedure as rational and objective as possible, the problems of some officials feeling left out or not being done due justice, remain. There is a further empanelment for the posts of Additional Secretaries and Secretaries in the Ministries/Departments in GOI and equivalent posts. Those who have worked in GOI before have a better chance of selection, though this is not a requirement. The highest post is of Cabinet Secretary for which again there is a selection. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) approves all the appointments.

The Cadre of the officer becomes his/her identity for life and many friendships are struck between the officers and their families, bringing in an element of camaraderie, cooperation and a personal touch to the profession and service. Officers working in the State generally feel comfortable when they work with a cadre mate in GOI and vice versa.

The control over AIS officers, even when they are working at State level is mixed. While disciplinary action can be initiated by the state government concerned, the final orders are issued only after obtaining due approval of the GOI. Often there arises difference of opinion or even conflict about the officers working at State level with the GOI. A

recent case was of the Chief Secretary of a State when he did not go to receive the Prime Minister at a particular place as apparently, he was with the Chief Minister in a meeting.[2] Such frictions tend to increase when the political parties in power at the Union and State level are different and when they do not see eye to eye. It can be said to be one of the occupational hazards; but as such not a difficult one.

While earlier there was reservation for SC/ST, after the Indira Sawhney Judgement the reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBC) was introduced, taking the total reservation to 49% with the cap of 50%. Recently the enabling provision of reserving another 10 percent posts for economically weaker section (EWS)[3] has been upheld by the Supreme Court. The age and attempts have also been gradually increased. Maximum age, which was 26, was increased to 28 and is now 32 with relaxation of 5 years for SC/ST and three years for OBC. The attempts include six for general, nine for OBCs and unlimited for SC/ST but all within the upper age limit. These developments show that the recruitment to the AIS (and the Central Services which follow a similar pattern) has widened the base and opened opportunities for those coming from socially and economically backward sections of society.

It is also a very noticeable achievement that women who were few and far between in the initial stages of selection after Independence, have now a strong presence in the selection process and they not only get selected but are toppers and rank high in the merit list.

Officers of the State Civil Services, State Police Service and State Forest Service are promoted to the IAS, IPS and IFoS respectively. Presently the number of posts to be filled up through promotion is 1/3rd of the cadre strength. At the same time a small quota of posts is also reserved for selection to the IAS from amongst the Non state civil services like Accounts, Tourism, Medical and Health, Engineering Services, Women and Child Development and other allied services. The political leaders too often waiver between having direct recruits or promoted officers in certain important post like those of Collectors, as they know the

latter better. However, it can be said that overall performance of promoted officers is one that enriches the administrative system.

To begin with, the Government of India had the challenges of Integration of Princely States, law and order, facing and rebuilding after the partition carnage, maintaining security, integrity and unity of the country, and providing infrastructure of rail, road and air travel and setting up mother industries especially in the public sector. Over the years, keeping in view the subjects under the Union List, the State List and the Concurrent List, enforcement of Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy, growing awareness among people and their rights, regular elections to Parliament, State Assemblies and now Panchayati Raj and Municipal Bodies, the role of the government at the Union, State and local levels has increased considerably -substantially covering the entire life cycle of the citizens. International developments, relations and conflicts with neighbors, and the emerging global scenario have also added more to the responsibilities of the governments. Correspondingly, the tasks to be performed by the members of the AIS have also increased manifold. Many issues like wildlife, environment, sustainable development, climate change, vagaries of monsoon, weather and natural disasters, women empowerment and gender sensitivity, Information Technology, and most recently, Covid-19 pandemic have created new challenges for the AIS and transformed the work environment for its members.

Some Issues of Concern and Way Ahead

One of the key concerns has been the relationship of civil servants with ministers, elected public representatives and other political leaders and workers. In the normal course, as the bureaucracy and specially the higher civil services work under the political control of the Prime Minister / Chief Ministers and their Council of Ministers and the Cabinet, the role of the officers is to assist in policy making and carry out duties as per the Acts and rules and directions issued under them. However, the working is not always smooth and there are a number of cases of differences and even conflicts between the ‘political masters’ as they are often called and the government

servant. This often leads to government servants being shunted out or given a cold storage posting. This happens more in states where tenures are not fixed compared to deputation postings in the Union Government. The officers call this uncalled for political interference while the politicians treat it as not following the wishes of the people whom they represent.

While the Supreme Court in many of its judgments[4] has laid down certain principles of tenures and transfers of officers, but, except for a few levels, it remains mostly a written word. At the State level, transfers and postings are often done as per the 'desires' of political leaders so that they can have their own persons in important positions including Collectors and SPs. In some cases, transfers are very frequent, as studies show. This greatly affects the officers and the administration, but the political leaders feel that unless the officers listen to them the schemes will not be properly implemented. This issue does not seem to get sorted out but will need to be addressed to ensure better performance and reduction of frequency and arbitrariness in the matter.

Sardar Patel on 2 April 1948, wrote in a letter to Nehru,[5] "I need hardly emphasize that an efficient, disciplined and contended service, assured of its prospects because of diligent and honest work is a *sine qua non* of sound administration under a democratic regime even more than an authoritarian rule. The civil service must be above party, and we should ensure that political considerations either in its recruitment or in its discipline and control are reduced to the minimum, if not eliminated altogether." Perhaps this is the spirit that needs to be adopted to ensure that the officers can contribute to full measure.

A key issue, especially at the field level and particularly at the district level, is the need for officers, specially, the District Collectors and their team to be sensitive to people's requirements and redress their grievances. While various mechanisms have been set up at the GOI and the State Level, it is the Vigilance and Grievance mechanism or the *Jan Sunvai* (public hearing) at the District level where the people connect

with the administration. The more responsive, and the more diligent and regular in tours and inspections the Collector is, the smoother the process of the grievance redressal will be. It is a key need of the day as various Acts of entitlement and food and health care, service delivery, right to information get enacted and are required to be implemented properly, especially in a changing environment where individuals, groups and non-governmental organisations are very much aware of their rights. Moreover, the Courts also vigilantly uphold the rights and any infringement, or violation or neglect is treated as dereliction of duty. One of the major challenges thus is to make the administration and the officers sensitive to these issues and establish procedures and processes easier for the people.

While there have been achievements of AIS officers often recognised through state awards, as also those initiated by social organisations, the issue of corruption spreading in the services has emerged as a serious and worrisome one over time. It can be said that in the early years of Independence the officers were motivated by a sense of idealism and honesty, and simplicity and integrity were a matter of pride for them. It was difficult to imagine in the early fifties and sixties an IAS officer being corrupt. However, much water has flown since then. As society gets more opulent and big showy weddings and functions and ostentation become the order of the day, the temptation to earn money through other than legal means increases. The number of cases against the officers has gone up under the Prevention of Corruption Act and many have come under the net of Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). At the same time, more and more senior officers are being investigated. Some of the chargesheets may be based on vendetta but with senior officers and now even Chief Secretaries being prosecuted and convicted, the spectre of corruption looms large, and it is a big challenge to set the house in order. There is a greater need to bring in honesty and integrity in recognition in the form of suitable awards and rewards and contain this virus to maintain the high standard and image of the services.

At the beginning of Independence, it was one party dominance with the Congress being in power at the Union and in most States. But gradually regional parties at the State Level and non-Congress parties and coalitions emerged in power at the Union Level. This has impacted federal relations and inter- governmental working for the service officers. The neutrality and offering free and fair advice or addressing issues objectively, considered the cardinal principles of bureaucracy, have become difficult to maintain and working in this environment is itself a challenge.

Increase in age and attempts at examination, widening of the number of subjects, facility to write the examination in regional languages and reservation have widened the base of the AIS. At the same time though the officers coming at a later age bring in experience, it is often felt they may not be much receptive to fresh learning. In such a situation, therefore, there is a need for regular monitoring and review of the performance of the service officers, and perhaps setting up a regular Civil Services Commission for suggesting timely changes and improvements may be the need of the future.

While there is camaraderie between the various services in the AIS and central services, the issues of inter service rivalries and one-upmanship are inevitable. While in the initial stages the number of papers required to be cleared were different for the services and made the services hierarchical, introduction of the common examination system with same number of papers has made the services claim for similar promotion levels and other facilities. Sometimes, these rivalries get exacerbated due to the personality of the officers as seen sometimes in the Collector-Superintendent of Police equation. Further, the selection and appointment to the post of Secretary, Additional Secretary, Joint Secretary at the GOI level are particularly vied for among different services, as also lateral entrants. The competition being tough as the posts are very limited at this level, the domain issues also arise along with the perennial controversy of the generalist versus the specialist.

While the academics, intellectuals, political leaders and representatives

and citizens raise issues of both appreciation and concern, the Services themselves also need to continually introspect within and be a true servant by providing facilities that the citizens and people require, and the country needs to establish its due position in the comity of nations. Overall, it can be said that by and large the Services and the officers have lived up to the expectations and played a vital role in the overall development of the country. This is borne out more clearly than ever by the fact that the services continue to draw numerous aspirants. This is also indicative of the faith that the Government and society places in them.

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Essay III: Indian Police Since Independence: An Infant Still?

M.K. Devarajan

Abstract

The basic structure and work ethos of the Indian Police have not undergone any major change since 1861. Independent India's political and bureaucratic leadership has done very little to make the police accountable to the law and people. The police strength has increased, and several central police organisations have been set up although policing is a 'State subject' under the Indian Constitution. The Indian police have a commendable record of managing natural disasters and internal security challenges such as terrorism, Naxalism, and communal riots, but they also have a problematic record of abusing special laws enacted to deal with these problems. A series of human rights violations, fake encounters and discrimination against the minorities have also contributed to the poor image that the police enjoy in India. When their very poor working conditions were compounded by humiliation at the hands of politicians, the police personnel resorted to an unprecedented police strike in 1979, which spanned across state and central police organisations. This led to a series of reforms but none of them has been very effective in addressing the problems. If the situation is allowed to get worse, another such flare-up cannot be ruled out.

Introduction

The police force is far from efficient. It is defective in training and organisation, is inadequately supervised, is generally regarded as corrupt and oppressive and has failed to secure the confidence and cordial co-operation of the people. (Indian Police Commission 1902)

The above observations made by the Indian Police Commission more than 12 decades ago seem to aptly summarise the state of Indian police even today after more than 75 years of Independence. This does not mean that the police have not changed at all – change is inevitable in any organisation, though everything will not change. The purpose of this article is to look at what has changed after the political system underwent a massive makeover from imperialism to democracy. But first, let us examine how India came to inherit its police system.

The Colonial Legacy

The East India Company started setting up police organisations wherever they gained administrative control in India. Following the annexation of the Sindh province in 1843, the then Governor of Sindh, Sir Charles Napier, constituted a police organisation modelled on the Royal Irish Constabulary.[1] The police in colonial Ireland were a centralized paramilitary organisation, answerable solely to the government and untrammeled by local authorities. In its services to the colonial ruling elite in a restless and violent country, in its availability as an armed force under civilian direction, and in its centralised organisation, the Irish police model was ideally suitable for colonial India.[2] As a colony India needed to be policed with a heavy hand to enable the Company to expand its territories and extract maximum revenues. Thus, there was no scope for introducing the police system that existed in the rest of the United Kingdom – a highly independent and accountable model of policing, first introduced in 1829 in London by the then Home Secretary, Sir Robert Peel.

Not long after they established the Indian police, the British realised that they had created a kind of Frankenstein, as repeated enquiries found the police to be incompetent, high-handed, and corrupt. Though the Police Commission of 1902 confirmed it, nothing was done to change it. The freedom movement which was gathering momentum had to be crushed. As Joshi and Bajpai remarked[3] 'Frankenstein came in handy - why change him at all! Curiously, the British seemed to have accepted their aberrated police system with all its warts.'

After Independence, Indian leaders who were themselves the victims of the police atrocities under the British, opted for a democratic form of government. It was only natural then to expect that the police system also would be totally overhauled to make it more democratic and accountable. But unfortunately, the Frankenstein created by the British, with many of its aberrations, continues even today, and in some respects, it has been getting worse.

Subramanian[4] analysed the reasons why the Congress Party retained the colonial repressive police structure after Independence. Though the relationship between the party and the police was antagonistic during the freedom movement, as the movement advanced, they had an expanding mutual interest in the protection of property and the prevention of violent and revolutionary change. This ensured a relatively untroubled transition from colonial police to Congress police. Moreover, the end of the Raj was a period of escalation of industrial disputes, communal violence, and communist insurrection. Since the Army was needed to defend the frontiers and to secure the integration of Kashmir and Hyderabad, the police had to be relied upon to maintain internal security.

Police Organisation

With the integration and reorganisation of states after Independence, the police forces that were maintained by the provinces of British India and the states ruled by Indian rulers also got reorganised. States are responsible for public order and police, under the State List in Schedule 7 of the Constitution. Article 355 casts a duty on the Union to protect States against external aggression and internal disturbance. India's land borders were initially guarded by the State Armed Police. They were gradually replaced by Central forces– *Assam Rifles (*Myanmar border)*, Border Security Force (*Pakistan, Bangladesh borders)*, Indo Tibetan Border Police (*China border)*,* and *Sashastra Seema Bal (*Nepal, Bhutan borders)*.* The *Central Industrial Security Force is* deployed for the security of vital installations and the Railway Protection Force for the security of railways. While the *Central Reserve Police Force* handles law and order, counter-insurgency, anti-Naxal

operations etc., its efforts have to be supplemented by the other forces mentioned above. The *National Security Guard s*pecialises in dealing with terrorism, hijacking, and hostage situations.

Apart from these 'Central Armed Police Forces', the Centre also maintains several police organisations. Important ones among them are:

1. *Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI):* responsible for investigating serious crimes with all India or inter-state ramifications, and corruption cases against public servants of the Centre.

2. *Intelligence Bureau (IB):* deals with internal intelligence, internal security, including espionage, insurgency, and terrorism.

3. *Research & Analysis Wing (RAW):* deals with external intelligence.

4. *National Investigation Agency (NIA):* investigates terrorism and other offences connected with national security.

5. *National Disaster Response Force (NDRF):* deals with disasters.

6. *National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB):* compiles crime statistics.

7. *Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D*): deals with research, training, and modernisation; and

8. *Special Protection Group (SPG)*: provides security to the Prime Minister.

Apart from these, there is the National Technical Research Organisation and a host of other security-related organisations.

With the spread of Naxal and terrorist problems and the setting up of agencies like the National Investigation Agency, the role of the Centre in law-and-order matters has been increasing. The state police

agencies have failed to specialise and expand unlike what the central agencies have done.

No data is available in the public domain about the size of Indian police force in 1947. However, it has registered an impressive growth since then although the complaint about inadequate strength remains. Official data with BPR&D 2020 shows that as on 1 January 2020, state police forces together had a sanctioned strength of 26.23 lakh and Central Armed Police Forces 11.1 lakh (actual strength – 20.1 lakh and 9.82 lakh respectively). The police per lakh population ratio for India was 195 and 156 based on sanctioned and actual strengths – the world median is about 300.

Most major cities in India have now the Police Commissionerate system, where some powers of executive magistrates are exercised by senior police officers. At the time of Independence, India had four Police Commissionerates – Madras (established sometime before 1842), Hyderabad (1847), Calcutta (1856) and Mumbai (1864). Today there are 66 commissionerates (the six commissionerates in Kerala, listed as such in "Data on Police Organisations" are not true commissionerates as the officers of these organisations do not enjoy any magisterial powers). Mega cities of Mumbai, Chennai and Hyderabad now have three Commissionerates each.

For long, the police everywhere, including India, have been a male bastion. Women started entering Indian police from 1938, mainly to deal with matters concerning women and children.[5] To increase their representation, during the last couple of decades, the Centre and States have introduced reservation for women in police recruitment. This has resulted in their actual strength increasing from 1.11 lakh in 2014 to 2.16 lakh in 2019. India's (also Asia's) first women's police station was inaugurated by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at Kozhikode (Kerala) on 27 October 1973. Now India has 389 police stations for women and children, and 12 all-women armed battalions.

Since Independence, the police have focused primarily on public order maintenance because the very existence of the government depends on it. As a result, investigations have been relegated to the background.

It is easier to persuade State Governments to create armed police battalions, intelligence, and special units, but much more difficult to make additions to civil police, the agency directly responsible for citizens' security. The main criticism against the Indian police system since Independence has been its failure to strengthen and empower the basic unit of policing – the police stations. Basic policing functions that are important for maintaining order and security, both in the short and long term, depend on the proper functioning of police stations. It is very difficult to persuade state governments to increase the strength of existing police stations although it may be easier to get new police stations. Generally new police stations are set up and their locations decided based more on political expediency rather than the policing requirements on the ground. When such long-term neglect results in problems, State Governments agree to raise new armed battalions, intelligence units and other special units.

Police Modernisation

The 'Scheme for Modernisation of State Police Forces', launched in 1969-70 by the Ministry of Home (MHA), has helped the States to improve much needed infrastructure and modernise their police forces. 'The Mega City Policing Plan' for Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Kolkata, is a sub-component of this scheme. The contribution of the Centre and States to the scheme is in the ratio 90:10 for the Northeastern states, Himachal and Uttarakhand; the remaining States contribute 40 percent. Unfortunately, funds for modernisation have been declining in recent years. The resource-starved States spend maximum on buildings followed by vehicles leaving hardly 25 per cent for technical upgradation and modernisation. Despite this, considerable technology induction has taken place.

Indian police were pioneers among government departments to use computers in the mainframe-computer-era in the early 1970s. After lagging for some time, now they are catching up and using computers in varied ways. The crucial functions of the police stations across the country have been standardised and computerised through the Crime

and Criminal Tracking Networks and Systems (CCTNS) implemented by the National Crime Records Bureau. Thanks to the modernisation funds, in place of a few chemical examiners at the time of Independence, now India has a good network of Forensic Science Laboratories established both by the Centre and States. Many States are using state- of-the-art technologies like Biometrics, DNA Examination, Face Recognition, Thermal Imaging, Smart Sensors, Artificial Intelligence, Drones etc. 'Robocops', first used in Dubai, made their Indian debut at Indore in 2017. Soon Jaipur will also have robots managing traffic.

Internal security problems

Independent India has had more than its fair share of natural calamities and their frequency and intensity have been increasing in the recent years. The number of casualties in major cyclones, floods and earthquakes has been mind-boggling. The police have been in the forefront of rescue operations following such calamities.

India has also been besieged by serious internal security problems of all types. This prompted many international experts, for several decades since Independence, to predict that India cannot remain one country. The role of the police in containing these problems and holding together the tenuous polity has been widely acknowledged and acclaimed. Whether it is communal, caste or sectarian conflicts, insurgency, terrorism, or proxy war by neighbouring countries, it is the police which have been in the forefront of the fight against such activities. In the 1980s and 1990s Punjab witnessed a very virulent bout of terrorism, arguably among the worst ever witnessed anywhere in the world. However, the Punjab Police, the Central para-military forces and the Army crushed it within a few years, a feat perhaps unparalleled in history. Since then, India's security forces have been grappling with a much worse terrorist and separatist movement in Jammu and Kashmir. Side by side they have been fighting insurgent, separatist, and Naxalite movements in various parts of the country. They have succeeded in controlling many such movements, and in the process more than 34,000 personnel have lost their lives, which speaks volumes for their efficiency and dedication. Despite all

criticism, if India remains united as a country, it is also because of good and efficient policing.[6]

Misuse of anti-terror laws

The police, or for that matter the State, have not always handled the problems as these should have been handled in a democratic country. Joseph[7] lists out 'increasingly draconian anti-terror laws' enacted to deal with insurgencies and terrorism – Preventive Detention Act, 1950 (expired in 1969 replaced by Maintenance of Internal Security Act 1971), Terrorist Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1985 (modified in 1987), Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002, (POTA), Disturbed Areas (Special Courts) Act 1976, Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA), Assam Preventive Detention Act, 1980, National Security Act, 1980 (NSA), Essential Services Maintenance Act, 1968, and Armed Forces (Jammu & Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990".

While the need to have tough laws to deal with tough situations cannot be disputed, some of the statistics quoted by Joseph do not cover the police with glory.[8]

> Under TADA, at least 76,000 people were detained and 25 per cent of them were freed without the police even filing charges. According to the most reliable estimates, only in 35 per cent of the cases trial was completed…95 per cent of the trials under TADA ended in acquittals. Thus, the law had an overall conviction rate of less than 1.5 per cent. In 1995, TADA was allowed to lapse…After 9/11, India passed POTA, and States discovered the political power it packed. A POTA review committee found that 11,384 people booked under POTA should have been charged under regular law.

Joseph also quotes conviction rate of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), 1967, – a law that has found great favour in recent years. According to the data presented in the Rajya Sabha in February 2021, only 2.2 per cent cases under UAPA between 2016 and 2019 ended in

convictions. Almost 2,000 people were arrested under the law during this period.

Joseph asserts that "Indian security forces were repeatedly failing the test of the Constitution. While it is true that the forces were operating in difficult circumstances, it is also a fact that they were not a ragtag army of militants, but the security arm of a democratic republic." He cites the examples of investigation agencies "a strange pattern in some of these cases: the investigation agency prepares a massive charge-sheet, running into thousands of pages, attaching all kinds of 'evidence' that no one will have the time or patience to go through in detail. When the cases go to trial, the accused may well be exonerated. But in the slow churn of the Indian Judiciary, the process is the punishment". This is an issue several legal practitioners and some courts have commented upon in recent times.

Selective enforcement of laws

A disturbing template of policing that has become well-established in recent times is the highly selective and disproportionate action against opponents of the government and deliberate inaction when its supporters are the troublemakers. The use of sedition law – Section 124A inserted in the Indian Penal Code in 1870 to deal with Indian nationalists who were fighting the colonial government – has staged a forceful comeback in the recent years. It is being used in ways the British could never have imagined. Today, anyone can be hauled up for engaging in a genuine democratic protest against the policies of any government, or even for criticising their actions or for pelting stones on a minister's car or an uncomplimentary cartoon! The US think tank Freedom House, has downgraded India's status from 'Free Democracy' to 'Partly Free Democracy' The Indian police will have to shoulder considerable blame for this.

Human rights violations

With the advent of Independence, everyone would have expected a considerable reduction in human rights violations by the police. It is

ironic that the police, the agency having maximum responsibility to protect human rights, is even today considered by many as the biggest violators of human rights. Among the major reasons for this are that human rights violations produce the desired results, the officers concerned get recognition, promotions, awards, and desired postings. Fed up with the delays and weaknesses in the criminal justice system, most of those in authority and the public do not question the means and are bothered only about the results – most adore 'instant justice'.

Fake encounters are the most obnoxious of all human rights violations by the police. Fake police encounters were largely absent during the pre-Independence era. They started becoming common, and getting official sanction 'unofficially', when the States started having dacoity problem, or serious internal security problems like terrorism, insurgency, separatism etc. It is a well-known fact that fake encounters were and continue to be freely resorted to in many areas affected by these problems.

Police often resort to encounters to deal with hardened criminals also. Such killings promote a climate of permissiveness, licentiousness, and lawlessness in the department. Though they were started for keeping anti-national and anti-social elements in check, officers, and often the department itself, starts sliding down the slippery slope. Personal interests, trigger-happiness, political considerations etc., creep in and the seniors who either encouraged these killings initially, or looked away conveniently, lose the moral authority to check the grave lapses of their subordinates. Some police forces are notorious for fake encounters; some have 'encounter specialists.' Writing about some such specialists who brought Mumbai Police into disrepute, former Mumbai Police Commissioner Julio Ribeiro[9] recalls that Mumbai Police Crime Branch realised that the incidence of extortion cases took a quantum jump when these encounter specialists were around, and when they were sent to police stations, fewer extortion cases were reported.

The fact that such flagrant human rights violations are taking place even 75 years after Independence points out to serious 'organisational

deviance' in some of Indian police forces and the inability of the human rights institutions and the judicial system to reign in the 'bold' officers who execute such fake encounters with reckless confidence.

Police Reforms

Gupta[10] (2005) predicted that policing is the area which would be the last to be reformed, as the politicians will be loath to give up their power over the police and what they can achieve through the police. A study of police reforms since Independence will reveal that the governments are out to prove Gupta correct. Though there have been several exercises to reform the police, these did not result in any structural changes in the police organisation or in its functioning. "In effect, while coercive powers were added, accountability was evaded."[11]

With the memories of police excesses during the Emergency fresh in mind, the Janata Party government constituted independent India's first National Police Commission (NPC 1977-81). Its eight reports contain recommendations to bring about improvements in all aspects of police; most of these are relevant even today. With the return of Indira Gandhi to power in 1980, these reports went into cold storage. Before this, some states had appointed Police Commissions – Bihar (1958), UP (1960, 1970), West Bengal (1960), Punjab (1961), Maharashtra (1962), Delhi (1966), Tamil Nadu (1969) and later Kerala (2003). Nothing significant seems to have come out of their reports.

In 1996, two former DGPs, Prakash Singh and N. K. Singh, filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court (SC), seeking directions to implement NPC recommendations. The Ribeiro Committee (1998-1999), set up as per the SC directions, submitted two reports. In 2000, the centre set up the 'Padmanabhaiah Committee on Police Reforms' which submitted its report in the same year. The Report of the Group of Ministers on National Security (2000-01), set up after the Kargil war, and the Malimath Committee Report on Criminal Justice System (2003) also contain important recommendations on the functioning of police and other security agencies. On 21 December 2004, the Ministry of Home

Affairs (MHA) appointed the 'Mooshahari Committee', to review the implementation of the reports of above bodies. The committee's report dated 23 March 2005, identified 49 recommendations for immediate implementation. It observed: "The implementation of these recommendations will, no doubt, involve some additional financial burden. However, considering the immense significance of police reforms for not only promoting good governance but also creating a more conducive climate for social and economic development of the country, this will be a small price to pay"[12] (MHA 2005). There was no action on the report. If this is the fate of the recommendations of a committee which had three senior officers of MHA among its seven members, the seriousness of the Central and State Governments about police reforms can very well be imagined. Naturally, there was no action on the Fifth Report of the Administrative Reforms Commission (2007) that deals with public order, either.

The landmark judgement delivered by the Supreme Court on 22 September 2006, in Writ Petition (Civil) No. 310 of 1996 – Prakash Singh and others vs Union of India and others, issued the following six directions to State Governments:

i. Constitute State Security Commissions.

ii. Select Director General of the Police of the State from a panel prepared by a committee, prescribed in the order, and provide him/her a minimum tenure of two years irrespective of the date of superannuation.

iii. Prescribe minimum two years' tenure to the police officers on operational duties.

iv. Separate investigation police from law & order police.

v. Set up Police Establishment Boards for deciding transfers, postings, promotions, and other service matters of Deputy Superintendents and lower ranks, and

vi. Constitute Police Complaint Authorities at the State and District levels.

The Court also directed the Central Government to set up a National Security Commission to prepare panels for selection of Chiefs of Central Police Organisations (who should be given a minimum tenure of two years) and review the service conditions of the personnel of these organisations.

This decision of the Apex Court raised lot of hope among various segments of society that police reforms have become unavoidable, but it was pure naivety to expect that the political leadership and the bureaucracy will allow their stranglehold on the police to weaken. The author had a firsthand exposure to the viciously hostile attitude of the bureaucracy towards these directions when he represented his State in the meeting called by the Union Home Secretary of Chief Secretaries, Home Secretaries and DGPs of the States to discuss implementation of these directions.

However, since the Court was monitoring compliance, some States started legislative process while others issued executive orders to 'comply' with the directives, only in form, none in true spirit. The Soli Sorabjee Committee constituted by MHA in 2005 drafted 'the Model Police Act, 2006' which became the basis for the new Police Acts, of course with changes. So far, 14 States (Assam, Bihar, Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, and Uttarakhand) have enacted new Police Acts, and four (Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu) have amended their existing Acts. Some other States and the Centre prepared Police Acts, which did not see the light of the day. MHA has, through administrative orders, set up a State Security Commission for Delhi and another for all other UTs. It has also set up Police Establishment Boards and state level Police Complaints Authorities for all the UTs. The Committee on National Security and Central Police Personnel Welfare, set up in response to the seventh directive appears to be a mere formality.

On 21 July 2009, while declining to rule on Prakash Singh's contempt petition, the Chief Justice of India lamented "Not a single state government is willing to cooperate. What can we do?"[13] Justice K.T. Thomas, Chairperson of the Police Reforms Monitoring Committee appointed by the SC in August 2006, said that the politicians he met found no reason in winning elections if they were at least not allowed the power to decide their own police officers.[14] (Rajgopal 2010). He submitted his report in August 2010.

Though the SC intervention resulted in most States setting up State Security Commissions, Police Establishment Boards and Police Complaints Authorities, none of them seems to have made its presence felt so far. Let us hope that these bodies also will someday assert themselves as the Election Commission of India did forty years after it was established.

Only the new Police Acts of Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Punjab, Rajasthan and Tripura have done away with the control and supervision of District Magistrate (DM) over the police (as per section 4 of the Police Act, 1861) and restricted DM's role to coordination of certain interdepartmental matters, as recommended by the NPC and the Model Police Act, 2006. However, in effect, this has not brought about any change in the role of the District Magistrate in police related matters even 15 years after the enactment of these Acts. Thus, though the 86-year-old Police Act, 1861, that India inherited from the British officially vanished from parts of India 60 years after Independence, its spirit lingers on, in full force, even in the states where the Act has officially been repealed.

Another initiative to bring about reforms was through the National Police Mission (NPM). Announced by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2005, it started working in 2008. The eight Micro Missions under it, dealing with Human Resources, Community Policing, Communication & Technology, Infrastructure, Process Engineering, Proactive Policing, Women & Children and Correctional Administration, have domain experts, mostly senior police officers. Out of 79 reports they have

submitted so far, 58 have been finalised by the BPR&D. The highly bureaucratic treatment meted out to NPM by MHA, which has formally approved only a handful of reports and even failed to allot Rs 93.23 crore sanctioned by the Planning Commission to implement the pilot projects, reiterated that improving police work is not a 'mission' – it is rather an 'omission' – for it.

Nobody who has studied India's police reform exercises can disagree with Subramanian (2017) who says that "surprising as it may appear, despite many extensive discussions and report writing, no original work on the police structure and criminal laws in India appears to have occurred ever since the historic September 1856 observations of Board of Directors of the East India Company and the work of Napier, which led to the adoption of the colonial Irish paramilitary police model in India in the 1850s."

Police Accountability

If this is the fate of police reforms, the state of police accountability can very well be imagined. The powers of superintendence over the police vested in the State Government by section 3 of the Police Act, 1861, enabled them to exercise full control over the police. The police establishments in all States were willing collaborators in this arrangement which suited both. None of the states that enacted the new Police Act after Independence was ready to alter this provision. Hence, the police in India are accountable to the government in power only, not to the people or law, and gradually they have become more and more accountable to the ruling party of the time and to individual politicians as well. Criminals who sought protection of politicians slowly started taking active part in politics and the increasing number of them getting elected to legislatures and occupying positions of power has complicated matters further. The increasing police-politician-criminal nexus has resulted in erosion of the rule of law and loss of police credibility. By influencing police decisions, politicians can assert their power, win support, and gain a major say in the

happenings in the society which enhances their prestige, status, and leadership role. It also provides opportunities for financial gain. Police escorts and uniformed officers provide glamour and publicity to the politicians.

Several experts and expert bodies have expressed doubt whether 'the power of superintendence' extends to the investigation work. Administrative Reforms Commission (1967)[15] observed that "cognisance of an offence, investigation, arrest, prosecution, and trial proceed in accordance with the law and are not susceptible to any ministerial interference… There is no room for ministerial interference in the investigation of criminal offence." The police are bound to act in accordance with the statutory provisions. The NPC (1981) felt that "the power of superintendence of the state government over the police should be limited only to ensuring that police performance is in strict accordance with law. There is a clear ruling of the Supreme Court (AIR 1968 SC V 55 C 12) that the action to be taken on conclusion of an investigation is a matter to be decided by the police alone and by no other authority. The performance of the preventive tasks and service-oriented functions of police should be subject to the overall guidance from the government which should lay down broad policies, but there should be no instruction about the actual operations in the field." To allow the police greater operational freedom while ensuring accountability, various experts have recommended that the political executive's power of superintendence over police forces be limited to promoting professional efficiency and ensuring that police is acting in accordance with law. But the governments are not willing to oblige.

Transfer is the weapon used by the governments to subjugate police officers and personnel and to discipline those who do not fall in line. Verma (2000)[16] has put the problem in the correct perspective. "Since some posts in the department are prized because of their perks, power, and prestige or as avenues of making money, the pressure to obtain these posts becomes more intense and political lobbying for them becomes a routine matter… The police have become a useful instrument in political battles. Control over the police provides

a means of harassing the political opponents, shielding anti-social elements aligned to the ruling party and gathering political intelligence. Those officers who refuse to toe the line of their political masters immediately feel the pinch". The blatant way the governments are misusing the police and other enforcement agencies has become a threat to our democracy itself.

It was with a view to ensuring operational independence that the NPC recommended the setting up of a statutory State Security Commissions, statutory fixed tenure for the chief of State Police and their posting from a panel prepared by a high-level committee. Most States have prescribed minimum tenures for DGPs and other police officers on operational duties, but generally they also get transferred as they used to be before such orders were issued. In fact, transfer has become a profitable industry in many States.

It is because of the lack of operational independence that the Indian Police has lost its credibility and the public view them as the private army of the ruling class, irrespective of the party in power. The anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984 and the post-Godhra riots in Gujarat 2002 would not have been half as bad if the police had operational independence – Indian Police can deal with such, and even larger, public order disturbances.

Police Image

The image of the police has generally never been good. The advent of Independence did nothing to improve it. In various surveys conducted over the years, the police emerge as having the second lowest image, politicians being the worst. However, the police image generally shows a significant improvement after it successfully handles emergent situations – like major natural disasters, terrorist attacks etc. After the 26/11 terror attacks, several organisations launched campaign to urge Mumbaikars to hug, shake hands with, compliment or gift roses to cops to demonstrate their appreciation."[17] Newspapers have been publishing photographs of people in several places showering petals on police contingents enforcing the Covid-induced lockdown. Surveys

by C-Voter (2020)[18] during this period revealed a massive jump in trust in the police.

What makes this improvement in trust in police remarkable is that the survey was done from 23-30 April 2020, when the police forces were enforcing several restrictions across the country – from harsh lockdown conditions to full-scale curfew – actions that generally make them unpopular. During the pandemic, the State and Central police forces went much beyond their call of duty, played a 'social service role' and organised various types of relief work including arranging and distributing food and other necessary goods to the needy, often risking their own health, safety, and life. The most important soft skills required in police personnel – empathy and compassion – were on abundant display during this period; this often happens after major disasters.

The media that is generally critical of the police was all praise for the police role during this crisis though there were occasional police excesses, including couple of alleged deaths due to police beating, while enforcing the lockdown. Finally, people will not be misled by publicity, but form their opinions based on what they hear, see, feel, perceive and experience firsthand.

The Ipsos survey (2019),[19] which ranked 18 professions in 23 countries, put police in India at 10th position with trustworthiness rating of 33%. Globally police were in 5th position with 38% trustworthiness. Indian Police can draw solace from these findings – after all they are not as bad as they are made out to be.

Conclusion

The above analysis will make it clear that while the police force has expanded considerably during the past seven decades, its ethos has remained the same. The failure of the police to change reminds one of people refusing to grow up. Famous psychotherapist Peck (1978)[20] has this to say about growing up: "Growing up is an act of stepping from childhood to adulthood…Though they may outwardly appear to be adults, even successful adults, perhaps majority of 'grown

ups' remain until death psychological children who have never truly separated from their parents and the power that their parents have over them." Applying these standards, India has a 76-year-old child refusing to grow up and cut the umbilical cord that connects it to politicians. For the sorry state in which the police find itself, it is not only the politicians who are responsible, equal, or more responsibility lies with the leaders of the force, the IPS officers, and to a lesser extent the bureaucracy. It is foolish to expect that, having tasted blood, politicians are going to let the police become independent any time soon.

There is lot that the police leadership can do to improve the current situation. They themselves have not implemented several reforms recommended by various commissions and committees, that are within their own powers. If they implement some of the projects that have been circulated by the National Police Mission Directorate under the BPR&D (all based on projects successfully implemented in certain areas with very good results), take measures to improve the behaviour and response of police personnel and sincerely take steps to reduce organisational deviance, they can bring about considerable improvements, and win the cooperation and confidence of the public. They should not forget that when their very poor working conditions were compounded by humiliation at the hands of politicians, the police personnel resorted to an unprecedented police strike in 1979, which spanned across State and Central police organisations. It kick-started improvements in their service conditions because governments had no option but to agree to their demands. Today, the junior police personnel are not happy with many things – the suffocating work environment, increasing attacks on them by politicians and mafia gangs having political protection, failure of their seniors to protect and stand by them, and several other grievances. It may take only a small spark to ignite another police strike. In such an eventuality, who knows, the governments and the police leadership may have to initiate measures to take the police out of the colonial era to a democratic one.

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Essay IV: Indian Urban Scene- Growth with Challenges

Kumaresh Mishra

Abstract

Urbanisation during the past 75 years has changed India's long-standing characterisation as a predominantly rural nation. Urban population in India is growing by 2.3 per cent each year according to the 2011 census. By 2031, 75 per cent of India's national income is estimated to come from cities. Providing the necessary urban infrastructure is a big challenge: most of the infrastructure that will be needed by 2050 has not been built yet. Despite the challenges, urban areas have contributed a great deal to India's growth story.

Introduction

In 1970 I came to Delhi to study at the University of Delhi. I came from Patna in predominantly rural hinterland of India. There were a limited number of colleges in DU. The streets were mostly deserted with limited traffic on the road. An attractive outing was a visit to Connaught Place using the bus service, a movie at one of the theatres there and dinner at a Dhaba on Connaught Circus circle. Anywhere beyond it looked as if travelling out of Delhi. I still recall participating in a debate at IIT Delhi. A bus was provided by IIT to bring the participants from the DU campus. One of the passengers was the Late Arun Jaitley representing Shri Ram College of Commerce. The distance seemed too long and looked as if we had travelled out of Delhi.

A student of today at DU sees traffic all around him. The roads are busy. IIT Delhi is in the heart of Delhi. The DU Campus has become the North Campus and a South Campus is now in existence. The crowded bus has been replaced by an efficient underground Metro system. The old road cum railway bridge on Yamuna has multiple road bridges.

Satellite towns are thriving, and some are attracting more business opportunities.

It was a cliché that India is predominantly an agricultural country, and it lives in its villages. Indian literature and stories reinforced this picture. Evolution of Indian social order also revolved around villages with its social structure, economic organisation, and community. The urban centers really emerged with the three presidencies of Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. In addition, the seats of power of Princely States and the administrative structures of the British rule especially the courts acted as nucleus of settlement most of them emerging as 'urban centres'.

Apart from the major presidency towns, at most centres urbanisation and urban development were not the focus of development efforts. Planned development was mainly confined to the government areas with limited activities undertaken by District Boards.

Post-Independence Urbanisation

Post-Independence India saw a major migration of population. In addition, it experienced a major push for industrialisation that brought rural urban migration. In India, the urban population is estimated at 461 million. This number is growing by 2.3 per cent each year. By 2031, 75 per cent of India's national income is estimated to come from cities. Providing the necessary urban infrastructure is a big challenge: 70 to 80 per cent of the infrastructure that will be needed by 2050 has not been built yet, and the estimated investment gap amounts to approximately 827 billion US dollars.

This shift in population offers a huge opportunity. The increase in economic activities makes urbanisation a major driver of development and poverty reduction. In addition, it offers a huge opportunity to deliver quality health services, education and other social facilities that can further provide a fillip to economic development.

While these are huge opportunities, unplanned expansion and increase in urban population have hugely impacted, housing and urban infrastructure in the cities. Except for the large metropolises

like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai the smaller and medium sized towns grew sharply and organically without major planning. Hence, most cities grew in an unplanned manner with ad hoc interventions on housing, water, sanitation and mobility.

In the global context cities occupy approximately only 2% of the total land. However, they contribute to 70 per cent of Gross Domestic Product, consume 60% of global energy, and generate 70 per cent of greenhouse gases and 70 per cent of global waste. The situation is very similar in India, but the country needs to invest so much more to make its cities more livable.

The New Urban Agenda

At the global level United Nations initiated global consensus building, based on consultations and discussions leading to UN Habitat Conference every twenty years. The first conference took place in 1976 in Vancouver followed by Habitat II in Istanbul in 1996 and then in Quito Ecuador in 2016. The Conference was mandated by the United Nations General Assembly. The Conference adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito Ecuador on 20 October 2016 called the New Urban Agenda. The New Urban Agenda is a shared vision for a better and more sustainable future. A well planned and well managed urbanisation can be a strong tool for development for both developed and developing countries.

Yet urban management was not a priority from a development perspective in India. Urban areas were seen to be generating more problems. As the population was predominantly rural more focus was on rural development. The poverty and infrastructure challenges were predominantly rural. Hence the focus of Indian development managers was to keep the focus on rural areas. The idea of self-sufficient villages, khadi and village industries and agriculture and the political structure where rural areas had more political representation ensured greater focus on rural development. Though rural and urban development are not mutually exclusive and in fact reinforcing the paucity of resources

and greater voice of the rural poor worked to sidestep issues of urban population. While urbanisation offered huge opportunities for growth and development it remained a byproduct of development.

Yet urbanisation was unstoppable. Changes in economic activities, variations in rural urban wage rate, education especially higher education employment opportunities, industrialisation, mass migration of population post partition substantially increased the urban population around the country. While these increased the share of urban population the growth was indeed slow. Even the migration of rural workers was more to other rural areas to support agricultural operations especially sowing and harvesting. Increased industrialisation and pressure on rural jobs gradually as well as the urban rural wage differentials saw an increased rate of urbanisation since the sixties.

This increased migration started putting greater pressure on urban basic services. Gradually, the infrastructure was stretched. With no concomitant increase in expenditure on infrastructure and other services the quality of life started to get affected. While few schemes were launched it was not able to meet the increase in demand for those services. This resulted in inadequate infrastructure and housing. The migrating population resulted in growth of unorganized and unplanned housing resulting in rise of slums. Consequently, livability declined. Informal settlements increased and these settlements often referred to as slums found inadequate housing, water, sanitation and breeding ground for diseases and other social ills.

One of the challenges in the Indian urban scene is the variability in urbanisation in various States. The more the industrialisation in a State, the higher is the percentage of urban population. There is an increase in the overall percentage of urban population from 25.72 per cent in 1991 to 27. 83 per cent in 2001 to 31.14 per cent in 2011 as per census of India and the annual average growth rate is 2.7 per cent. While it may look small in average it resulted in a huge increase in numbers, putting pressure on urban life.

In India's development history, urbanisation increased albeit slowly

and proportion of urban of population is still lower than that in developed countries. It is indeed paradoxical that while governance structures were based in urban areas it did not receive any priority attention.

Indian cities have been facing huge governance challenges. Despite the 74th Amendment which conferred the Constitutional status to urban local governments, they remain weak and constitute the lowest rung in the governance hierarchy. They have little defined power and even lesser ability to enforce and implement. Hence their political influence and legal authority is limited. Moreover, there are multiple authorities impacting urban life. This coupled with weak finance and dependence on grants from the State Government, often to even pay the salary of the staff, makes urban local bodies inefficient and ineffective in discharging their assigned responsibilities. The urban local bodies have very limited sources of raising tax revenue or raising finances from the market. The talent pool in the local bodies is also limited and hence are unable to contribute sufficiently in urban planning and implementation. This further affects in developing infrastructure for water, sanitation, and housing.

The investment and expansion in urban services in the country has been uneven, but still uniformly low. The percentage of capital expenditure to both development expenditure and overall expenditure has been less than 5 per cent. Hence an increasing population with low investment and poor governance is recipe for increasing challenges of living in Urban India. The reforms in terms of the 74th Amendment in the constitution in the 90s, India's first urbanisation policy in 1988 by the National Commission on Urbanisation (NCU), the launch of JNNURM in 2005 were all efforts but hugely inadequate in managing the challenges.

Urban management and improvement in urban living was brought to the forefront under the BJP Government which came to power at the Centre in 2014. It started with the launch of a series of initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U) Smart Cities Mission (SCM), Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation

(AMRUT), National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDYA), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U), National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) and some other schemes. So, clearly urban development was also seen as a vehicle of growth and development.

It was indeed a major change in strategy that incorporated urban development an integral part of urban growth. This change and thrust coincided with the launch of SDG 11 which for the first time put urbanisation as a sustainable development goal. Given the concentration of population in urban area, that produced 80% of GDP and 70% of emissions it was necessary to focus on its appropriate management.

The New Urban Agenda that was adopted in October 2017 under which India agreed to focus on sustainable urbanisation in four areas of sustainability – economic, social, environmental, and spatial. Economic sustainability covers job creation, productivity, and competitiveness. Social Sustainability focuses on empowerment of marginalised groups, gender equality, age responsive planning and for migrants, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities. Environmental Sustainability covers biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, resilience and adaptation to climate change and its mitigation. Spatial sustainability is about urban density and equity.

The New Urban Agenda was mandated to be precise and implementable. Hence it has a clear call for action towards implementation. The intervention mechanisms included National Urban Policies, Land Policies, Housing and Slum upgrading policies, urban legislation and regulations, urban design, municipal finance, and urban governance. It also called for hard measures for infrastructure and services that included transport and mobility, energy, solid waste, water, and sanitation. The soft measures covered culture, education, health, and urban safety. Finally, technology and innovation, a key element which included transportation, construction and building technology, mapping and spatial data.

The New Urban Agenda has identified the key challenges as well as

the way forward. In the span of 75 years of Independence, India has achieved phenomenal gains bringing the economy to be the fourth largest in the world and growing. In this growth trajectory India's urban growth has contributed substantively, and efforts are on to make it sustainable in all areas of urban life. Urban India would continue to grow but liability would increase too.

Conclusion

As a Delhi resident what do I see now in the last fifty years. The corporate hub for businesses has moved to Gurugram. The two cities of Gurugram and Noida/Greater Noida have increased the population living in the Greater Delhi Metropolitan area. The development continues to be uneven in all areas of housing, mobility, sanitation etc. The most modern living apartments are juxtaposed with semi urban living and sanitation just outside those perimeters. The fancy cars move along with dilapidated and overcrowded transport buses and tempos. The cyclists on the road either to work or exercise risk their lives daily. The planning bodies require greater planning or coordination and even more efficiency in implementation. Integrated work and living areas are few resulting in major pressures on transport infrastructure. The environmental challenges almost make these areas unhealthy in winter months.

At this juncture it needs to be recognised that higher urbanisation is unstoppable. The focus that has been given now could be reinforced both in coordinated planning and implementation with sufficient resources.

Essay V: More Public or More Private? Tracing Shifts in Urban Policy Orientations

Champaka Rajagopal and Lavanyaa Saxena

Abstract

This essay addresses the question of whether the policy shifts introduced by the Indian state since Independence and especially post liberalization to involve the private sector in infrastructure development and public service delivery were radical or evolved incrementally. Spanning over a period of forty years (1980 to 2023) that cut across multiple political tenures, the essay traces policy design of the Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT, 1980), the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM, 2005), the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT, 2015) and Smart Cities Mission (2015).

The design of National Government schemes for urban development are powerful indicators of shifts in the policy orientations of the state towards privatisation in India since independence. Through liberalisation, the Indian state introduced structural reforms to policies to attract private sector investment in infrastructure development and public service delivery. Several researchers have critiqued the entry of private sector involvement in public infrastructure development, service delivery and lack of participation in nationally sponsored schemes post liberalisation. A study of how privatisation influenced the design of National Government schemes and the nature of shifts in institutional arrangements to accommodate the private sector remains an area that requires further research.

By studying four National Government schemes for urban development pre and post liberalisation, this paper addresses the

question of whether the policy shifts introduced by the Indian state to involve the private sector in infrastructure development and public service delivery were radical or evolved incrementally. Spanning over a period of forty years (1980 to 2023) that cut across multiple political tenures, the paper traces policy design of Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT, 1980), Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission[1] (JNNURM, 2005), Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT, 2015) and Smart Cities Mission (2015). We focus on governance arrangements of the schemes, their funding and financing patterns, and employment of mechanisms of privatisation. Through these empirics, we observe a gradual transition in policy orientations; emerging from a state which is paternalistic in nature (IDSMT) to a persuasive state (JNNURM) to one which embraces neo-liberal reforms (AMRUT) and then to one which actively supports corporatisation of urban governance through arm's length control by the National Government (Smart Cities Mission).

National government schemes for urban development

Prior to liberalisation of the Indian economy, urban development was not central to policy (See, Five-Year Plans (FYP), Planning Commission of India[i]). Policies concerning urban development introduced right after independence primarily catered to ensuring basic services and housing for the economically weaker section and rehabilitation, given the context of the partition and migration of refugees.

During the initial years (1951-1974), policies proposed through the Five-Year plans were sector specific, catering to housing, slum clearance and improvement, namely Slums Areas (Improvement and Clearance) Act 1956 and Environmental Improvement of Urban Slums (EIUS) scheme 1972–73. Subsequently, from the Fifth Five-Year plan onwards (1975–), the focus shifted to development of towns and

i Five-year plans: http://164.100.161.239/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html

cities, urban poverty alleviation and employment. Schemes such as Nehru Rozgar Yojana (NRY), Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) and Prime Minister's Integrated Urban Poverty Eradication Programme catered to providing employment opportunities to underemployed and unemployed people in cities. After the Eighth Five-Year plan, reforms continued to focus on basic infrastructure and housing for the economically weaker section.

In 2014, the Planning Commission of India was dissolved. The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) was established with the "mandate of re-imagining the development agenda by dismantling old-style central planning."[ii] Thereafter, National Government schemes laid emphasis on basic services as well as high quality services. For instance, the Smart Cities Mission drew on technology and innovation. Schemes also focused on sanitation, water conservation and cleanliness; and livelihoods also took on major significance, through the National Urban Sanitation Policy, Swachh Bharat Mission and Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Urban Livelihood Mission (DAY-NULM).

All four schemes this paper engages with, namely, IDSMT, JNNURM, AMRUT and Smart Cities Mission are focused on improving access to development and service delivery of basic infrastructure. By studying governance arrangements of the scheme, funding and financing patterns, and mechanisms of privatisation they employ, we trace the gradual evolution of policy shifts in National Government schemes.

The Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT)

The National Government introduced the IDSMT scheme in 1980, during India's Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85). The IDSMT Scheme was launched to address the challenges posed by imbalanced urbanisation which resulted from greater migration from villages to larger cities

ii Planning Commission to NITI Aayog: Making strategies for transforming India: https://pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=170000

such as Delhi and Bombay. A key intent was to curtail influx of migration into metropolises by fostering balanced urban growth. With the objective of retaining populations in small and medium towns, the scheme involved the establishment of industries and improving infrastructure and service delivery in the selected cities (Batra, 2009).[2]

During the pre-liberalisation period, the state was driven by objectives of equal distribution of resources. Multiple Five-Year plans in the period between 1960 and 1980 had focused on balanced urban development in policy. This scheme accordingly targeted upgrading of basic infrastructure in towns and cities with populations up to 500,000.

Scope of the scheme

Led by the Town and Country Planning Organisation (TCPO) at the national level, the design of the program focused on enhancing urban infrastructure and amenities in 235 small and medium towns. The scheme's emphasis on categorising towns based on population size led to a primary focus on towns with populations ranging from 20,000 to 500,000. As a centrally sponsored scheme, the IDSMT supported the development of minor civic projects including roads, pavements, bus sheds, markets, shopping complexes, and theaters. Financial contributions from both National and State Governments amounted to a substantial INR 423 crores (0.44%% of the total outlay of the 6th FYP). A significant proportion of the funding was facilitated by Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO), a wholly government owned company set up in 1970 specifically for funding urban infrastructure development and financing housing for the economically weaker section (6th FYP).

The IDSMT continued to be the most important scheme for the urban sector under the Seventh and Eighth FYPs (1985–1995) (Batra, 2009). Post liberalisation, during the Eighth FYP period (1992-1997), the National Government sustained its role as provider to further allocate INR 145 crores towards minor urban projects such as, reinforcing link road facilities, establishing market yards, shopping complexes, industrial sheds, and water supply systems.

HUDCO as a significant funding agency at the National Government level was key to reviewing project reports submitted by State and Union Territory authorities. The monitoring of the scheme remained centralised with the Town and Country Planning Organisation (Batra, 2009).

The funding pattern

Over a period of ten years spanning the 6th, 7th and partially, the 8th FYP (1980 to 1997), the National Government's project finance strategy evolved. It moved away from an initial reliance on grants mainly from National and State Governments, to involving a mix of grants and loans from public and private lending agencies, in the latter years. The revised guidelines (1995)[iii] introduced after economic reforms saw a shift from greater contributions from the National Government towards a balanced financing approach from National and State Governments in a 60:40 ratio, respectively, along with finances from HUDCO/ other institutions covering 20% to 40% of the project cost. Further, for the first time after independence, National and State Governments loosened their control over provisioning of grants for urban amenities by allowing beneficiary towns to access loans for public infrastructure development from the market.

In 2002, the scheme's underperformance prompted a review. The Government of India underlined capacity constraints for implementation, lack of matching state funds, and land availability issues as major obstacles to implementation of the scheme and accomplishment of its targets (IDSMT Guidelines, 2008). Hence, the IDSMT scheme evolved and was eventually subsumed under the Umbrella Integrated Development Scheme for Small and Medium Towns (UIDSSMT) initiative following the implementation of the JNNURM.

iii IDSMT Revised Guidelines: https://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/90.pdf

To understand the intentions and design of the JNNURM, let us briefly trace how shifts in political motivations were mediated through National Government task forces and committees on urban development, leading to liberalisation of the Indian economy.

Liberalisation, the Emergence of Cities as Engines of Growth and Decentralisation

By the latter part of the 1980s, faced with a stagnant, low economic growth coupled with the crisis of balance of payments, the government led by Rajiv Gandhi began to recognise the importance of contributions of cities to economic growth and employment generation. In 1988, the National Government set up the National Commission on Urbanisation led by the renowned architect, the Late Charles Correa, setting a milestone in urban development policy since independence. The Charles Correa Committee underscored the importance of large metropolises and digressed from decades of policy focus on balanced development. In this framework, mega-cities were advanced as engines of growth (Batra, 2009).

Following the liberalisation of the economy, two types of reforms in urban development are significant: decentralisation of urban governance and privatisation in infrastructure development and service delivery. While we focus on privatisation in this paper, a brief discussion on decentralisation agenda is essential to set the context.

The discussion on the rise of cities' economic and financial power is seldom accompanied by the legal and hence political power of city governments (Idiculla, 2020).[3] Economic reforms in 1991 were accompanied by an impetus for cities not only as engines of economic growth, but also as urban local self-governments. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) enacted in 1992 aimed at empowering Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) through devolution of 'functions, funds and functionaries from State Governments to elected municipal bodies (Idiculla, 2020).

The 12th Schedule of the Constitution, nested in the 74th CAA, entrusted the responsibility of preparing plans, implementing schemes and infrastructure projects for economic development and social justice with Municipal Governments. These mandates for decentralisation, which intended to empower them were to translate into working arrangements in National Government schemes and planning legislation. However, since devolution of political and financial power continues to remain outside of local governments for most States in India, functions related to urban planning have remained vested with the State Government (ibid).

Catalysing economic growth through urbanisation also required focus on infrastructure development. The National Government appointed the Committee on Commercialisation of Infrastructure in 1996, led by Rakesh Mohan, the then Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. The Committee promoted cities as dominant contributors of growth and infrastructure as a catalyst to boost this growth.

The committee is critiqued to have made over ambitious growth projections and recommendations for increasing the proportion of investment in infrastructure development, from the prevailing 25 percent of GDP to about 29 percent by 2000-01 and 31.5 % by 2005-06 (Batra, 2009). This meant that a total investment of INR 4000 – 4500 billion was to be channeled in urban and regional infrastructure development between 1996 and 2001 (Mohan, 2003[4]; Batra, 2009). A large proportion of this investment for infrastructure development, the Committee contended, would need to be garnered through the private sector.

National Government schemes that followed did not immediately adopt the radical propositions of the Committee on Commercialisation of Infrastructure, as we will see in our analysis of the four schemes. Imperatives for commercialisation of infrastructure gradually led to the emergence of new institutional arrangements in the form of

Special Purpose Vehicles (SPV[iv]) and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP).

PPPs as a project-oriented mechanism secures its funding from a blend of sources, including equity investments contributed by its shareholders, as well as loans from banks or the issuance of bonds and other financial instruments. The financial framework is structured on equity and debt, and long term contractual relationships between public authorities and private investors, shareholders and the lenders (Department of Economic Affairs, 2023).[5]

In decades that followed liberalisation, mission led Special Purpose Vehicles became widely adopted as an institutional arrangement for efficient project implementation. Through the 1990s, the PPP mechanism gained traction as a means to leverage private sector resources, expertise, and efficiency in urban infrastructure development and service delivery.

The Smart Cities Mission (2015) marked a significant shift in not just implementing specific projects through a PPP mode, but to envisage the governance of the scheme itself for every city through a SPV mechanism. The AMRUT Scheme (2015 and 2021) further deepened promotion of PPPs as a key instrument of privatisation.

Within this backdrop, the three schemes discussed below map policy strategies employed by the National Government to attract private sector investments in public infrastructure development. We also discuss the extent to which the design of the governance of each scheme reflects their alignment with the decentralisation agenda.

iv A Special Purpose Vehicle as an entity created by governments to undertake a specific project. The creation of a Special Purpose/Project Vehicle (SPV) is a key feature of most PPPs (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UNESCAP).

Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM)

The Indian National Congress led National Government launched the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) in 2005. The policy initially spanned seven years but was later extended up to 2014.

Scope of the scheme

Initiated under the aegis of the Ministry of Urban Development, the JNNURM was structured to include two sub-missions: Urban Infrastructure and Governance (UIG) and Basic Services to the Urban Poor (BSUP). BSUP was administered by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation. The UIG component focused on projects related to civic amenities, urban transportation, and city redevelopment, while the BSUP component aimed to provide essential services to urban poor populations. Components of the IDSMT were transferred under the JNNURM, now renamed as Urban Infrastructure Development for Small and Medium Sized Towns (UIDSSMT). This scheme also continued to focus on improving infrastructure, services, and governance in cities while emphasising planned development, urban renewal, and universal access to civic amenities, especially for the urban poor (UIDSSMT Guidelines, 2015).

Funding pattern

The JNNURM steered a fundamental shift in the funding mechanism with an objective of equipping municipal corporations to strengthen their fiscal and financial management capacities over time. Under the UIG sub-component, the Scheme provided for distribution of funding between the national-state-local governments, ranging from 35%-15%-50%, to 50%-20%-30% to 80%-10%-10%, based on the population of the city (CAG, 2012, pp. 4)[6]. Under BSUP, for cities with a population over one million, funding was distributed 50:50 between Centre and State or ULB, while for cities in the Northeast and Jammu

and Kashmir, the split was 90:10 and 80:20, respectively (Guidelines for Basic Services for the Urban Poor, 2005).[7]

JNNURM set an unprecedented model in nationally sponsored schemes, by tying grants to mandatory and optional reforms. Tied grants meant to incentivise State Governments to incrementally devolve power to local governments. These were in the form of structural reforms that the Scheme incentivised with an objective to chart the course of implementing the 74th CAA across Indian States.

Under the JNNURM Guidelines, ULBs were no longer passive recipients of funding. State and Local Governments had to implement reforms in order to avail financial assistance. Some of the mandatory reforms for Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) included adoption of modern accounting systems, introduction of e-governance and IT applications for service delivery, property tax collection reforms, implementation of user charges for services and decentralisation measures (JNNURM Guidelines, 2005, pp.12).

Other mandatory reforms like the Community Participation Law (CPL) and Public Disclosure Law (PDL) were also geared towards decentralisation of powers while gradually capacitating Municipal Corporations (JNNURM Guidelines, 2005, pp.13). These reforms aimed to improve capacities in local governance, financial management, and service delivery. Optional reforms aimed to streamline integration of urban planning, land use, infrastructure and socio-economic development processes, which are mandates of the 74th CAA.

A key distinction between National Government schemes prior to liberalisation and the JNNURM was the structure of project finance. In IDSMT and UIDSSMT, cities initially received grants from National, State Governments and HUDCO. Financial assistance was distributed not merely between the National and State Governments, but also Local Governments. Financial contributions were no longer mediated to cities through National and State Governments alone. Municipal Governments were required to commit to a minor share of funding alongside the national and state government grants, for meeting their own infrastructure deficits. In addition, Phase 02 of the Scheme

involved loans that ULBs accessed from commercial banks (Batra, 2009).

Despite wider agendas of promoting decentralisation, the National Government continued to play a dominant role in providing financial assistance and setting the framework for reforms (Batra, 2009). Continuing in a mode of delegation and control, the National Government directed State Governments to devolve some functions to Municipal Governments, in order to ensure that city governments avail the promised grants, while building local capacity. Historically rooted constraints however persisted in the form of resistance to reforms and lack of coordination among State Governments to devolve functions to local government bodies (Kamath, 2015).[8] The State Government's role gained greater significance than in the past, in facilitating reforms, policy implementation, delegating to Local Governments and coordinating with the National Government (Batra, 2009).

ULBs at the city and Ward levels held custodianship of City Development Plans and Detailed Project Reports (JNNURM Guidelines, 2005, pp. 6). However, project approvals were ultimately centralised with National Government organisations. Projects were approved first by the ULB, then, at the state level by the State Monitoring Committee, finally, at the national level by the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) and the Central Monitoring and Steering Committee, to access grants (ibid).

Local elected representatives were often bypassed, through centralisation of decision making at the National Government level (Kamath, 2015, pp.13). Insufficient project preparation, inadequate response to local needs, historical contexts and the lack of a real bottom-up approach to urban planning and design at the level of the locality tended to weaken the accomplishment of outcomes. Practitioners, planners and private consultants involved in the preparation of City Development Plans and Detailed Project Reports however, argue that measures such as those of the JNNURM must be viewed as gradual, intermediate steps initiated by the then National

Government towards accomplishing the goals of decentralisation and capacitating ULBs in the long term (author's experience).

Addressing these issues and others required a comprehensive re-evaluation of the JNNURM Scheme's strategies and a renewed commitment to empowering local governments and communities in the urban renewal process. To revisit these agendas, in 2015, the National Government, this time, led by the National Democratic Alliance where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was (is) majority, subsumed the JNNURM under another national mission, AMRUT, which had an enlarged scope.

Atal Mission for Rejuvenation And Urban Transformation (AMRUT)

The Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) launched on 24 June 2015, succeeded JNNURM. In the first phase, AMRUT 1.0, once again, the National Government selected 500 cities and towns across the country and focused on development of basic infrastructure, in the sectors of water supply; sewerage and septage management; storm water drainage; green spaces and parks; and non-motorised urban transport. A set of Urban Reforms and Capacity Building have been included in the Mission.

In October 2021 the National Government extended the scheme to launch AMRUT 2.0 which subsumed phase 01. AMRUT 2.0 was launched for a period of five years, from the financial year 2021-22 to the financial year 2025-26. It is centred around providing universal coverage of water supply through functional taps to all households in all the statutory towns in the country, over and above the scope of AMRUT 1.0.

Scope of the scheme

The National Government's focus remained provisioning and enhancing urban infrastructure in India. These encompass water supply, sewerage facilities, and septage management, stormwater drainage to mitigate flooding risks, the establishment of pedestrian

pathways and non-motorised transport facilities, creation of parking spaces, and the elevation of urban aesthetics by the establishment and rejuvenation of green spaces, parks, and recreational centres.

The AMRUT Scheme continued JNNURM's tradition of linking reforms to grants, categorising them into mandatory and incentive-based reforms. The mission requires participating cities to embark on an ambitious set of 11 reforms over a four-year period. These reforms are strategically designed to catalyse advancements in municipal governance, service delivery, financial management, and environmental stewardship. At the state level, the rewards in the form of grants come from the implementation of an agreed set of policy reforms, while at the city level, the incentives come in the form of untied performance grants.

These reforms reflect multiple dispensations of the state. On the one hand it strengthens local government's fiscal capacities and abilities to plan for their own infrastructure needs through new design approaches. On the other, it encourages cities to adopt technological innovations to support monetisation of assets and incentivises adoption of neo-liberal approaches to financial management.

Mandatory reforms comprising property tax reform and user charges reform aim at strengthening Local Government's fiscal capacity. The ULB is required to demonstrate increased property tax collection efficiency through property tax reforms. Reforms to user charges were however vested with states, who are supposed to notify user charges for water supply and sewerage, along with the resolution of their adoption by all ULBs. This reform initiated at the state government level also intends to substantially offset operation and maintenance (O&M) expenses for ULBs, by including a mechanism for periodic increases.

While capacitating ULBs in plan preparation for infrastructure development, the AMRUT Scheme nudges ULBs towards crafting socially beneficial innovation. The policy calls for 'out-of-the-

boxthinking' in Service Level Improvement Plans (SLIP)[v] formulation, advocating inventive solutions such as water recycling and reuse to minimise capital and electricity consumption costs. State Annual Action Plans (SAAPs) delineate yearly improvements in water supply and sewerage connectivity to households, prioritising 'Smart Cities' and necessitating a minimum 20% contribution from the States toward the total project cost.

The responsibility of preparing plans continues to be vested at the level of ULBs in AMRUT, as in the case of JNNURM, ensuring the involvement of elected corporators, and in principle, deepening capacity to plan at the ward level. Responding to local needs, ULBs devise SLIPs at the city level, which are subsequently consolidated into SAAPs in each State.

Further, the policy entails a set of incentive-based reforms, centred around water conservation, urban governance and energy efficiency, with allocation of 8% of project Central Assistance (CA). The water conservation reforms focus on empowering ULBs by assigning them duties such as reducing non-revenue water to 20% or below and rejuvenating water bodies. Tier-2 city credit rating, enhancing ULB creditworthiness, and municipal bond issuance are targeted reforms that are covered under the urban governance reforms.

Naturally, the introduction of incentives induced deeper competition between State Governments and between Municipal Corporations to gain eligibility and access to funds. Successful implementation of reforms, posited as incentives to access funds, claimed to bolster municipal governance, financial management, service delivery, and environmental sustainability. In addition, the second phase of AMRUT made the adoption of PPP for large scale projects in cities with a population over 10 lakhs (1 million).

v The Service Level Improvement Plans (SLIP) is prepared for each city or town highlighting the gaps in the provision of sewerage connection, water supply and measures to mitigate these gaps (MoHUA, 2015).

The second phase of AMRUT focused on strengthening ULBs in Tier-2 cities for projects in the water and sanitation sectors. As in the case of JNNURM, through the scheme the National Government continues to set the focus on the category of cities and sectors which are admissible. Yet, AMRUT is distinct from JNNURM in channeling greater responsibilities of monitoring, steering and approving projects to state governments. It recommends the setting up of a National Project Management Unit to monitor the overall progress of the mission. However, project appraisals and approvals are structured under State Governments channeled through State High Powered Steering Committee (SHPSC), the State Level Technical Committee (SLTC) and Project Development and Management Consultant (PDMC) appointed by State Governments (AMRUT 2.0, Operational Guidelines, 2021, pp.41).[9] The Scheme also deepened the process of tracking implementation of reforms by widening the nature of stakeholders involved. Apart from assessments by the State Government, third-party audits, citizen feedback, and interviews with officials were institutionalised.

Marking a shift from previous schemes, AMRUT 2.0 promotes monetisation of public assets of cities as a way to promote financial management capacity of ULBs. By formalising the shift towards monetisation of public land resources, the scheme envisages reforms in urban planning and unlocking land value. The scheme promotes GIS based Master Plans for Class II towns (population, 50,000 to 99,999), as a means to improve land use efficiency. Stepping into the domain of statutory planning, AMRUT 2.0 promotes the implementation of Local Area Plans (LAP) and Town Planning Schemes (TPS) in select cities with the objective of optimising land utilisation (AMRUT Toolkit, 2021).[10] Sub-schemes for GIS-based master plans and local area/town planning schemes are proposed for land value optimisation and efficient land use as a part of urban planning and land value reforms.

Funding pattern

Commencing from the fiscal year 2015-16 to 2019-20, the National Government allocated INR 50,000 crores for the scheme, increased to

66,750 crore INR. Systematically divided into four distinct categories, the fund included a majority allocation for projects (80%), a minor component for reform centric incentives (10%), and other expenses including State funds for administrative and office expenses (8%), and the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) allocation for administrative and office expenses (2%), indicating a negligible focus on reforms for decentralisation for empowering ULBs. The National Government decided on a proportionate distribution of funds in a ratio of 90:10 between National and State/UTs using population, number of statutory towns and area of cities as criteria.

Continuing JNNURM's strategy of involving National, State and Local governments for funding, the National Government structured a graded funding pattern with greater funding allocations based on population. Cities with a population exceeding 10 lakh were to receive a Central Government grant constituting one-third of the project cost. Cities with populations below 10 lakh were granted half of the project cost. Expanding responsibilities on State, Local Governments and the private sector, for both categories of cities, the residual funding was to be sourced from the State Government, ULBs, or private investment. Given this financing structure, AMRUT positions itself as a mix of government led stewardship, innovation, while promulgating preparedness on part of ULBs to manage private sector investment.

Private sector's involvement took on deeper significance. Going beyond 'encouraging' ULBs to explore projects on the PPP mode, this Scheme includes a mandatory clause for cities with population greater than 10 lakhs (1 million) to structure at least 10% of their projects on the PPP mode (Clause 3.10, AMRUT 2.0 Operational Guidelines, 2021, pp.9). While PPPs are made mandatory for projects of scale, the Scheme also persuades relatively greater preparedness on part of ULBs for financial risks, as it levies dis-incentives to Local Governments on account of process delays or incomplete projects

(AMRUT 2.0, Operational Guidelines, 2021),[vi] in the form of project take-overs by the State Government.

AMRUT 2.0 also deepened the role of the private sector in preparation of plans and projects. State Governments established Programme Management Units anchored by large private corporations which formed Project Development and Management Consultant (PDMC). Further, PDMCs are encouraged to explore the possibility of PPP in project implementation. The private sector's role in National Government schemes became more consolidated, with their widespread involvement across all stages of the project cycle, from preparation of City Development Plans, Detailed Project Reports, management of public procurement processes, award and management of contracts, quality and costs of projects.

Launched at the same time, the Smart Cities Mission presents a different anchor and governance model.

Smart Cities Mission (SCM)

The Smart Cities Mission was launched in June 2015, with an objective to 'drive economic growth and improve the quality of life of people by enabling local area development and harnessing technology, especially technology that leads to Smart outcomes' (Smart City Mission Statement and Guidelines, 2015).[11] The application of technology and innovation as a means to better quality of life was central to the scheme.

Scope of the Scheme

The Smart Cities Mission intended to enhance citizens' quality of life through smart solutions, infrastructure development. The mission's core elements encompassed essential services such as water supply, electricity, sanitation, urban mobility, housing, IT connectivity,

vi Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation 2.0, Operational Guidelines, 2021, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India. https://www.pppinindia.gov.in/report/Book%20Reference%20Guide%20for%20PPP%20Project%20Apraisal.pdf_1695790904.pdf

governance, environment, safety, and health and education.

Unlike the previous schemes, where eligible cities were selected by the discretion of National and State Governments, eligibility in smart cities was driven by a two stage 'challenge' requiring cities to compete to be selected, reflecting a shift towards competitive and cooperative federalism. Participating cities were required to submit a Smart City Proposal (SCP), detailing their vision, capacity to mobilise and utilise resources through a resource mobilisation plan, and drawing out expected outcomes.

The strategy for the Smart Cities Mission primarily included two scales of interventions: an 'Area-Based Development in the including city improvement (retrofitting), city renewal (redevelopment) and city extension (greenfield development); and a Pan-city initiative in which Smart Solutions are applied covering larger parts of the city'. Acknowledging that the above two scales of intervention do not address all inhabitants of participant cities, to make sure 'all city residents feel there is something in it for them', the scheme makes an 'additional requirement of some (at least one) city-wide smart solution has been put in the scheme to make it inclusive' (Smart Cities Mission Statement and Guidelines, 2015).

By allowing cities the freedom to define their own understanding of smartness, the Mission claimed greater agility and inclusion in its recognition of diversity of definitions for a "Smart City" (Smart Cities Guidelines, 2015), reflective of a National Government which acknowledged the local agency of ULBs. The Smart Cities Guidelines recommended that each smart city should have an SPV which is responsible to plan, appraise, approve, release funds, implement, manage, operate, monitor and evaluate the Smart City development projects (Smart Cities Guidelines, 2015). In principle, while the SPV may be read as a temporary organisational structure, SPVs are limited companies registered under the Companies Act, 2013 and are owned by the State or UT and the ULB in an equity shareholding of 50:50. They are thus designed to continue even after the end of the Mission' (CPR, Budget Briefs, 2023-24),[12] potentially making the company-led

governance model a permanent feature of municipal governance.

The SPV served as the instrument to channel investments to targeted locations in winning cities. Established at the city level as a limited company, the SPV was designed to facilitate the implementation of plans and projects under the mission. The SPV was jointly promoted by the State/Union Territory and the ULB with equal equity shareholding with a 50:50 ratio. While private sector and financial institutions were allowed to participate as equity stakeholders, public sector agencies (the State/Union Territory and the ULB) retained majority shareholding and control.

Funding pattern

Funds from the Government of India (GoI) are channeled through the SPV in the form of tied grants. Segregated into a separate Grant Fund, these funds are utilized exclusively for designated purposes As a financial mechanism, the SPV is required to remain fiscally self-sustainable. It is required to raise and sustain dedicated and substantial revenue streams, enhance its own creditworthiness in order to raise additional resources from the market. Moreover, ULBs as key promoters of the SPV, can channel GoI grants as equity capital to the SPV, promoting a strong equity base.

National Government grants of 48,000 Crores INR were to be channeled over a five-year period into specific project requirements and administrative functions, with 93% directed towards project funding and 5% and 2% allocated for Administrative and Office Expenses (A&OE) for State/ ULBs and the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD), respectively. While the National Government provided tied grants which required that ULBs utilise funds for purposes given in the Mission statement, the National Government did not warrant any reciprocal accountability from the ULB, in the form of compliance.

National, State and the ULB were this time, required to contribute equal amounts for project funding, thrusting greater ownership and

accountabilities on the ULB, compared to the previous schemes.[vii] With State and Local Governments placed on the same platform of financial accountability as the National Government, State and Local Governments were to match funds received from the National Government. State governments and ULBs were expected to mobilise resources through a diverse range of market led mechanisms, including user fees, beneficiary charges, land monetization, debt, loans, and tax increments. State Governments were encouraged to establish financial intermediaries to provide additional support. State and Local Governments were required to explore the adoption of innovative financing mechanisms such as municipal bonds, the Pooled Finance Mechanism, and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) ensures financial sustainability of the mission.

The SPV as a governance model

The composition of the Board of Directors in the Smart Cities SPV marks a radical shift in representation in urban governance regimes, from elected representatives in municipal corporations to Chief Executive Officers from private companies.

A Board of Directors, including a full-time CEO and representatives from the National Government, State Government, and the ULBs formed the main members of the SPV. The CEO of the SPV is appointed with the approval of the MoUD, for a fixed term of three years and could only be removed with the prior approval of MoUD (Smart Cities Mission Statement and Guidelines, 2015, pp. 38). The Independent Directors were to be chosen from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs' data bank, with a preference for individuals who have previously held positions as independent directors on boards of companies compliant

vii See, Smart Cities Toolkit: The Smart City Mission will be operated as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) and the Central Government proposes to give financial support to the Mission to the extent of Rs. 48,000 crores over five years i.e. on an average Rs. 100 crore per city per year. An equal amount, on a matching basis, will have to be contributed by the State/ ULB; therefore, nearly Rupees one lakh crore of Government/ULB funds will be available for Smart Cities development.

with Clause 49 of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) listing agreement (Smart Cities Mission Statement and Guidelines, 2015).

Private consortia/ firms forming Project Management Consultants oversaw project design, construction and management, continuing the tradition of ubiquitous presence of the private sector in National Government missions, post-liberalisation.

Several lenses of critique exist on the Mission. Some scholars critique the design of the scheme through the lens of transfer of powers and autonomy to the Smart Cities SPV. Under the guidelines, SPVs have full operational independence from the ULB, and further, State Governments and ULBs are both "encouraged" to delegate their statutory powers to SPVs (discussion with Idiculla, 2023). A key critique is that the Scheme re-centralises power with the National and State Governments, given the mandates for shareholding structures vest greater ownership of the company with the national and State Governments. The Guidelines of the scheme also do not specify the exact nature of the relationship between the SPV and the ULB (CPR, 2018),[13] exacerbating the problem of powers and accountabilities of the ULB in the scheme.

However, perspectives from within government spheres vary. Senior officials from the National Institute of Urban Affairs, Government of India who were involved in framing the design of the Smart Cities Mission confirmed that the SPV as a governance mechanism was designed to operate as a company promoted by the ULBs (interviews with Jagan Shah).[viii] Smart City SPVs are not exclusive of local level political representation. The Smart City SPV in Bhubaneswar, Odisha integrates representation from councillors on a rotational basis (Government of Odisha, 2016;[14] Nath, 2018).[15] Similarly, the Smart City SPV in Aurangabad, Maharashtra has permanent representation from the Mayor and District Collector, Aurangabad ((Aurangabad Smart City Development Corporation Ltd. (ASCDCL), 2016)[16]), showing

viii Jagan Shah, former Director, National Institute of Urban Affairs, Government of India

how the design of the SPV, while being a vehicle to channel project specific funds, does not exclude democratic oversight. While critics have pointed out that in practice, Smart City SPVs at the city level were primarily represented by administrators from the State Government and that political representation was negligible (CPR, 2018), these cases potentially open up the possibility to re-imagine the design of SPVs as governance structures which embed political accountability.

Summary of shifts towards privatisation in the four schemes

The role of the private sector in public infrastructure development and service delivery evolved over forty years, highlighting a significant paradigm shift. Nationally sponsored schemes pre-liberalisation was controlled mainly by the National Government supported by state governments. Post liberalisation, policies promoted by the National Government gradually mainstreamed new institutional arrangements, yet, through specific radical shifts, to accommodate private sector investment and partnerships between government and private corporations.

The IDSMT scheme was entirely a government funded policy. Its successor scheme, the UIDSSMT however, was administered differently by several States, including U.P, M.P, Bihar Orissa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka & Kerala. An overall performance of the Scheme undertaken in 2008 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs records that in UIDSSMT in these States, the 'component of institutional finance was limited, with their share capped at 10% of the project cost. Meanwhile, the projects from PPP were 'encouraged in a big way' under the UIDSSMT scheme' (IDSMT Guidelines, 2008). This dynamic shows that while the normatives of the UIDSSMT scheme only mildly recommended projects under PPP mode, some States boldly undertook the risk of being the first to seek increased private sector financing.

JNNURM marked the beginning of increased private sector participation in urban development. PPP arrangement was explicitly included within the optional reform agenda with the core objective of strengthening ULBs financially as the role of private and donor agencies were promoted (Kamath et al., 2015). Scholars have highlighted that states with higher levels of urbanisation and development, such as Maharashtra and Gujarat, proactively devised pro-PPP policies and administrative frameworks and instructed their cities to adhere to these directives. In numerous City Development Plans (CDPs), there was a distinct preference for involving the private sector in delivering municipal services and enforcing fees for such services (Narayanan & Bhatia, 2007).[17]

The introduction of AMRUT 2.0 further built upon JNNURM's foundation by expanding the scope of PPPs and redesigning reforms to attract private investments. It is noteworthy that this scheme made it a mandate for cities with population more than one million to compulsorily have a PPP arrangement; a clause absent in previous schemes. Moreover, cities and ULBs could directly reach out to multilateral agencies and banks such as Asian Development Bank, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau, Agence Française de Développement and World Bank to meet the financial requirements (AMRUT 2.0 Guidelines, 2021, pp. 13).

The Smart Cities Mission was primarily run on an SPV model. According to SCM, 43% of the financing was funded through public-private partnerships and partnerships with the private sector at the city level have mobilised up to 9.3% of the funds, with the aim of fostering collaboration for sustainable urban development (UN-Habitat, MoHUA, GoI, 2023). Additionally, the private sector and financial institutions were allowed to stake in the equity shareholding of the SPV, provided the State/UT and ULBs were majority shareholders.

INCREMENTAL PRIVATISATION THROUGH SPECIFIC RADICAL INTERVENTIONS

The trajectory of National Government schemes, from the IDSMT to the Smart Cities Mission shows how a hesitant liberalised state at the National and State levels remains entrenched in urban development processes at the local levels, while prudently opening up possibilities for private investment. Schemes post liberalisation show a State persuading private investments through reform based incentives, presumably to attract reluctant private sector investors. Policy interventions for promoting privatisation across the schemes are gradual. Yet, each scheme introduced specific reforms or mechanisms as radical markers in the evolution of urban policy in India - from encouraging projects on PPP mode to making projects on PPPs mandatory to institutionalising new institutional arrangements such as the SPV as a parallel governance model which given its legal structure, may support or potentially compete with the ULB.

UIDSSMT Scheme (2005)[18] 'encouraged' State Governments to 'explore' projects in PPP mode. The JNNURM (2005) adopted a similar cautious approach. In a significant step, Phase 2 of the AMRUT Scheme (2022), thirty years after liberalisation, embraces a neo-liberal approach to project finance, by introducing a mandatory clause for cities with population greater than 10 lakhs to structure at least 10% of their projects on the PPP mode. It continues to harness a neo-liberal tenor in its promotion of land monetisation for offsetting municipal fiscal deficits in providing funding for projects. At the same time, the design of AMRUT 2.0 does not situate the National Government as the ultimate decision-making authority, transferring the role of project approvals to a state level apex committee. Mandating privatisation however, is not mutually exclusive of the Scheme's measures to strengthen fiscal and financial capacity of ULBs, an important aspect of stronger local governments. The Smart Cities Mission steered a major shift in the governance model, by introducing Special Purpose Vehicle as the

custodian of the scheme at the level of the ULB. While the ubiquitous adoption of the new institutional arrangement draws attention to the absence of democratic oversight, it is equally significant to note that ULBs were primarily responsible for promoting the SPVs within the ambit of the Smart Cities Mission. Specific cases such as Aurangabad and Bhubaneswar show how despite being gated in their governance structure as a company, the Smart Cities SPV at the city level fostered process innovations at the operative level to include political representation, commitment and capacity building of ULBs.

Over a period of forty years (1980 to 2023), the design of these four nationally sponsored schemes indicate an incremental and gradual as opposed to a radical shift towards privatization. While new institutional arrangements of privatisation have become all pervasive, the contentions of or innovations in project implementation are an area of research that requires attention. A question that emerges for future research is, to what extent does this reluctant state continue to remain entrepreneurial at the micro level of project implementation, in its pursuits for promoting competitive cities and inclusive urban development?

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Essay VI: Rural India: Poverty Reduction and Livelihood Transformation

Amarjeet Sinha

Abstract

This paper is an effort to understand rural poverty and livelihood from the perspective of women in Independent India. The paper shows how the recent programmes launched by both the Union and State Governments to strengthen livelihood have contributed to a drastic reduction in poverty across the country. The paper argues, however, that business as usual approach towards growth will not deliver the kind of inclusive growth and wellbeing that is needed to sustain the gains of poverty reduction. Notwithstanding the success of some of the poverty-alleviation programmes, India needs to address inequalities more directly. Since rural livelihood is also about women's participation in agriculture, the paper also shares the learning from women farmers in sustainable agriculture.

Introduction

Colonial rule had left India in deprivation of an unprecedented order. The spectre of the Bengal Famine of 1943 haunted independent India's first generation of idealist Council of Ministers.[1] Food security received primacy and the Intensive Agriculture Development Programme (IADP) was launched for the assured irrigation districts. While it did secure food grains for people, sources of livelihood in the rain-fed areas, especially the Central Indian tribal pocket, remained fragile. Poverty reigned supreme and women received scant attention in public discourse in the nascent democracy.[2] Rural Livelihoods suffered consequently, and the persistence of poverty reflected throughout the earlier decades. Primary education and primary health were also neglected,[3] especially in the northern half of India.

After 75 years of Independence, it surely is a psychological victory for India to have got the better of the colonial masters on the size of the economy. In terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), India is now the fifth largest economy.[4] Given India's young population and size, the gains must reflect in per capita terms as well, which, however, has been slow to happen. On income, employment, human development, gender and social equality, quality of life and overall wellbeing, India has a long way to go.

The condition in 1947 was dismal on most parameters of growth and development. Thanks to the freedom fighters and the first independent government and its thrust through planned development, India could develop resilient and independent institutions, heavy industry capacity, and a few outstanding centres of learning like the IITs. Growth improved but the failure on primary education and primary health during this phase perhaps limited the country's capacity to follow the East Asian miracle trail in the 1960s and 1970s.[5] While growth started improving in the late eighties, it was only the 1991 reforms and thereafter, that India moved on a faster rate of economic growth. As far as poverty reduction, human development and other social indicators are concerned, the gains are more improved post 2005-06.

The Global Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index 2018 brought out by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Index (OPHI) 2018 shows India's momentous progress in reducing multi-dimensional poverty. It says, *"India's scale of multi-dimensional poverty reduction over the decade from 2005-06 to 2015-16 – from 765 million poor persons to 364 million – brings to mind the speedy pace of China's poverty reduction, which occurred over more than 20 years."*[6]

Similarly, the Brookings Institution published a note on a new poverty narrative which stated that poverty in India had fallen sharply and at the end of May 2018 *'trajectories suggest that Nigeria had about 87 million people in extreme poverty, compared with India's 73 million'*. The United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation 2018 similarly stated that India had managed to reduce Under-Five

Mortality Rate from 126 in 1990 to 39 in 2017. Likewise, infant mortality rate had fallen from 89 in 1990 to 28 in 2020.

A World Bank Report (2022) states that extreme poverty in India in 2019 was 12.3 percentage points lower than in 2011 (falling from 22.5% in 2011 to 10.2% in 2019).[7] Poverty reduction was higher in rural India, declining from 26.3% to 11.6% between 2011 and 2019. The study also found that farmers with small landholding sizes have experienced higher income growth. The rate of poverty-decline between 2015-2019 was faster than between 2011-2015. This significant reduction in poverty was possible because of the thrust on improving ease of living in the form of Ujjwala Gas connection, electricity connection, PM Awas Yojana, Swachh Bharat Mission, Mission Indradhanush, Jandhan Bank accounts, Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihood Mission, improved coverage under National Food Security Act across all States/UTs, and so on.

Explaining Poverty Reduction

While debates will rage regarding the methodology, it is important to understand what reduced poverty in rural areas at a much faster pace. Some key factors that contributed to this are the following:

First, the identification of the deprived households based on Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC 2011) across programmes like housing, gas connection, free electricity connection, Ayushmaan Bharat, etc., helped in creating a constituency for pro-poor public welfare of the deprived irrespective of caste, creed or religion. Deprivation being the basis, SCs and STs got a higher coverage and, similarly, the erstwhile backward regions like Bihar, MP, Rajasthan, UP, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Rajasthan, rural Maharashtra, and so on got a larger share of the benefits as more poor and deprived households are in these areas. This surely was a game-changer for social and regional balanced development.

Second, the coverage of women under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana and Self-Help Groups (SHG) moved up from 2.5 crore in 2014 to over 8 crore, with more than 75 lakh SHGs[8] working very closely

with over 31 lakh elected Panchayati Raj representatives, of whom more than 40% are women. It provided for a robust framework of community connect and social capital that helped every programme, from the Rani Mistris for Swaccha Bharat to community mobilisation for effective implementation and accountability. The PRI-SHG partnership framework provided an opportunity for speedier poverty reduction and accountability, particularly the use of IT/DBT/Aadhar in all payments. Using Aadhar cleaned up the system of corruption at all levels and ensured that the funds reached those for whom it was meant. Likewise, the use of technology in geo-tagging, houses under-construction and for following up on Panchayat Infrastructure, cleaned up delivery mechanisms in many places.

Third, the Finance Commission transfers were large and directly to Gram Panchayats, leading to the creation of basic infrastructure like pucca village roads and drains at a much faster scale in rural areas.[9] The very high speed of road construction under PMGSY created even greater opportunities for employment in nearby larger villages/ census towns/kasbas by improving connectivity for mobility. PMGSY reduces poverty by opening opportunities.

Fourth, with the social capital of SHGs, availability of credit, both directly through banks and through micro-finance institutions, MUDRA loans, etc., increased considerably. DAY-NRLM prioritised livelihood diversification and carried out detailed micro credit plans for greater credit disbursement. This explains the increase in real incomes of small farmers. New businesses, both farm and non-farm livelihood, have been taken up by women's collectives on a very large scale with appropriate skill augmentation and handholding by Community Resource Persons.

Fifth, the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan in 2018, in two phases, where 63974 purposively selected villages with very high population of SCs and STs were saturated with seven benefits, namely, gas connection, electricity connection, LED bulbs, accident insurance, life insurance, bank account and immunisation. Elaborate monitoring arrangement made a fundamental transformation possible in the poorest of villages where

very large number of deprived households were located. Performance of line departments went up manifold due to a community led action. The gains in gas connection, bank accounts, electricity connection and immunisation can be seen in the findings of National Family Health Survey – V, 2019-2021.

Sixth, the thrust on universal coverage for individual household latrines, LPG gas connection, homes for those in kachcha homes, electricity connection etc. ensured that no one is left behind. It further reinforced the constituency of the poor and created what is often referred to as *Labarthi Varg*. The social justice platform was thus well established.

Seventh, this was also a period which recorded far higher transfer of public funds to rural areas, including the States' share and in some programmes through extra budgetary resources.[10]

Eighth, the thrust on a people's plan campaign, *Sabki Yojana Sabka Vikas* for preparing Gram Panchayat Development Plans and for ranking villages and Panchayats on human development, economic activity and infrastructure from 2017-18 laid the foundation for a very robust community participation and accountability involving Panchayats and SHGs effectively. This and the assessment of gaps in every village and Gram Panchayat helped to focus on where thrust was required, leading to a Mission Antyodaya Plan of making a Panchayat poverty free.

Ninth, through processes like social audit, concurrent audit etc., efforts were made to ensure that resources are fully utilised. Many changes were brought about in programmes like MGNREGS to create durable assets which are productive. A very large number of individual beneficiary schemes for livelihood for marginal and small farmers were taken up like farm ponds, irrigation wells, vermi composting, soak pit construction, 90 days of work for house construction, and so on. This clearly helped marginal and small farmers in improving their incomes and diversifying their livelihoods.

Tenth, the thrust and competition amongst States for better performance on rural development helped. Irrespective of the party in power, nearly all States and UTs focussed on improving livelihood diversification in rural areas and on improving infrastructure significantly. Adoption of technology and principles of improved financial management were mandated in the programme itself. Capacity building at every level in the States was a priority to ensure adoption of reforms and technology.

All these factors have contributed to the improved ease of living of the deprived households and in improving their asset base. This has clearly led to the decline in poverty. A lot has been achieved, a lot remains to be done, especially with the adverse consequences of Covid on children's learning and adults' employment and wage-earning opportunities. Covid and the Ukraine crisis pose challenges to the gains made in poverty reduction up to 2019.

The Southern Indian States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana have fared much better in poverty reduction and economic wellbeing. If one tries to understand the factors that have contributed to these changes, especially in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, six key interventions stand out as most significant: -

- High rates of adolescent girls' participation in secondary and higher education on account of better educational provisioning.
- A functional public system of health care (especially in Tamil Nadu and Kerala) alongside a private sector in health care for universal health coverage of reasonable quality. A functional public system has had consequences for cost and quality of care in the private sector health care in these States.
- Very fast decline in fertility rates on account of higher participation in secondary and higher education and a functional publicly funded primary health care system.
- Girls' education contributing to a group identity and the formation of women Self- Help Groups (SHGs) on a large scale.

- Women Self-Help Groups and growing social capital through thrift and savings generating an environment for livelihood diversification through skills on a large scale.
- Access to Bank loans through women Self-Help Groups on account of enabling Reserve Bank of India circular issued 26 years ago.

Livelihood Transformation

The interventions mentioned above have contributed to the most rapid decline of multi-dimensional poverty. Trends similar to Southern Indian States have started under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) in many Northern, Eastern, and Northeastern Indian States. The participation of adolescent girls in secondary and higher education in these States has also seen significant expansion despite quality of public education being unsatisfactory. The mere participation in school education even with limited learning, creates the identity of collectives of adolescent girls who then form women Self-Help Groups and move on to diversified livelihoods. Clearly an even faster rate of decline in poverty is possible through these approaches.

Through convergent planning under Mission Antyodaya[11] starting on 2 October 2015 in 2569 backward Blocks, the Department of Rural Development was able to significantly improve the participation of women in Gram Sabhas and in ensuring that poor households were given the opportunity for livelihood diversification through programme funds.

DAY-NRLM now touches the lives of over 8.38 crore women organised into 76.94 lakh Women Self-Help Groups. Many of these women have credit linkage and together they have leveraged Rs 5.27 lakh crore loans from banks during the past eight years. Despite a nearly 30% growth year-on-year, DAY-NRLM, SHGs have managed to bring down the Non- Performing Assets (NPA) from over 7 % in 2012--13 to a little over 2 % now. At a time when the corporate borrowers' tales of

woes and deception hit the headlines often, these poor women have not only borrowed but used it effectively to improve their lives and livelihoods and return it as well. The lending was based on a detailed micro credit plan for each household, prepared after ascertaining the asset base and resources through a participatory process. It is for this reason that NPAs have been low and gains large.

It is no longer a story of just the five Southern Indian States whose SHGs accounted for over 84% of the total lending till as recently as 2013-14. Exponential increase in lending to DAY-NRLM SHGs in States like Bihar and West Bengal indicates a growing confidence of Banks in lending directly to Community Institutions of the poor rather than through Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) alone. Loans through MFIs are often good for consumption but not for economic activity as it reaches the borrower with anywhere between 20-30% interest rate. A diverse range of economic activities, from setting up 10,471 Custom Hiring Centres, 760 public transport systems in remote regions, to retail shops, restaurants, nano production units of farm and non-farm products, are all being undertaken by women's collectives.

What explains this transformation of lives and livelihoods on an unprecedented scale through the DAY-NRLM over the past eight years? How has the movement from social capital to economic activity happened?

First, the intensive processes of developing social capital under DAY-NRLM have stood the test of time. They have emerged as vibrant community institutions of the poor. They have expanded their mandate from following the *panchasutra* of good savings and borrowing to *dasasutra* that encompasses access to public services, education, health and wellbeing of poor households. Vibrant community institutions of the poor are ideal economic activity opportunities as well, if pursued through relentless capacity building and handholding.

Second, the biggest resource in this movement have been the Community Resource Persons (CRPs). These are women who were poor and have won the battle against poverty through hard work and toil. Over 3.5 lakh such women CRPs go round the country setting up

women's collectives and making them vibrant. These foot soldiers of the livelihood movement are the best example of national integration. Women from Kerala, AP and Bihar have spent months with women in remote corners of the Northeastern States and in Jammu and Kashmir.

Third, a conscious effort has been made to promote convergence of institutions and resources. The framework for partnership of elected Panchayati Raj leaders with women Self-Help Groups was developed and incorporated under the new governance improvement programme of Panchayats called Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA). Women SHGs and Panchayat leaders are to be trained together to find more meaningful solutions to the challenges of development. The women SHGs were involved in Gram Sabha meetings and in developing Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) under the *Sabki Yojana Sabka Vikas* efforts.

Fourth, financial resources from all ongoing programmes in rural areas were focused on villages with social capital of DAY-NRLM women SHGs on priority. Individual Beneficiary Schemes under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) for housing, animal sheds, farm ponds and wells, soak pits, vermi compost, were all provided on priority wherever social capital was available. Likewise, priority in implementation was given under the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) Housing Programme for such villages.

Fifth, opportunities for skilling and diversification of livelihoods were provided on scale through skills programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development as also Community Training Institutions, KVKs, etc., directly under DAY-NRLM. Both farm and non-farm livelihoods are encouraged to enable a more diverse livelihood framework.

Sixth, credit linkage for these women SHGs was given priority and a series of confidence building measures undertaken to give banks the comfort that these women will not only borrow but also return on time. The setting up of Community Based Recovery Mechanism (CBRM), positioning Community Resource Persons (CRPs) called Bank Sakhis to act as a bridge between community and the bank and Bank

Mitras from women SHGs as Banking Correspondents' agents helped in generating confidence for the DAY-NRLM system. The training of Bank Managers and efforts at financial literacy, and skills also helped. After settling debt and meeting consumption spending, many SHG women now borrow for economic activity, education and health needs. The Start Up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) in 100 plus selected Intensive DAYNRLM Blocks with higher order lending to families of SHG, including youth and men, has also facilitated higher order economic activity. The unique cadre of Community Resource Persons for Enterprise, developed by the EDI Ahmedabad and the Kudumbashree, Kerala, along with support for market intelligence and feasibility study of enterprises, ensures a very high success rate in the over one lakh such SVEP cases already financed.

Seventh, the pro-poor public welfare programmes for improving ease of living of poor households required active involvement of women SHGs and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). This improved the asset base of many women SHGs on account of support for rural housing, toilets, gas connection, electricity connection, Bank account, health insurance, accident and life insurance etc. The DAY-NRLM women played a very important role in building a movement for better public services at the local level. This was seen most remarkably during the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan in 65000 villages to guarantee seven very basic services for the deprived.

Lastly, the efforts at promoting innovative interventions in farm and non-farm livelihoods broke new ground in leveraging social capital of SHGs for sustained economic activity. The setting up of 10,471 Custom Hiring Centres and 760 rural transport managed by SHGs is an indication of the diversity of livelihood development and opportunities. Many groups make money through organic manure, managing restaurants, better market for products through Saras Melas, e-marketing opportunities, etc.

The poor women have come out of extreme chronic poverty and are now poised for higher order credit support to improve the thrust for enterprise and sustainable economic activity. Nano enterprises of

SHG women must be formalised to develop them into micro and small enterprises with proper value chain development and leveraging markets for them. Holistic credit guarantee systems for even higher level of credit where social capital exists is required to translate the potential of social capital into sustained rates of higher economic activity. Credit for those who have come out of poverty to move faster and further up the wellbeing ladder is the biggest challenge of development today. It holds the key to a more shared and inclusive growth with less inequality. DAY-NRLM and its women have the social capital and the ability to make transformational changes in lives and livelihoods. Social capital is not only good social justice; it is also the best foundation for a shared sustained economic progress.

Learning from Women Farmers:

There was a time when women's work in agriculture and animal husbandry was rarely counted. As per 2015-16 Agriculture Census, 11.72% of the total operated area in the country was operated by female operational holders. Civil society assessments suggest three fourths of the full-time workers on farms are women as men move to cities for higher wages. Yet, there was little attention to empowering women in agriculture. The Rural Livelihood Mission initiated a Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) in 2010-11 to '*meet the specific needs of women farmers.*'

Over the last decade, 1.74 crore women have joined the Livelihood Mission's work through a Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture (CMSA), a Value Chain Development thrust, Organic Cluster Promotion and a Climate Resilient agriculture intervention under the Rural Livelihood Mission. The efforts focused on the small and marginal women producers with a household-centric approach. Accepting the need for diversified livelihoods, the thrust was on agro-ecological practices, Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFPs), Livestock, Skill Based Enterprise and Value Chain activities. The thrust was on the small and marginal farmers, mostly in rain-fed areas, for risk mitigation, income increase, cost reduction and sustainability.

Over 60,000 Krishi and Pashu Sakhis, women Community Resource Persons (CRPs), who had themselves come out of poverty, have been trained as agents of change through intensive capacity building in partnership with national and state resource persons and institutions like Krishi Vigyan Kendras. Farmers' Field Schools (Krishi and Pashu Pathshalas) were set up in partnership with the women's collectives. Seed preservation through own farm seeds, seed rotation, and seed treatment by brine solution, cow urine, beejamrut (cow dung, cow urine and lime), and trichoderma (bio fungicide) was tried.

Since 2014-15, concerted efforts have been made at convergence with the MGNREGS under which over 60% has been spent on agriculture and allied activities and thrust is given on individual productive assets like farm ponds, animal sheds, dug wells, vermi and NADEP pits, water and soil conservation, soak pits, solid resource management, plantations, etc. Ashok Pankaj's study (2017) highlighted how individual beneficiary schemes went up from a fifth of the works taken up in 2012-14 to two thirds (67.71%) in 2019-20. While suggesting how MGNREGS can be re-engineered for doubling of farmers' incomes, the study in six districts of UP, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu confirmed the major gains in incomes of these households because of this thrust. Landless with household nutrition-gardens could also take up animal sheds and 90 days of wage work for Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana Gramin house construction. Therefore, the landless were also not left out.

This has led to a meteoric increase in income generating durable assets as compared to the MGREGS of 2005-2014. Between 2014 to July 2022, 35.76 Lakh farm ponds, 307.16 lakh Natural Resource Management Works, 21.01 lakh horticulture works, 67.03 lakh plantations, 11.38 lakh check dams, 10.87 lakh dug wells, 11.90 lakh Cattle sheds, 16.62 lakh NADEP Vermi-compost pits, 49.99 lakh water conservation structures, 24.95 lakh Soak pits, and a total of 377.08 lakh individual beneficiary works came up. This number was only 26.58 lakh for 2005-2014. Sikkim's organic story, Madhya Pradesh's agricultural improvements, Jharkhand's vegetables, fruits and animal resources thrust, Odisha's innovative NTFP and mangoes related

initiatives, Rajasthan's water management, Andhra Pradesh's natural farming, Gujarat's and Himachal Pradesh's efforts at Prakritik Kheti have all gained from such social capital, convergence and credit. From river rejuvenation efforts in Uttar Pradesh's Banda, to revival of tanks in Udham Singh Nagar in Uttarakhand, a very silent revolution on water management has been possible, even though the challenge is Herculean in many parts of the country even now. An Institute of Economic Growth (IEG) study quantified the gains in terms of productivity, incomes, fodder availability and improvement in the water table. Community-led social audit exposures in MGNREGS only indicates the efforts to further ensure accountability. *Down to Earth* tracked the water conservation successes of fifteen first years' villages of MGNREGS in its twentieth year.

The entire initiatives have been independently evaluated by the University of Stanford (2019), Institute of Rural Management Anand (2018), Institute of Economic Growth (under Dr. Manoj Panda 2017), A.C. Nielsen (2019) and others, clearly establishing gains in incomes due to diversified livelihoods of women farmers. Case Studies by TISS Mumbai on MKSP farmers in Chotaudepur in Gujarat with the Shroff Foundation, PRADAN's work in village Bhadubeda in Keonjhar Odisha, work of Krishi Sakhis like Champa Singh in Anuppur MP, Urmila Linda in Namkum Block of Ranchi, Jharkhand, Ranjana Tai in Koli village of Yeotmal in Maharahtra, and thousands of others in many villages, confirm the role of handholding by CRPs for income gains.

Rising cost of living, huge increase in price of LPG meant tough times for poor households in the margin. With India's public debt already 90% of its GDP, there is barely any fiscal space to expand expenditure to enlarge demand. In a scenario of limited jobs, women suffer more than men, given the fragility of the engagement. While a lot is being done to push infrastructure roll out, logistics improvement, digitalisation and so on, gains are also showing. But there is still some way to go for India to turn a challenge into an opportunity.

While India has done better than most countries both on growth and inflation, the fragility of those in the margins of slipping into poverty makes the challenge formidable and more immediate. Business as usual will not deliver the kind of inclusive growth and wellbeing that is needed to sustain the gains of poverty reduction. While continuance of the free ration scheme may have helped households in food grain security, it by itself, is not enough to keep households in a state of wellbeing. We need to address inequalities also more directly.

References

1 See Jean Dreze and Amartya Kumar Sen: India- The Uncertain Glory.

2 While there were women nationalist leaders, rural women at grassroots level were voiceless.

3 See Census of India Data, NSSO 42nd Round 1986-87.

4 September 2022 assessment; published and discussed in leading dailies.

5 East Asian Miracle: The World Bank 1990.

6 Sabina Ikere; OPHI; 2019.

7 Working Paper of The World Bank, using the CMIE household data, duly adjusted. Also see Dr. Surajit Bhalla's paper in The Indian Express; 2022, using the free foodgrain cost to assess on the 1.90 dollar per caita.

8 DAYNRLM – MIS – Real Time. www.MoRD.nic.in

9 Recommendations of the Fourteenth Finance Commission

10 Analysis of Budget Documents.

11 Mission Antyodaya – Framework for Implementation; MoRD.

Essay VII: India's Herstory: A Struggle between Rights and Patriarchy

Sarojini Ganju Thakur and Shobhita Rajagopal

Abstract

With Independence, the Constitution of India created a broad framework for gender equality in various spheres - political participation and representation, education and employment opportunities and access to resources of various kinds. The Constitutional provisions have been reinforced by national policies and international commitments. Although these measures have helped India make progress in achieving the goal of gender equality, specifically in equality between men and women, certain kind of gender inequalities have become wider and more visible over the years as seen in the declining sex ratio at birth, and women's work force participation, and increasing violence against women. The nature of progress since Independence highlights a constant struggle between assertion of rights and long-standing patriarchal norms and mindsets.

Introduction

Draupadi Murmu, a tribal woman from Odisha being elected as President of India is one of the most memorable images of 2022. Her journey epitomises the possibility and opportunity that India holds and has developed for women since Independence. The Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, with its provisions for equality for men and women and affirmative action propelled all women into the public arena as voters, a process that had taken more than 50 years in the UK and which was possible in Switzerland only in 1971, opened doors for the participation of women in politics, employment and created a framework of rights for Indian women. It also marked the beginning of

a struggle which arose then and continues till now between rights and values promoted by a longstanding patriarchal social hierarchy. That tension persists today and manifests itself in the low position that India occupies in Global Gender Gap Report, brought out by the World Economic Forum. In 2022 India was at 135 out of 146 countries.[1] While this figure does mask the progress made in various fields, in relation to progress in other countries this is where India stands.

This essay focuses on mapping the nature of progress made since Independence towards gender equality, more specifically in the context of men and women in India. The broad contours of the development trajectory are presented here, notwithstanding the fact that women are not a homogenous category, and there is intersectionality of caste, class, rural, urban, and religious divides that need to be considered.

The Journey: Shifts in the State's Approaches to Women and Development

In the 1950s when government was largely "by men, for men and of men" the predominant women's role that was addressed was as mother or carer within the family. Single, widowed or deserted women were "fallen" or needed protection. Women were objects of "welfare". Planning led to the establishment of the Central Social Welfare Board, *Mahila Mandals*, programmes on food and nutrition, and Short Stay Homes, *Nari Seva Sadans*.

This was the dominant approach till the early 1970s when the publication of the seminal work ***Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974)*** shaped and influenced the discourse on women, signifying a clear shift. The Terms of Reference were principally to understand the impact of the constitutional and administrative provisions on women, their social status in terms of employment and education and to suggest measures "which would enable women to play their full and proper role in the building up of the nation".

Apart from its review of legislation, education and health status, its most significant contribution was to bring greater visibility to

women's roles as producers and workers in the formal and informal sector, including as farmers looking after livestock and on plantations, who could contribute to the economy and not just as recipients of welfare-oriented schemes. This led to debates in parliament and the recognition for a special focus in planning on women and development.

The Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85) introduced a separate chapter on Women and Development emphasising the need for mainstreaming and integrating women into national development, viewing them as individuals and a crucial human resource. The major thrust was on the economic rehabilitation of women through greater opportunities for self and wage employment. During this period, women-specific schemes such as DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas), a grandparent of the current National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), and Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) which continues even today were initiated. In 1985 a separate Department for Women and Child Development (DWCD) was constituted in the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD).

The Seventh Five-Year Plan operationalised the concern for **equity** and **empowerment** articulated in the International Decade of women 1975-85. The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, stated that the education system needed to play a positive interventionist role in women's empowerment. It was the first policy that uses the word **empowerment** in the context of women. This was a time when the concept of empowerment was just entering the discourse on women and development everywhere!

Empowerment of Women

4. Women become empowered through collective reflection and decision making. The parameters of empowerment are:

- Building a positive self-image and self-confidence
- Developing ability to think critically
- Building up group cohesion and fostering decision making and action
- Ensuring equal participation in the process of bringing about social change
    - Encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society
    - Providing the wherewithal for economic independence

Government of India (1986) National Policy of Education, 1986

The glaring inequalities in education and employment also led to a very detailed report on women and work (**Shram Shakti, 1988** Report of the National Commission on Self Employed women and Women in the Informal Sector) followed by the National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988-2000.

Several milestones characterized the 1990s. In 1992 and 1993, the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, reserving at least 1/3 of elected positions in local bodies for women, propelling women into the public sphere, came as a game changer. The ratification of the Convention for Elimination of All Form of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),and signing of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), a document identifying 12 critical areas for women and development impacted the domestic front as well. In the Ninth Plan (1995–2000) 'empowerment of women' became one of the nine primary objectives.

Post Beijing, countries all over the world were finalising their policies on women and India also embarked on its exercise. It was only in

2001, after many consultations, iterations, dilutions, that the National Empowerment Policy of Women was finalised. While much has changed within the country and outside this policy still stands though in drastic need of revision. Over the years at national and state level, Commissions for women were established and DWCD was designated as a Ministry in 2006 to ensure the implementation of women's rights.

Subsequent plans also focused on women as agents of economic and social change. India is also committed to Agenda 30, the realisation of the 17 SDGs many of which have a gender component, including the specific SDG 5 on gender equality. In terms of overall assessment in 2022 India stands at 121 of 163 countries (Pandey 2022) and NITI Aayog's own assessment shows that the composite index performance on SDG 5 at 48 is next to the lowest amongst the SDGs (NITI Aayog 2021).[2] Although there has been some progress, SDG 5 is off track and not poised to meet the 2030 goals.

Several schemes have been introduced and implemented for improving wellbeing, livelihoods, entrepreneurship, security and social protection for women since 2001. These include Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), NRLM, social assistance schemes for women and children – pensions for single, widowed and old women, schemes like MUDRA to enhance entrepreneurship and skill development, educational allowances, scholarships, National Health Mission (NHM) and Maternity Benefits Schemes to name a few. Their impact will be dealt with in greater detail in respective sections.

Political representation and governance

The State determines the framework for rights, policies, and financing for women's development. Having a critical mass of women at the decision-making level has a clear impact on decision-making and largely explains the narrowing of the gender gap in many countries.

In India, the past 75 years have not brought about a significant change at the national level in the political representation of women. In 1950 women represented 5 % of those elected to the Lok Sabha; at present

women's representation is at 14.4%, 78 women in a house of 543. India stands at 148 out of 188 countries and the global average for women's representation stands at 25.8% (Rao 2020).[3] State assemblies show a poorer performance, with an average of 10 % women's representation (PIB,2022).[4]

While enhancing women's representation everywhere has been a challenge and slow process, accelerated change has been brought about either by the provision of quotas as in the electoral processes in Bangladesh or through representation at the level of political parties as in Norway. In India, Constitution Amendment Bills have been introduced four times in 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2008 (passed in Rajya Sabha) to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies but all four lapsed before it was finally passed by both Houses of Parliament in 2023. At the root of the long delay in passing the Women's Reservation Bill for National and State assemblies is the reluctance of all political parties to share power.

In the meantime, the representation of panchayat and municipal bodies has gone up to 50% in at least 21 States, from 33 per cent which the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts provided for. Although there are aspects of the Acts like the continuous rotation of seats which undermine women building up electoral bases, and there are men *sarpanch pati* who still act as proxies for their elected wives, there is a perceptible change in the voice and agency of women at the grassroots level. It is the burgeoning of women at this level which is ushering in change at the local level.

The Bureaucracy

The representation of women in the higher echelons of the bureaucracy, the civil services, has seen changes both in nature and number over the years. Article 16(3) of the Constitution by providing for "equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State" opened doors for women that had hitherto been closed. However, mind-sets about what could be appropriate roles and jobs for women impacted the way that these

doors were opened. Sometimes this took the shape of rules - for instance the perception that women may not be able to perform their duties in the higher civil services once they married resulted in a rule, "where woman appointed to the service subsequently marries, the Central Government, may if the maintenance of the efficiency of the service so requires, call upon her to resign". A similar rule existed in the foreign service, and many women had to choose between marriage and a career. This rule was challenged in a case (AIR 1979, SC 1868) by C.B. Muthamma, where the judges spoke of the "naked bias" of the rule and discrimination against women. But this was after several women had resigned (Thakur 1997).[5] Similar biases were manifested - in the Indian Police Service (IPS) and Dr Kiran Bedi was able to break the stereotype that women were incapable of policing. In the Indian Forest Service (IFS) the lowering of a physical qualification, which existed in addition to the exam, enabled entry of women.

It has been a long journey where capacities of women to perform are constantly questioned and it is often court-orders or overall shortages that have allowed women entry into what are viewed as powerful and elitist domains such as fighter pilots, forest guards, village revenue accountants and most recently recruitment into the National Defence Academy as full-fledged army officers. There have also been landmark cases to ensure that women and men enjoy the same rights in employment, such as the Air India vs. Nargesh Meerza (1981), which was on conditions of retirement of air hostesses.

Over the years, recognition of the need for maternity leave has resulted in government enhancing maternity leave to six months of full paid leave, paternity leave being introduced and in addition women being allowed two years of childcare leave during their career. While this is an advance, there is also the continued stereotyping of child-care being only a woman's responsibility. It does lead to ironic situations where there is a working couple, the wife can use the provision of child- care leave when the husband is posted to a different place so that the family can be together, but if the wife is on study leave overseas, the husband cannot get child- care leave even if he is the primary caregiver!

In terms of numbers there has been an increasing trend in the representation of women in the higher civil services since Anna Malhotra was selected for the IAS in 1951. In 2022 the number of women selected in the Civil Services was 177 of 685 candidates, about 26% of the total. A study at the Ashoka University showed that of the 11, 569 IAS officers selected for the civil services between 1951 and 2020 only 1527 were women, about 13% in overall terms (Bhatia and Chawla 2022).[6] There is still a long way to go to ensure gender parity although there are some IAS batches which have more than 30% women. There has never been a female Cabinet Secretary so far!

In terms of quotas for women in employment there are several states like Gujarat, MP, Rajasthan, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and Punjab which have reservation of at least 30% for women in all government jobs. Similarly, there are quotas for women in CRPF, CISF, and the police in most states. The face is changing but it will take a long time before at least 50% of the employees in government being women! In the Judiciary while women are well represented in the lower rung of the Judiciary, it was only in 1989 that the first woman was appointed to the Supreme Court (SC) and to date there have only been 11 female SC judges, of whom three are serving presently!

Women and Education

Education is viewed as one of the most significant indicators and drivers of development, in general and women's development, in particular. It is now accepted that education is a source of social mobility, equality and empowerment both at the individual level and collective level. As in the case of overall approaches to women and development, in education too there have been important shifts in the approach to women's education.

There has been an overall increase in literacy levels in the country and in the case of women it has increased from a mere 9% (Census 1951)[7] to 72% (NFHS- 5,[8] 2019-2020). Recent national level surveys indicate that there has been a significant improvement in the gross enrolment ratio (GER) showing promising trends. The GER for girls is at par or

higher than boys across educational levels. However, dropout rates at secondary levels continue to be high. These rates are higher among girls and students from socially disadvantaged groups especially Scheduled Tribes (STs).

There is evidence to show that given the conducive environment, parents are willing to educate girls. There is a certain degree of agreement about constraints to education and about the strategies that work from a gender perspective. A combination of barriers i.e. poor network of secondary schools, gender differences in educational investment, quality of school education, safety and security concerns and social constraints like early marriage continue.

At the tertiary level, there has been a phenomenal growth in the number of women enrolled in higher education since Independence when women's enrolment- was less than 10% of the total enrolment. The overall participation of women in higher education is showing a steady improvement and a tapering gender gap. However, the disparities among women from different social groups, who have multiple disadvantages, are greater compared to men in the same social groups. The institutionalisation of Women's Studies as an interdisciplinary discipline in higher education in the 1980s by the University Grant Commission (UGC) also established the need to generate new data and analyses on various aspects relating to women, adding new knowledge and a 'critical perspective' to social science academia. While women's studies programmes struggle with devising effective pedagogic strategies, there has been an increase in studies on women, both by academics and NGOs, which have contributed in bringing women's issues to the forefront.

A brief analysis of the pre and post-Independence era shows that several factors had a profound impact on the issue related to the education of women. These included the social reform movement of the 19th century, the efforts of Christian missionaries and several nationalists, the participation of women in the freedom struggle and demand for universal franchise. The contribution of Savitri Bai Phule, Fatima Sheik and Pandita Ramabai in advocating education for girls

and women and fighting caste-based oppression and exploitation contributed significantly to the debate on education of women in the 19th and 20th century.

Post-Independence, women's education in India received a fresh impetus. A number of commissions and committees were appointed to look into various aspects of women's education and to make improvements for expansion. The education of women was no longer seen exclusively as an instrument for inculcating values appropriate to women's role as had indeed been seen earlier. It was now perceived as a means of providing equality of opportunity (Rajagopal 2000).[9]

Notwithstanding the policy rhetoric, the welfare approach which dominated successive Five-Year Plans till the 1970s, continued to see *women largely as dependents concerned only with welfare of the family.* These policies defined separate education for women considering their social roles and even when a common curriculum was encouraged, it was to upgrade their domestic roles. By the 1970s, statistics were used to show that the education system basically had not touched the lives of most of the population, especially women.

The seminal 'Towards Equality' report referred to earlier made specific recommendations about the nature of education to be imparted.

Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974)

The CSWI report noted the urban and middle-class bias of educational planners and bureaucrats in regard to women's roles, needs and priorities.

For universal elementary education, the Commission recommended:

- *Provision of primary schools within walking distance from the home of every child.*
- *Sustained mobilisation of public opinion and community support for creating a climate for girls' education.*
- *Special incentives to be given to girls in areas of low female enrolment of girls.*
- *At least 50 per cent of the teachers at the elementary stage should be women.*
- *A system for part-time education for girls who are unable to attend school on full- time basis.*
- *Provision of additional space in schools so that girls can bring their younger brothers and sisters to be looked after either by the girls themselves or in turn by some local women.*

Government of India, 1975[10]

The emphasis of the 1970s was on the role of functional literacy as a critical determinant variable that would positively impact social and demographic indicators. This transitioned, in the 1980s to rights-based approaches reflected in the National Policy of Education (NPE), 1986 and the 'World Declaration on Education for all in 1990'.

The period 1987-1994 were also significant in the history of basic education and women's education in India. Several initiatives were launched by the Government of India with international donor

assistance for primary and elementary education.[i] These initiatives also generated greater demand for and interest in gender issues in education and created an environment for sustained engagement and insights into social relations and education (Ramachandran 2011)[11] The Shikshakarmi Project and Lok Jumbish projects in Rajasthan were front runners in weaving in gender concerns at different stages of planning and implementation.

The new Millennium saw the launch of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2000 with a goal of universalising elementary education by 2010. Bridging gender and social equity gaps was one of the critical objectives of SSA. As part of SSA residential schools for girls - Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) were also started with the aim of enrolling girls from SC, ST, OBC and Muslim communities in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBB) of the country.

The framing of the National Curriculum Framework, 2005 and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 once again reiterated that the aim of education is to achieve a substantive equality of outcome, not merely a formal equality of treatment. The significance of the RTE, 2009 lies in the fact that the provision of free and compulsory education is now a legal requirement. The Act has emphasised three important aspects of education delivery - access, equity and quality.

In 2018-19, the Government of India, started *Samagra Shiksha* - an overarching programme for the school education sector extending from pre-school to class 12. The broader goal was improving school effectiveness including equal opportunities for schooling and equitable learning outcomes. It subsumes the three erstwhile Schemes of *Sarva*

i The initiatives were: The AP Primary Education Project, Rajasthan Shiksha Karmi Project (1987), Mahila Samakhya, Education for Womens Equality 1988, Bihar Education Project and Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project 1990, Lok Jumbish 1992. In 1994 the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was conceived and launched, aimed at increasing enrolment, retention and achievement at primary stages and reducing the gender and social disparities in districts with low literacy rates.

Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan* (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE). For girls' education, a total of 5970 KGBVs with a capacity of 725700 girls was sanctioned to States under *Samagra Shiksha* till 2018-19. Out of them, 4841 are operational with 590276 girls (GoI 2018-19).[12]

The National Education Policy, 2020, the first policy in the 21st century, three decades after the previous NPE of 1986, talks of a Gender Inclusion Fund toward equitable education for girls and transgenders. The substantive aspects of this Fund are yet to be revealed. The GoI[13] notes that the objectives of this Fund are being met through specific provisions under SamagraShiksha2.0 by allocating dedicated resource. In 2020-21 funds were allocated for Free distribution of textbooks, uniforms, KGBVs, Residential hostels, Self- defence training, Incinerators and Sanitary napkins vending machines, stipend for CWSN girls etc (PIB 2022).

For three decades gender has been accepted as a category in the formulation of policy and curricula frameworks in India. "Gender", "Equality" and "Empowerment" of girls have also been used as key words in educational documents for long as it is evident from the preceding sections. The focus however has largely been on 'parity' not just in terms of enrolment or retention of girls, but also in terms of the curriculum and content. The distinction between parity, or formal equality, and substantive equality is critical. Substantive gender equality in education is a more complex notion that relates to the nature and quality of education and has to focus on how education can enable girls to exercise their choice and claim their rights (NCERT, 2005).[14] The challenge today is how to guide social choice towards advancing social justice in education and ensuring that improving educational attainment of girls is a key policy imperative moving beyond rhetoric!

Women and Health

In overall terms, there has been a general improvement in the health condition of men and women in India. Many indicators stand witness

to this; the average life expectancy which was 36.2 for women and 37.2 for men in 1951 has increased to 70.7 for women and 68.2 for men (TOI 2022).[15] Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has dropped from 146 for 1000 births to 27 (Census of India 1951; NFHS-5) and the Maternal Mortality Rate from above 1000 in the 50s [ii] to 113. More importantly the Total Fertility Rate has dropped from an estimated 6 to 2, slightly less than the replacement rate of 2.1(Rangarajan and Satia 2022).[16]

While these indicators are positive, these figures mask the glaring gender inequality that exists related to the very survival of the girl child. In some parts of India, the continuance of strong son preference has resulted in sex selective abortions, female infanticide, and post-natal neglect in the first five years of girls' lives. This has led to the declining sex ratio at birth which according to census figures was 919 girls to 1000 boys in 2011. This gender gap explains the 'missing' millions of women in India. The State of World Population Report 2020 indicated that India accounted for 46 million of the 142.6 million girls missing world-wide in the last 50 years, and that each year about 460,000 girls go missing! Government both at the National and State level have introduced a slew of schemes, such as *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao,* and other cash transfers schemes to cover costs related to marriage and education to impact on attitudinal change. But there is a long way to go, even though NFHS-5 figures show a marginal improvement in sex ratio to 929. This explains why India ranks 146 out of 146 countries for the health and survival sub index of the Global Gender Gap Report.

In addition to the nature of health system and infrastructure that can be accessed, women's health in India depends on a variety of socio-cultural and biological factors. In India, from the policy perspective the approach to women's health, especially till this century, has been dominated by focus on her reproductive role. Since 1951 , successive Five-Year Plans and other policy documents, such as the National Health Policy (1981) focused on family planning, the introduction of contraceptive methods, its integration with maternal and child health and flagged several areas needing special attention such as nutrition,

ii An estimate of the Mudaliar Committee

immunisation and school health programmes .The International Conference on Population and Development 1994 brought a paradigm shift from the earlier target oriented to a target-free client centred and demand driven approach which became known as Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) approach. The essential components of the RCH were prevention of unwanted pregnancies by promoting contraception for both spacing and limiting children, providing services for safe motherhood, improvement in child survival by expanding immunisation coverage. The burden of family planning continues to be on women, with female sterilisation being the highest form of contraception. Male sterilisation remains extremely low at 0.3 percent.

The Alma Ata declaration with Health for All, the National Health Mission (NHM) in 2005[17] and the National Health Policy 2017 have broadened the overall approach to universal access to equitable, affordable & quality health care services that are accountable and responsive to people's needs. Improved coverage is also evident from data on immunisation, Ante Natal Care (ANC) coverage, institutional deliveries, and other process indicators, all of which would have contributed to improve mortality outcomes.

> The **'Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana' (PMMVY)** was launched in 2017. It is a maternity benefit scheme launched by Government of India and is being implemented in all the Districts of India in accordance with the provision of the National Food Security Act 2013. Under this scheme, a cash incentive of rupees five thousand is transferred directly to the bank account of the eligible pregnant women and lactating mothers during the first pregnancy. (GoI, 2017)

It is evident that policy discourse has largely focused on women in their reproductive role while lesser attention has been paid to other morbidities among women. However, the country continues to fare poorly on several nutrition indicators with increasing incidence of overweight children and rising anaemia amongst children and women. The worsening of anaemia levels is a critical issue for India,

for health, productivity and income and its inter-generational impact highlights implications well beyond the individual. A 2017 estimate of the impact on GDP due to loss of productivity on account of women's anaemia was of Rs 1.50 lakh crore!

While National programmes do exist to address this, in large part this has been in the form of providing iron and folic acid (IFA) for pregnant women. It has not been able to make a dent in the overall prevalence, NFHS -5 indicates that 57% of women between the ages of 18 and 49 are anaemic, compared to 18% men. The government conceptualised and launched the National Nutrition Mission or POSHAN Abhiyaan, a multisectoral intervention to address the intergenerational aspect of malnutrition. Addressing anaemia requires interventions that start during childhood, continuing into adolescence, and there are few focused interventions in that regard.

For women's health some of the issues also related to the lack of availability of female doctors in rural areas in some parts of the country, inhibiting the nature of access to health services. In addition, the fulcrum of health services rests on front line health care workers -ASHA, AWW and ANMs who provide the first mile delivery of services. A majority of these workers are women, and during the COVID pandemic many of them were at the forefront of the COVID response, especially in rural areas. However, a burning issue has been their lack of recognition and integration as workers, as they are paid an 'honorarium". Their work situation and challenges need to be constantly acknowledged and addressed by the health system.

The data on gender suggests the need for a health system much more focused on aspects of gender and its interaction with health access and outcomes. A deeper gendered approach to health delivery is essential.

Women and work

The continuously declining work force participation rate (WFPR) of women in India despite higher levels of educational attainment and declining fertility rates and the gaps between male and female WFPRs is one of the most glaring and visible inequalities that exist between

men and women in India. In the report on Strategy for New India @75[18] one of the two primary objectives for gender was to increase the female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) to 30 % by 2022-2023 (NITI Aayog, 2022). The current female FLFPR is 23.7 per cent (26.7 per cent in rural areas and 16.2 per cent in urban areas). The declining trend is particularly strong in rural areas, where it has gone down from 49.7 per cent in 2004-05 to 26.7 per cent in 2015-16. In fact, what is disquieting is that there has been a decline in rural labour force participation rates ever since Independence.

There is much research around this issue, but clearly certain social developments contra-indicate this trend. Since Independence there has been a significant and sharp decline in fertility. From six children, the reproduction rate now stands at less than two children, so it cannot be attributed to 'the motherhood penalty". Also cited as an explanation is that girls are now spending longer in education and therefore are not available to the work force, but in fact with higher education aspirational levels increase. One of the factors that comes up repeatedly is about the fact that so much of women's work goes unaccounted for; it is invisible and unpaid and that it is an issue of mismeasurement. Women's work, especially contributing to the household and over and above just care is quite invisible.

A recent national time use survey, the first after an initial pilot in six States in the late 1990s has further demonstrated that participation rate of men in paid employment is 57.3% while for females is 18.4%. Further the participation rate of men in domestic activities is at 26.1% while for females it is 81.2%.

The temporary dropping out of the labour force, both in urban and rural areas, suggests unavailability of regular and steady employment opportunities for women. It is possible that this is a manifestation of widespread informalisation and precarity of labour markets where men are working out of compulsion, but women can join the work force only when it is compatible with reproductive labour (domestic chores, childcare, elderly care). These tasks are predominantly under the purview of women everywhere, but even more strongly in South

Asia, where the gender norms of sharing housework are markedly more unequal than the rest of the world, barring the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. However, there is a very compelling argument about demand side constraints "It appears that women are dropping out of the labour force because of the nature of the growth process that has not been employment intensive and during which female workers are being displaced by male workers" (Deshpande and Singh 2021).[19]

Irrespective of these explanations, the fact remains that not as many women in a country of India's size and income level, are working or are available for work. It would take special effort both in devising more scientific methods to measure women's labour force participation, and in providing more suitable job opportunities for them. The time to do so is now, before the unprecedented shock presented by COVID-19 further depresses women's already grim work situation. Perhaps lessons may be drawn from the past, on what India did right in the early 1970s and 2000s.

Women and the informal sector

India's informal economy is amongst the largest in the world and accounts for employment of almost 90% of the labour force. Women make for only 23% of those employed in India's informal sector, but up to 91% of Indian women in paid jobs are in the informal sector, according to the Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy-Institute of Social Studies Trust report (Gupta and Jha 2020).[20] The informal sector includes wage employment in informal establishments and households; self-employment; unpaid contribution to family work; or informal wage employment in formal establishments (for e.g., frontline health and nutrition workers who are part of the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ILO 2017)). Typically, women are concentrated at the lowest rungs of the informal sector such as domestic workers, home based workers where it is difficult to organise. They work with little job security, legal and social protection, low wages, and sometimes poor and dangerous working conditions.

To deal with the issue of employment at the level of government there are interventions for wage and self-employment. While MGNREGS is essentially a social protection scheme it has in fact changed the landscape for wage employment in many states. In many states, such as in Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan it has created the opportunity for women to earn cash for the first time in their lives, and with separate bank accounts, created the possibility especially where women operate their accounts independently. The wage provided is the basic minimum wage. The MGNREG Act provides for at least 30% employment for women, and nationally and in many states, women constitute most workers. This is for several reasons – as work must be provided within one km from home, women can cope with their domestic responsibilities as well as work, work is "on demand" and one can exit and enter at will. Women are asking for an increase to 200 days of work and a higher than minimum wage. There are other issues about the nature of payments, the norms for the measurement of women's work, which states are dealing with.

Several models have developed since Independence, in the government and nongovernment sectors, that demonstrate that if women organise themselves in collectives or groups it gives them the strength that comes from solidarity. With increased awareness they demand their rights and entitlements, enhanced accountability of systems and institutions, and improve their livelihoods.

The earliest model is Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Ahmedabad, a trade union founded in 1972 to organise self – employed women – small scale traders, home-based workers, and manual labourers. It mobilised members into cooperatives, so they could control their products and labour. Its growth in the past fifty years has been phenomenal – having spread to at least 2 million women, 18 states in the country and all the SAARC countries apart from influencing women's organisations throughout the world (SEWA 2022).[21] The founder Ela Bhatt has also profoundly influenced the women's movement in the country.

Other models have been more linked to government. Mahila Samakhya was a unique government programme which emerged out of a partnership between the women's movement and the government in 1986. It functioned through an independent society and the entry point was to mobilise women into sanghas at village level and create a federation at Block/District level. It aimed to enhance awareness about rights and entitlements, bring about changes in families and the community. It had a great impact on ensuring girl's education, campaigning against child marriage, accessing services and entitlements like PDS, pensions, scholarships. It demanded accountability of structures and institutions like anganwadis and extension workers. In Mahila Samakhya, there was a huge investment in process and capacity building of individual women and groups. It did lead to questioning the way things are done. The national programme was withdrawn in 2015 though some states continue with it by a different name. This approach was about transforming the way women viewed themselves in relation to the family, community state (Jandhyala not dated).[22]

The Kudumbashree Mission in Kerala started as a poverty eradication programme in urban areas and was elevated to a State-wide programme in 1988. It too was based on a three-tiered organisation – neighbourhood, ward, and village. It goes beyond organisation of SHGS to community-based service and women's empowerment. The women decide priorities for actions themselves - from which works to be taken up to interventions for violence against women. In Kerala, 50 % of the elected women representatives come from these groups. Kudumbashree is recognised as a National Resource organisation for NRLM. From the early 90s, a predominant approach has consisted of organising women into Self-help groups (SHGs), which often in other countries are called savings and credit groups. It started with the NABARD – SHG linkage programme but has now been transformed into a (Deendayal Antyoday National Rural Livelihood Programme (DAYNRLM), nationwide programme which aims that at least one woman from each family should be part of such a group. Women's

groups act as a collateral for women's loans, enhanced access to markets. The focus today of NRLM[23] is to ensure that women are transformed into *lakhpati* entrepreneurs and there is a Gender Operational Strategy in place for capacity building on gender. In the past, the approach to SHGs has been largely instrumentalist -the potential of the groups for transformative change as in the case of MS groups is yet to be seen.

Violence Against Women

India has often made international headlines for issues related to violence against women. While the picture for safety and security for women in the country varies from State to State, the highest number of recorded cases are from UP, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Odisha. Delhi is known as the city with the highest rate as well as the highest number of cases of crimes against women.

Official figures show an increasing trend of recorded cases of crimes against women. In 2021 of the 4,12,278 registered cases the maximum number (31.5%) fall under the category of "Cruelty by husband or his relatives", followed by cases (22. %) which come under the category of "Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty", kidnapping (17%) and rape 7.4% (Amogh 2022).[24] Over the years, an increasing awareness has developed of the recourse to the police and the law for redressal of violence, but even so the recorded cases represent only the tip of the iceberg. Recent NFHS-5 data of married women in age 18-49 indicated that 29% had experienced spousal violence**.** Violence against women includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse.

As the UN Declaration on Elimination of Violence against women (1993) states "Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men which have led to domination over and discrimination against, women by men." In other words, violence against women perpetuates a patriarchal system. Various policy documents such as CSWI, NPP, the National

Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) acknowledged the need for institutions and mechanisms to strengthen the prevention of such violence.

The setting up of the National Commission for Women in 1992 as a statutory body to safeguard and review the Constitutional and legal measures for women and facilitate redressal of grievances was a significant step in upholding rights of women. Over the years there have been several institutional support mechanisms established by the State Governments like women's police stations or cells, women's counselling centres, legal aid and special cells to address violence against women and support survivors of violence However, a combination of factors has prevented them from functioning effectively. These include issues such as the lack of personnel and funds. Further, another aspect is related to the lack of gender sensitisation of the staff who are involved with these institutions.

But it is the women's movement in India which has constantly and strongly pushed the agenda of violence against women and gender justice. The Supreme Court's acquittal of two policemen involved in the rape of a minor tribal girl brought forth many aspects of women's oppression i.e., roles of class and caste in oppression of women, accountability of public servants and the Judiciary in achieving the constitutional guarantees. A rape case in Mathura involving police personnel, in which women's groups vehemently fought for justice during 1979-80 led to significant changes in the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Penal Code. The changes led to the introduction of a category of custodial rape, but they were however not sufficient. The definition of rape does not extend to marital rape (Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995).[25]

The protests around dowry and dowry related violence became another rallying point for the women's movement. The amendments in the Indian Penal Code Section 498-A passed in the wake of the anti-dowry agitation encompassed for the first time a definition of cruelty which included not just physical but mental cruelty as well. In 1982 organisations in Delhi and elsewhere built up formidable evidence

of dowry related murders being passed off as suicide or accidents. It was a consistent widespread mass campaign under the aegis of the *Dahej Virodhi Chetna Manch* that finally pressure was mounted on the government to act. A joint committee was also appointed by the Parliament to review the working of the Dowry Prohibition Act. Through the amendments in laws pertaining to dowry in 1984 and 1986 the scope of dowry was widened; the offence was made cognisable and non-bailable with a minimum punishment of five years of imprisonment and fine not less than Rs 15000. However, despite the reforms the problems continue to persist.

In 1986, the Forum Against Sex Determination and Sex protection was formed in Mumbai. The forum addressed the entire spectrum of reproductive technologies especially pre-natal diagnostic techniques like amniocentesis, to prevent misuse of technology for sex selection and elimination of female foetuses. Following the Maharashtra Regulation of Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act in 1988, the Parliament enacted the Pre- conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (PCPNDT) 1994. However, a large number of girls continue to be 'missing' given the sex selective elimination leading to skewed child sex ratio, a key indicator of status of women/girls.

In 1987, a young, educated woman Roop Kanwar was burnt alive on her husband's pyre in the name of Sati in Deorala, Rajasthan. It was a clear case of murder that was sanctified in the name of tradition and culture. The slogan *'Sawal hai naari ki pehchan ka, naari ke samman ka* became instrumental in mobilising a large number of rural women in Rajasthan. A nationwide protest was organised by women's groups and central legislation was passed outlawing glorification of sati. But the law had several loopholes. The immolation of Roop Kanwar also pointed out how a murder of a 'widow could be transformed into a sacred event that brought 'honour' to the family (Mathur 2004).[26]

A long struggle for justice and accountability of the State Governments for protecting women at the workplace began in 1992, when Bhanwari Devi, a *sathin* (village-level worker) of the Women's Development

Project[iii] was gangraped by five upper caste men for stopping a child marriage. The arduous trial in the district courts did not deliver justice to the victim as the rapists were finally acquitted. A public interest litigation (PIL) was filed in the Supreme Court under the collective platform of Vishakha. They demanded justice for Bhanwari Devi and urged action against sexual harassment at the workplace. The court, for the first time, drew upon an international human rights law, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to pass a set of guidelines for Sexual Harassment at workplace in 1997 that are popularly known as the Vishakha Guidelines. The court stated that these guidelines were to be implemented until legislation is passed to deal with the issue. Almost 15 years later the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 came into force. It mandates all organisations to constitute an internal complaints committee, conduct training, and awareness sessions and ensure that 'no woman is subjected to sexual harassment at any workplace'.

Given the increasing graph of domestic violence against women in India 'The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) was enacted. The Act recognises domestic violence as a human rights violation. It recognises a woman's right to live in a violence-free home. To realise this right, the Act recognises a woman's right to residence and her right to obtain protection orders under the law.

The gruesome rape of a 23-year-old woman in Delhi in December 2012 by four young men popularly known as the Nirbhaya case, made the country stand up to extreme forms of sexual assault. It once again brought to light the indignity and extreme violence that women are subjected to in the country. In the wake of this case, the Justice

iii The Womens Development Project was implemented by the Government of Rajasthan in 1984 with support from UNICEF. It was the first programme for empowerment of Women in India. The Sathin or village level worker was the pivot around whom the activities were planned. WDPs focus was on viewing women as equal partners with men in development process rather than 'mere recipients of welfare'

Verma Committee was constituted to recommend amendments to Criminal Law, to provide for quicker trial and enhanced punishment for criminals accused of committing sexual assault against women. The Committee submitted its report on 23 January 2013. It made strong recommendations on laws related to rape, sexual harassment, trafficking, child sexual abuse, medical examination of victims, police, electoral and educational reforms. The Committee was of the view that rape and sexual assault are not merely crimes of passion but an expression of power. Rape should be retained as a separate offence, and it should not be limited to penetration of the vagina, mouth or anus. Any non-consensual penetration of a sexual nature should be included in the definition of rape.

The Central Government also announced the creation of a Nirbhaya Fund in its 2013 budget. An allocation was made of Rs1,000 crore per year for three years starting from the financial year of 2013-14. This sum of Rs 3,000 crore was a non-lapsable corpus fund to support initiatives by the government and NGOs working towards safety and security of women. However, for years on end the utilisation of these funds was extremely low.

Post Nirbhaya, One Stop Centres (OSCs) were mandated at notified hospitals to help victims of sexual assault and ensure speedy justice. The purpose of these OSCs is to give women easy access to the police, medical facilities, emotional support and other required services. Police and NGO run OSCs have been set up across several states in the country along with Special Cells for Women and Children to address domestic violence. However, studies show that there are gaps in implementation of reforms post Nirbhaya. These include utilisation of funds, misguided focus on technologies in place of strengthening of institutions, and contradictions in the legal provisions, which seem to be posing fresh challenges (Lingam et. al 2022).[27]

Another extreme form of gender-based violence faced by women in some States is witch hunting. It has been used as a means of subjugating and subjecting women to severe physical torture, mental violence and ostracism. The increasing graph of witch hunting related

crimes in India, has compelled five States to formulate necessary legislation against this practice. The first State to have formulated the Anti -Witchcraft Act was Bihar. The Witch hunting (Dakan/Dayan) Prevention and Protection Bill was passed in Rajasthan in 2015. There is no central legislation as yet to address witch- hunting related violence.

The Indian experience shows that while more cases of violence against women are being reported, the response of the enforcement agencies, and sometimes even of the judiciary, perpetuates patriarchy. The remission granted to the convicts in the recent Bilkis Bano case is only one example. In addition, low conviction rate in cases of sexual assault and delayed redressal act as deterrents to taking a legal course by women survivors. There is a need to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach for ending gender-based violence. It is essential to ensure that women and girls have access to institutional support systems regardless of their social and religious backgrounds. Adequate institutionalisation of legal justice system, transparency and fixing accountability will lead to prompt redressal and proper care of survivors of violence.

Financing for gender equality

Over the years there has been recognition of the need to track public expenditure on women's development. Apart from the fact that today the nature and extent of gender responsive budgeting is an indicator of SDG 5, it has throughout been recognised as an essential tool for gender mainstreaming and analysing the nature and adequacy of budgetary allocations to meet political commitments made on gender and the goal of gender equality. Financing for gender equality has taken various hues. It started with the monitoring of 27 beneficiary-oriented schemes. Then, under the Ninth Plan (1997-2002) a Women's Component Plan was introduced. Both Central and State Governments were required to earmark a clear, unconditional minimum quantum of funds/benefits of "not less than 30 per cent of the funds/ for women in the schemes run by all Ministries/Departments that were perceived to be "women related" (Das, not dated).[28]

Gender Responsive Budgeting was introduced later in 2005-2006 when a Gender Budget Statement (GBS) based on the classification of expenditure of allocations for women was included in the budget. This built on the analysis of sex disaggregated development data that was included in the chapter on Social Sector in the Economic Survey. In fact, the starting point of this analysis was a meeting called by the then Secretary, DWCD, B.K. Chaturvedi with Ashok Lahiri, who was the Director of National Institute of Public Finance and Policy to commission some work on sex disaggregated development parameters.[iv] This practice of a GBS continues and is published separately now as statement 13 of the Budget.

At the national level, gender budget cells have been set up in at least 54 Ministries with a view to make programmes more responsive to gender needs. Further, 20 states have adopted GRB, some annually publish a separate GBS.

How has this impacted the nature of investment in women? An assessment of the annual allocations at the national level from 2005-2006 to 2019-20- indicates that in percentage terms it had remained at approximate 5% of the Budget. If one looks at schemes which are specifically for women, they have stagnated at about 1 % of the total budget (Thakur and Mitra 2019).[29] In its implementation GRB has been technicist, focussing greatly on the production of GBS. What is needed is to focus more sharply on the responsiveness of current policies to men and women's needs and priorities. Translating that into budget allocations requires conceptual clarity, capacity and commitment at all levels.

Conclusion

In every sphere of gender and development there is contestation between claiming rights and maintaining and establishing patriarchal hegemony. One is reminded of Alice in Wonderland "Now, here, you

iv As Joint Secretary, DWCD , S. G,. Thakur , one of the authors has a clear recollection of the meeting

see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that". When it comes to women's issues, rightful claims often result in a backlash (Batliwala 2012)[30] and structural changes in women's position, which laws and policies often propose, are not translated into reality because one of the biggest challenges is dealing with mind-sets that resist and are slow to change. Laws and policies can be in place but for practice to change it requires enhanced accountability for gender equality across the board, massive national level campaigns about the social construction of gender, acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours, substantial investment in the gender friendly infrastructure to ensure women's access to and control of resources, gender parity in decision making bodies, and government commitment to translate all this into reality. At its current pace it would take the South Asian Region 197 years to close the gender gap in the region (WEF, 2022). The gap slows not only the development and empowerment of women, but also the growth and development of the country. While the struggle between rights and entrenched patriarchy continues, concentrated efforts from policy makers, development planners and civil society actors would go a long way in ensuring gender justice and achieving gender equality.

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Essay VIII: Renewable Energy Power development in India

Shanti Prasad Joshi

Abstract

Indian Power system has grown from 1362 MW at Independence to all India grid of 402817 MW with 100% village electrification. Renewable energy (RE) generation capacity constitutes 39.7%. Renewable Energy development has been initially through multi-purpose river valley projects. From the beginning of this century, emphasis has shifted to wind and solar energy. Power development, which was initially in government sector through budgetary support and foreign assistance, shifted to equity-debt financing and private sector participation. Wind and solar energy projects have been brought mainly by private sector. Enactment of laws and creation of organisations such as Central Electricity Authority, State Electricity Boards, Regulatory Commissions promotional policies, enforcement of Renewable Purchase Obligation etc., has contributed to this development. This paper brings out history of the Renewable Energy development and their potential.

Renewable energy (RE) is energy that is collected from renewable resources that are naturally replenished on a human time scale.[1] Renewable sources include sources such as sunlight, wind, rain, tides, waves, biomass and geothermal. The replenishment of these resources is natural phenomena with daily, seasonal, and annual variation but on some finite year basis. Most of Renewable Energy sources are sustainable.

Introduction

Sun is the main source of renewable energy. Sunlight is electromagnetic radiation extending from infrared to ultraviolet region. Infrared part

causes heating of atmosphere, earth surface and ocean and results in wind, clouds, and rains. Rains result in river flows and water storage in natural or manmade reservoirs. The elevation of reservoir level is the hydro energy potential used to generate hydroelectricity. Infrared part of sunlight is also directly utilised for solar thermal power generation. A part of kinetic energy of wind velocity is utilised for wind power generation.

Ultraviolet radiation of sunlight, in the presence of water, carbon dioxide and chlorophyll, results in photosynthesis in plants and thereby vegetation on the earth which supports the human and animal life. Biomass is renewable organic material that comes from plants and animals. Biomass can be burned in boiler to raise steam or by anaerobic fermentation to produce methane. Steam or methane is used to run engine / turbine for power generation. Biomass energy sources include (i) wood and wood processing wastes (ii) agricultural crops and waste materials (iii) biogenic materials in municipal solid waste (iv) animal manure and sewage. Biomass sources are renewable but not considered unsustainable, if exploited at large scale. Ultraviolet part of sunlight is extensively utilised for power generation through battery of photo voltaic cells.

Heat is continuously produced inside the earth through slow decay of radioactive particles in earth core.[2] The temperature of the earth's inner core is at about 10,800 °F as hot as the surface of the sun. Temperature reduces as heat is transmitted through inner core of 1500 miles in diameter to outer core to mantle and earth's crust. At boundary of mantle and the earth's crust (at about 15 to 35 miles deep) temperature is about 392°F. For utilising geothermal resources, wells are drilled as deep as 2 miles and steam or hot water is brought to the surface through piping. Electricity is generated by direct use of steam or steam generated by hot water. Geothermal energy will last till earth's inner core heat lasts.

Tidal energy is taken from the Earth's oceanic tides.[3] Tidal motion is the result of gravitational attraction on ocean water exerted by the Moon and the Sun. The magnitude and variations of tidal motion is

caused by changing positions of the Moon and the Sun relative to the Earth, the effects of Earth's rotation , local geography of the seafloor and coastlines. Since Earth's tides are due to gravitational interaction with the Moon and the Sun and the Earth's rotation, tidal power is practically inexhaustible renewable energy resource.

Hydro, wind, solar, geothermal and tidal power generation does not produce carbon dioxide (CO2) and are thus no-carbon power generation. Biomass power generation is carbon neutral as CO2 produced by its burning gets utilised in photosynthesis process to produce vegetation.

Nuclear generation also does not generate CO2. Presently nuclear reactors are based on fissionable isotope of uranium (U235) and plutonium (Pu239). Nuclear reactors in India are thermal neutron reactors. In fast breeder reactors, nuclear fuel generated is more than it is consumed. With fast breeder reactors, nuclear fuel will become renewable and practically in-exhaustible. Sources of power in the sun and the stars are by nuclear fusion reaction of conversion of hydrogen into helium. Various research organisations are working for producing fusion reaction of conversion of hydrogen (or its isotopes deuterium and tritium) into helium on sustainable basis. When a breakthrough is achieved, it will be clean nuclear reaction and inexhaustible source of power as hydrogen is one of the constituents of water which is available in abundance on the earth. Such generation will also not have problems with existing nuclear reactors of disposal of nuclear waste.

Power development since independence

In 1947, the total power generating capacity in India was 1362 MW (vide annexure -1). Out of which hydro power was 508 MW (37.31%). At that time, electric power was considered a luxury and was limited to a few cities. Electrifications was then affected under Indian Electricity Act 1910, mostly by private licensees, and Princely States using small steam turbines and diesel sets. The highest system voltage was 110 kV. In 75 years, power system has grown manifolds. Power generation

capacity as of 30 May 2022, is 402817 MW, of which 46723 MW is hydroelectric generation capacity and 113226 MW is renewable energy generation capacity other than hydro power (vide annexure -1). Initial renewable power development was dominated by addition of hydro generation capacity created mainly in public sector through budgetary support and foreign assistances. With growth of the sector, financial resources requirement increased. Financial institutions were created to arrange funds and provide loans to power utilities. Private participation in power generation came up with the financial reforms in the 1990s. Then concerns were raised about global warming by CO2 emission from thermal power plants and consequential acid rains, adverse climatic change and health hazards created by pollution. This led government to focus on renewable energy generation. With promotional policies of governments and regulatory commissions, in this century wind power generation has picked up first, followed by solar power generation. Their generation capacity has been created mostly by private sector. Renewable energy generation capacity is presently 40 per cent of the total generation capacity and this proportion will increase in the coming years.

Hydro Power generation

After Independence, agricultural and industrial development was considered to be of prime importance and electricity as their prime mover. The Electricity (supply) Act was enacted in 1948. The Central Electricity Authority (CEA) and autonomous State Electricity Boards (SEBs) were constituted under this Act. The CEA was to develop a sound, adequate and uniform national power policy and to coordinate the activities of the planning agencies in relation to the control and utilisation of power resources. SEBs were charged with general duty of promoting the coordinated development of generation, supply and distribution of power within the State in the most efficient and economical manner particularly in such areas which were not served or not adequately served by licensees.

First-Five Year Plan was launched in 1951 and multipurpose river valley development projects were undertaken for flood control,

irrigation, and power generation. Notably among them were (i) Bhakra-Nangal partnership project between Punjab and Rajasthan to irrigate vast areas of these states and generate Hydroelectricity. (With the reorganisation of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and the union territory of Chandigarh are its partners and beneficiaries) (ii) Damodar Valley development in eastern region for Bihar and West Bengal; (iii) Chambal Valley projects as partnership project of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh; (iv) Hirakud project in Orissa. Transmission of power to beneficiary states was the part of these projects and long distance transmission led to higher voltage level of 220 KV introduced for Bhakra to Delhi transmission line commissioned during 1960-62.[4] With the high priority to multipurpose projects in the first and subsequent plans, installed hydro-generation capacity increased to 50.62 per cent of the total capacity by 1963. Thereafter, want of interstate agreements, long gestation period, new projects in higher altitude having high cost, geographical and environmental concerns, slowed the pace of hydro projects and lower gestation period and cost led to quicker built up of thermal power generation capacity. Growth of power demand led to building of generation capacity in central sector. In 1975, National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC) and National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) were created with the main objective of establishing, operating, and maintaining respectively hydro and thermal power stations with their associated transmission network in central sector.

SEBs were mandated for electrification in rural areas. The Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) was created in 1969 with the main objective of promoting and financing projects aimed at providing rural electricity infrastructure and household electrification, pump set energisation and decentralised and non-conventional energy sources. The canal development with multipurpose hydro plants and massive pump set energisation coupled with development of high-yielding varieties and pest resistant strains of wheat (mainly led by agricultural scientist M. S. Swaminathan in India and Norman E Borlaug), sow the seeds of the Green Revolution in 1968[5] and ultimately the self-sufficiency in food production. As a result of emphasis on rural

electrification and pump set energisation, per capita consumption, number of electrified villages and pump sets, which were respectively 16.3kWh, 1500 and 6400 at the time of Independence was (as on 31.3.20) 1208 kWh, 597464 and 22044042.[6,6A,6B]

Transmission system development

With the growth of generation capacity, in additions to transmission system created with the generation project, state electricity departments / boards provided intrastate transmission lines from generating station to load centre and their interconnections to have reliability. State grid initially had few interstate links created by transmission system of hydro and thermal projects. In the seventies, regional load despatch centres were created to regulate power flows in the region. To meet growing requirement of transmission system, first 400 kV system was created almost simultaneously by UPSEB (Obra-Sultanpur line) and Beas Construction Board (Dehar -Panipat) line in June 1979.[4] Power Grid Corporation of India limited (PGCIL) was created in 1989 with main objective of planning, promoting, developing, operating and maintaining an integrated and efficient high voltage power transmission system network, load despatch stations and communication facilities and coordination of integrated operation of regional and national grid system. It took over transmission assets of central sector generating companies, namely NTPC, NHPC, NEEPCO, NLC, NPC, THDC and SJVN in a phased manner and commenced operation in 1993. It took over the operation of existing Regional Load Despatch Centres (RLDCs) from the CEA during1994-1996. With the establishing of regional grid with inter-regional ties, for load despatch at national level, National Load Despatch Centre (NLDC) was established in 2009. PGCIL interconnected all regional grids, to form all India grid on 31.12.2013.[7] Later PGCIL diversified into the telecom sector for efficient use of its spare telecommunication capacity of unified load dispatch centre (ULDC) schemes.[8]

Other financial institutional developments.

With growing power system, government funding was found to be inadequate, and Power Finance Corporation Ltd. (PFC.) was established in 1986 to provide financial assistance to power projects including generation, transmission, distribution, and RM&U projects. Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (IREDA) was established in 1987 for promoting, developing and extending financial assistance for setting up projects relating to new and renewable sources of energy and energy efficiency/conservation. The Central Bank of India, Housing Development Finance Corporation Limited and Unit Trust of India promoted Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services Limited ('IL&FS') in 1987 to catalyse the development of innovative world-class infrastructure in the country. IL&FS are widely acknowledged as the pioneer of Public Private Partnership (PPP) in India. These financial institutions created environment of debt financing of power sector.

India started having balance of payments problems and by the end of 1990, India was in a serious economic crisis. This led to economic liberalisation through budget of 1991. To incentivise foreign investment, it laid out a plan to pre-approve all investment up to 51 per cent foreign equity participation, allow foreign companies to bring modern technology and industrial development.[9] This paved the way of entry of private sector in the power industry. Competitive biddings were called for establishing, operating and maintaining conventional and nonconventional power generation capacity with foreign participation, and had some success.

Renewable Energy Power development:

Oil shocks of the 1970s causing sudden increase in the price of oil, uncertainties associated with its supply and the adverse impact on the balance of payments position led to identification of energy self-sufficiency through new and renewable energy worldwide and also in India. Commission for Additional Sources of Energy (CASE) was created in the Department of Science & Technology in March

1981 with the responsibility of formulating policies and their implementation programmes for development of new and renewable energy apart from coordinating and intensifying R&D in the sector. In 1982, Department of Non-conventional Energy Sources (DNES), incorporating CASE, was created in the then Ministry of Energy. In 1992, DNES became the Ministry of Non-conventional Energy Sources. In October 2006, the Ministry was renamed as the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) which is now the nodal Ministry of the Government of India for all matters relating to new and renewable energy. The broad aim of the MNES is to develop and deploy new and renewable energy to supplement the energy requirements of the country to achieve energy security through increase in the share of clean energy (like wind, hydro, solar, geothermal, bio & tidal power to supplement fossil fuel based electricity generation), and energy affordability through cost-competitive, convenient, safe, affordable and reliable energy supply options.[10] Hydro Power generation, though it is renewable, was considered as conventional power generation and MNRE considered only small hydro power plants up to 25MW as of RES (Renewable Energy Sources). Central Electricity Authority also started reporting RES generation accordingly.

Wind Power Generation:

Wind power potential of India has been assessed in 2008 by the Centre for Wind Energy Technology (C-WET) as 49GW (1GW=1000MW). It was later revised to 103GW at 80m hub height. This is considered as wind power potential in India although National Institute of Wind Energy (NIWE) has assessed total onshore wind energy potential at 302 GW at 100 meter and 695.50 GW at 120-meter hub height. Using Global Information System (GIS) and computational methods, much higher potential is assessed by others. Out of onshore potential, more than 95 per cent of commercially exploitable wind resources are concentrated in seven States namely Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu. Wind power availability is dependent on nature. It has daily and seasonal variations and availability up to maximum seven months in

a year. First ever wind power plant was installed at Veraval, Gujarat with 40 KW wind turbine through Dutch assistance[11] but the turbine failed. Later, wind turbines installed at Mandvi, Gujarat have been successful. In the same period, Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) got a wind farm installed at Mullakkadu, Tamil Nadu with 10 WTGS each of 55 kW capacity. In 1998, India's first wind turbine test station was established in India and the Centre for Wind Energy Technology (C-WET) was created in Chennai. C-WET became a catalyst for all R&D and policy related activities in the country. Power shortages, nonavailability of coal and hydro resources in the State and long distance from coal belt causing high transportation cost of coal, led State Governments to explore other energy sources like lignite, gas, mini/micro hydel, wind and solar . The concern of global warming also raised awareness at government levels to promote clean energy power generation. Renewable energy rich states notified policies to promote renewable energy generation. Rajasthan Government notified the Policy For Promoting Generation Of Power through Non-Conventional Energy Sources in 1999 which interalia specified execution of PPA by Rajasthan State Electricity Board for 20 years with power purchase price for 10 operational years and transcom's / discom's responsibilities for grid connectivity. It also specified, captive use/third party sale with wheeling charges, banking of energy and five years of exemption from levy of electricity duty. Power purchase price of Rs 2.75 per kWh was specified for the year 1998-99 with 5 per cent annual escalation. This tariff was based on MNES formulated tariff of Rs 2.25 per kWh for 1993-94 with 5 per cent annual escalation. A 2.0 MW demonstration project was thereafter established using BHEL make Wind Turbines at Amar Sagar in Jaisalmer District by Rajasthan Energy Development Agency (now RRECL) in 1999. Other State Governments also specified similar policies. Various incentives were specified by the Government of India for the promotion of non-conventional energy. Among them were tax holidays on income from sale of renewable energy power (during 1985-1990 and the accelerated depreciation benefit of 100 per cent during 1990-2002, later reduced to 80 per cent and then to 35 per cent (15 per cent normal and 20 per cent additional).[12,13] Success of the demonstration

projects, execution of PPA by State power utilities/third party, permit of captive use and incentives, enabled financial institutions and bank to finance the projects and this instilled confidence of private sector for investment in wind and also biomass generation. This is evident from an increase in wind power plant capacity from 18 MW in 90 to 1628 MW by 2002 (vide annexure -1) mainly in private sector.

The Electricity Act 2003 was made effective from 10 June 2003. One of its objectives was 'promotion of efficient and environmentally benign policies'. In furtherance to it Section 86(1) (e) of the Act specifies the function of the State regulatory commission to promote generation of electricity from renewable sources of energy by providing suitable measures for connectivity with the grid and sale of electricity to any person, and also to specify for purchase of electricity from such sources, a percentage of the total consumption of electricity in the area of a distribution licence. Under this section, SERCs specified Renewable Energy Purchase Obligation ('RPO') for distribution licensees, thermal power generated by captive consumers and Open access consumers with provisions of penalty for default. For supply of electricity from RE generating stations, Regulatory commission under Section 62 of the Act determined (i) the generic tariff (also referred as feed-in or preferential tariff) or (ii) project specific tariff and also determined transmission tariff and regulations of open access under Section 62(1)(b) and 42(2) of the Act.

Under Section 3 of the Electricity Act 2003 Government of India notified tariff policy in January 2006 which in respect of Non-conventional sources of energy generation mandated that RPO should be made applicable by the SERCs latest by 1 April 2006 and that till non-conventional technologies can compete with conventional sources in terms of cost of electricity, procurement by distribution companies shall be done at preferential tariffs determined by the Commissions and that Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) will issue guidelines for pricing non-firm power from non–conventional sources where such procurement is not through competitive bidding.

State Government's Policies were also amended from time to time. For example, Rajasthan Government issued separate 'Policy for Promotion of Electricity Generation from Wind, 2003' which, interalia specified allotment of land for wind farm and wind monitoring stations. It was further amended by 'Policy for Promoting Generation of Electricity through Non-Conventional Energy Sources,2004' wherein year-wise tariff was specified. The Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Commission (RERC) notified its regulation for renewable energy in November 2006 specifying the RPO for wind and biomass power and provisions of determinations of their tariff, grid connectivity,banking and other charges. The RPO could also be fulfilled by purchase of Renewable energy certificate (REC) from renewable power plant established under REC scheme. These proactive actions of Governments and regulatory commissions have been the major factor for the growth of RE generation.

Tariff policy was revised in January, 2016 and its para 30(2) provided that procurement of power by Distribution Licensee from renwable energy source projects above the notified capacity, shall be done through competitive bidding process, from the date to be notified[13]. The Government of India notified in December 2017, the guidelines for tariff based competitive bidding process for procurement of power from Grid connected Wind Power projects. With these guidelines, determination of generic tariff for Wind and solar power plants were not undetaken by SERCs. Subsequent regulations, for instance RERC (Terms and Conditions for Tariff determination from Renewable Energy Sources) 2020 provides for determination of generic tariff for bio-mass / bio gas/ bio gassifier based power plants only and project specific tariff for other RE power plants.

Under the revised tariff policy of 2016, the central govt through order dated 30 September 2016 and its amendments, notified that for generation projects based on wind and solar resources (including solar -wind hybrid projects with or without storage), awarded through competitive bidding process, no interstate transmission charges and losses will be levied for 25 years from date of commissioning on transmission of the electricity through the interstate transmission

system for sale by such projects commissioned till 30.6.23.

The land resources required for onshore wind projects are gradually becoming a major constraint. India is surrounded by water on three sides and has coastline of about 7600 km and as per preliminary estimates offshore projects have potential of 36 GW off the coast of Gujarat and 35 GW off the cost of Tamil Nadu. Considering this, the Government had notified the "National off shore wind energy policy" in October 2015 and has set a target of 5.0 GW of offshore wind installations by 2022 and 30 GW by 2030 in order to bring the economy of scale and localisation of necessary ecosystem for offshore wind energy sector.[14,15] The first offshore wind energy project of 1.0 GW capacity was planned in the identified zone-B off the coast of Gujarat Presently, their generation cost is high but with exhaustion of best windy sites and upward movements of market determined tariffs for offshore wind energy, in future onshore wind energy may become cost competitive.

Solar Power generation

Initially on account of high capital and operational cost, about 5 kW battery storage solar PV plants for 3-4 hour street lighting were used to be provided in few selected villages every year. These were planned and executed by REDA in Rajasthan. Mega watt scale power generation plant at California in USA and other parts in the world were solar thermal type. Considering this, in 1990s MNES constituted an expert committee to propose MW scale piolet solar thermal plant in India to harness solar power and gain experience. Rajasthan or Gujarat was considered on account of vast barren land and 300 or more clear sky days in a year. A 35 MW standalone solar thermal plant was recommended at Mathaniya village in Jodhpur district (Rajasthan) considering availability of long-term solar insolation data for Jodhpur city. With the liberalisation of the economy, Rajasthan also invited tenders for setting up of thermal and solar power plants. However, besides execution of PPA and selection of site, solar power plant did not progress further. The World Bank evinced interest in Mathania solar thermal power project and this project was converted to 140

MW integrated solar combined cycle power plant to have 35 MW solar energy input and rest by HSD fuel but even with repeated biddings this project did not materialise.

MNRE announced supporting 50 MW solar project both for PV and thermal in 11th Plan by providing generation-based incentive through its notification in 2008 specifying maximum subsidy of Rs 12/kWh for solar PV and Rs 10/kWh for solar thermal for a period of 10 years subject to some conditions. Under this scheme 5 MW per developer and 10 MW per state has been considered. RERC in April 2008 decided tariff of Rs 15.78 / kWh for PV and Rs 13.78 / kWh for CSP for 10 MW projects under MNRE GBI scheme and tariff of Rs.0.18 per kWh lower for projects up to 50 MW project over and above MNRE scheme. First MW scale 5 MW solar PV plant was commissioned under this scheme in Rajasthan by Nov 2009 at Khimsar. Around that time, 2 MW solar power plant in Punjab and 2 MW in West Bengal were also commissioned.

These led to the interest of private sector in solar power generation. Eleven numbers of petitions were filed for determining project specific tariffs before RERC in 2009. With six of them, requesting for generic tariff, RERC determined 25 years generic tariff for solar thermal and solar PV projects in 2010.

National Action plan on climate change was launched in June 2008 with eight key missions. One of them was Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission(JNNSM) This Mission envisaged a target of installing 20000 MW solar power plant by FY2022 in three phases. First phase to be completed by 2013 with grid connected solar power generation to 1100 MW utilising solar thermal and photovoltaic technologies[16]. In order to minimise the impact on tariff, the centre. considered the option to bundle solar power with unallocated quota of 15% in central sector thermal power stations. For supplying bundled solar power to State discoms, NTPC Vidhyut Vyapar Nigam limited (NVVNL), a subsidiary trading company of NTPC, was designated. NVNNL was to have PPA with Developers to purchase solar power fed to 33 kV and above grid in accordance with tariff and PPA duration as fixed by

CERC, bundle it with equivalent Megawatt capacity (out of unallocated quota of NTPC power stations) to be allocated by Ministry of Power considering the rate determined by CERC and sale the bundled power to States utilities at the rates determined by CERC. Considering the fact that some of the grid connected solar power projects are at various stages of development, the Government of India considered migration of such solar power projects, from their respective existing arrangements to ones envisaged under JNNSM subject to consent of distribution utility and the developer.[17] Consequently 11 projects of 66 MW in Rajasthan migrated to JNNSM.[18]

Thereafter, tariff based competitive biddings were held for solar power projects by NVVNL and by SECI after its creation. Falling prices of PV modules and inverters in international market and competitions among developers resulted in continuous reduction in tariff from Rs 17.91 to 9.28 per kWh in 2011 to Rs 2.44 per kWh in May 2017 to Rs 1.99 per kWh in 2020. It has then shown rising trend in bidding of SECI for 1,785 MW of solar projects (Tranche IV) in Rajasthan with bid tariff of Rs 2.17 per kWh in 2021. Solar tariff has been affected by prices of imported modules etc., in international market, production capacity and price of indigenous wafers and modules, interest rates for lending, safeguard duty imposed before April 2022. Levy of 40 per cent import duty on photovoltaic modules and 25 per cent duty on photovoltaic cells in 2022 (to protect domestic manufacturers from competing imports mainly from China) is likely to raise solar tariff. Competitive biddings for solar power projects were more successful as from onset, investors and developers were not the supplier / manufacturers of solar power plant modules and with competitive bidding, price reduction of components got reflected in tariff.

Green corridor

Paris Agreement of 2016 intended Nationally Determined Contribution targets for renewable energy generation. India made commitment of producing 50 per cent of its total electricity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030. In 2018, India set a target of producing 175 GW by 2022 and 500 GW by 2030 from renewable energy.[19] With

solar PV energy generation tariff going below grid parity, demand for it has risen and penetration of wind and solar renewable energy power plant capacity has increased to 24.2 per cent on all India basis. Penetration is much higher in renewable energy rich States. Solar resources in renewable energy States were away from load centres, requiring augmentation of transmission system. For the addition of renewable energy capacity of 32,713 MW during 12th Plan Period,[20] Green Energy Corridor scheme for the development of the intra and interstate transmission system, setting up of Renewable Energy Management Centre (REMC) and the control infrastructure like, reactive compensation, storage systems, etc., was conceived for the renewable rich States of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. PGCIL was appointed as Project Management Consultant for 11 REMC projects at 11 locations (SLDCs of above 7states, their 3 RLDCs and NLDC). Intra State transmission schemes are to be funded by 20 per cent State Government equity, 40 per cent grant from National Clean Energy Fund and 40 per cent soft loan and the interstate transmission schemes to be funded by 30 per cent equity by PGCIL and 70 per cent soft loan.

Solar power projects can be set up anywhere in the country. However, for the Individual projects of smaller capacity, developer has to acquire land, get land use changed, take various permissions, have site development, draw separate transmission line(s) to nearest substation, arrange water etc., which incur cost and takes long time. To overcome these at individual developer level, the scheme for "Development of Solar Parks and Ultra-Mega Solar Power Projects" was rolled out in December 2014 by the Government of India with an objective to facilitate the solar project developers to set up projects in a plug and play model.[21] Grid integration of solar power parks in States, of about 20,000 MW capacity was envisaged and works related Transmission schemes for Ananthapur, Pavagada, Rewa, Bhadla-III, Bhadla-IV, Essel, Banaskantha & Fatehgarh solar parks was assigned to PGCIL. The transmission system for number of solar parks has been commissioned.

Biomass power generation

India has bio-mass generation potential of 42 GW against which existing installed capacity is 10206 MW. Parali burning by farmers is causing heavy pollution in National capital and its adjoining areas. For promotion of bio-mass power plants, in 2001 in its NES policy, Rajasthan Government specified a radial distance of 50 km of the site of the first power plant to be reserved for that biomass power plant. On account of no organised biomass market and biomass put to other use like brick kilns, Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) etc., its availability at reasonable price is becoming more difficult and biomass power generation cost is high.

Municipal solid waste (MSW) can also be used for power generation by burning it directly in boilers to generate steam or by anaerobic fermentation of biomass to produce methane. Picking of plastic, cotton and papers by rag pickers results in uncertainty of combustible materials in MSW and hence its calorific value making the use of MSW for power generation unremunerative. Biomass & MSW generation has not picked due to these.

Tidal Power

India is estimated to have tidal power potential of 12.45 GW and wave power potential of 41.3 GW. Tidal power is harnessed by storing sea water during high tides and generating electricity by discharging it through turbines during low tides. The tidal range in the Gulf of Kutch is about 8 meters and in the Sundarban region 6-7 meters. Wave energy in the form of motion of ocean waves can be extracted using energy conversion devices. Promising locations for wave energy plants are Western Coast of Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Kanyakumari, Southern tip of India, etc. Wave energy plants too have high capital cost. For 1.125 MW wave energy plant at A&N islands cost is Rs 60 Crore and for 8 MW plant of Indian Navy it is Rs 2000 Crore.[22]

Geo-thermal Power

There are around 300 geothermal hot springs in India, mostly in medium potential (100 C to 200 C) and low potential zones. The promising geothermal specific sites for electric power generation are two in Jammu & Kashmir and one each in Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Telangana & Maharashtra. No geothermal power plant has been set up in the country so far due to high upfront cost of Rs 30 Cr/ MW.[23]

Nuclear Power generation

Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited was created in 1987 for installation and operation of atomic power plants under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962. Nuclear ores in India is about 78,000 tonnes of uranium (which has 0.7% fissionable U_{235}) and about 518,000 tonnes of thorium. No nuclear reactor has been built on thorium in the world. The Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) in India is 500 MW nuclear reactor being constructed at the Madras Atomic Power Station (MAPS) in Kalpakkam. Above uranium resources, first used in natural uranium–fueled pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs), can produce about 420 GWe- years of electricity (GWe-years=8.76×10^9 kWh). Use of depleted uranium and separated plutonium from these PHWRs in fast breeder reactors (FBRs) could generate an additional 54,000 GWe-years of electricity. Thorium assemblies loaded in the blanket and low-power zones of FBRs, can produce uranium-233, which can produce an additional 358,000 GWe- years of electricity.[24]

Conclusion

As this brief review shows, renewable energy development in India has been initially through multi-purpose river valley projects. From the beginning of this century, emphasis has shifted to wind and solar energy. Power development, which was initially in government sector through budgetary support and foreign assistance, shifted to equity-debt financing and private sector participation. Wind and solar energy projects have been brought mainly by private sector. Enactment of laws and creation of organisations such as Central Electricity Authority,

State Electricity Boards, Regulatory Commissions promotional policies, enforcement of Renewable Purchase Obligation etc., has contributed to this development.

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Essay IX: Water Management in India

A History of Progress, Disregard, Achievements, and Way Forward

Ajitabh Sharma

Abstract

This paper examines water management policy and practices in India since Independence. Rising population, increasing urbanisation and a fast-growing economy has put immense pressure on the limited water resources of the country. The paper discusses the challenges country faces today in the water sector, and the way forward to overcome them. The paper is based on the work done by various policy research institutions, international organisations, and independent researchers. The paper concludes that while the country has made remarkable progress in managing its competing sectoral water demand the current approach of fragmented interventions is unsustainable. The paper further argues that an integrated approach hinged on water science, policy and coordinated action is the best chance for the country to tide over the current water crisis which is getting further exacerbated due to the changing climate.

Introduction

India is endowed with only 4% of global water resources to sustain 18% of world population.[1] According to the Ministry of Water Resources per capita availability of water in the country has reduced from 1816 cbm/year (cubic meter per year) in 2001 to 1545 cbm/year in 2011 and is estimated to further reduce to 1174 cbm/year by 2051.[2] India is already in the category of a 'water-stressed' nation as it has slipped below the *Falkenmark Index* threshold limit of 1700 cbm/capita/year of water availability for its people.

According to the United Nations, India's population in April 2023 touched 1,425,775,850, surpassing China for the first time.[3] UN World Urbanisation Prospects 2018 Revision[4] report claims that the Indian urban population will almost double between 2018 and 2050, from 461 to 877 million. India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies and its GDP is targeted to grow at 8.5% CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) between 2012 to 2047. The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) ranked India sixth among the world's largest manufacturing countries.[5] Moreover, under this pressing scenario agriculture sector remains the biggest guzzler consuming 80% of water resources of the country.[6]

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)[7] 2019-21 reveals that only 46% of households in the country have access to in-house or public tap water supply, and only 69% of households have improved and unshared toilet facilities. The Central Pollution Control Board in a report[8] submitted to the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2016 stated that 63% of sewage in India gets mixed with surface and groundwater sources. The groundwater quality in India is rapidly deteriorating because of over-abstraction, leading to increased exposure to fluoride and heavy metals, and due to the mixing of external contaminants like sewage, industrial pollutants, and pesticide and fertilisers into the aquifer systems.

Rising population, increasing urbanisation, rapid economic growth, depleting surface water resources, declining groundwater levels, and deteriorating quality — are all reasons for per capita water availability to fall below 1000 cbm/year making India a 'water-scarce' country. Under the business-as-usual scenario the demand-supply gap in water availability will reach unmanageable proportions, and if corrective policy measures are not taken at the earliest this would severely impact the socio-economic growth plans of the country.

Colonial Legacy

Two centuries of colonial policies impoverished the subcontinent on social, economic and ecological fronts. When India gained independence in 1947 the economy was primarily agrarian with agriculture contributing 54% share in GDP and providing the source of livelihood to about 60% of the population. The engineering and construction-driven water policies of the British while increasing the irrigation potential decimated the indigenous water systems and put India on a course of unsustainable water management practices. India inherited the economy destroyed by colonial actions and the partition of the subcontinent further sliced away the prime irrigated areas of Pakistan and Bangladesh (East Pakistan) out of its geography. This posed a serious challenge to the policymakers to ensure food security for independent India. Under these pressing circumstances, it was not easy for India to make any kind of radical shift in its irrigation policies. Policymakers in independent India walked the same path as the British, of the love for mega irrigation projects, and continued adding new irrigation areas with the sole focus on technical designs. Groundwater resource was a new addition which fuelled the great Indian Green Revolution during the 1960s.

Priorities, Practices and Achievements

Five-Year planning began in 1952 and the primary focus of the government was to invest heavily in large multipurpose irrigation projects. Bhakra Nangal, Hirakud and Damodar Valley were the stepping stones in the first two Five-Year plans in this policy direction. The importance given to these projects can be gauged from the remarks of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India. While commencing the work of Bhakra Nangal Dam Nehru termed these mega engineering projects as the 'Temples of modern India.'[9] As a result of persistent efforts, the net irrigated area in the country increased by 22% from 20.85 million hectares (Mha) in 1950 to 68.38 Mha in 2015.[10] Canal irrigation during the period almost doubled from 8.29 Mha to 16.18 Mha, and irrigation from tube wells and other wells increased by 618% from 5.98 Mha to 42.96 Mha, the rest was

from other sources. In relative share terms, the percentage of canal irrigation reduced from 40% to 24%, and groundwater increased from 46% to 65%[11] in the period between 1950 and 2015. Undoubtedly, rising irrigation potential, both surface and groundwater, was a major contributing factor which helped India tide over the food scarcity, rather it made the country more than self-sufficient.

The fixity of engineering design is characteristic of the large canal irrigation systems, and it creates topographical limitations to the benefits of the projects. Whereas groundwater aquifers are more widespread and are relatively less obstructed by the bio-physical environment, making them more equitable and distributional. Coupled with advancing tube-well technology and subsidised electricity tariffs groundwater became a major source of irrigation in independent India. The new irrigation potential, high-yielding varieties of seeds, and the use of fertilisers and pesticides — beginning in the late 1960s, termed as green revolution increased the production of food grains in the country multi-fold. From 1950 to 2014, India's wheat production increased from 6.46 million tonnes to 95.85 million tonnes, and rice production increased from 20.58 million tonnes to 106.65 million tonnes.[12] Since independence, the population in India has tripled, but the food grain production has quadrupled, marking the exceptional strides made by the country in food security.

The big reservoir multipurpose irrigation projects were showcased to the world as the pride of independent and modern India. But, the old colonial canal revolution and the independent India's mega reservoir projects soon started exhibiting limitations in various forms. They were not flexible in operations, the interstate food security disparity was rising despite heavy investment in these projects, the full design potential of these projects was not getting realised, poor repair and maintenance were common, inequitable water distribution to the tail-end farmers, and there were limited techno-economically feasible sites for similar mega projects. This was putting a constraint on addition of new irrigation potential for future growth. Moreover, the legacy of centralised command and control administration of these projects had bred deep inefficiencies in operations.

The second Irrigation Commission,[13] 1972 highlighted the problems of the large irrigation projects in the country. This led to the beginning of the Command Area Development Programmes (CADP) in 1974-75 by the government of India as a solution to the problems. Unfortunately, even CADP ignored the real issue of inflexible design and community-disengaging management practices of big irrigation projects in the country (Bottrall, 1992).[14] In 1985, the Government of India prompted the State Governments to promote farmers' participation in water management and maintenance of watercourses in the CAD projects on a pilot basis.

The National Water Policy (NWP) 1987[15] stressed equity and social justice in water allocation in irrigation systems through on-farm works and management improvement. Another reform was the World Bank assisted National Water Management Project 1987 (NWMP). As per the World Bank document, "The purpose of the project was to increase agricultural productivity and farm incomes through the provision of a more reliable, predictable and equitable irrigation service…".[16] The outcome was mixed, which led to the advent of Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) practices in India.

In the ninth plan (1997-2002), an independent working group was formed for adopting PIM which recommended taking up 2000 pilot PIM projects in the country. Again, progress remained tepid in the actual formation of Water User Associations (WUA), but several policy initiatives for PIM were undertaken during this period. The NWP 2002[17] emphasised participatory approach in water management not only for the water users but also for other stakeholders. In the tenth plan (2002-2007) a working group was formed for 'Private Sector and Beneficiaries Participation in the Irrigation Sector'. The working group analysing the progress of recommendation of the previous plan period suggested the modified and more comprehensive action in the form of a new programme 'Command Area Development and Management (CADAM)' which covered both CAD works and the grass-roots irrigation management practices by providing legal powers to the WUAs on — water distribution, role in the setting of rates, collection of revenue and capacity building of farmers.[18]

In totality, the PIM has to date remained riddled with regional socio-economic and political hurdles. PIM has not been able to take off to make any major impact on the irrigation water management practices except in very few project areas. Significant improvement in the performance of irrigation projects and an increase in agricultural productivity is the foremost objective yet to be achieved.

The creation of new irrigation potential from surface water resources was mostly through large and medium sized projects (Gulati, 2016)[19] even after independence. The small and community-managed surface water sources continued to be neglected due to a lack of investment and government support. The expansion of groundwater abstraction as an alternative led to further neglect of these systems. These indigenous surface water sources in rural India used to render numerous other benefits like drinking water for humans, water for cattle, sites for religious practices, and as a means of recreation. There are several examples of sincere attempts made by states like Telangana, Maharashtra and Rajasthan to restore these traditional water systems. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment transferring small irrigation schemes to the panchayats in rural areas has also not been able to deliver much.

To enhance the productivity of land and promote water conservation in drought-afflicted regions, the government launched the Drought Prone Area Development Programme (DPAP) in 1973-74. After the recommendations of the Hanumantha Rao Committee (1994) the programme was implemented considering the watershed as a unit for planning and management. The committee also recommended community-based management as the key to the success of the watershed projects. The watershed programme guidelines were successively amended in the years 2001, 2003, 2006, and 2008 emphasising the role of NGOs, village panchayats, other institutions and gram-sabhas in watershed management.[20] But, achieving the goal of collective action for common good – as in Ralegaon Siddhi — remained elusive because of the socio-economic heterogeneity in rural areas. In 2009-10, for the success of the concept, Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) was launched merging

the Drought Prone Areas Programme, Desert Development Programme and Integrated Wastelands Development Programme.

Policy action in water management before independence centred around arranging water for irrigation. Drinking water and sanitation were a collateral benefit but did not get the priority emphasis except in a few densely populated urban towns. In independent India, increased focus on drinking water and sanitation services was a major policy intervention by the governments at the Centre and in the States as well. Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) and Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) are the breakthrough programmes in these two areas.

Since 1960, providing clean water, safe sanitation and hygiene services have remained the primary focus of all governments in India. UNICEF has been actively supporting the country to achieve these objectives. The status of progress in the provision of drinking water and sanitation services can be assessed by analysing the advancement made in achieving sustainable development goal 6 (SDG 6 Clean water and Sanitation).[21] Despite consistent efforts, the outcome has been far from ideal. As per the SDG Index Report 2019,[22] India scores only 56.6% in achieving SDG 6 targets. The report suggests that India may fail to achieve the SDG 6 targets by 2030 unless there is a massive push by the government in the sector. As of 2017, 163 million people in India do not have access to safe drinking water and 210 million do not have access to improved sanitation. According to a NITI Aayog report, by 2019, 75% of households did not have drinking water on premises, and 84% of rural households did not have piped water access.[23] World Bank has estimated that inadequate water and sanitation facilities reduce India's GDP by about 6.5%.[24] The Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) launched on 2 October 2014 with the aim of promoting sanitation has been acclaimed across the world. SBM is claimed to have built more than 100 million household toilets and created more than 700 open defecation free districts across the country. The National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS) 2018-19 has concluded that 93.1% of rural households have access to toilets and that 96.5% of them use these facilities.[25]

In May 2019, the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation and the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation were merged into a single Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS) to manage the water issues with an integrated approach. Water is a cross-cutting sector, and the government has made policy interventions in several areas to address the challenges in the water sector. Some of these important current interventions are – the National Water Policy; National Water Mission; Jal Jeevan Mission; Swachh Bharat Mission; Namami Gange; Atal Bhujal Yojna; Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayai Yojna; Command Area Development and Water Management Programme; National Hydrology Project; National Groundwater Management Scheme; National River Interlinking Programme; Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation; and, Hydro-Meteorological Data Dissemination Policy. Despite the best efforts of the centre, states, and other stakeholders varied challenges are encountered in finding sustainable solutions to our water problems.

Challenges Ahead

The current water management practices are posing serious challenges to society and policymakers to attain water security. Some such prominent challenges are discussed in this section hereinafter.

Water Stress: Quantity

India possesses only 4% of the world's freshwater resources to sustain 18% of the world population. This is a strong indicator that the country needs to be full of prudence in managing its water resources. According to the NITI Aayog report, India's utilisable water resource is 1123 BCM (billion cubic meters) per annum with 690 BCM as surface water and 433 BCM as groundwater resource. The total demand for water in 2010 was 813 BCM which is estimated to rise to 1093 BCM by 2025, and 1447 BCM by 2050 steeply surpassing the 1123 BCM of availability.[26] These projections are evidence that under the business-as-usual scenario the country will be facing acute water security issues early on. The per capita availability of water in the country has reduced from 1816 cbm/year (cubic meter per year) in

2001 to 1545 cbm/year in 2011, which further reduces to 1421 cbm/year by 2021 and is estimated to reduce to 1174 cbm/year by 2051.[27] India is already a 'water-stressed' nation as it has slipped below the *Falkenmark Index* threshold limit of 1700 cbm/capita/year of water availability.

At a granular level, the picture gets grimmer as water resources in India are highly skewed in time and space. India receives an average annual rainfall of around 1100 mm and is concentrated over four months from June to September. There is a huge variance of 11000 mm in Cherrapunji (Meghalaya) in the east to 100 mm in Rajasthan in the arid west. Despite such a monsoon pattern of varying intensity and limited days, the Himalayan glaciers give rise to perennial rivers in India like the Indus, Ganga and the Brahmaputra.

The Indian catchment consists of 20 river basins. The Ganga basin is the largest comprising 25.6% of the country's geographical area. It is the largest basin in terms of area, population and water resource, with the largest surface and groundwater storage. But, due to high population density the per capita water availability of 1093 cbm per annum is less than the national average. Whereas Brahmaputra and Barak basins due to sparse population have annual per capita availability of 11782 cbm.[28] The 10 river basins – Krishna, Cauvery, Subarnarekha, Pennar, Mahi, Sabarmati, Tapi, and a few other western and southern basins, with per capita availability of less than 1000 cbm per annum are water scarce. Other 3 major river basins — Ganga, Indus and Godavari, with per capita availability in the range of 1000 to 1700 cbm per annum are water stressed. It is estimated that by 2025 Ganga and Indus basins will also become water scarce. Water reservoir storage structures have a critical role in the economy facilitating irrigation, electricity generation, fisheries and providing resiliency in times of floods and droughts. To make things more complicated live storage capacity is also unevenly distributed across the country, 57% is concentrated in five states Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa and Gujrat in that order.[29]

The Indo-Gangetic and Brahmaputra plains have enormous groundwater reserves. Hilly areas of the country have aquifers having low storage capacity. Parts of Rajasthan and Gujrat aquifers do not get enough recharge because of less rainfall. In peninsular India, aquifers have varying yields. The total annual groundwater recharge is 432 BCM and the extractable part is 393 BCM. The 67% of groundwater gets recharged from rainfall and the remaining 33% by other secondary sources such as applied irrigation water, surface water bodies, and water conservation structures. The Groundwater Yearbook 2019-2020[30] of the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) states that out of total groundwater extraction of 249 BCM, 89% is consumed for irrigation and the remaining 11% is consumed for domestic, industrial and other uses. India is the world's largest groundwater extractor.

According to the NITI Aayog CWMI[31] report, 54% of groundwater wells are witnessing a continuous decline in water levels putting stress on all sectors, particularly on drinking water needs. About 60% of irrigation and 85% of rural drinking water needs are met by groundwater. The Easement Act 1882 allows the landowners to utilise groundwater under the land held by them. This provision while creating equity and ease of extraction in the initial phases has led to the problem of over-exploitation with time, causing fast depletion and high risk to the agriculture and drinking water needs of the country.

Water Stress: Quality

Water contamination — from the point sources such as urban sewage and industrial effluents, and diffused sources such as mining, chemical fertilisers and pesticides — is a major cause of concern for sustainable water management. Quality compromised water not only restricts its use but also impacts the health of humans and other species and impairs aquatic ecosystems. It causes loss of productivity and loss of life. It gives rise to externalities imposing economic costs on households for health care, widens gender inequality and reduces education opportunities for children. Due to the increased level of contamination ecological functions of wetlands, marshes, mangroves and rivers also get adversely impacted.

According to a Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) 2009[32] report, sewage generated in the country pollutes 303 stretches of rivers affecting 650 towns including 35 metropolitan cities. The level of contamination in rivers Ganga and Yamuna is the quintessence of how these holy rivers have been treated by us. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)[33] 2019-21 reveals that only 46% of households in the country have access to in-house or public tap water supply, and only 69% of households have improved and unshared toilet facilities. Central Pollution Control Board in a report[34] submitted to National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2016 stated that 63% of sewage in India gets mixed with surface and groundwater sources.

Out of 718 rural districts in the country groundwater in 386 is nitrate affected, 335 fluorides affected, 301 iron, 212 with salinity, and 154 are arsenic affected. The concentration of other heavy metals is high, lead in 93 districts, chromium in 30 districts and cadmium in 24 districts. To illustrate, out of 11 districts of Delhi, 8 have excess nitrates, 7 have excess fluoride, 3 have excess lead and 2 have excess arsenic in their groundwater.[35] Apart from geochemical leaching due to high abstraction, discharge of toxins from industries and landfills, contamination from fertilisers and pesticides, percolation of sewage, and saline water ingression in coastal areas are also deteriorating groundwater quality at a fast pace.

The lack of networked water services and absence of consumer-targeted subsidies for distributed supply solutions — like a voucher or card-driven water kiosks, water cans, regulated safe water tanker supplies, and decentralised sanitation —are causing severe health issues for the poor. Health risks impose heavy economic costs on poor families, which at times also disproportionately raises inequality.

Sectoral Challenges

Among sectors, agriculture uses the largest 80% of the total water consumed in India, about 10% is consumed by domestic, and another 10% by the industrial sector.[36] As water resources are limited it is pertinent to understand the nature and extent of challenges faced

by different sectors including those by aquatic ecosystems before charting out a way forward to confront the water crisis in the right earnest.

Agriculture: The demand for irrigation water, which was 688 BCM in 2010 is expected to rise to 910 BCM by 2025, and 1072 BCM by 2050.[37] About 80% of water in India is used for agriculture purposes, 60% of irrigation is from groundwater and 89% of groundwater is consumed for this. The contribution of agriculture to GDP was 17% in 2017 and the share in employment in 2020-2021 increasing marginally reached 39.4%.[38]

Despite the continued focus of all governments since independence on creating new irrigation potential net irrigated area of 65.26 million hectares (Mha) is only 46% of the net sown area of 141 Mha. Further, the gross irrigated area (91.53 Mha) is also only 47% of the gross cropped area – implying, that even after seven decades almost half of the cropped area in the country is rainfed and is dependent on the vagaries of the monsoon, most common to which are droughts (Gulati, 2016).[39] This makes the water security issue more critical from the perspective of livelihood and food security in the country.

Another problem the irrigation sector faces is the gap in the Irrigation Potential Created (IPC) and the Irrigation Potential Utilised (IPU). Out of a total of 113.5 Mha of Irrigation Potential Created only 87.9 Mha of Irrigation Potential has been Utilised by the 11th Plan (2012), leaving a gap of about 23%. This is worrisome considering the investments made in creating this potential which is lying unutilised.

Easy access to groundwater, pump technology innovation and low electricity tariffs have caused a rapid increase in irrigation-area in the country since the 1970s. Groundwater is a more equitable resource. But, its unsustainable extraction for agriculture purposes has become a cause of serious concern for irrigation and drinking water needs in the country, jeopardising food security and increasing the health risks.

On the water productivity front, as per the Central Water Commission 2014 report,[40] India uses two to three times more water to produce a

unit of major food crops when compared to China, Brazil and USA. The overall groundwater system irrigation efficiency in India is 65-75% and the overall surface water irrigation efficiency is as low as in the range of 30-65%. The price support mechanism has more effectively worked for rice and wheat only which are highly water-intensive crops and heavily dependent on groundwater. An average Punjab farmer uses twice the water than in West Bengal to grow one unit of rice when Punjab receives less than 40% of rainfall as compared to West Bengal. India is only second to Pakistan in the world in having the highest water footprint in paddy production.

The above challenges get amplified with climate change impacting the availability of water for agriculture, this is discussed later in the section.

Domestic: The demand for domestic water at 56 BCM in 2010 is expected to rise to 73 BCM by 2025 and to 102 BCM by 2050. The major driving force behind this rising demand is identified as increasing urbanisation and changing lifestyles putting immense pressure on water supplies. According to a United Nation report, India's urban population will almost double between 2018 and 2050, from 461 to 877 million people. On the sourcing side, groundwater, which is depleting fast supports about 50%[41] of urban and 85% of rural drinking water supply in the country. Coupled with deteriorating quality as elaborated before, unsustainable groundwater management is looming as the most critical challenge for the policymakers to overcome.

The Latest Census of 2011[42] is the most comprehensive database on water services in the country. According to this information drinking-water coverage of urban households is – 70.6% through tap water (only 62% is treated tap water); 20.8% from handpump and tube wells; 6.2% from wells; and 2.5% from other sources.[43] Out of tap water coverage of 70.6%, 71% are on-premises, 20.7% near premises, and 8.1% away from premises. As per Census 2011 out of a total urban population of 377 million, 64.5 million are slum dwellers making full coverage of urban households more challenging. As against 70.6%

tap water coverage in India — China is 91%, South Africa is 86%, and Brazil is 80%. In Indian cities, water supply duration ranges from 1 hour to 6 hours, whereas it is 24 hours in China and Brazil, and 22 hours in Vietnam. Short-duration supply leads to excess storage and wastage of water.

Drinking water supply level in India is in the range of 37-298 litre per capita per day (lpcd). According to Central Public Health and Environmental Engineering Organisation (CPHEEO) average water supply in urban local bodies is 69.25 lpcd, which is way less than the prescribed standard of 150 lpcd for metropolitan and 135 lpcd for non-metropolitan cities.[44] For the provision of safe sanitation services, only 46% of urban households have closed drainage, 37% have open drainage and 18% have no drainage services at all. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)[45] 2019-21 reveals that only 46% of households in the country have access to in-house tap water supply, and only 69% of households have improved and unshared toilet facilities. Central Pollution Control Board in a report[46] submitted to NGT in 2016 stated that 63% of sewage in India gets mixed with surface and groundwater sources.

The NITI Aayog report released in 2018 raised an alarm in policy circles stating that 21 Indian cities are in imminent danger of losing groundwater resources impacting 100 million people. The report went ahead to argue that 40% of the Indian population would be living in water-stressed cities by 2030.[47]

Industrial: The demand for Industrial water (including energy needs) in the country was 17 BCM in 2010. It is expected to rise to 38 BCM by 2025, and to 193 BCM by 2050. The industrial sector has a substantial share of 23.52% of GDP (2020) in the economy. United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) ranked India sixth among the world's largest manufacturing countries.[48] The current emphasis of the government on boosting the manufacturing capacity of the country through the policies like Make in India, Production Linked Incentive and National Infrastructure Pipeline in all likelihood will cause a further rise in water demand by the sector.

According to the UNICEF report 2013, the average water productivity of Indian industries is among the lowest at 7.5 US$/cubic meters. Whereas it is as high as 443.7 US$/cubic meters for the UK, 92.2 US$/cubic meters for Sweden, and 23.4 US$/cubic meters for Brazil. Moreover, the industry sector in India, consuming 2 to 3.5 times more water per unit of production as compared to other advanced economies, has a very high water footprint.

Apart from managing the rising demand the most critical challenge for the sector is to devise and implement policies to stop the release of industrial effluents to the water bodies and adopt technology to treat and reuse the water. The industry needs to work on reducing the water footprint by learning from the experiences of the advanced economies.

Aquatic Ecosystems: The aquatic ecosystems such as lakes, ponds, rivers, flood plains, estuaries, wetlands, marshes, lagoons, mangroves, coral reefs, and coastal process conserve water and provide resilience both against water scarcity and surpluses. The wetlands and other water bodies also help in purifying the water. The natural water flow cycle of these aquatic systems is getting adversely impacted by human action and climate change. They are getting rapidly destroyed due to heavy urbanisation, industrial growth, deforestation, siltation, catchment degradation, tourism activities, encroachments, intensive agricultural practices, rising contamination, construction of storage structures and over-abstraction of surface water and groundwater aquifers.

A programme by the government of India to assess the status of health of wetlands observes that one in every four wetlands in the country has low to very-low ecosystem health and is under high to very-high threat. In the last three decades, nearly one-third of the country's wetlands have been lost to urbanisation, agriculture expansion and pollution.[49] The decimation of wetlands in urban areas is one of the most prominent causes of urban floods and water insecurity. Protecting and restoring aquatic ecosystems enabling them to render

essential ecosystem services would require long-term participative efforts from all stakeholders.

Transboundary Disputes

India has witnessed transboundary water disputes among the States within the country and also with its neighbouring countries since independence. With rising demand and climate change impacting water availability in the river basins, amicably resolving these disputes would be one of the most pressing challenges for the governments in future. Transboundary disputes have become more problematic in recent times as the water-sharing States and countries have started questioning even the provisions of the historically agreed water treaties and compacts. The grim side of the picture is the developing perception in the country that even the parliament and the apex court are unable to resolve the interstate water disputes and every other forum would seem to just pass the time whenever the crisis occurs.

Water, in the Constitution of India is a State subject, except for the matters relating to regulation and development of interstate rivers which is in the Union list. This has made water regulation a complex process as almost all major river basins and groundwater aquifers are spread in more than one state in the country. Interstate River Water Disputes Act, 1956 provides for the Centre to constitute tribunals to resolve these disputes. Eight such tribunals have been formed thus far, most notable among which are — Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry); Ravi and Beas Water Tribunal (Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan); and Godavari Water Disputes Tribunal (Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa) (Modak, 2021).[50]

The extraction of surface and groundwater is done within the jurisdictional limits as per the prevalent policy guideline of the State. But, the States in the upper reaches are better positioned to capture more water and reduce its availability for the downstream States. Now there is a growing demand from some States to add groundwater extraction, from the aquifer beneath the shared rivers, also to the

amount of water used. This will redefine the water balance equation as until now interstate water sharing is for the surface river flows only. This has made the mediation over the disputes more complicated for the decision-makers.

India shares its rivers with several international neighbours including China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. Ganga, Brahmaputra and Indus are important river systems which India shares with its neighbours. These river basins are of immense importance to India and for the future socio-economic growth of the country. The water-sharing treaties and agreements signed with these countries have become more relevant in times of increasing water crisis and the higher capability of all partner countries to tap the most difficult of the waters of the shared basins.

With time, the geopolitical and economic strength of these countries has also drastically changed. The construction of a large number of storage structures by China in upstream of Brahmaputra[51] is a cause of concern both for India and Bangladesh. The 1960 Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan has again opened conflict, and the Baglihar and Kishanganga projects have come under dispute.[52] India shares 54 rivers with Bangladesh. Disputes with Bangladesh over the Farakka barrage, Hardinge Bridge and Teesta River have remained in news ever since (Pandey, 2012).[53] If not resolved amicably the transboundary water disputes are bound to get more severe and difficult to settle.

Investment Deficit and Ageing Infrastructure

A Bank of America Merrill Lynch 2019 report[54] states that India needs an investment of about 270 billion US$ between the next 5 to 15 years for providing piped water supply to all homes by 2024, cleaning Ganga, transporting water to water-scarce regions and irrigation projects. A UN 2021 report titled 'Ageing Water Storage Infrastructure: An Emerging Global Risk' states that of the 5200 large dams built so far in India 1100 have already reached 50 years of age, and the number will increase to 4400 by 2050 (Parera, 2021).[55] To

illustrate, Krishna Raja Sagar dam is 91 years and the Mettur dam is 88 years old. There are some dams more than 120 years old. This implies that 80% of the country's large dam stock will get obsolete by 2050. According to another CWC report on a survey of 243 important reservoirs, siltation of dams is severely impacting the useful life of these projects. Likewise, the drinking water supply infrastructure in many cities is more than 50 years old. In some, it is beyond 100 years. The ageing water distribution network in most cities has crossed its threshold design capacity to cater to the rising demand of the growing population.

India spends about 6% of its GDP on infrastructure but the share of water remains inadequate. The water sector is not on priority of private investment because of the low rate of return, huge sunk costs, and no framework for capital and operational cost recovery which increases the risk. Moreover, suitable government interventions in financial markets are not forthcoming to attract private capital in the sector.

Climate Change Impact: Water-Energy-Food-Climate Nexus

India ranks 7th on the Global Climate Risk Index 2021 (Eckstein, 2021).[56] The index analyses to what extent countries and regions have been affected by the impact of weather-related events (storms, floods, heatwaves etc). The impact is calculated in terms of fatalities and the direct economic losses from it. The report highlights that the monsoon surplus caused major hardships to people in India. Floods caused by heavy rains were responsible for 1800 deaths and displacement of 1.8 million people, and economic damage caused was to the tune of 10 billion US$. The report further states that the Himalayan glaciers, the coastlines and the desert in India have been severely affected by global warming and that there has been an increased intensity and frequency of cyclones and an increased rate of glacier melting in India. As per Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report[57] released on 28 Feb 2022, India faces a high degree of vulnerability to extreme events of floods, cyclones and heatwaves, and a decline in water availability and agricultural productivity. Indus and

Ganga river basins would be more severely impacted. India's energy systems will become less reliable. This all is evidence that there is a high likelihood of climate change impacting our water, energy and food security systems and managing water-food-energy-climate next with strong mitigation and adaptation measures would be the most tedious challenge for the policymakers to overcome.

Water Governance

The key to water security is good water governance. But unfortunately, the water sector in India suffers from weak, inefficient and ineffective and governance. Water governance reforms are an essential component of holistic reforms in the sector.

Water management in India is highly fragmented with more than 17 different departments and agencies dealing with water-related issues — ranging from the now Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS), Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Power, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Central Water Commission, Central Ground Water Board, Central Pollution Control Board, Indian Metrological Department, Inland Waterways Authority of India, and the corresponding departments in the states. MoJS is dependent on this large number of organisations for policy interventions in the sector. Water being on the State list, the Centre collaborating with States is imperative for implementing long-term solutions to our water problems.

The regulatory environment in the water sector is disaggregated, weak and lacks uniformity among States. Regulating standards for — health safety, discharge of treated wastewater, industry effluents, zero liquid discharge, diffused pollution, sanitation services, water supply levels, groundwater extraction, pricing mechanism, utility efficiency, and demand side management are a few areas needing urgent attention of the government.

India manages its water with the legacy of a supply-driven engineering approach with limited or no participation from the community.

Demand side management is a low priority in the policy framework. Water is getting scarcer by the day, valuing its use has to be the underlying principle for sectoral allocation. Pricing water is an idea not to be ignored in its entirety. Water governance in India completely misses out on this. An appropriate regulatory framework for valuing water while keeping equity issues in the front is a challenge to be overcome. Whatever business model we adopt the key idea is to arrange requisite financial resources to ensure provision of safe and reliable water and sanitation services to all. Efficient water supply organisations are the backbone for achieving this. But, India lacks a robust utility framework for rendering water services, particularly to the urban areas.

The water and sanitation service-providing agencies in India have weak internal governance and mechanisms for external engagement are almost absent. These agencies are nowhere close to a utility framework in their functioning making them inefficient and ineffective in operations. Adopting appropriate business models and improving the governance of these organisations would require a series of reforms in the sector.

Way Forward

The previous section discussed the water challenges India faces mostly on account of the supply-driven strategy, non-participation of stakeholders, and not valuing the ecosystem services rendered by water. This section focuses on the way forward to overcome these challenges.

Water Science, Climate Change, and the Nexus

The water cycle is a complex hydroclimatic phenomenon. It has a natural pattern of variations and climate change induced variability and uncertainties. Climate change may be natural or induced by human action. Understanding the risk and opportunities of the changing water cycle and its implications on intensifying demand for water is the most fundamental challenge for scientists and policymakers.

Feedback of this scientific understanding is imperative to policy planning for managing water sustainably.

Water Science and Climate Change: Various scientific models are in use across the world to analyse the role of hydroclimatic variability and extreme events. These models help in determining water availability and the hydrological hazards it can create. A few examples are Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP), Global Circulation Model (GCM) and Regional Circulation Model (RCM). Increasing our understanding of the climate system will improve our capability in forecasting the events on a wider range of timescales from short-term seasonal forecasting to long-term climate projections (Dadson, 2020 will enable the policymakers in reducing uncertainty while choosing between various options to mitigate or adapt to these extreme hydroclimatic events.).[58] Models for groundwater science such as the Modular Finite Difference Groundwater Flow Model (MODFLOW) analysing storage, recharge and abstraction, and even the quality aspects are in extensive use internationally. Water quality models at the catchment level such as Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) and Integrated Catchments Model (INCA) for diffused pollution are also being used. Many models exist from the scale of local catchment models to global hydrological patterns. A few are used in India too. These models are essential for predictions at the local level to assess the impact on rainfall, catchment behaviour, diffused pollution, groundwater and surface water availability, agricultural productivity, and the consequent impact on livelihood.

India needs to finetune its modelling processes through improved data collection, validation, verification, and confirmation of the models. Urgent action is needed for strengthening Institutions connected to these scientific studies.

The Nexus: According to the UN World Water Development Report 2020,[59] 74% of natural disasters between 2001 and 2018 were related to water. The floods and droughts caused the death of more than 166000 people, affected 3 billion people, and led to economic damages of 700 billion US$. Increased frequency of extreme weather

events like high temperature, cyclones, heavy rainfall, and extended drought periods are exacerbating the adverse impact of climate change on human lives, livelihood, and the economy. Water is intricately connected with the energy systems both for its use in the generation of energy and by using energy for transporting and treating water, and for other sanitation services. Climate change impact assessment at different time-space scales and a road map to mitigate the risks jeopardising our energy and food security systems needs to be on high priority.

Managing Water as a Hydrologic and Hydrogeologic Unit: River Basin Management: Water as a resource is a hydro-ecological entity with hydrologic and hydrogeologic characteristics. The current legal framework for managing water in India is defined by the political and administrative boundaries as the management units. This has been a major cause for failure of a number of policy interventions in the water sector in the country. Ostrom's (1990)[60] design principles for the management of common pool resources can be the basis for the river basin approach. A transition to the catchment-based approach for managing the rivers provides a platform for the community, the competing sectors, and other stakeholders to participate in the planning and the negotiation process for the most optimal and equitable sharing of water resources. Collective action requires understanding the socio-economic heterogeneity in the river basin and planning at the micro watershed level can address this issue. The success of the Murray Darling River Basin Authority in Australia is an excellent learning source regarding the dynamics of interactions and the institutional framework for river basin management. Namami Gange Project is a good basin-level management model in India but it deals only with the partial objective of keeping the river clean.

Groundwater Aquifer Conjunctive Management: Over-exploitation of groundwater has reached an alarming situation threatening the drinking water and irrigation needs in most parts of the country. There is a need for extensive reform in groundwater management. The current model groundwater law does not provide effective measures to regulate unbridled abstraction. The aquifers recharge through

rainfall and surface flow patterns, hence, a strategy for groundwater management excluding surface water flux would be incomplete. Conjunctive management of surface water and groundwater would be the key to managing water as a true hydro-ecological unit. The collection of dynamic datasets of abstraction and recharge, along with surface flow data would be essential for holistic water budgeting of the region for water allocation. The National Project on Aquifer Management (NAQUIM) needs to be re-parametrised to cover these aspects. Active participation of farmers is critical for the change in agricultural practices and shift to less water-consuming crops to reduce groundwater consumption. Rationalisation of irrigation electricity tariffs also needs to be immediately brought into effect.

Traditional Water Bodies and Natural Water Ecosystems: Traditional and natural water bodies play an important role in rural urban water resiliency and ecosystem functions. They act as a source of supply during the scarcity period and reduce the threat from surplus as well by holding excess water, allowing it a safe passage, and recharging the groundwater. Destruction of urban wetlands and natural water courses is a major cause of urban floods in cities like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Gurugram. To restore the ecological functions of these water bodies a project for their comprehensive mapping based on historical records needs to be taken up at the earliest. After prioritising their contribution to the water balance equation and ecosystem services, restoration work with the involvement of the community will be the right beginning. The government and the local bodies will have a major role in restoration works, both in the planning and the investment phase. Community participation will be more for management purposes — regulating the water supply, keeping a watch on expenditure, resolving conflicts, and protecting the assets. The current stand of government agencies abstaining from traditional water bodies will nothing but make them disappear forever.

Interventions in Agriculture Sector

The increasing population needs to be provided with adequate food and nutrition. To mitigate the water induced threat to food security

necessary measures need to be put in place.

Utilising the IPC-IPU Gap: The foremost attempt should be to obtain the designed benefits of the investments already made in the irrigation projects. These are low-hanging fruits but require policy interventions by the government. The first step can be to utilise the IPC-IPU gap through command area development programmes.

Re-emphasising PIM: A fresh outlook is imperative to the Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) process. Addressing the socio-economic and political issues which have caused low success in the past is the need of the time. Socio-economic heterogeneity had been the major cause for the failure of the participation process. Collective action demands equitable sharing of the benefits among the members and across the water user associations of a project. Politics cannot be avoided in the collaboration and participation process, rather it would be more fruitful to develop and strengthen the mechanisms for negotiation and conflict resolution.

Cropping Pattern: Production of rice in Punjab, and cotton and sugarcane in Maharashtra and Karnataka, all water-intensive crops, has caused acute water-related problems in these areas ranging from water logging to over-exploitation of groundwater. This has led to soil degradation in Punjab and acute drinking water problem in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra. Shifting to traditional crops consistent with agro-climatic zones requiring less water has a huge potential in reducing total water demand. Distortions in the support price mechanism which encourages rice and wheat cultivation need to be reworked for true cost and return reflective market prices. Crop diversification promoting pulses, oilseeds, millets and fodder for livestock will reduce water consumption. Water is almost free for irrigation. Regulations for valuing the water judiciously will promote water-productive agricultural practices.

Improving Water Use Efficiency: According to the National Water Mission average irrigation efficiency in India is only 38%, which in developed economies is in the range of 50-60%.[61] Sprinkler and drip irrigation while improving the on-farm water use efficiency up to

90% also reduces the rate of fertiliser input. Using drip and sprinkler technology with soil moisture sensors has a high potential in reducing the demand for water for irrigation. Saving even 10% of irrigation water will spare enough water for other sectors having higher per unit water use productivity.

Tackling Diffused Pollution: There is a regulatory vacuum in controlling agriculture-related diffused pollution in the country. Globally, some countries use catchment-based pollution monitoring models to enforce health safety standards. There is an urgent need to establish a suitable regulatory framework in this regard. Participatory efforts for mitigating pollution such as by New York City may be attempted on a pilot basis in select watersheds in India. This model is based on the source protection method under which the city protects the Croton and Hudson River watershed systems, the major source of water supply to the city. The city authority has signed agreements with the landowners for not using intensive chemical fertiliser inputs to keep the water quality within standard limits. In return of the reduced productivity the farmers are financially compensated by the water utility. The source protection model both for quality and water conservation purposes holds immense potential for India's future water problems too.

Interventions in Domestic Sector

Urban Water Services: Transforming water utilities from inefficient and capital-devouring organisations to efficient and self-sustaining institutions is essential for drinking water and sanitation security. Operational and financial efficiency improvement would be fundamental to utility turnaround. Retrofitting and replacement of ageing infrastructure needs to be prioritised with a well-laid-out asset management plan—to reduce leakages (NRW), stop theft, and maintain pressure as per technical standards for reliable supply and avoid contamination risks.

Fetching water from the stand-alone source points in localities without piped connections escalates health risks. A policy

intervention providing point-of-use decontamination kits will reduce the expenditure of households on health care facilities. Apportioning a part of the demand-side subsidy for this purpose will go a long way in reducing water inequality. Groundwater—from the handpumps, self-owned wells, and as a feed for the water tankers—is the most critical drinking water source for the non-networked households. Hence managing groundwater from the quality and quantity perspective is crucial for urban water security. The issue of poor coverage in the urban and rural areas needs to be addressed by increasing financing. The release of water connections and sanitation services should be delinked with tenement ownerships. Due emphasis is needed to incorporate drainage plans into the urban planning process.

Auxiliary Resource: Non-Revenue Water, Wastewater Treatment and Reuse, Water Harvesting, and desalination: According to a UN 2018 report, 40% of the supplied urban water does not earn any revenue. On the discharge side, 80% of the water supplied to cities joins back the water cycle as a return flow. Reducing NRW, reusing the fit-for-purpose treated return flow, water harvesting, and desalination have immense potential for creating a sufficient additional resource to augment the old schemes or provide supplies to the left-out areas. Treated water can also be used for recharge of groundwater, but enabling regulations are to be framed for this. Wastewater is a critical health and environmental hazard. The current capacity is to treat wastewater is 23277 million litre per day (MLD) which is only 37% of the total wastewater generated. Huge investments are to be earmarked to enhance this capacity.[62] The regulatory framework to ensure efficient performance of STPs and limit emissions from domestic sources need to be strengthened.

Rural Water and Sanitation Services: The rural water supply and sanitation services in will remain distributed and decentralised for years to come. There is a tendency in policymakers to keep the rural decentralised water systems in low priority for government funding. There had been a major shift in the late 1990s of transferring such schemes to village committees 'sugar-coating' as community participation. This has deprived the rural schemes of financial

support for regular operation and maintenance, severely impacting water services. This approach needs complete transformation and government will have to proactively provide technical and financial support to make rural supply systems sustainable. Operation and maintenance can be ensured at the community level with the right amount of government support in terms of non-distortionary subsidies and technical know-how. Human waste is a major source of contamination of rural water supply systems as many households do not have tap water supply and carrying water has contamination risks. SBM has been instrumental in making villages open defecation-free and changing the behaviour, leading to the adoption of safe sanitation and hygiene practices. Rural areas lack adequate water testing facilities, there is a need for greater emphasis on this aspect. Decentralised water treatment or point of use purification systems should be more extensively used in rural areas.

Interventions in Industrial Sector

As highlighted before, industrial water use practices in India are an exemplar of low productivity, high footprint, and a major source of contamination. Two fundamental reasons for this are the weak regulatory framework and missing incentives for water use reduction through technology adoption. Various demand side initiatives in collaboration with the industry are needed to overcome this challenge. An enforceable policy for the adoption of the latest technology reducing water consumption for the high-water-consuming industries is needed. To safeguard from losing out in the competition in the market, performance-based incentives may be provided to such industries with a transparent monitoring and enforcement mechanism. Setting up water use benchmarking standards for water-intensive industries and establishing of Bureau of Water Efficiency on lines of the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) can provide institutional support for these endeavours.

Treating and reusing water must be an underlying principle for the industrial water use strategy. To the extent feasible zero liquid discharge principle be made applicable to the high polluting industries.

Initial support, for setting up effluent treatment plants, in form of fiscal nonfiscal incentives, tradable water discharge permits, or abatement charge facilities may be considered by the government.[63] Planning of new industrial areas must incorporate water sourcing, treatment and reuse plans. Assessment of impact on local water resources and the catchment areas from the existing and the proposed industries be also formalised. Water practices of industry affect its future performance, society, and the environment as well. Hence, a mandatory annual water disclosure by the water-intensive industries will increase transparency in corporate governance of the businesses.

Virtual Water Transactions: Water is consumed in the process of production and transaction of commodities in markets. But, it might or might not be embedded as a physical substance in the final commodity being produced and transacted. The total water consumed in such processes is called virtual water. A set of readymade garments and a sack of rice exported accounts for an equivalent amount of water — used in producing these commodities — exported out of the home country. Some water-scarce countries have made policy decisions to slow down the domestic production of water-intensive commodities and rely more on the import of such commodities from other countries. The trade war between China and US in 2018 was about virtual water too. India is the highest net exporter of virtual water in the world, mainly because of the export of its agricultural produce. India in 2014-15 exported 10 trillion litres of water by exporting 3.7 million tonnes of basmati rice.[64] With many countries now giving more importance to the trade in virtual water as part of their economic policy, India also needs to incorporate this significant aspect in its overall planning for sustainable water management.

Resolving Trans Boundary Disputes

Resolving transboundary disputes at interstate and international borders requires urgent and concerted efforts by all stakeholders. The principle for resolving these disputes needs to incorporate the broader perspective of river basin and aquifer level conjunctive water use management. The fresh negotiations will have to go beyond

the historical treaties based on age-old data of precipitation and surface water flows. This becomes more important considering the increasing groundwater withdrawal and alteration in catchment areas hugely impacting the river flows. As this exercise would be time-consuming and require professional support a unified agency at the central level with a strong implementation framework to negotiate the interstate water disputes will have a positive impact. In context to the international water conflicts the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)[65] 1992 and the UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UNCIW)[66] 1997 can be the good guiding principles in taking fresh negotiations ahead. To mutually succeed in negotiations the critical part is to convince people beforehand, and this would require developing trust with people regarding the sincerity of the governments in addressing the regional water security issues first.

Water Governance and Sector Reforms

Valuing Water: As a Social Good, a Human Right, and an Economic Good: Inequality in water and sanitation service provision within communities and across the society is evident from various government reports and independent surveys. SDG of safe and reliable water and sanitation services leaving no one behind cannot be achieved without eliminating this inequality. Poor service levels in quantity or quality impact the disadvantaged and the marginalised more, causing them to bear the high economic costs of the same. Such groups mostly involve children, women, socially deprived castes, and disabled persons. Special emphasis is needed for these sections of the society for equitable access to water services. Solving water challenges provides better opportunities to the disadvantaged allowing them to contribute more to society and economic growth.

UN General Assembly recognised water as a human right in 2010.[67] Though the Constitution of India does not provide for the human right to water, various judgements of the Supreme Court have recognised the right to water as being enshrined in Article 21 in the form of a

right to life (Cullet, 2009).[68] There are other connotations to the term 'human right', human right is more individualistic whereas water is a resource shared among humans and between humans and the environment depending on its availability. Government policies need to be more broad-based in managing the rights and entitlements for equitable access to water to all constituents of the whole biophysical environment. Water as a social good is part of the aforesaid underlying principle and has to remain accessible and affordable to all sections of society. But keeping water service charges unreasonably low among the consumers has acted as a perverse incentive and led to inefficient utilisation of water. This has deprived other sectors of an allocation which is otherwise able to add higher productivity to water use. Valuing water sensibly, even allowing differential pricing, is essential for the water utilities to become financially sustainable and for the overall socio-economic growth of the country as well.

Utility Reforms: The water sector in India, barring a few exceptions, is yet managed traditionally by the line departments in the government. The utility framework in the form of a board, agency, government-owned corporatised body or an investor-owned corporation is non-existent in India. Whereas, water utilities owned by local municipalities are a norm for urban towns in developed economies. There are separate utilities for managing water supply and wastewater activities, but in many instances, both are also jointly managed by a common utility. Free markets foster competition and innovation. The non-existence of a utility framework in the water sector in India is a major reason for the sector not becoming as vibrant and dynamic, in the free market interactions, as the energy sector. This has created a legacy of water management being devoid of creative solutions and innovations to combat the ever-worsening water crisis witnessed in current times.

The utility framework exposes the inefficiencies and cross-subsidisation of activities in the sector, identifying gaps to be fixed. Utilities are easier to regulate and enforce. Their operational and financial performance is more transparent and can be easily benchmarked against the best practice standards. With these characteristics, the operations and the financial creditworthiness of

the utilities can be improved — thereby increasing the opportunities for raising finances for service delivery improvement and network expansion. Attracting private investments would also become easier in the changed scenario. The government intervention in the water sector needs to be transitioned from the current model of direct provisioning and subsidisation to the opening up of the sector for extensive reforms, establishing water utilities, private partnerships, community participation, and creating an appropriate regulatory framework. Government oversight through regulatory institutions shall ensure the aspects of equity and fairness along with functional efficiency.

Subsidy Reforms: Proper targeting of capital and operational subsidies, revision of tariffs, and recovery of costs can only let water utilities survive. The key to subsidy reforms is targeting the subsidies to the poor and the disadvantaged for improving access and consumption of water services. Undifferentiated operating subsidies breed inefficiencies in utility functions, causing an increased burden on the consumers. The policy to allow utilities to recover the cost of supply from the users while targeting the subsidies—both capital and operating—to the needy, would spare financing for network expansion in the left-out areas. Well-designed demand-side subsidies are less distortionary. Extensive demand-side water tariff reforms are required to achieve the objective of high-income consumers cross-subsidising low-income households.

Sustainable Financing: Achieving the sustainable development goal of safe and reliable water for all and fighting climate change impact would require investments of unprecedented scale. This can be achieved if the water utilities in the country are made financially sustainable. As most water utilities are loss-making and there is a general perception of water investments being a high-risk, private investment is limited in the sector. To bail out the water sector from this paradox serious efforts are needed to develop innovative financing models to bridge the investment gap. The first step in this direction will be to transform the utilities from making operational losses to operational profits. Once the utility reaches a position to recover its operational expenses

from water user charges it can plan to explore further avenues for innovative financing like blending government funds or external aid with commercial borrowings, viability gap funding, and using government guarantees to reduce the risk for private capital and enter into outcome-based private partnership agreements. Attempts should be made to explore the possibility of deploying green bonds, debt funds, ESG linked financing as an alternate source of financing. Utilities rising on the financial sustainability ladder should consult credit rating agencies to explore commercial borrowings from the financial markets. The government will need to develop model financial products as each utility will have its own best fit financial sustainability model.

Technology and Data Sharing: Data is essential for decision-making. Timely and quality data is key to efficient water management. From source to discharge, water managers deal with a variety of data sets relating to – meteorological and other climate phenomena, precipitation, catchment flows, river flows, aquifer recharge and depletion, groundwater and surface source quality, water use data, utility function data, reliability of supply, metering, service levels, asset management, wastewater flows, discharge of used water to aquatic ecosystems, pollution levels, and water for environmental needs etc. Data is essential for predictive decision-making for security from water shortages and surpluses as well. Data shortage is increasingly being realised as one of the major obstacles in designing policy interventions in the water sector in India. There is less use of technology in capturing data at different points of the water cycle including sanitation services. This needs to be emphasised with adequate rules and regulations in place. The Water Resources Information System (WRIS) has proven to be at a nascent stage in providing good quality comprehensive data in a machine-readable format for use by researchers, water managers and policymakers. Strengthening data collection, validation, transmission and sharing under a vertical structure from the district to the national level is

essential for attaining water security.

Institutional Reforms: Water problems are complex and cut across various sectors. The Mihir Shah Committee report[69] discusses transforming the institutional framework for water governance reforms. The committee drafted a report, 'A 21st Century Institutional Architecture for India's Water Reforms' and two bills 'National Water Framework Bill 2016' and 'The Model Bill for the Conservation, Protection, Regulation and Management of Groundwater 2016'. National Water Framework Bill suggests the merger of the Central Water Commission and Central Ground Water Board into a new agency National Water Commission for integrated surface and groundwater management. These three documents contain a broad policy framework for integrated, interdisciplinary and demand-side intervention-based approach to water management.

Policy formation in India in the water sector is diffused among various ministries at the Centre and multiple departments in the States. Regulatory space is also shared by many agencies. The legal framework in the water sector in India is rooted in the British common law providing unlimited power to the landowners to extract water. The draft report proposes to follow the public trust doctrine, as determined by the Supreme Court in various case laws, as the basis for legal reforms in water sector. Unfortunately, the Shah committee report and the model bills have not yet gained a formal legal status to become implementable policy directives. Early action by governments in the Centre and the States is essential for introducing these reforms. Reforms in the utility and the finance sectors also need to be taken up at the earliest. There is a need for an overarching single nodal agency to coordinate among different ministers in the government on water related issues. The formation of State water regulatory authorities to determine the pricing structure for water services has also been deemed desirable in the country.

Redefining Political Economy: Policy decisions in political economy are characterised by the understanding of its constituents — the political system and the people — of the problems to be resolved. This

understanding is strongly influenced by the information available for taking such decisions and the expected outcomes. The special interests of the politicians and the depth and breadth of information available are key to this process. The role of academicians, voluntary agencies, civil society, and other stakeholders is critical in setting the policy direction for the long-term sustainable management of water resources. Advocacy for water conservation, efficiency, valuing water, and climate change impact on water security is essential in setting the stage for debate over the policy agenda and influencing the political economy for taking decisions for long-term goals rather than short-term political gains. Information and education campaigns, pilot projects, behaviour change programmes, and changing the way we live will continue to have an impactful role in the strategy to attain water security for the present and future generations.

Conclusion

Independent India inherited the supply-side water management approach from the British. Policy decisions were made for community and user participation but there has been limited success. It is vital for the policymakers to entirely redesign the policy in the sector to avoid the looming water crisis.

The Indian water crisis is more of economic scarcity and less of a physical scarcity in nature. Even sufficient availability of water as a resource, but, bottlenecked by infrastructure and lack of demand-side investments can cause to exacerbate the crisis. Valuing water and pricing it prudently while maintaining equitable and affordable access for the disadvantaged will help water utilities in recovering the marginal cost of supply of water and sanitation services. Reforming water utilities and removing the distortions in the subsidy structure needs immediate action. This will act as a stepping stone for the water utilities to make their operations financially sustainable. Innovative financing solutions will have to be explored by the utilities and the governments to fill the investment gap for network expansion and wastewater infrastructure financing. Resolving transboundary disputes needs a fresh outlook on the challenges and a more

concerted basin and aquifer level conjunctive management approach. Water governance and institutional reforms would require clarity in understanding of the roles, responsibilities and accountability in water management as water is an interdisciplinary subject. There is a strong need for capacity building and to transform and strengthen our institutions to enable them to develop and implement the strategies to tide over this most decisive crisis which the earth faces today.

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Essay X: School Education in India: Story of Stagnation and Transformation

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Abstract

India had only 12 per cent literate population at the time of Independence. Today it aspires to emerge as a global educational powerhouse. In between, it has been a checkered history of policies, programmes and experiments, some successful and some not so successful. India has just started implementing yet another National Education Policy which aims to re-orient education and its governance to meet the emerging global challenges and to address decisively the persistent problems of equal access to and quality of education. It is a story of transformation and yet it is a story of stagnation. The essay seeks to capture this story.

Introduction

Asha is an 18-year-old female boldly announcing her pronouns as she/her and has six members in her family comprising her father, mother, two sisters, and a brother. Asha's family originally hails from Uttar Pradesh but moved to Maharashtra and settled near Pune. She began school at the age of 7 and walked to her school, a couple of kms away from home, along with her sister. Asha's father, an auto driver, studied only till the 10th grade and her mother, a petty shop keeper, till the 8th grade, both in Hindi medium. Her parents together earn no more than Rs 5 lakh a year. Asha's grandparents, who were farmers, never went to school. However, today Asha is a post-graduate student. Her siblings are graduates too. This is a true anecdote of a student the authors personally are acquainted with (Asha is not her real name).

This essay attempts to capture India's transformation in the education sector, a transformation that has helped millions of Ashas in India realise their dream. While tracing this trajectory, the essay also asks if it really required all the time it has taken to provide youngsters like Asha their wings or could there have been a faster track of development.

Early Education Scenario in Independent India:

While India today has one of the largest education-systems in the world and stands at the precipice of implementing a new National Education Policy, the current strategies and practice are informed by histories of struggle, a quest for justice and equality, and deliberations into the vision of a democratic society that the nation's leaders envisioned. For a country that has caste, class, religious, linguistic and culturally normative diversities alongside a rich intellectual history and a voracious representative democracy, the task of systematising education involves a serious consideration into who an educated Indian citizen will be, and who decides about education.

Under the colonial rule, education for the Indian subjects involved forming a "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect".[1] However, perspectives on a just and contextually responsive education for Indians were visualised and vocalised by eminent Indian leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindra Nath Tagore, B R Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, Pandita Ramabai, Periyar Ramaswami Naicker and so on. The Wardha Scheme of Basic Education (1939), popularly called *Nayee Taleem* was a consequence of the realisation that the existing system that the colonial rule had introduced was not only ineffective but also unjust. *Nayee Taleem* situates the school in its community and offers children relevant and radical knowledge from their life-worlds. Schools under *Nayee Taleem* must be places of work, experimentation and discovery, and the child an active participant, not merely a passive absorber of information.

The provision of nationwide free and compulsory education, something that was legitimised almost 70 years later under the Right to Education Act-2009, finds its earliest mentions in the Wardha Scheme. This was an essential feature of the Indian National Congress' manifesto in the provincial elections of 1937. However, it was nearly two and a half decades earlier that it was brought into the educational discourse when, on 18 March 1910, Gopal Krishna Gokhale moved a resolution at the Imperial Legislative Council seeking provisions for a "free and compulsory education" and this topic was extensively discussed at the 1910 session of the Indian National Congress.

The first census in independent India in 1951 recorded a literacy rate[2] of 18.3%, with male literacy at 27.2 percent and female literacy close to 9%.[3] However, despite this low rate of literacy and the stark disparity in foundational learning among the masses and the elite classes of the time, the first commission on education appointed in independent India in 1948 under the chairmanship of Prof. S. Radhakrishnan was asked to study the status of higher education.

The Radhakrishnan Commission or The University Education Commission (UEC) was set up to investigate and recommend measures for improving higher education. Building and asserting India's identity as a nation remained at the heart of most policies and practices soon after 1947. The youth of the nation was an especially promising resource in this endeavor in two ways - one, to advance and enrich the country's economic status, and two, for citizenship building in the fledgling nation.

The UEC report presented a vision of progress and advancement towards a 'New India', with a sufficient exploration of the past. It recommended the development of scientific and technical knowledge. As Advani, S. (1996)[4] rightly points out the commission intended higher education to be the vehicle that cultivated not only scientific knowledge, skill and moral values, but also a citizenry that could lead the nation towards modernity. While the recommendations on higher education were in earnest, it is pertinent to note that the population that accessed these institutions of higher education were

generations of learners from upper castes and upper class, who were able to benefit from and adapt to the colonial system of education. A difference in access could also be observed in terms of enrolment of female students to male, right from elementary education to higher education. At the time of UEC Report, for every 100 male students, higher education saw only 13 female student enrolments.

A post-colonial reconstruction of an education system established by the British regime to create a working class for their end, could have envisaged and initiated a system of inclusion and access to primary education for all as a necessary step in improving the intellectual and cultural fabric of India. However, one notices a rationalisation of conditions of access in the UEC Report, and evident differences in access due to the stratification present in Indian society at the time.

Mudaliar Committee: Initial Focus on School Education

Education continued to be envisioned as a vehicle for cultivating nationalistic sentiment and economic growth, ideas of which were reinforced by the Secondary Education Commission of 1952, presided by Dr. Lakshmanaswamy Mudaliar, popularly known as the Mudaliar Commission. Formed only two years after the Constitution of India came into effect and closely coinciding with the win of the Indian National Congress in India's first general elections, the task of establishing a strong education system fell on the newly formed representative government. It is not surprising that among the aims of education as envisaged by the commission was cultivating democratic values and creating socially sensitive citizens of a diverse and highly stratified nation. In keeping with constitutional values of fraternity and justice, one of the functions of school education is creating a critical awareness of social customs, practices and institutions. The crucial outcome of education explicitly stated in the commission's report is in creating a citizenry that contributes to economic growth and better standards of living.

While multipurpose schools[5] were suggested with the objective of breaking down social barriers by providing socially hierarchised vocations in an "equal" arena such as the secondary school, an important component (and the only recommendation to women's education) of the commission's recommendation was to introduce the home sciences in women's education. This not only undermined the constitutional values of equality and dignity but also contradicted social sensitivity by failing to address real and practical reasons that hinder women's education.

The commission reiterated the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction, as suggested in the Wardha Scheme of Basic Education and recommended learning in secondary schools to be centred around productive work. It reinforced the idea of educational leadership from recommendations by UEC 1948, and suggested a variation to school stages, introducing middle school of 3 years and secondary school of 4 years. Improved service conditions and benefits for teachers were discussed at length.

The Constitution of India mandated in the Directive Principles of the State Policy that the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children until the age of 14 in ten years. Despite this, the second significant commission on education largely focused on the state of secondary education alone. This not only delayed the crucial need for equitable and quality education at primary level, but also contributed to the disparity in educational levels that have generationally persisted among various social groups. Despite its merits, the report of the Mudaliar Commission fundamentally fails to address the need for access to and inclusion in school education, particularly at the primary level.

National Policy on Education 1968: Finally, Focus on Primary Education

More than a decade after the Mudaliar Commission, a compulsion to move beyond the rhetoric of equality, inclusion and rights set in motion the appointment of the National Education Commission of

1964 (Kothari Commission), chaired by Dr D.S. Kothari, to respond to the quality of education. Kothari Commission not only reiterated certain suggestions from the previous attempts at policy making, but also recommended innovations in the system. A key recommendation of the Kothari Commission that is relevant to this day was setting a benchmark for expenditure in education to 6% of the GDP. The considerations were informed by the enrolment rates in economically developed nations such as the US and Japan (nearly 90% of children in the age group of 5 to 14 were enroled in those countries as compared to India's 48%), and the proportionate level of spending in these countries. The realisation of the same was to occur in a period of 20 years, considering likely trends in population growth and economic growth. However, decades later, the goal remains unrealised. The highest it touched was 4.14 percent of the GDP in 2001. According to India's Economic Survey 2022-23, the current total education outlay, including both national and state-level, is a mere 2.9 per cent of the GDP – a proportion that has remained almost constant for the past four years.

The Kothari Commission report put forth the necessity of access to schooling as a social equalizer of opportunities and repeated the necessity of providing free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 and mother tongue as medium of education. While the commission emphasised creating a citizenry that contributed to the nation's economic growth, it also stressed the nurturing of democratic citizenship through schooling. The National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) was established a few years earlier in 1961 as an autonomous body that could be leveraged to supplement this vision by creation of standardised textbooks, training of teachers to transact the content, collaborate with various organisations for the development of a robust curriculum and engage in knowledge generation and accumulation through research.

With the spirit of collective improvement, the report acknowledged the disparity in school conditions and home environments of children in rural and urban backgrounds. To address challenges of access, abolition of fees, provision of hostels, scholarships, bicycles, free

books, uniforms and meals were recommended. It also recommended measures for the inclusion of educationally backward groups such as disabled children (with a spectrum of disabilities identified in that period), girls and scheduled tribes. In the document, the role of women in society was re-envisaged as one of equal to a man, and emphasis was laid on a partnership between the genders to improve social conditions and fight social evils of poverty, health and hunger. This contrasts with recommendations of Mudaliar Commission that envisioned only a care-giving role for women.

The commission also highlights regional imbalances in literacy rates, enrolment, attendance and retention, and its association to expenditure in education. For instance, Kerala had the highest enrolment with 140 per 1000 population in lower primary stage (Grades 1 to 5), whereas Rajasthan had the lowest at 80 per 1000 population in the same stage. Stark disparities were present in the gender ratio as well (1960-61). Kerala had the highest per capita direct expenditure of Rs 11.2 and Orissa the lowest of Rs 2.8 (p. 208-209, Kothari Commission Report).

The formulation of a National Policy on Education was a crucial recommendation by the Commission, which was realised in 1968, after the fourth Lok Sabha elections. The National Policy on Education 1968 entailed the execution of key features of Kothari Commission, basically standardising education system for the entire country and operating on the principle of unrestricted access and equalising opportunities. It emphasised the need for education for economic and cultural development towards "one nation" aiming to fulfill the directive principle of free and compulsory education up to 14 years, as well as ensuring completion of education, with a uniform pattern of 10+2+3, with the higher secondary stage of 2 years located in schools or colleges. The three-language formula[6] was implemented, promoting Hindi in various parts of the country, though the learning of other languages by primarily Hindi speaking States, as envisioned in the three-language formula, failed.

The larger failure of NPE 1968, however, lay in the inability of the Central and the State Governments to implement most of the

provisions. As education was under the State List of the Constitution until 1976 (when it became a concurrent subject), the role of the centre was ambiguous. This posed severe challenges to systemising equal and normative educational processes and inputs.

While efforts to standardise education continued, more than a decade later, India had a child population of over 170 million in the 5 to 14 years age group.[7] In the same year (1980), the number of children enroled in schools was close to 74 million. Of these, data indicates that 38% of these students were girls, 14% were from the Scheduled Castes (SC) and a mere 6% from the Scheduled Tribes (ST). One can note that the task of equalising education was limited to generating outputs that were common, integrated and operated with an imposed sense of collective. However, the lack of representation in the population not only created setbacks for generations of SC/ST as well as girl children, but also failed to truly commit to the constitutional value of equality. The lack of diversity and inclusion in the primary years also indicate that only a certain section of the population could transition to secondary education, and subsequently higher education, developing only a fraction of employable candidates in the modern industries that benefited the economic development of self and the nation.

Efforts Continue: The National Policy of Education, 1986

India's second education policy with a focus on primary schools, the National Policy on Education, 1986, was promulgated soon after, with a commitment to address the disparities present in enrolment and retention of children in schools, with special attention on education for girls, SC and ST population. The scope of implementation of these policy initiatives in a systematic as well as uniform manner widened now owing to the definitive and conducive role the centre had to play in education.

The NPE 1986 viewed women's education as an agent of change in the status of women. It encouraged the participation of women in technical and vocational programmes, emphasising the value of

non-discrimination and encouraging their participation in non-traditional roles. Incentives to parents were planned to ensure the retention of students from scheduled caste background. Learning materials were to be designed in tribal languages, with scaffolding to switch to a dominant regional language, along with construction of school buildings in tribal areas. The youth in the community was to be leveraged to undertake teaching-learning processes in schools in tribal regions. The establishment of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas was significant in providing modern, quality education to students from rural areas. The policy provided an impetus not only to the spirit of social justice, but also to the maintenance of the system in cohesion with other institutions of family, economy, and politics.[8]

Quality is intrinsic to both access and equality. Centrally sponsored schemes were introduced to improve the quality of education by providing quality infrastructure and improved ways of teaching and learning. Quality improvement also required students to stay in school longer, thrive in a conducive environment and secure certain conditions for learning that were hitherto privy only to the private sector education. Operation Blackboard of 1987 was one such scheme under which the existing schools were provided with additional infrastructure and new schools constructed. Implemented in a phased manner, Operation Blackboard ensured the reach of basic facilities such as toilets, classrooms, libraries and aids such as chalk and blackboard as well as contingency funds to rural primary schools. It also tried to ensure that every class or section had a dedicated classroom space and the presence of a teacher. This, however, remained largely unrealised. The teacher is recognised as a valuable functionary for quality of education. The task of educating and training teachers was of paramount importance not only to ensure quality of education, but also to enable improvements in the enrolment and retention of school-going children. This responsibility fell on the centre.

The NPE 1986 policy set in motion a centrally sponsored scheme for teacher education, stating it as a continual process, with pre-service and in-service education being inseparable. State Councils for Educational Research and Training (SCERT), and District Institutes of

Education and Training (DIET) were set up to decentralise the task of ongoing learning for teachers, curriculum development as well as associated duties of educational management, leveraging technology and evaluating the educational programmes in the State and District. Additionally, selected teacher training colleges of State Governments and department of education in government universities were funded and converted into Institutes of Advanced study in Education (IASE) and Colleges of Teacher Education (CTE). Setting up these institutions, especially the DIETs was in keeping with the idea that a decentralised unit to support and train teachers, would be more responsive to the needs and contextual challenges present. Though over the next decade many DIETs, CTEs and IASEs were established and almost all States got an SCERT, most of them have not been able to play the kind of role envisaged in the policy. Barring a few exceptions, they have become extended arms of the NCERT / SCERTs in their respective States, merely carrying out activities planned at the Ministry of Education in the Centre.[9] Exceptional performance of a few of these institutions suggests that the issue is not about the model, but of the inconsistency of its implementation as most of them continue to have staff vacancies; for instance, a multi-State TISS study indicates that majority of the DIETs have less than 50% of the academic posts filled.[10]

Economic Liberalisation and School Education:

The role of the centre as vital in energising the reach and quality of education with an egalitarian underpinning was realised through the 1986 policy. The economic liberalisation launched in 1991 set in motion events that have influenced the quality of education as well as perspectives towards the purpose of being educated in Indian society.[11] A *Programme of Action was formulated* in 1992. The subsequent years saw rapid changes. The number of recognised primary schools more than doubled and the number of upper primary and secondary schools registered a 90 per cent jump when compared to the numbers in the 1950s.

During the 1990s, insistence on universalisation of elementary education increased globally. In 1990, which was incidentally the

International Year of Literary, India was one of the 155 countries that adopted the World Declaration on Education for All. The declaration stated that 'Every person, child, youth and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs'. While access to basic education was a necessary aspect of the declaration, attention was placed on the quality of education and actual learning outcomes.

This also coincided with the boom of private schooling in India. An increase in the presence of private schools brought to the fore a new element into the question of accessibility of education - affordability. Parents and caregivers now had the option to choose from a range of schools, and as the demand for schools to create "global citizens" increased, the considerations (for instance, English medium education was considered essential to social mobility) into choosing a school went beyond what could often be economically feasible for the family. The aspirations of Indian society were heavily influenced by the opportunity that was available for social mobility by joining the white-collar workforce. Parental choice for education of their children became an implicit right, and the starkly varied approaches, facilities and teachers in private schools and public schools at the time created new class of divisions in Indian society.

With universalisation and quality being the central aim, the State as well as the public accepted the presence of and input from private education institutions, non-governmental organisations working on education as well as external funding agencies. A landmark programme that channeled funding from various external sources, with the aim of improving enrolment, retention and transition at elementary stage was the *District Primary Education Program (DPEP)*. The program is noteworthy due to several factors. Apart from it being a focused, measurable, relevant and time-bound intervention in elementary education, the processes it followed and the systems it created - decentralised planning and management, participatory processes, equity, capacity building and quality improvement through creation of Cluster and Block level academic support systems and a variety of pedagogic interventions were all very significant.

With this intervention, another essential aspect of accessibility was addressed - elimination of financial obstacles. Being a centrally sponsored scheme, 85% of the funds for DPEP came from the Centre. The Central share is resourced through external agencies, the largest creditor being the World Bank. The influence of the World Bank's investment in Indian education can be observed in the standardization of school outcomes, pedagogic choices and processes.

The benefits of the program are evident in improved enrolment ratio between before DPEP (1980-81) and after DPEP (1990-91), particularly of girls. The upper primary GER of female students in 1980-81 was 28.6% and it registered an increase of nearly 40 per cent by 2001 which is a mere six years of DPEP implementation. Further, there was also an improvement in transition in the case of female students, with nearly 60% girls moving from primary to upper primary grades (2000-01). A key feature of the DPEP that continues to be relevant and necessary lies in its participatory nature of planning, executing and monitoring. Meetings were conducted at the district, sub-division and sub-district levels with NGOs, teachers' associations, village community representatives and functionaries of education and other related departments. An effort was made to involve the local community in micro-level planning and decision making. While there were variations in the extent to which various districts under DPEP exercised their autonomy and the extent of community participation, the opportunity to involve multiple social institutions (such as Village Education Committees) and stakeholders is indicative of democratic and decentralised decision-making.

DPEP also focused on quality improvement measures in classroom practices, the objectives for which have been partly drawn from the *Learning without Burden report by the Yashpal Committee 1993*. Some of these objectives focus on reduced academic burden, achievement of Minimum Levels of Learning by students, multigrade teaching (which is a departure from the dedicated classroom, dedicated teacher for every grade recommendation in Operation Blackboard 1987) and encouraging gender and environment sensitivity. Accomplishing these meant not only a shift toward child-centered methods and

activity-based learning, but also a change in the approach to teacher training...[12]

Education becomes a Fundamental Right:

In the early 2000s, a popular song was regularly heard playing on television sets, with visuals of young children clad in school uniforms joyfully scaling various terrains to reach schools. *School chale hum* advertised exactly what the Vajpayee government's *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)* intended to promote - elementary education universally accessible to children of all genders, minority groups and locations as an essential and necessary right. SSA was modeled on the DPEP scheme, spanning pan-India, in partnership with the state and local governments. DPEP's impact on the improved enrolments and conditions of access to minority children (especially in Phase 1), led to the conclusion that the net investment in the project was quite fruitful.[13]

SSA was designed to invest in all inputs in school education such as curriculum, infrastructure, teacher training and educational planning and management, and the convergence of centrally sponsored schemes such as Total Sanitary Campaign and Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programmes.[14] Toward the aim of universalised and relevant education for all children under 14 years and bridging social, regional and gender gaps in elementary education, time-bound goals have been outlined; SSA's attempt was to go beyond availability of schools and improved enrolment numbers to addressing issues of transition and retention as well. To this end, the role of two key stakeholders - the community and the teacher - were brought under the ambit of the programme. Involvement of community or local bodies in the ownership, planning and monitoring of school interventions are key features envisioned by the programme. The critical role of the teacher and thus the professional development and training of teachers were also bracketed under the programme.

In addition to the SSA, a major thrust in improving school enrolments, transition and retention has been the *Mid-Day Meal Programme*

(MDM), which became a centrally sponsored scheme under the orders of the Supreme Court of India in 2002. Currently renamed as the *Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman Scheme under the Ministry of Education (2021)*, the Mid-Day meal in India is one of the largest of its kinds in the world and is a primary reason why children enrol and attend schools in several parts of the country - to avail one nutritious meal a day. The Mid-day Meal Scheme has been implemented in the Union Territory of Puducherry under the French Administration since 1930. In post-independent India, it was first launched in Tamil Nadu, pioneered by the former Chief minister K. Kamaraj in the early 1960s. In addition to Mid-Day meals, the provision of free school uniforms and textbooks have also been pioneered under SSA.

Despite improved enrolments in elementary education, enrolments in the eight years after the launch of SSA, and its continued efforts in improving school education, an observable decline in the transition from elementary to secondary enrolment cannot be overlooked. With secondary education being a necessary precursor toward higher education and thus movement into employable roles, a centrally sponsored scheme, *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) 2009* was launched that particularly focused on challenges and issues in secondary school stage to improve conditions of access, quality and to bridge inequality. The aim was to universalise access and retention of schooling for children of 15 to 16 years of age by 2020. Key interventions and facilities envisioned by the scheme include infrastructural improvements such as the provision of laboratories, libraries, toilets especially for girls, drinking water and ICT facilities. Quality concerns were not limited to infrastructural improvements but also the quality of the teaching learning processes in secondary schools, evidenced by the focus on in-service training of teachers especially in Math, Science and English education. Employment of teachers to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio to 30:1 was also aimed at by this scheme.

Almost three years later, Mishra, K. R. (2015) notes that the ratio of elementary to secondary schools in 2012 was 15:1 at the national level, which itself presents a huge concern. The lack of school facilities,

preferably at a reasonable distance, itself was an obstacle to access to secondary schooling, and children who look to transition from Grade 8 naturally are met with the absence of a resource and opportunity. He also notes the abundance in teacher vacancies at this level in most states, except for Kerala, that contributes to the failure to deliver the promise of quality school education at this stage.[15]

Meanwhile, in 2002, Article 21A was added to the Constitution of India as the 86th amendment. The primary objective of this amendment was to emphasise the right to education as a Fundamental Right, as necessarily flowing from the Right to Life (Article 21), and concomitant with other Fundamental Rights. By including education as a Fundamental Right under article 21A, the State is legally obligated to ensure that education is in the reach of the majority of the population.

The events described above, along with the nation becoming a signatory to Education for All (previously described) acted as a juggernaut to mandate the *Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2009*, which came into force in April 2010. What sets RTE apart from innumerable educational Programmes launched since Independence? The RTE mandates free and compulsory education for all children in the age bracket of 6 to 14, legally binding state and central governments to enable universal access, retention and transition in primary education. With this Act, India became one of the 135 countries to have mandated the right to education as a fundamental right.

The justiciable nature of RTE also makes it possible for the public to take action through grievance redressal mechanisms in case of non-compliance with RTE norms, thus making education a participatory affair. The concomitant programme of SSA was restructured to become the primary vehicle through which the RTE is implemented across India.

The RTE mandates that a primary school is made available to all children within a kilometre of travel, and secondary school, within three kilometres. It prohibits schools from conducting screenings for selective admission of students, and prevents government run schools from charging fees. The State is also obligated to include children from

marginalised communities, minorities, different genders as well as children with special needs. Further it mandates that out-of-school children should be admitted to an age-appropriate class and provided with special training to come up to an age-appropriate learning level.

A key mandate within the RTE that has been contested, and that continues to have severe implications, is the reservation of 25% of seats for children belonging to socially disadvantaged and economically weaker sections in private schools. This provision of the Act is aimed at boosting social inclusion. This is indicative of the rights in education that the public now had in terms of parental choice of schools, as well as recognising children as the subjects of this right. A 2014 report by Oxfam India[16] investigates the effects of this mandate in the private schools of two cities - Bangalore and Delhi. While the report explores the challenges in administrative processes as well as the influx of court cases from private schools seeking minority status (as they are exempt from this mandate), outlined here are specific failures of inclusion. The report notes that only populations that are aware of such entitlements and could acquire necessary documents have been able to leverage this mandate in securing a private school admission for their child; children from impoverished families, orphans, street and migrant children have been excluded from this quota, due to lack of information. In terms of integrating with the private school culture that consists of students from middle-class and affluent families, younger children are more likely to adjust well as they do not notice the class difference. However, as they grow older, social, cultural and economic differences emerge. Integration in low-income private schools was noticeably easier than in elite institutions. Teachers tasked with the challenge of fostering inclusion merely took it on as an exercise to acculturate students admitted through this quota to the mainstream culture, by considering their mannerisms, language and culture to be deficient. Further, although parents were keen on securing a free seat in a private school due to the claims of better quality of education, they struggled with providing material resources necessary to participate in academic and school life.

Access is not merely to be enabled in terms of presence and reach of schools, and enroling and attending schools, but also in terms of the quality of education that the child is privy to. Teachers play a central role in enabling quality education as they hold the maximum interface with the child in the school system.[17] RTE lays down standards for pupil-teacher ratio (number of students per teacher) which has implications for the systemic level recruitment, deployment and training of teachers. The prescribed pupil-teacher ratio for elementary grades is 30:1, which means for a maximum class size of 30 students, one teacher must be available.

Two years after its implementation through SSA, in the conference of State education secretaries in 2012, it was noted that "6.31 lakh posts of teachers have been sanctioned across the country under SSA since RTE became operative, but there are serious concerns about the slow pace of recruitment. The backlog vacancies particularly high in Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal."[18] It is to be noted that some of these states constituted large populations of school going children.

Nearly 10 years later, the standard pupil-teacher ratio remains to be achieved, particularly in peri-urban and rural areas. One observes that there is either a disproportionate number of students in a classroom (especially at secondary stages of schooling) handled by one teacher, and far more grievous is the presence of single teacher schools. As of 2021, with 1.5 million government schools, 84% of them located in rural areas, the total number of teachers stands at 9.4 million, 72% of them employed in rural areas. Data also indicates that nearly 1 lakh schools are single teacher schools, with 89% of them located in rural areas. Further, there is a requirement of nearly 1.1 million teachers, with 60% of the requirements in rural schools; Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar fare worse than other States with their proportion of requirement crossing 50,000 posts. Uttar Pradesh records a shocking need for over 3 lakh teachers.[19]

What is to be made of these numbers and why does the RTE mandate for pupil-teacher ratio hold gravity? A standard ratio is necessary to execute child-centred curriculum and teaching practice, support children intensively, and to understand and respond to their needs, which is nearly impossible in large classrooms. The *National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF '05)* advocates learning without burden, and pedagogies that are interactive and responsive in nature, as opposed to the instructive style. To implement innovative classroom pedagogy, classroom sizes along with infrastructural aids and facilities matter. It is also necessary for teachers to understand children as individuals and develop their own knowledge about how children learn and build subject expertise, respond to the contexts and circumstances they come from, understand their needs and tailor school experiences in a fruitful and joyous manner.

However, achieving the standard ratio is not sufficient to declare quality education. Quality parameters also include norms relating to physical infrastructure of the classrooms, separate toilets for girls and boys, drinking water facility, number of school-working days, working hours of teachers, etc. A concomitant feature to quality is parental and community engagement. The adage has proved particularly relevant here – 'it takes a village to raise a child'. Bringing a key objective of SSA alive by legally binding it, all schools covered under the RTE are obligated to constitute a School Management Committee consisting of a head teacher, local elected representative, parents, community members, etc. The committees hold authority, just like the State, to monitor the functioning of schools and prepare annual school development plans, thus including a stake from parents and community in ensuring quality education.

RTE, for the first time, prohibits all kinds of punishment - physical, verbal, or those inflicting mental or emotional harm, discrimination based on gender, caste, grade and religion. Punishment previously considered as synonymous with pedagogy is now illegal and could warrant punitive action. Assessment pattern has also been changed to one that actually measured and catered to the holistic development of the child. The perspectives towards formative and summative tests

underwent significant change with the introduction of Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) for the entire period of elementary schooling. Another reason why this system was initiated was to evaluate every aspect of the child during their time in school so that gaps could be identified and worked on over the span of eight years of schooling.

It has been over a decade since the Supreme Court gave its judgment on the constitutionality of RTE, but the implementation of the Act has been an embarrassment and various High Courts have called upon State Governments to do more to ensure its implementation. A PIL filed in the High Court of Karnataka in 2015 on many out of school children is a case in point; this PIL continues till date with the Court continuing to nudge the State to ensure compliance to one of the basic provisions of the Act regarding compulsory schooling up to the elementary level.

The Emphasis on Early Years:

While the descriptions of school education so far largely focused on children aged 6 to 14, attempts have been made at the national level to capitalise on the formative years of growth, i.e., before 6 years of age, as it is a critical period of brain development. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) first evolved in developed countries and evolved as a global phenomenon after the introduction of Sustainable Development Goals. In India, it developed from previous policies and schemes such as *National Policy for Children (1974)* which consequently operationalised as the *Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)*. The NPE 1986 also considered ECCE to be a critical input for holistic human development. *The National Nutrition Policy (1993), Health Policy (2002), National Plan of Action for Children (2005)* along with the *Position Paper on ECCE in the NCF 2005*, are all key contributions to the development of *Early Childhood Care and Education Policy* of 2013. Additionally, international covenants such as Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, and Education for all 1990 with its tagline of "learning begins at birth' have reaffirmed India's commitment to ECCE. The vision of the policy is to 'achieve holistic

development and active learning capacity of all children below six years of age by promoting free, universal, inclusive, equitable, joyful and contextualised opportunities for laying foundation and attaining full potential."

The Five-Year Plans have also acknowledged the importance of ECCE for laying the foundation of lifelong development. The 12th Five -Year Plan (2012-17) emphasises the "need to address areas of systemic reform in ECCE across all channels of services in the public, private and voluntary sectors." This policy attempts to redefine ICDS beyond its functions of health and nutrition providers, channel non-formal preschool education, with additional and trained human resources designed to provide educational experiences for the young child. Thus, the policy calls for introduction of a developmentally appropriate curriculum framework with joyful early learning methods for children between three and six years of age, including school readiness interventions for children who are five plus years of age, in a universalised manner. AWCs (Anganwadi centres) would be continued and are envisioned as a 'vibrant child-friendly early childhood development centre. Ensuring equity, inclusion and quality have also been discussed in the policy along with plans for implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Considering one of the focus areas is improving quality in all elements of early learning, Anganwadi centres set up under ICDS to provide nutritional support to pregnant women and early education to children, today are still short of meeting the quality parameters laid out in the policy. Strengthening capacity through family, community and institutional intervention is touted as a focus area, but there have been little efforts to ensure such stakeholder engagement beyond mandatory vaccination checks, provision of nutritional supplements and mid-day meals. The availability of adequately trained Anganwadi workers to enable learning for the child in the time spent at the Anganwadi is abysmal; adult-child ratios and segregation by age (under 3 and 3 to 6 years) are conditions that are barely met. While Anganwadis-cum-creches do ensure childcare, nutrition and healthcare, resources for age-appropriate stimulation and interactive

environments remain far from the vision of the Anganwadi. While the mother tongue is the mode of communication, English is not 'encouraged in a meaningful manner.' Multilingual and bilingual means of instruction are a long shot currently. Play and learning materials provided by the government are absent in most AWCs, and the promotion of local folklore and songs for children's enrichment by way of meaningful interaction is also missing. What is tangibly productive in ECCE in India is the presence of private entities that offer a variety of curricula - Montessori, Reggio-Emilio, Canadian - at high fees and with exclusivity to a certain class of society.

The Union Budget of 2018-19 proposed to treat school education holistically and as a continuum from early childhood (3 years) to Grade 12 (18 years). Thus, came into picture the *Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)*, an overarching programme for the school education sector extending from pre-school to Grade 12, with the broader goal of improving school effectiveness measured in terms of equal opportunities for schooling and equitable learning outcomes. It aligns itself to Sustainable Development Goal 4, which states "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." It subsumes the three erstwhile Schemes of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan* (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE). The shift in the focus is from previously organized projects in school education to improving systems level performance and schooling outcomes. Furthermore, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan integrates and channels implementation and transaction costs between Union, State, District and Sub-district levels, with a comprehensive plan for execution and monitoring at the decentralised level of a district.

New Education Policy after Three Decades: NEP 2020

Since independence, India has been witnessing an array of policies, schemes and projects aimed at improving and transforming the public education system. The success of the history outlined above is

evident with the percentage of primary enrolment at 102% in 2021 as opposed to 79% in 1971,[20] three years after the first National Education Policy was formulated. However, the percentage of transition from primary to senior secondary has been a mere 22% of those enroled, with dropouts occurring at every school stage, making a case for improvements in quality of school experiences.

With the integration of primary and secondary education as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, and the scope for improving the continuum of schooling through improved quality of education keeping with the times, a new *National Education Policy (NEP 2020)* was rolled out in 2020. It came in response to the evolving educational landscape of India, which sees the advent of rapid technological advancements, as well as the need for a comprehensive overhaul of the system which works towards holistic development and generation of employable youth in the country.

A meticulous process was followed while drafting the NEP 2020, starting with the constitution of a high-level committee in 2017, chaired by Dr. K. Kasturirangan, a renowned space scientist, and comprising education experts, academicians, and stakeholders from various fields. The committee held consultations with State Governments, educational institutions, teachers, students, civil society organisations, and the public. The committee extensively reviewed existing educational policies, reports, and research. It also studied global best practices, emerging trends, and diverse perspectives. A draft was prepared for public viewing and feedback. In all, including the work of a previous committee (TSR Subramanian Committee), the policy took 5 years of work before it could be presented to the Government as the Kasturirangan Committee Report (also known as the Draft NEP 2019).

Subsequently, The Ministry of Education, present since 1947, also reclaimed its name with the public announcement of the NEP 2020, a change from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) which was accorded during the Rajiv Gandhi government. The NEP 2020 released by the Ministry of Education ensured that all the key

recommendations of the Draft NEP 2019 was in the final report; therefore, for those interested in the details of the educational policy road map, the Draft NEP 2019 could be considered as the one containing the details and the NEP 2020 a summary of the report submitted by the Kasturirangan Committee.

Innovations in the policy include due importance given to early childhood education, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary opportunities for students, vocational training for all students from middle school, introduction of school complexes to generate communities of practice and resource sharing as well as new educational bodies and concepts (such as the NPST) introduced for the training and management of educational practitioners and practice.

The historicity of the new NEP lies not only in the process of its formulation, but also in the introduction of concepts such as mother-tongue based multilingual education, personalisation of learning through technology using secondary research, emerging trends and global practices to meet its commitment to the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. To this end, the NEP 2020 acknowledges and embraces technology in education to facilitate the learning experience, teacher's professional development as well as developing administrative structures for monitoring and evaluation of school development and ensure that education has a 'learning centric' approach rather than a teacher centric or a student centric one. It also reinforces the merits of past policies and schemes, such as community engagement through SMC, involvement of local community members for vocational education as well as promotion and preservation of contextual cultural collateral.

Further it attempts to promote cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of the child by addressing the demerits of practices such as board exams, that place undue stress on the child, caregivers as well as school community. It recommends a continuous and comprehensive evaluation, that considers not just academic but also development in co-curricular areas. Competency based

framework to evaluate learnings, peer learning, project-based learning, and self-evaluation have been suggested as well to assess for overall development of the child. The NEP 2020 encourages the use of technology-enabled assessments in the future, including online assessments, adaptive testing, and data-driven analytics, to provide personalised feedback and support individualised learning paths for students.

The success of NEP 2020 will depend on its implementation over a period of 15 years that the policy document itself has earmarked. However, most of the school education provisions have targets to be met before 2030 corresponding to the targets set by the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2030. As indicated in the policy, several crucial factors have to be aligned to ensure that the policy is truly transformative; and for this to happen all stakeholders will have to rise to the occasion as NEP 2020 aims to transform the basic architecture of the Indian education system. It hopes to do this by building on all the good progress made in education in the country and confronting the erroneous aspects or features of earlier policies that could not get implemented. It is in this light one could view the National Curriculum Framework 2023 (NCF 2023); as an improvement over the highly acclaimed NCF 2005 which however failed to influence the classroom teaching learning processes adequately. It is with this hope that the decade ahead is seen as a transformative period for Indian education, both at the school and higher education stages. The expectation is that the policy provisions will not only enable all children in the country enroled and retained in school and receive high quality meaningful and relevant education till Grade XII by 2030 and thereby meet an important education goal of the SDG, but also ensure that half the youth in the country get enroled to pursue higher education after finishing school.

The implementation of NEP 2020 is well underway – the Centre has launched the NIPUN Bharat (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) Mission to improve the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) and many States have followed suit. The policy had FLN as one of the earliest targets to be

met by the country so that every child can read with understanding and do basic arithmetic calculations by the time, they are about 8 years old or are in Grade 3. This is just one of the targets and the policy has unambiguously stated that, to be serious about meeting the aims of education, the policy implementation must be done comprehensively without casting aside any of the provisions. Therefore, the question is whether the Governments, both at the Centre and the States, would walk the talk and do the needful to ensure the paradigm shift envisaged in the policy.

Conclusion

The journey of the family of Asha, introduced in the beginning of this essay, from 'never enroled in school' to having all the third-generation members studying in Higher Education Institutions is a clear statement on the educational progress the country has made since Independence. But the question is, could this have happened earlier? Rather than the benefits of the efforts since independence reaching the third generation, could the benefits come earlier – could Asha's parents have gotten a better education, or could her grandparents at least become literates if not passing school? This essay has critically examined the key policies since India's independence, the associated activities and the period in which they were implemented. It does indicate that a re-ordering of priorities could have enabled better mass education to be in place, however it would have come at the cost of something else – such as investments in higher education. What costs the country would have had to incur if the initial emphasis was to be in elementary education is not an easy question to answer, however comparative analysis of societies that invested in school education instead of higher education indicate a faster and progressive trajectory in societal development. Using Gandhi's *Nayee Taleem* framework for our initial investments in education with a clear focus on the primary classes would have provided a solid foundation in basic literacy and numeracy and numerous educational researches have indicated that investment in basic mass education has a massive impact on the overall development of a society, including reduction in disparities.

The other question for policy makers to ask at this juncture is, irrespective of the pace at which we have grown, whether the education that Asha, the protagonist in this essay, and her siblings are getting is relevant, rigorous and enabling. The NEP 2020 strives to ensure that education helps students in school and youth in Higher Education to build the required knowledge, capacities, dispositions and values to face the unknown future. There is reason for hope for families like those of Asha's as the education policy making space continues to remain vibrant and democratic with high participation of all important stakeholders. NEP 2020 aids this process to ensure that not only everyone has access to education, but every child finishes 15 years of schooling (Age group of 3 to 18) and that children get a meaningful and rewarding learning experience which makes each one of them a 'learner for life'.

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Essay XI: Growth of Higher Education in India: Challenges and Prospects

Ashok Thakur and S.S. Mantha

Abstract

The Indian Higher Education system is large, complex, and growing. It has come a long way since Independence in terms of opening new institutions and enroling students from all sections of the population and regions. Though it had a head start compared to other developing countries in terms of the use of English as a medium of instruction and modern universities having been set up as early as the middle of the 19th century, it has not been able to reap the harvest to the extent expected.

To achieve excellence in higher education, however, a lot more needs to be done. To begin with, the autonomy of the institutions must be boosted, the role of the Government and the regulators reduced, research and interdisciplinary studies need to be encouraged and linkages with the industry must be established. Firming up a policy with skilling as part of education, discarding bad practices like inbreeding, time-bound promotions promoting transparency in recruitment and promotion rules, providing adequate funding and reforming State colleges and Universities are equally important too.

The National Education Policy-2020 aims to address some of the above issues. The success in its implementation will to a large extent depend upon spending certain portion of the GDP in education, which in turn is contingent on how the economy fares in the years to come.

Introduction

Today, the Indian Higher Education System is the second largest in the world, next only to China's with 44.3 million enrolments.[1] According to the All-India Survey of Higher Education Report (AISHE 2019–20)[2]

India has 1,043 universities, 42,343 colleges, and 11,779 stand-alone institutions. The rate of growth of these institutions too has been mindboggling; a rise of more than 400% since 2001, with most of it in the private sector.[3] Such is the demand for Higher Education (HE) that India added almost a university every month.

In terms of quality output too, it looks impressive as the top Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of the world are Indians and products of the Indian HE system whether it is Sundar Pichai of Google (IIT Kharagpur), Satya Nadella of Microsoft (MIT Manipal), Parag Aggarwal of Twitter (IIT Bombay), Shantanu Narayan of Adobe (Osmania University), Laxman Narasimhan of Starbucks (University of Pune) and so forth.[4] The Indian engineers are at the cutting edge of the IT revolution and so are the Indian doctors as seen all over the world.[5] With most of the advanced countries experiencing a declining population trend, it will not be far when India will become world's one-stop-solution for all their manpower needs.[6] Indian higher education system therefore is one of the oldest, largest and of late churning out the best students that the top companies the world over are clamouring for.

However, the challenges too are enormous, commensurate. Though in terms of access it has done well, quality wise there is much to be desired. None of the top universities in the country figures amongst the top 200 in the world whereas China, though a late starter, has 24.[7] According to the India Skills Report 2022[8] only 46.7% of the graduates are employable.

Lack of sufficient funding at the National as well as the State levels is proving to be a major problem. Against a nationally claimed target of spending 6% of GDP on education since NPE 1986, India barely manages to spend 3% out of which in HE it is only 1.5%.[9] Similarly, the investment in research in the country is abysmally low i.e., just 0.8% compared to 2.23% in China.[10]

The expansion of HE in the country continues to take place mainly through the private sector. They may fulfil the needs of the urban and semi urban areas, but the Government needs to nudge them in entering other areas as well and at the same time caution them against

commercialisation and the "teaching shop" image that some of them seem to have acquired.

This essay presents the evolution, challenges, and the way forward for the Indian HE system. It is largely based on *secondary data* from the Education Ministry's annual reports, publications, weblinks and references of important works. It also draws upon the observations of the two authors who have had long tenures in the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) now Ministry of Education Government of India. Whereas the first author worked as Additional Secretary Technical Education and then as Secretary Higher Education with total number of seven years from 2008 to 2014 the latter remained Chairman AICTE for six years from 2009 to 2015.

Evolution of Indian University system

In ancient India parents sent their children for schooling to *Gurukuls* after which they entered the *Parishads* for higher education.[11] Temples and Viharas provided religious instructions as well and taught logic, science and mathematics-based studies.[12] Emphasis was laid on 'Paravidya', i.e., higher knowledge or spiritual wisdom, as well as 'Aparavidya', the lower knowledge or the materialistic sciences. Nalanda is one such example which is acknowledged as the oldest university in the world. The curriculum of Vedic education included grammar (vyakarana), phonetics (siksha) etymology (moola), logic (tarka) astrology (jyotisha), economics (arthashastra), law (dharmashastra), art of warfare (sastravidya), and fine arts (kala). Debates and discussions were the core of learning.[13] Vocational education like animal husbandry, agriculture, dairy farming etc., were also taught.[14] The country therefore has a long history of educating its people.

This education system which served Indian society for centuries was brought to an end by the British in the 19th century when they replaced the ancient 'gurukul' system with the clones of their own schools and universities.[15] Thus was born the present-day education system of India, not from the point of view of educating the masses, but to hire

cheap clerks to run the Empire.[16] In the earlier phase, broadly till the first half of the 19th century, there seemed to be some interest to learn about the Indian knowledge system including its history, culture, language and literature. The year 1781 saw the establishment of the Calcutta Madarasa for Islamic law studies and then the founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 by William Jones to understand and study the history and culture of India. During 1785, Charles Wilkins translated Bhagwat Gita to English. In 1791 Jonathan Duncan started the Sanskrit college for the study of Hindu laws and philosophies. Then in 1800, Fort William College in Calcutta was started to train the civil servants of the East India Company in Indian languages and customs though it was shut down after two years for "too much Indianising".

The real agenda for future education system of India was set by Thomas Macauley who is famously known to have said that "*a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.*"[17] He advocated the 'Downward filtration theory' where the British were to educate a small section of upper and middle-class Indians who would then be the bridge between the masses and the government, and these educated ones would spread western education to the masses gradually. This tussle between mass education vs select few, vernacular vs English language, provincial vs central funding continued and can be seen in various reports - *John Adam's report* of 1835, 1836, and 1838, *Wood's dispatch of 1854, Hunter Commission* 1882, Raleigh *Commission 1902*, Saddler *University Commission* 1917-19*, Hartog Committee (1929),* and Sargent *Plan of Education 1944*.[18] The last of these recommended free primary education for 3-6 years age group, compulsory education for 6-11 years age group, High School to selected students of 11-17 years age group, improved technical, commercial, and arts education, focus on teachers' training, physical education, and education of mentally and physically handicapped which shaped the modern universities and education system prevailing in India.

The first seeds of an Indian managed education system were sown in 1937 as the *Wardha Scheme* of basic education pioneered by the Indian National Congress which organised a national conference

on education in Wardha. The scheme focused on "learning through activity" which was based on Gandhiji's ideas published in Harijan. However, these ideas could not be implemented due to the starting of World War II.[19]

Education Policies

In the post-Independence period, issues of education reconstruction were reviewed by serval commissions including *University Education Commission 1948-49* and the *Secondary Education Commission (1952-53)*. *The Education Commission 1964-66* was appointed to advise the Government on "the national pattern of education and on the general principles and policies for the development of education in all stages and in all aspects".

The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 was a defining document in shaping education in the post-independence era. The policy promoted free and compulsory education, development of languages, equalising educational opportunities, reducing regional disparities, promoting national integration, merit-based admissions, emphasis on education of girls, promoting education amongst the socially disadvantageous sections of the society and physically challenged persons, examination reforms, promotion of scientific temper, identification of talent for achieving excellence in education etc.

The National Policy on Education 1986, modified in 1992, served as an anchor sheet for the development of education in the country for over 34 years. This envisaged a national system of education which brings about uniformity, making adult education programme a mass movement, providing universal access, ensuring retention and improving quality in elementary education. It stressed the education of girl child, establishing pace setting schools like Navodaya Vidyalyas in each district, vocationalisation of Secondary Education, interdisciplinary research, starting more open universities, strengthening All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), encouraging sports, yoga, and upgrading evaluation capacity. In pursuance of the above, the Ministry started '*Education for All*'. In

Higher Education the thrust was on expansion, equity, and excellence. In the 6th Five-Year Plan the budget for HE was increased nine-fold, and a host of new centrally funded institutions were created. Accreditation was made the central pillar for improving quality of education. However, it essentially remained input based and only about 20% of the participating institutions were accredited.

In keeping with the changing times, the *New Education Policy (NEP 2020)* replaces the earlier policy of 1986. The NEP 2020 aims to make India a knowledge superpower by equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge and to be able to become a global factory for meeting manpower requirements in science, technology, academics, and industry. The policy states that 'it proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, including SDG-4, while building upon India's traditions and value systems.'

Expansion of Higher Education

At present there are 456 State Universities, 126 Deemed-to-be Universities, 54 Central Universities, and 421 Private Universities with a total of 1057 universities.[20] Further, 159 Institutes of National Importance (INI), which include AIIMS, IITs, IIMs, IIITs, IISERs, and NITs have also been established among others. The rate of increase of these institutions has been creditable by any standards, coming as it happened in just 75 years after independence.

What fuels this enormous juggernaut of HE? It is the country's huge demography of 1.4 billion people of which more than 65% are youth in the age group of 20 to 35 that drives this. The country today boasts of being the youngest country in the world with a median age of 28.4.[21] Despite this a GER of 27.1% in 2019–20 has fallen short of the MoE's target of 32% by 2022. According to a study by the Centre for International Higher Education[22] it is significantly behind China's 51% and Europe and North America's 80%. The number of students enrolled in HE in India was about 40 million in 2019[23] which was a

3% increase over 2016. The enrolment in open and distance learning (ODL) is approximately 4 million. The Economic Survey 2021-22 says that the country has done reasonably well in terms of *expansion* of higher education. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) which was only 0.4% at the time of Independence and 20.4% in 2011, has reached 27.1%. It will still be a tough call to reach 50% by 2035 which is the target set by National Education Policy 2020.

The diversity in the Indian education system is large. There are new as well as old institutions offering degrees/diplomas/certifications. There are also technology vs social sciences institutions, multi-disciplinary vs single discipline, private vs public, research-based, innovation-based, language-based or even special purpose institutions/universities.

India has been grappling with the challenge of ensuring equity in higher education since the beginning, whether it is for the socially weaker sections of the society (SC, ST and OBC), women or reducing regional disparities. Even after 75 years, the gaps are discernible. The Gross Enrolment Ratio for SC is 23.4% and for Scheduled Tribes, it is only 18% as against the overall 27.1 per cent.[24]

In terms of infrastructure too, the disparities are glaring. Whereas in Andhra Pradesh the density of colleges per lakh population is above 50, it is only around nine for Bihar. There is also an enormous variation in quality of these institutions across States. For instance, according to the National Institutional Ranking Framework of India 2021, the best colleges in the country are concentrated in nine of India's 28 states: Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and West Bengal.

Indian Universities in World Ranking

The biggest challenge is in improving the *quality* of HE. In world ranking none of universities appears even in the top 200. India's graduate employability remains at a small 46.7%[25] Indian universities lack in autonomy in terms of governance as well as academic freedom as they are regulated either by the affiliating university for the

colleges and the regulators like UGC and AICTE. Most of all, they lack interdisciplinarity. A University as the very name suggests stands for a universe of knowledge wherein all disciplines whether science, humanities, medicine, engineering, law, agriculture, architecture, management, pharmacy and even skills are seen as intrinsically linked. Human experience shows that all path breaking innovations take place on the fringes of disciplines.

Indian universities appearing in the world list of the best has been poor in the past though a few of them like the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) have been faring much better in the recent past. India's highest-ranked institution, the IISc, was in the 301–350 range among institutions worldwide in 2022, according to the Times Higher Education 2022 World University Rankings.[26] China, by contrast, has 16 institutions in the top 350, including six ranked in the top 100 and two in the top 20.

There are at least 20 Global Ranking agencies that measure quality on various parameters. Though several Indian universities participate in world rankings, the country has also devised its own ranking system in National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF).[27] Its rankings is based on six parameters - teaching learning and resources research, professional practice, graduation outcomes, outreach, inclusivity and perception about the institution. The overall score for ranking is computed, based on the weightage allotted to each parameter and sub parameter. The data is provided by the institutions themselves and the rest is sourced from third party sites. Ideally, an objective function must be defined for an institution, with the desired attributes as variables and weightages apportioned to each such attribute that depends on their importance in the overall value proposition that the institute serves.

However, the ranking game is an unlevel playing field. In the Union Budget 2021, whereas the government allocation was Rs 7,686 crore to IITs, the total outlay for all Central Universities was Rs 7643.26 crore. Some departments in IITs have even better faculty ratios since they are not bound by the cadre rules applicable to State universities.

While the State university budgets are ridiculously low, they are all competing on the same quality parameters and are expected to outperform the better endowed ones. It is time to also check the return on investment (ROI) especially when several of students from elite institutions, educated on public money, do not even serve within the country.

Another glaring oversight is the disconnect that exists between the ranking and accreditation. There are several universities which have earned NAAC 'A' grade but may fare poorly in the ranking system. Probably, in the future, NIRF must take into consideration the NAAC scores too in its evaluation.

The lack of international faculty and students, and inadequacy of research to connect with the industry are weak points. International faculty and students will arrive only if they see a value proposition in Indian institutions, an indicator of quality. Industry connect will happen only when the research translates into improved or new processes and products. Patents translated to products and not just patents filed have value. To make this happen, NIRF must have top experts in its core committee not only from the country but also from outside.

Another trend that has adversely affected higher education and the "idea of a university" is the mushrooming of single subject universities. Scores of private engineering, management and even dental collesges have become universities. Last but not the least is that genuine trusts /societies with good track record and commitment to education are being crowded out by commercial interests though education is not for profit.

These are all important parameters for attaining a good world ranking as well.

Improving quality in Higher Education

Quality comes at a price. Investing adequate amounts by both the public and the private sector is *sine qua non* for its attainment. To begin with one must realise that quality in higher education system

is dependent on the quality in the primary and secondary education systems. Hence, there is a need to invest time and money in improving the school education system since, the students passing out of the schools are the building blocks of colleges and universities. More than 2 million students enter the HE system every year. To improve schools, first, attention must be paid to government schools which form the backbone of school education and where the bulk of the budget is spent. Since the school education is primarily in the hands of the State Governments they should focus on selection, promotion, and transfer of teachers in a transparent manner.

Second, the governance structure of Indian universities needs to be strengthened. The selection, training, promotions, and appointments must be done in a transparent manner. They need to be autonomous and self-driven to do research, interdisciplinary studies, publish in reputed peer reviewed journals, link up with the industry and discard some bad practices that have crept into the system like inbreeding, time-based promotions (Carrier Advancement Scheme), etc. The regulators and universities must follow the best practices by putting in place transparent admission processes based on merit, subject of course to the national legal provisions regarding equity.

Since the cadre-based academic structure is the norm today in universities and institutions, unlike the IITs where it is based on qualifications set for a certain position, it is suggested that the university system must also be freed from the cadre-based appointments according to graded autonomy. This will attract quality faculty besides improving the student teacher ratios. Universities in the private sector can afford it and must be made to follow it. Those in the Government sector must be encouraged to collaborate with the industry for additional funding besides what they receive from the government.

The Skill Paradigm

The National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship was launched 2015. It was confronted with a huge task of training and

providing jobs to more than 8 million persons[28] annually who join the Indian workforce. With almost 6 million graduates passing every year, finding appropriate employment year on year for them is proving to be more than a challenge. The problem is massively compounded when employment must be found for an age group of 25 to 35 which is five times as large, year-on-year, who lack skills and education of any consequence.

The most important point that the Policy states is that skilling is to be seen as part and parcel of education and not as a separate entity. They are like the Siamese twins and artificially separating them would be harmful to both. Also, success in skilling depends upon the collaborative working of as many as 18 Ministries of the Government of India involved in skilling apart from the state governments, school boards, universities and 37 Sector Skill Councils like construction, retailing, hospitality, automobile etc. The role of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MoSDE) is therefore one of a coordinating Ministry.

MoSDE now seems to focus only on Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna (PMKVY) which is a target-oriented scheme. After six years of the implementation, the PMKVY[29] dashboard says that it has trained 137 million candidates of which 109 million were certified. The initial target of training 400 million by 2022 remained a distant dream. Besides those trained are mostly of the lowest levels i.e., 1 to 4. The dashboard states a placement performance of 54% which could be mostly in the unorganised sector. A glance through the training programmes reveals that most of them are trade-based, traditional, not kept pace with times and limited in reach. Acceptability in the society for such courses has been limited.

The standards of training, operational details, curriculum, and certifications are state-specific with the result that they have become a hurdle from the point of view of providing mobility to trainees nationally as well as internationally. Several traditional skills have an unexplored job market and consequent earning potential that has not

been researched and hence shunned as revenue models. These need to be continuously explored.

India has a small window of only 20 odd years to reap the demographic dividends. To fast track it, a National Skills University (NSU) under MSDE / NCVET[30] with pan India jurisdiction can be set up just as Indira Gandhi National Open University did for Open and Distance Learning in 1980 and 90s. This would ensure not only skill and education remaining together but also uniformity of standards throughout the country. Unfortunately, several States have already setup skill universities each with the power of issuing its own regulations, defeating the very purpose of having a unified national framework / standard. The other step would be for the PMO to take a lead in skilling. The Prime Minister as the Chairperson of National Council for Skill Development could not only provide the much-needed funds on a large scale for upgrading infrastructure in schools for vocational education but also bring about synergy amongst the various organs of the government which are at the heart of success of the programme. In the States the Chief Ministers could play a similar role.

Online Education and Blended learning:

Online education is generally thought of as providing coursework in remote mode. However, it is much more than that. Building a technology platform that captures the learning profiles is a challenge and a way out.

The NEP 2020 rightly assesses the future of Indian Higher Education system, to a large extent to its ability to handle the digital transformation of colleges and universities. Even as it envisages reaching a GER of 50 by 2035 from the current 27.1, it acknowledges the limitation of the conventional brick-and-mortar model in the Indian context where numbers defy conventional solutions. Since India has 65% of its population below the age of 35, it implies that there are at least four times as many, who could have gone to colleges but did not!

ODL and ICT are two sides of the same coin. IGNOU when it opened and offered courses through “correspondence” but today one cannot

imagine it without ICT. Some cornerstone features of NEP 2020 like the *Academic Bank of Credits, Student-Centric Education, personalised education* and *Multiple Entry and Exit System* can simply not take off unless there is a robust digital component.

Another important aspect is that online education must be driven by an effective Learning Management System (LMS) which provides a complete solution covering administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, delivery of programmes training of faculty with continuous assessment all based on AI-driven predictive analysis. Several good universities in the west such as MIT or Stanford use third party LMS that not only takes care of a student's entire learning cycle, but also becomes a tool to her lifelong learning.

One appreciates the concern of the UGC in allowing only the top institutions of the country for the conduct of online programmes for the present, but in the years to come, there is a need to unshackle online education completely. A level playing field to Indian institutions and universities especially when the government is considering allowing entry to foreign universities is necessary. 'SWAYAM' is a good initiative as it encourages creating and porting of content through the country's top institutions. However, for it to be effective, the best LMS and the best of third-party content, created and curated by the best of faculty in world must be used.

Currently UGC has enabled 40% learning credit towards a university through SWAYAM only. Allowing third party content and platform providers can enable students to learn from the best sources besides fostering healthy competition among the HEIs.

Autonomy in Higher Education

Autonomy has been proposed as a panacea for all ills in the education system. However, providing autonomy for a large system, that has more than 45000 institutions is another challenge.

Autonomy has four facets: administrative, academic, managerial and financial. Unfortunately, only academic autonomy seems to be the

talking point. Unless it is supported by the other three facets, it does not deliver.

In the context of a university, it is the freedom to govern for the promoters, to teach and do research for the faculty and to learn for the students in the highest learning- teaching traditions. Autonomy is a university's default mode and therefore once it is created it cannot be re- given or taken away by any higher authority. To that extent the role of the education regulators like UGC or AICTE are against the true spirit of autonomy. The stumbling blocks in autonomy of universities in India are: affiliation system, financial dependence on State, inadequate governance structure, lack of pride in academics and what it stands for, and over regulation.

Affiliation system cuts into the concept of autonomy of the institutions. The system cannot be wished away due to its long standing but can be phased out gradually by encouraging UGC's Autonomous College scheme and by creating cluster universities as is being done under Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA). The NEP 2020 is very proactive on this issue and has several recommendations for empowering colleges with top ranking and accreditation, to be fully autonomous.

As of June 2023, there were 979 autonomous colleges identified by the University Grants Commission.[31] This status is earned by them based on their proven track record on a few indicators. Many of them have a glorious legacy and continue to be excellent centres for teaching and research. Hindu College under Delhi University or Stella Mary under the university of Madras, are some, with excellent claims to be converted into universities.

Regulation of Higher Education

The Constitution of India envisions that the coordination and maintenance of standards in institutions of Higher Education or research and scientific and technical institutions rests with the Union of India. To achieve this end the UGC was created in 1956 under an Act of Parliament. To be able to confer a degree, whether it is in

medicine, engineering, management law, architecture, pharmacy or even fashion technology, it is mandatory to be part of the University system which is regulated under the UGC Act. However, over a period, several professional education regulators came into being, curiously through government legislation, which have encroached upon the apex regulator's space. The writ of UGC is limited to the formal aspect of issuing of degrees by universities as far as legal and medical education are concerned.

Today there are more than 13 *de facto* "regulators" in Higher Education, oftentimes issuing contradictory instructions causing confusion amongst the institutions and students alike. To reduce chances of this happening there has been a move since long to create a single authority i.e., Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). Also, conceptually the idea of a university is not complete unless knowledge is treated as a single whole. The NEP also talks about this though it shies away from including medicine and law under the HECI.

The AICTE is a statutory body, and a national-level council for technical education, under the Department of Higher Education, MoE. The AICTE was set up in November 1945 as a national-level advisory body to conduct a survey on the facilities available for technical education and to promote development in the country in a coordinated and integrated manner. The main objectives have been promotion of quality in technical education, planning and coordinated development, making regulations for the purpose and maintenance of norms and standards.

The AICTE functions through several bureaus like with e-governance, approval, planning and coordination, administration, research, faculty development, etc. There are 10 additional Board of Studies dealing with technician, vocational, undergraduate engineering, postgraduate engineering and research, architecture, town and country planning, pharmacy, management, applied arts and crafts, hotel management and catering technology education. Currently, AICTE regulates over 10,000 Institutions that offer programmes in engineering, technology and management.

Challenges in implementing NEP 2020.

The NEP 2020 is a good document which lists out action points in education in a short to medium time range. However, a policy on education for a huge system like India's is akin to an ocean liner where taking a turn is often not discernible, yet the final objective remains clear. It must be relevant to the entire nation and for a long time irrespective of governments. The last National Policy on Education (NPE) was formulated 34 years ago, yet several of the ideas continue and flow into the present as well. Education has a long gestation period and therefore its policy should be in broad strokes capable of capturing scenario for the next 30 years or so. It cannot be prescriptive nor too specific lest it becomes dated.

The proposed target of 50 % GER by 2035 is realisable, provided there are fewer budget constraints and the moving parts in the system, especially skilling and ODL, play their part. The new NEP stipulates spending 6% of the GDP on education as in the NPE 1986. On the ground, however, expenditure on education has been falling: in 2012-13, education expenditure was 3.1% of the GDP which fell in 2014-15 to 2.8%. By 2018-19 it barely managed to touch 3%. [32] The percentage spent on Higher Education has been even less. Proper implementation of the education-cess could largely resolve this issue.

There are several new initiatives proposed in the NEP 2020 like academic bank of credits, providing a student-centric education, multiple entry and exit points with appropriate certification, etc. which are *avantgarde* and progressive but implementing them could prove to be a nightmare. They not only require massive funding but also call for a paradigm shift in the attitude of the regulators, faculty and most of all the academic bureaucracy which is notorious for its rigidity.

The policy document also advises creation of a single regulator in higher education (Higher Education Commission if India - HECI), segregation of accreditation (National Accreditation Council -NAC), separate funding (Higher Education Grants Council) and regulatory roles (National Higher Education Regulatory Council- NHERC) which

will yield positive results in the times to come. Presently, regulators in Higher Education function independently, many a time issuing contradictory regulations. However, since the purpose was to integrate all higher education under one umbrella, the logic of keeping Law and Medicine out of it especially when their degrees are also given by universities is difficult to fathom. The country has missed a golden opportunity to integrate knowledge streams across disciplines and to draw the line between general and professional education once and for all.

The recommendation to phase out affiliation over next 15 years and provide graded autonomy to all colleges based on accreditation is a positive move. Its success will depend to a large extent on the cooperation the institution is able to get from its faculty in putting the extra effort on achieving autonomous status. Also, the funding of RUSA should not be reduced as this is the mechanism for creating Cluster Universities out of several affiliated colleges.

The document would have done well if it had thrown more light on the eternal debate of funding Institutes of National Importance vs the State Universities where bulk of the students are enrolled.

One of the major drawbacks of Indian universities has been their poor research quotient and the disconnect with the industry. Research without patents and IPRs is like a body without soul. The NEP's recommendation of a new authority, the National Research Foundation (NRF) though a good idea, falls short of setting up a Max Planck or a Fraunhofer model of institution, which stipulates earning 70% of its income through contracts with industry or specific government projects. This provides them with genuine autonomy and an entrepreneurial approach to research both so important for national initiatives like 'Make in India' and 'Start-up India'.

Lastly one expected the NEP 2020 to focus on some of the best practices - avoiding inbreeding, mandatory promotions, and fair selection of faculty. Universities like Allahabad University, Aligarh Muslim University, Mumbai University, Delhi University, Calcutta University, Madras University and a dozen others would have blazed

the trail in world rankings today if no compromise was made in faculty recruitment. Also, the absence of any steps to check commercialisation in higher education institutions is problematic. If implemented sincerely NEP 2020 has the potential to meet the changing needs of the country with regards to quality education, innovation, and research. It has the potential to make India a knowledge hub by equipping its students with the necessary skills and knowledge thereby eliminating the shortage of qualified human resource in science, technology, academics, and industry not only for the country but also globally.

Conclusion

The Indian Higher Education has tremendous potential to be one of the leading in the world. It has the advantage of the English language as well as a large pool of qualified human resource which enabled it to earn as the sobriquet of the "back office of the world". What is sobering is the fact that the foot soldiers for this revolution were from the engineering colleges of India's tier two cities and not from elite institutions. The lesson from the above is that wonders can be achieved by putting education, skills and industry together.

The size of the Indian Higher Education pie has grown. The focus must be on its quality now. To make this happen the government, the regulators, academics and the management of the institutions must work as a team. They all need to be open minded and follow the best practices in the world for management, teaching and research, though it may sometimes mean stepping out of their comfort zones. The government on its part must ensure autonomy as well as adequate funding.

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Essay XII: India's Neighbours – A Persistent Foreign Policy Challenge

Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty

Abstract

During the last 75 years, India has reinvented and reshaped its neighbourhood policy. India has progressively opened to subregional and regional multilateralism, abandoning rigid bilateralism. India's persistent efforts to stabilise relations with its neighbours is based on the fundamental premise that a peaceful, democratic, politically stable and economically integrated neighbourhood is in India's long term national interest. Empirical evidence from the European Union and the north American nations [Canada, Mexico, and USA] suggests that nations that have settled borders with neighbours and have developed stable political and economic relations with one another, have achieved higher levels of development and prosperity. India's neighbourhood policy has also evolved, moving away gradually towards more liberal policies to foster connectivity and economic development.

Introduction

The neighbourhood has been an important element in the written doctrine of statecraft in *Kautilya's Arthashastra,* the first substantive Indian treatise on strategy.[1] How to deal with neighbouring kingdoms and those beyond the neighbours is an integral aspect of Kautilya's famous "*Rajamandala* theory", wherein he postulates that neighbours are most likely to be hostile, while kingdoms on the other side of one's neighbours are likely to be potential allies. Modern International Relations, based on Western concepts, basically anticipate many of the strategic concepts outlined in the *Arthashastra.*

"The Kautilyan tradition of statecraft was acknowledged and elaborated on by several later masters. For those in the world of diplomacy, the *Nitisara* of Kamandaki is also a truly remarkable text. It builds on the work of Kautilya and earlier scholars, and also uses the *mandala*'s conceptual framework for examining interstate relations."[2]

Indian Prime Ministers from Jawaharlal Nehru to Narendra Modi have all kept the neighbourhood as a central aspect of foreign policy. Geography is an immutable overhang over a country's foreign policy and plays a very large role since India's location and borders are defined by this reality. The overall objective of India's foreign policy is to ensure the transformation of India into a secure, stable, developed, and prosperous nation and to achieve these goals, a peaceful, politically stable and economically secure periphery is a desired objective, as is a global environment which fosters peaceful cooperation regionally and globally. Creation of a required ambience to focus on the essential tasks of growth and development, a common challenge for the entire South Asian Region, therefore, requires suitable architectures for stability and resolution of conflicts and differences.

The overhang of history affected foreign policy in post-Independent India. "India's foreign policy carries three major burdens from its past. One is the 1947 Partition, which reduced India both demographically and politically. An unintended consequence was to give China more strategic space in Asia. Another is the delayed economic reforms that were undertaken a decade and half after those of China. The third is the prolonged exercise of the nuclear option".[3]

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee famously said in 2003 that "you can change friends, but not neighbours". Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, addressing the annual conference of Indian Ambassadors in November 2013, said *inter alia,* the following while outlining five principles guiding India's foreign policy:

> We recognise that the Indian sub-continent's shared destiny requires greater regional cooperation and connectivity. Towards this end, we must strengthen regional institutional capability and capacity and invest in connectivity.[4]

Addressing the UN General Assembly in September 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said,

> India desires a peaceful and stable environment for its development. A nation's destiny is linked to its neighbourhood. That is why my government has placed the highest priority on advancing friendship and cooperation with her neighbours.[5]

India's neighbours constitute the first circle of civilisational linkages, security, and socio-economic ties. This "intimacy" influences foreign policies of all countries in varying degrees. This intimacy also creates friction. A unique aspect of India's ties with her neighbours has been the dynamics of domestic politics in a neighbouring country which induces impulses for seeking India's support in domestic politics and counter-balancing India with external powers. India's policy makers, therefore, must balance various options, both bilateral, and plurilateral. One such option is the non-reciprocal approach for integrating markets, capacity building, investments, educational and cultural exchanges, where feasible. As a first responder for disaster management, counter-terrorism cooperation and development cooperation, India remains an important interlocuter for her neighbours.

The asymmetry and historical burden, bring to the fore sensitivities, fears, and complexes, despite Indian reticence to leverage its size and strength. Asymmetry gives India advantages but also makes her neighbours wary of her intentions. The refrain of a "big brother" and ties which preserve "dignity" are constant reminders of this asymmetry. India's democracy, state institutions, economic growth, soft power, and social developments also influence India's neighbours. India's soft power has pervasive influence in the region and a positive factor in ties.

Evolution of India's Neighbourhood Policy

India's neighbourhood policy has evolved, moving away gradually towards more liberal policies to foster connectivity and economic development. Vajpayee conceptualised 'beneficial bilateralism' to nurse ties in 1977 as external affairs minister in Morarji Desai Government. The Gujral doctrine set aside reciprocity in bilateral relations in 2004. Neighbourhood policy was re-defined by Manmohan Singh as India's "asymmetric responsibility". This has now progressed to Modi's "Neighbourhood first policy". The economic dimension has largely overtaken the earlier securitised policy. During the last 75 years, India has reinvented and reshaped its neighbourhood policy. India has progressively opened to subregional and regional multilateralism, abandoning rigid bilateralism.

Smruti S. Pattanaik writes in her paper, "India's 'neighbourhood first' policy: the primacy of geoeconomics": that "India has traversed from perceiving its border as an inviolable security limit to transgressing it in search of economic opportunities that connectivity and trade entail –geocentric military security parameters to geoeconomics with a developmental underpinning of '*sabka vikas*'. After its over-emphasis on bilateralism to uphold a 'hegemonic' negotiating position to the discomfort of its neighbours, India is now open to subregional and regional multilateralism in its neighbourhood policy. Over the last seventy-five years India has reinvented and reshaped its neighbourhood policy with dynamism in some areas and imperiousness in others." [6]

The benefits of regional cooperation are as obvious, as is the fact that creating structures for regional cooperation are challenging. India has taken several asymmetric steps in giving market access to its neighbours which helps in regional integration in a mutually beneficial manner. An Asian Development Bank study estimates the potential of intra South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) trade under South Asian Free Trade Association (SAFTA) to be over $ 85 billion. While several agreements under the SAARC umbrella are in operation, Pakistan's role in objecting to connectivity proposals has

pushed SAARC aside and India has focussed more on Bay off Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) as the preferred platform for regional cooperation and sub-regional cooperation among BBIN [Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal] countries.

A brief survey of India's ties with her neighbours is as follows.

Afghanistan

For India, Afghanistan is a neighbour with whom there are historical ties - [India shares a border with the Wakhan corridor in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir-PoK]. The country's role as Pakistan's western neighbour and neighbour of Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, makes it important for India's geostrategic interest. The American withdrawal from Afghanistan and the second takeover of power by the Taliban in Kabul, caused a strategic setback for India. India has invested in development partnership, valued at USD 3 billion. This investment went mostly into infrastructure. The Taliban's role in the hijacking of Indian Airlines flight to Kandahar in 1999, in collusion with Pakistan's ISI, hosting anti-Indian Islamic terrorist organisations, as well as international terrorist groups like the Al-Qaida, ISIS and Al-Khorasan group, had made Afghanistan a global concern. The return of the Taliban to power has not led to any recognition of the government and only ad-hoc contacts, mainly for humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people, almost 90 per cent of whom are now below the poverty line.

After the second Taliban takeover, India closed its Embassy and Consulates and withdrew all official personnel. Currently, India has re-opened channels of communication with the Taliban leadership. The Afghan people look towards India for help and have a favourable opinion of India. There was criticism of India not keeping its options open and putting all eggs in the American basket, even after it became clear that the Americans were preparing to quit Afghanistan. India, however, did establish contact with the Taliban's negotiating team at Doha, Qatar before the Americans withdrew.

Afghanistan is facing an economic meltdown and the humanitarian situation is extremely serious. Rising seizures of narcotics at Indian ports and borders areas, indicate that an impoverished Afghanistan has turned to smuggling of narcotic drugs, managed by Afghan-Pakistan drug cartels. Countries neighbouring Afghanistan and beyond are concerned about the export of terrorism by international Islamist groups, re-establishing bases with their supporters in Afghanistan. The elimination of Ayman Al-Jawahari, head of Al-Qaida, living in Kabul, by an American drone attack in 2022 shows that such fears are justified. The Taliban are not in full control of the whole country and resistance to their medieval rule, exemplified by their clampdown on girls' education and other archaic regulations continue, particularly in non-Pashtun areas.

Though India has not recognised the Taliban government, it has sent consignments of wheat, COVID vaccines and life-saving medicines via air and land. Pakistan came under Afghan pressure to permit transhipment of wheat via the Attari border and had to relent after some hesitation. The offer by Iran to tranship wheat via Chahbahar may have also hastened Pakistan's decision. India's policy is a mixture of pragmatism and caution. The steps taken by India to re-establish a presence in the Embassy in Kabul and humanitarian assistance are aimed at helping the Afghan people and are limited steps to sustain the goodwill that India enjoys among the people. India's assistance has been welcomed by the Taliban.

The Taliban-Pakistan nexus is a close one and is likely to continue despite occasional friction over the Durand Line [Afghan-Pakistan border]. The ISI-backed Haqqani faction is an important player in the Taliban government. The China-Pakistan nexus is also active, and China has provided aid to the Taliban and is keen to absorb Afghanistan into its strategic Belt and Road Initiative [BRI] network. Meanwhile, Pakistan's attempts to convince the world to recognise the Taliban government as a *fait accompli* has been unsuccesfull. Without international recognition which is unlikely in the near future, Afghanistan's future is bleak, and the humanitarian lifeline is the best it can expect, as long as it continues with it anachronistic and medieval

policies. Taliban-Pakistan relations have also developed fractures and management of ties have fundamental challenges.

Bangladesh

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's September 2022 visit to India reinforced the fundamental strength of bilateral ties which are the best ever, during 50 years of diplomatic relations. This golden chapter in bilateral ties had been described as model for other countries. Bilateral ties have been on an upward curve during the last decade and a half. Much of the credit for this remarkable journey must go to the top leadership of the two countries. For India, Bangladesh and Bhutan are now central to India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy'.

The transformation in bilateral ties have progressed, reaching new levels of trust, and expanded sectors of cooperation. The maritime boundary dispute and the land boundary demarcation, were resolved in 2014-15, removing two long-pending irritants. To celebrate Bangladesh's 50 years of Independence and the birth centenary celebrations of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, Modi visited Dhaka to attend the celebrations on 26 March 2021 and President Ram Nath Kovind was the Chief Guest for Victory Day on 16 December 2021.

Bangladesh is now India's largest trading partner in SAARC, with an annual turnover of around USD $18 billion. Indian investments in Bangladesh have reached USD $3 billion. India's development partnership programme has grown to over $ 8 billion. Connectivity has become a defining pillar. Pre-partition trans-border railway nodes are being reconnected, pipelines supplying hydrocarbons form India, transhipment of goods via Chittagong to Agartala and cyber connectivity extension from the undersea cable gateway at Cox's Bazaar to Agartala, building conventional and nuclear power plants, supplying power via connected electricity grids and greater people-to-people movement makes Bangladesh India's major development partner in the subcontinent." Bangladesh will continue to remain a pivot for India's 'Look East Policy', and trans-regional and sub-regional groupings like BIMSTEC and BBIN.

Bangladesh's economy has logged impressive growth, though currently under some stress, like most countries, because of the COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The rise in oil and gas prices have created an energy crisis. An important issue that will need resolution is the trading framework which will undergo fundamental changes when Bangladesh graduates from a Less Developed Country [LDC] to a developing country, like India, and will no longer be entitled to trade and other benefits that are accorded to LDCs under international and regional trading agreements. Hence, The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement [CEPA] becomes crucial to preserve duty-free facilities under a bilateral agreement. CEPA negotiations have begun and may culminate in an agreement by 2026.

The energy sector has witnessed increased cooperation with a 1320 MW thermal power plant being built by the NTPC in a 50:50 joint venture with PDB of Bangladesh. Adani Group is also building a 1600 MW power plant in Godda, Jharkhand which will supply power to Bangladesh, via a dedicated transmission line. This project is expected to come online by December next year. A 'friendship' pipeline from Numaligarh refinery is built to deliver petroleum products to Parbatipur in Bangladesh.

Bilateral ties even with the friendliest of neighbours, like India and Bangladesh, can never be without some disagreements and the two countries have their share on the bilateral menu. It is, however, a sign of the maturity of the leadership in both countries that these differences have not been allowed to upset the broad positive trend in the relationship, nor hold bilateral ties as hostage to resolution of disagreements. River water sharing, migration issues, border management and communal violence against Hindus in Bangladesh will remain continuing challenges. The smuggling mafia in both countries create situations that provoke violence at the border. A multipronged approach is required for border management and elimination of violence along the border.

The Rohingya refugees, numbering around a million, is a festering problem with potential for incubating violence and migration. The

military coup in Myanmar has made a resolution of this issue more difficult imposing a huge burden on Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina has repeatedly raised this issue and called upon India to help in its resolution. The ultimate resolution would be the safe return and resettlement of these refugees in Myanmar. The latter, after the military coup, has shown no willingness to help and the million or more refugees remain in camps in Bangladesh. The pressure on India to help resolve the issue is understandable but can India resolve it unilaterally? India can help and it has done so with humanitarian assistance and quiet dialogue with the military government in Naypyidaw. Only international pressure can help but China is unlikely to push Naypyidaw to resolve the issue.

While there is a bipartisan political consensus in India on the furthering of this relationship, in Bangladesh there remains an anti-Indian constituency that constantly pillories Sheikh Hasina for selling out to India without any commensurate returns. This constituency is motivated by politics and a mindset that remains rooted in the ideology of Pakistan. The two-nation theory did not wither away and die when Bangladesh was born. It became a three-nation theory and lives on as a latent feeling which comes into the open as anti-Indian outbursts. The frequent attacks on Hindus, forcing them, to migrate to India, is a manifestation of this mindset.

Sheikh Hasina has consciously striven to reinforce the secular nature of Bangladesh's polity. With her overwhelming majority in Parliament, she has restored secularism as a founding principle in the Constitution but has avoided expunging the provision which makes Islam the state religion. Military dictators who ruled Bangladesh had subverted the original Constitution to make it Islam-friendly. They were trained in Pakistan and retained the mindset nurtured in the Pakistan army. In the eternal quest for identity, they believed that Bangladeshi nationalism must be based on Islam to distinguish it from Bengali nationalism. Islam remains a defining feature of Bangladesh and religion trumps secularism frequently. Sheikh Hasina, has therefore, been cautious and does not want to give her opponents the opportunity to hurl allegations of being anti-Islam. She ensured that war criminals were

convicted and executed. This dampened the morale of the Islamists, particularly the pro-Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami.

Islamists with their puritanical vision of Islam want to make Bangladesh an Islamic state with the imposition of *Sharia* Law. Their actions will remain a source of danger and instability, as violence to achieve this goal, is regarded as justified by the Islamists. The rise of extremist Islamist organisations in Bangladesh is a worrying development and can cause domestic upheaval and damage bilateral ties. Their networks are linked to Pakistan's terrorist organisations. They seek to de-stabilise Bangladesh and India for their puritanical ideological goals. Better intelligence cooperation has helped both sides to tackle these disruptive elements. While bilateral ties will continue to grow, these inimical forces will seek to undermine goodwill. Both countries must cooperate more closely against this menace if the future has to be secured for economic growth and prosperity for which India has to bear asymmetrical responsibility.

Bangladesh's cooperation in counter terrorism and intelligence sharing has helped in combatting terrorism. The recent American sanctions and cancellation of visa of some Bangladeshi officials in the security forces who have been instrumental in eliminating terrorists, have complicated matters between the two countries. Human rights groups and Sheikh Hasina's opponents, mainly the opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and the Jamaat-i-Islami, have a role in lobbying the American Administration which has used human rights a tool of bringing pressure on various countries.

Bhutan

Bhutan-India ties are rock solid. Bhutan defies the *Kautilyan* proposition that ties with a neighbour will always be inimical. Bhutan continues to be steadfast ally. Bhutan and Nepal are the only two neighbours, with whom India has open borders with free movement of people. Bilateral ties were established in 1968 with the establishment of a Special Office of India in Thimphu. The basic framework of bilateral relations is based on the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed

in 1949 between the two countries and revised in February 2007. PM Modi's first foreign visit was to Bhutan, underlining the unique and special relationship shared by the two countries. Bhutan has been a central pillar in India's neighbourhood first policy.

Underpinning bilateral ties are a shared strategic perspective on security, economic integration, development partnership and the investment in hydropower. Surplus power is exported to India, providing Bhutan a steady and increasing revenue and providing India an assured supply of clean power. Bhutan's estimated potential of 30,000 MW (20,000 MW is technically and economically feasible), only about 1400 MW has been harnessed.

India has extended a financial assistance package of Rs 4500 crore to Bhutan for the 12th Five- Year Plan (FYP), comprising Rs 2800 crore for Project Tied Assistance (PTA), Rs 850 crore for High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPCs/erstwhile Small Development Projects), and Rs 850 crore towards Program Grant/Development Subsidy. Under the 12th Five- Year Plan, India is implementing 82 PTA Projects and 524 HICDPs in Bhutan. In addition, India has also committed Rs 400 crore towards Transitional Trade Support Facility and Rs 100 crore towards Tariff Adjustment of Mangdechhu Hydro Project.

China

India and its neighbourhood, as well as the international order are today coping with geopolitical and geoeconomic changes, brought about by the dizzying pace of advancing digital technologies, the phenomenal growth in the Chinese economy, fallout of the Chinese-origin COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine. China has catapulted to become the second largest economy after the USA. It has become a manufacturing powerhouse and the dominant trading partner of all major economies. China's GDP today is five times that of India, even after India pipped the UK and moved up into the fifth position globally. China is now promoting its model of development – authoritarian one-party government combined with state-directed capitalism as an

alternative to the Western model and pushing its ambition to become a hegemonic superpower.

The China-driven disequilibrium in the international order, is now reaching the margins of conflict. China's economic heft and military modernisation are fuelling an aggressive and expansionist agenda. This has manifested themselves in its muscle flexing and its disregard of international agreements and norms in the South China Sea, Hong Kong, threatening posture against Taiwan and clashes with India in Ladakh and aggressive posturing against Japan, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam.

India has reiterated that bilateral ties cannot return to normal without restoring the status quo. Despite the violent clashes at Galwan in Eastern Ladakh, the first in the last 50 years, India has maintained a dialogue with China at the bilateral level and also participated in plurilateral fora with China.

The Indo-Pacific nomenclature, the QUAD, AUKUS and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework [IPEF] are viewed by China as geostrategic moves to constrain China's ambition. China views India as an impediment to its hegemonic aspiration. India reacted to the Galwan violence by banning many Chinese digital Apps and launching investigation against Chinese companies in India, many of whom are involved in money laundering and fraud. India also upped its investment and implementation of border infrastructure. Meanwhile, China continues to build infrastructure on disputed territory and indulges in its hypocritical double-speak

After sixteen rounds of diplomatic and military talks, some disengagement along the Line of Actual Control [LAC] in eastern Ladakh has taken place, where the two armies are deployed face-to-face. India has reiterated that it would not be "business as usual" till the pre-clashes status quo is restored.

While bilateral ties have gone downhill, bilateral trade has increased. China is India's largest trading partner in Asia, though trade pattern is lop-sided. India-China trade has crossed USD 125 billion for the

second consecutive year, and has clocked USD 67.08 billion in the first half of 2022. In 2021-22, the trade deficit between India and China rose to $72.9 billion.

Former US President Donald Trump's policies of withdrawing from several multilateral initiatives and organisations encouraged China in its aggressive and expansionist policies. These American policies vacated space for China to fill the vacuum. The perception of a USA in decline has permeated international opinion. American policy may be changing under President Joe Biden but sustaining the shift will depend on economic disengagement with China, which is not an easy task, given that the global economy is interdependent and tied to supply chains.

Meanwhile the US is taking steps to maintain higher tariffs on Chinese imports and constraining China's ability in the domain of semi-conductors, a crucial input for the digital economy. Under President Xi Jing Ping who is on the verge of managing an unprecedented third term as President, China believes that its time has arrived to remake the international order and muscle its way to be the hegemon in Asia and the world. China's Belt and Road Initiative (formerly OBOR/MSR) is a geo-economic and geo-strategic project. The BRI is currently facing headwinds because of Chinas "debt trap diplomacy" and the adverse economic impact of the Chinese-origin COVID pandemic.

Asian powers like Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN have been quite circumspect and seem reluctant to openly take an anti-China position. Japan's posture is changing gradually, and its defence posture is undergoing seminal re-orientation to counter-balance China. Despite closing the gap with the US economically and technologically, China is still not able to knock off the US from its global perch as the largest economy and technological power. International power politics abhors disequilibrium and counter-balancing measure are well underway. Elements of counter balancing China's aggressive behaviour are developing in the form of the QUAD, AUKS and IPEF.

Maldives

During former President Abdulla Yameen's government, 2013-2018, bilateral ties went steadily downhill. Yameen's government pivoted towards China and its pro-China policies led to serious bilateral differences. China subverted Maldivian leaders with financial inducements and attempted to entrench itself by taking long lease of some islands and dredging the sea to expand the land area. This was facilitated by favourable laws passed by the Yameen government. Opposition leaders accused China of trying to set up a military bases, a charge denied by China. There is ample evidence that China is stepping up efforts to acquire islands in the Indian Ocean Region [IOR] to set up dual-purpose establishments which can be used for military operations. China's policy to increase its influence in the IOR led to its pushing for closer engagement with the Maldives via the BRI in this strategically positioned archipelago, by actively promoting infrastructure projects, impacting on India's security interests.

President Ibrahim Solih, after his election victory in 2018, began reversing polices of the Yameen government. He declared an "India first" foreign policy and reset ties with India. Solih publicly declared that the Maldives "makes no apology" for close ties with India. In April 2016, a defence cooperation action plan was signed and Modi stressed that Maldives' stability and security is directly linked to India's national interests.

Former President Yameen has launched an "India Out" campaign, keeping in mind forthcoming Presidential polls in 2023, after acquittal against charges of corruption, and release from jail. This campaign is targeted at India's minimal military presence. Politics in the Maldives have centred around President Solih and the ruling coalition partners, as well as other political parties opposing Yameen's anti-India campaign.

India's diplomacy concentrated on providing swift assistance in rushing COVID testing kits, vaccines and participating in infrastructure projects on various islands. India's actions have generated goodwill among the people. Indian tourists still provide the bulk of revenue

from this sector. India's liberal visa regime and medical care for Maldivians are factors that mitigate attempts, to whip up anti-Indian feelings by Yameen and his supporters.

In January 2022 China's Foreign Minister visited several island nations in the IOR, including Maldives and Sri Lanka. The timing coincided with the 50th anniversary of the establishment of China-Maldives diplomatic relations and 65 years of diplomatic relations between China and Sri Lanka. Both the Maldives and Sri Lanka have been economically crippled by the COVID pandemic which devastated the tourist industry. China has been seeking to leverage the economic vulnerability of both countries for its geostrategic goals. The India-China competition in the Maldives and other neighbouring countries will intensify in the future.

Myanmar

The military coup in Myanmar has adversely impacted the internal situation and a low intensity civil war continues. The dim prospects of whatever limited democratic structures that were created have been extinguished and former leader who was functioning as a head of government, sentenced to imprisonment on corruption charges. India has called for an early return to democracy and release of political leaders. Security interests continue to influence bilateral ties. Civil-military conflict and restive ethnic minority groups are challenging the military junta.

India's security interests are directly linked to the activities of insurgent groups from Northeastern states which use Myanmar as their refuge and staging ground for attacking Indian security forces and civilians. India has avoided condemning the military coup and promised to continue development projects funded by India. Engagement with Myanmar's military junta was renewed during the Indian Foreign Secretary's visit in December 2021. The ASEAN outreach to the military government has elicited India's support, though this has not produced any tangible result.

China's growing influence in Myanmar is directly related to its funding and building of infrastructure, in pursuit of China's strategic goal of building a China-Myanmar Economic Corridor [CMEC], into the Bay of Bengal. India's effort to cultivate and influence the military regime led the gifting of a decommissioned Indian Navy submarine to Myanmar to counter China's influence over the military. Playing the India and China cards, Myanmar's military junta, also received a submarine from China.

Any return to democracy seems improbable and Myanmar's military junta is unlikely to hold elections in the short-term. The military government's brutal crackdown has forced refugees to flee into India, creating humanitarian problems. India's security cooperation with Myanmar's military against Indian insurgent groups has given Myanmar added leverage to moderate India's policies. Myanmar has cooperated in capturing Indian insurgents involved in attacks in India and handed them over. India's has, therefore, avoided any strident approach on human rights violations being perpetrated by the military junta. India's approach to Myanmar has come under criticism from foreign and domestic human rights groups.

As a member of ASEAN, Myanmar's is India's only neighbour in this group and an important interlocuter for security and economic reasons. She remains crucial in India's "Act East Policy" and BIMSTEC. The Trilateral Highway Project from India via Myanmar to Thailand will be an important connectivity with ASEAN. Several other projects have received funding assistance from India including the Kaladan project which connects Manipur with Sittwe port in Myanmar. India will have to walk the tightrope between her desire for restoration of democracy and engaging with the military junta for security considerations and balancing China's attempt to make Myanmar a client state.

Nepal

Nepal's domestic issues like the internal protest over the new Constitution which led to a blockade of the border in 2016, complicated relations with India. Competitive domestic politics in

which India's support is actively sought by Nepal's politicians, willy-nilly makes India a domestic political player. After a turbulent period that afflicted Nepal's domestic politics, its Supreme Court reinstated the dissolved Parliament and Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli. The pro-China communist party leader had to hand over power to the Nepali Congress leader Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. Despite ideological differences, Deuba was supported by several Communist MPs. Although there is a border dispute with Nepal over Lipulekh-Kalapani area, relations remain stable, and the new government led by Deuba has given renewed signs of positive progress in bilateral ties. Nepal's internal politics, however, continues to impinge on bilateral ties. China's intrusive manipulation of politics within Nepal's Communist Party may have run its course.

India-Nepal ties are unique among nations. As with Bhutan, India shares an open border and deep-rooted people-to-people contacts of kinship and culture, nurtured by free movement of people across the border. Nepal's border with India touches five Indian states - Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The foundation of bilateral ties is the India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 which characterizes this special relationship. Nepal's citizens avail facilities and opportunities on a par with Indian citizens in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty. Nearly 8 million Nepalese citizens live and work in India. Nepal is the only country from where the Indian Army sources recruits. The Gorkha regiments of the Indian Army are raised partly by recruitment from hill districts of Nepal. Currently, about 32,000 Gorkha Soldiers from Nepal are serving in the Indian Army. Overall, bilateral ties are complex, multifaceted and also unique.

Nepal has some reason to be aggrieved because of perceived neglect by Indian Prime Ministers to visit Nepal. Modi was the first Indian Prime Minister in 17 years to visit Nepal in 2014. This led to new infrastructure, irrigation and energy projects and reinforced India's continuing commitment of constructive cooperation. As a first responder, after the massive earthquake in 2015, India helped Nepal generously with disaster relief assistance. China's role in Nepal, as in all of India's neighbours, has led to the usual India-China cards being

deployed by Nepal's leaders. While this casts a shadow, the inbuilt strength and resilience of bilateral ties are quite strong to make Nepal tilt towards China. Nepal's communist party has actively wooed China to fund infrastructural projects, some of which have raised security concerns in India. China's debt trap diplomacy has raised red flags in most countries and Nepal is now more circumspect about generous Chinese loans that may lead Nepal into a debt trap and trigger an economic crisis that has bedevilled Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

India is Nepal's largest trading partner. India accounts for approximately 60-65 per cent of all trade with Nepal even as other countries, such as China have made significant inroads in the last few years. There are about 150 Indian ventures operating in Nepal engaged in manufacturing, banking, insurance, dry port, education, telecom, power and tourism sectors. "Thousands of people cross the open border every day to work, buy, sell, and transact businesses.

One nagging bilateral territorial dispute is over overlapping territorial claims at Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh, and Kalapani near the tri-junction between India, China and Nepal. Currently, pushed into the background it has the potential of being exploited by domestic political constituencies in Nepal for anti-Indian politics, as was done by Sharma Oli.

Pakistan

Pakistan's Army-dominated domestic polity has made it the most hostile neighbour after China. Pakistan's internal power structure gives the Army overwhelming dominance over in its polity. Normalisation of ties with India will loosen the Army's grip on the levers of power within Pakistan and undercut its strategic anti-India nexus with China. There is not much hope for change in the current impasse in bilateral ties. Pakistan remains an outlier, relying as it does, on terrorism as her principal instrument of state policy, not only against India but also against many other countries.

Despite attempts to reach out to Pakistan, Indian Prime Ministers have been rebuffed. Pakistan's Army has undermined all these efforts,

as this would undermine its primacy as the defender of the country and its Islamic ideology. The Army has consistently propagated that India is bent on reversing the Partition and it is the only institution that can prevent this from happening. Pakistan's state-sponsorship of terrorism against India is a result of its realisation that conventional means, tried in 1948 and 1965 wars, failed in grabbing Kashmir. Having suffered a humiliating defeat in the 1971 war and the secession of Bangladesh, Pakistan's strategy has been to rely on terrorism and sabotage. The widening economic gap with India has reduced Pakistan's options.

The current impasse in bilateral ties is a result of Modi's policy change in response to Pakistan's continuing sponsorship of terrorism against India. The changed policy based on retaliation to Pakistan-sponsored terrorist incidents has received overwhelming public support in India. Pakistan is now forced to factor in retaliation for its state-sponsored terrorist strikes and recalibrate its policy, earlier predicated on the lack of retaliation from India, because of the fear of escalation to the nuclear level. Pakistan's policy of promoting terrorism against India is the primary reason for India's position that talks and terror cannot go together.

Ties with Pakistan plummeted further, after repeal of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, changing the status of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan downgraded diplomatic ties and trade across the land border, stopped, except for one-way transit trade from Afghanistan to India and import of essential pharmaceutical products. Occasional exchanges with Pakistan have continues sporadically, for instance, the renewal of the 2003 ceasefire along the LOC in early 2021 and both sides cooperated in the opening of the Kartarpur Sahib pilgrimage corridor for Sikhs.

Given Pakistan's track record and its Army-driven power structure, the new policy is unlikely to change the country's approach towards bilateral ties with India. "No civilian government in Pakistan can craft any policy on India, independent of the Army. For daring to dream about normal ties with India, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif paid a

high price. He was deposed as Prime Minister and hounded out of Pakistan."[7]

The ouster of Prime Minister Imran Khan's government has not turned out to be routine, as in the past, when the Army conspired to oust Prime Ministers who strayed from the line laid down by them. This time Imran Khan is challenging the Army and is attracting huge public support. He has attacked the Army in his speeches and will certainly face blowback in various forms which may lead to his disqualification to stand for election.

Imran Khan has blamed his ouster on a foreign conspiracy by the USA. His ouster has also led to warming of ties with the USA. Pakistan has been rewarded by a package of USD 450 million to upgrade and maintain the American-origin F-16 fighter aircraft. This warming of Pakistan-USA ties indicates a transactional arrangement in which Pakistan is providing the USA with some vital services vis-à-vis Afghanistan and Ukraine. The USA may be inclining towards Pakistan and vice-versa because the Army wants to balance its ties with China. Pakistan has been labelled a vassal or client state of China for some time. The USA's long association with the Army through the Cold War years and later over Afghanistan continues at a reduced level. Pakistan remains a "non-NATO ally" of the US. India's refusal to join the American-led campaign against Russia over the Ukraine war is also a factor in American policy towards Pakistan.

Pakistan last years battled unprecedented floods and its economy has been hollowed out and the country is surviving on loans from the IMF and some Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE. India's offer of humanitarian assistance has been rejected by Pakistan which wants the Kashmir issue to be settled first. There is not much scope for any progress in ties soon.

Sri Lanka

Modi's visit to Sri Lanka in 2015 was after 28 years of a previous visit by an Indian PM, underlining a lack to high-level political engagement. Despite disagreements over several issues, mainly related to China's

growing footprint and "debt trap" diplomacy over infrastructure projects, both sides have re-emphasised their desire for closer ties during visits by Modi again in 2017 and 2019. Bilateral trade grew considerably to reach around USD 5 billion, after the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement which came into force in 2000. India's development partnership is worth around USD 3 billion.

The Rajapaksa clan [three Rajapaksa brothers held positions of President, Prime Minister and Finance Minister], all ousted after recent huge public protests over economic hardship, was distinctly pro-Chinese. The Hambantota port issue led to the debate on China's "debt trap" diplomacy. Sri Lanka was unable to pay the Chinese loan and in return signed a 99-year lease, handing over the port to a Chinese company. The dispute over the visit of a Chinese spy ship to Hambantota, highlighted China's intention to use the port for military purposes. Sri Lanka is in no position to repay loans extended by China and had to bend before China's threats. China needs port facilities in the IOR for projecting its military power and that clashes with India's security interests in the IOR.

Sri Lanka's critical economic situation has led to the ouster of President Rajapakse who had to flee the country in the face of huge public protests. He has since returned. Ranil Wickremasinghe, the new Prime Minister, admitted in Parliament that the economy had collapsed. The economic crisis in Sri Lanka was inevitable given the policy decisions taken by the Srisena-Wickramasinghe government and their Rajapaksa successors. Highly dependent on tourism and expatriate remittances, Sri Lanka's economy suffered severe blows following the 2019 Islamic terrorist attacks and the COVID pandemic. Revenue from tourism plummeted and the decision to convert the country's agriculture into organic farming caused agriculture to implode. Arbitrary lowering of taxes led to plunging revenues and reduction of subsidies. Finally, Sri Lanka defaulted on its foreign debt payments, the ultimate benchmark of a failing economy.

The China-Sri Lanka dispute over a Chinese company supplying "contaminated" fertilizer led to China's threatening international

arbitration and blacklisting of the Sri Lankan Bank handling the transaction. To mollify China, Sri Lanka agreed to a resolution, favouring the Chinese company. India has extended financial assistance and lines of credit for energy and food supplies amounting to around USD 3.5 billion. Sri Lanka has also negotiated a loan from the IMF to bolster its foreign exchange reserves. While agreeing to provide financial and medical aid, India also drew red lines on security which led to cancellation of a Chinese-funded solar power project on three islands in the north of Sri Lanka, close to the Indian coast. Chinese companies are all linked to the Chinese Communist Party or the People's Liberation Army and provide cover for espionage and intelligence gathering. China's foreign minister reacted to this by commenting that third parties should not interfere in bilateral issues, a typical Chinese cliché.

Sri Lanka has reciprocated by granting projects like the West Terminal Colombo port and modernisation of the 2nd World War era Trincomalee oil storage tanks to India. Sri Lanka's marked tilt towards China had been a cause for worry in India, as Sri Lanka's political leadership, led by the Rajapakse clan, had overplayed the China card. Sri Lanka continues to grapple with the economic crisis and will remain vulnerable for quite some time to come. India's financial help has helped to tide over the short-term economic crisis. China has refused to help Sri Lanka at its time of crisis.

Conclusion

The foremost geostrategic challenge for India in the neighbourhood is to counter the inroads made by China via the BRI and machinations by the China-Pakistan axis. Except Bhutan, all neighbouring countries have signed on to China's BRI, with the CPEC [China Pakistan Economic Corridor] in Pakistan being the mega project, with maximum Chinese investment. The strategic aspects of the BRI in India's neighbourhood are to bind countries to China economically and militarily, undermine India's influence and create bases in the IOR to protect military power. India's neighbours take advantage of the India-China rivalry in deriving benefits from both sides, though China's "debt trap"

diplomacy has made these countries more cautious about India's red lines on security.

India's initiatives like SAGAR [Security and Growth for all in the Region] is to counter China's strategy of dominating IOR. India has intensified her development partnership efforts and committing more funds to regional infrastructure, energy, education, cultural exchanges, and public utility projects. India needs to dispel the perception of "delivery" deficit on such projects to balance China's determined bid to "contain" India's influence in her neighbourhood.

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Seven and a half decades is not a long time in the history of a nation. Yet, it is certainly an occasion to take a dispassionate look at the years that have gone by, and to draw lessons for the future.

This publication is a collection of essays on the transformation that India has seen in some specific domains since Independence. The selection of themes is not exhaustive, but they cover the story of the transformation that the Republic has witnessed in some key areas. Starting with an exploration of the very idea of India that emerged because of the illustrious legacy of freedom struggle, the 12 essays in this compendium cover key domains such as nationalism, civil and police administration, rural and urban development, education, women's empowerment, water and sanitation, energy, etc.

These essays are contributions from practitioners in their respective domains, mostly retired civil servants, and scholars, who have simultaneously engaged in professional practice in their area of expertise. And though they are not representative of all the national discourses on the subjects examined, the compendium is a ready reckoner for students and interested citizens to enable them to get a quick, yet rounded understanding of how the country has changed since Independence in these key areas. Indeed, the story of India's transformation has its ups and downs as has been identified by the essayists; yet there is a positive sense of optimism apparent in almost all the essays presented here.

The essays together tell us a story of 'continuity and change' that India has witnessed since Independence, while also reminding us of the permanence of the founding ideals of the Republic. They are also reminders that as we transform ourselves into one of the most powerful economies of the world, as citizens we need to reconnect to the old values and ideals that gave us freedom and strive to preserve them in our national life.

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