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SOCIAL
JUSTICE

For Civil Services Examination

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INTRODUCTION

Striving for social justice is the most valuable thing to do in life. *- Albert Einstein*
Freedom is incomplete without social justice. *- Atal Bihari Vajpayee.*
"A just society is that society in which ascending sense of reverence and descending sense of contempt is dissolved into the creation of a compassionate society" *– Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*

India, primarily being a caste-based society, witnesses profound social inequalities. These social inequalities stem from a complex interplay of factors, including caste, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. These factors can create overlapping layers of disadvantage, making it especially difficult for members of certain groups to break free from cycles of poverty, marginalisation, and limited access to essential services like healthcare. However, contemporary India is striving to bridge these disparities through various governmental and non-governmental initiatives.

VULNERABILITY

- **Vulnerability** is the proneness to harm or damage originating from external forces.
- **Types of Vulnerability**:
  - **Physical Vulnerability**: Lack of ownership rights and entitlements for the Poor. (e.g., poor people)
  - **Economic Vulnerability**: Erratic income due to informal employment with low wages. (e.g., migrant workers)
  - **Social Vulnerability**: Income inequality leading to divergence between lower strata and middle class.
  - **Personal Vulnerability**: Victims of injustice and violence, particularly low-caste people and minorities, including women, children, the elderly, the disabled, and the destitute. (e.g., low-caste women)

COMMON VULNERABLE SECTIONS IN INDIA

BASED ON CASTE AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

- **Scheduled Castes (SCs):** Formerly known as "untouchables," they face social stigma and discrimination.
- **Scheduled Tribes (STs):** Indigenous communities facing challenges in education and development due to remote locations.
- **Other Backward Classes (OBCs):** Diverse communities facing historical disadvantages and economic and social disparities.
- **Economically Weaker Sections (EWSs):** Groups facing poverty and lack of opportunities not categorised under SC, ST, or OBC.
- **Religious Minorities:** Groups like Muslims and Christians facing social and economic vulnerabilities.
- **Transgendered Persons:** Individuals facing discrimination, lack of acceptance, and limited access to education and employment.

BASED ON AGE AND ABILITY

- **Senior Citizens/The Elderly:** Ageing population facing health, financial security, and social isolation issues.
- **Persons with Disabilities (PwD):** Individuals with physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments facing societal barriers to participation.

BASED ON CIRCUMSTANCES

- **Children:** Vulnerable to malnutrition, child labour, abuse, trafficking, and lack of education due to poverty and identity issues.
- **Migrants:** Internal migrants facing exploitation, discrimination, and lack of social support.

RATIONALE OF WELFARE SCHEMES FOR VULNERABLE SECTIONS

In India, structural discrimination based on **gender**, **caste**, **class**, and **ethnicity** hinders equal access to economic opportunities and basic amenities. Many disadvantaged groups, including **women**, **Dalits**, **tribals**, **Muslims**, **informal sector workers**, the **poor**, the **elderly**, and the **disabled**, face exclusion from key public goods.

SPECIFIC VULNERABILITIES

- **Scavenger Community:** Vulnerable to stress and diseases, with limited access to healthcare.

- **Tribal People:** Marginalised based on ethnicity, often landless with little control over resources, leading to poverty, low education levels, and poor health.
- **Women:** Experience double discrimination, facing gendered vulnerabilities in addition to caste, class, or ethnic discrimination.

NEED FOR GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

- **Constitutional and Philosophical Basis:**
  - **Preamble:** The Indian Constitution promises justice, social, economic, and political, and equality of status and opportunity for all citizens.
  - **Fundamental Rights:** The Constitution guarantees rights like **equality, life with dignity, education, protection against untouchability, and freedom from exploitation**.
  - **Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs):** These principles direct the state to ensure the welfare of its citizens, making India a **welfare state**.
- **International Conventions:** India upholds international agreements like the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**, which advocate for state support to vulnerable groups.
- **Humanitarian Grounds:** Vulnerable sections require special assistance and care from the state for their well-being. Lack of state support leads to disadvantages and prevents access to fair and equal life choices.
- **Economic Imperative: Inclusive Growth** is essential for economic development, requiring support for vulnerable sections. Welfare schemes protect the poor and disadvantaged, enabling them to participate in economic growth.
- **Nation Building:** Injustice perceived by these sections undermines social cohesion and unity, hindering nation-building endeavours.

Emancipating weaker sections from oppression, marginalisation, and backwardness is crucial for societal progress and inclusive growth. Government support, grounded in constitutional principles, humanitarian considerations, economic imperatives, and nation-building goals, is essential for uplifting vulnerable sections and fostering a more equitable society.

SIGNIFICANCE OF WELFARE SCHEMES

- **Reduction of Poverty, Vulnerability, and Inequality:** Welfare schemes significantly contribute to the reduction of poverty, vulnerability, and inequality within society, fostering social cohesion.
- **Economic Enabler for Growth:** These schemes act as economic enablers, promoting robust, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth. By increasing household incomes, they stimulate consumption and savings, thereby boosting aggregate demand.
- **Human Capital Development:** Welfare schemes play a crucial role in enhancing human capital development. They increase productivity, improve skills, and enhance employability, ultimately realising the potential of demographic dividends.

LIMITATIONS OF WELFARE SCHEMES IN INDIA

While welfare schemes aim to uplift vulnerable sections, they face challenges that hinder their effectiveness.

TARGETING ISSUES

- **Inclusion/Exclusion Errors:** Schemes often miss intended beneficiaries due to errors like "ghost cards" in the Public Distribution System (PDS). Some states have issued more ration cards than households, while others struggle to identify all eligible households.
- **Unintended Beneficiaries:** Social protection aims for individuals to eventually escape poverty. However, without continuous evaluation, benefits may go to unintended beneficiaries perpetually.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

- **Corruption and Leakages:** These divert resources away from those who need them most.
- **Focus on Outputs over Outcomes:** Schemes might prioritise construction (outputs) like building schools, neglecting the ultimate goal of improved education (outcomes) like higher literacy rates.

BENEFICIARY PARTICIPATION

- **Lack of Awareness:** Demand-driven schemes like PDS or MGNREGA require beneficiary awareness and participation for efficient implementation. Without this, vulnerable sections remain mere recipients, not partners in development.

SCHEME DESIGN ISSUES

- **Addressing Structural Issues:** Some schemes, like MGNREGA, intended as temporary solutions, can become permanent, failing to address root causes of poverty like lack of skill development.

- **Disincentivizing Capacity Building:** An excess of welfare schemes might discourage beneficiaries from improving their skills and becoming reliant on government support.

FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

- **Exchequer Burden:** A multitude of schemes can strain government finances, limiting investments and job creation.
- **Digital Infrastructure Challenges:** Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs) can face last-mile delivery issues due to inadequate digital infrastructure in rural areas.

Welfare schemes play a vital role, but addressing these limitations is crucial for maximising their impact on vulnerable sections of Indian society.

OVERCOMING LIMITATIONS OF WELFARE SCHEMES IN INDIA

While limitations exist, India is taking steps to improve the effectiveness of welfare schemes:

IMPROVED TARGETING

- **Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC):** This initiative replaces outdated Below Poverty Line (BPL) lists for better beneficiary identification.
- **Aadhaar:** Unique identification helps target intended beneficiaries and reduce fraud.

ENHANCED IMPLEMENTATION

- **Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs):** DBTs like the JAM trinity (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) for LPG subsidies ensure funds reach the right beneficiaries, minimising leakage.
- **Use of Technology:** GeoMGNREGA uses space technology to create databases of assets built under MGNREGA, promoting transparency via mobile tagging and online monitoring.

5 principles of Social Justice

GENDER EQUALITY
Is first a matter of social justice, allowing equal access to rights, resources and opportunities. **Gender equality is a condition of development, and a matter of sustainable peace and security.**

HUMAN RIGTHS
Human rights and social justice are two sides of the same coin. They can't exist apart from each other. For a society to be just, It must ensure the protection of everyone's civil, political, economic, cultural, and social rights.

EQUITY
To achieve social justice and ensure equal opportunities for success. it is important to **provide equitable resources that focus on the specific needs of communities and the individuals within them.**

PROMOTION OF PEACE
Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon the respect and cooperation between peoples and nations. Social workers promote peace and the general welfare of society from local to global levels.

PARTICIPATION
Social justice requires that individuals have the opportunity and platform to participate in making the policies that affect their well-being.

STRENGTHENING PARTICIPATION

- **Social Audits:** These mandatory audits for schemes like MGNREGA increase transparency and public involvement.
- **Self-Help Groups (SHGs):** SHGs are involved in implementing and monitoring schemes like NRLM, enhancing beneficiary awareness and transparency.

PERFORMANCE-BASED BUDGETING

- **Outcome-Based Budgeting (OBB):** This method assesses departmental progress based on achieved results, shifting focus from spending to outcomes like improved literacy rates.

By addressing limitations and adopting these improvements, India can make its welfare schemes more effective in uplifting vulnerable sections of society.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

As per the United Nations, "Social justice may be broadly understood as the **fair and compassionate distribution** of the fruits of economic growth". Social justice advocates for **equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities** for all individuals within a society. It encompasses principles like **human rights, access, participation, equity**, and **fair distribution** of resources.

- **World Day of Social Justice:** Observed annually on **February 20**, it aims to foster dialogue and action towards strengthening the social contract and overcoming rising inequalities.

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN INDIA

- This is a multifaceted concept rooted in the principles of equality, fairness, and inclusion. India's journey towards achieving social justice has been influenced by its historical legacy of caste-based discrimination, economic disparities, gender inequality, and systemic injustices. Here are some key aspects of social justice in India:
  - **Caste System:** India's historical **caste-based discrimination** has marginalised groups like **Dalits** and lower castes.
  - **Reservation Policies:** Government implements **reservation** in education, employment, and politics for **Scheduled Castes (SCs)**, **Scheduled Tribes (STs)**, and **Other Backward Classes (OBCs)**.
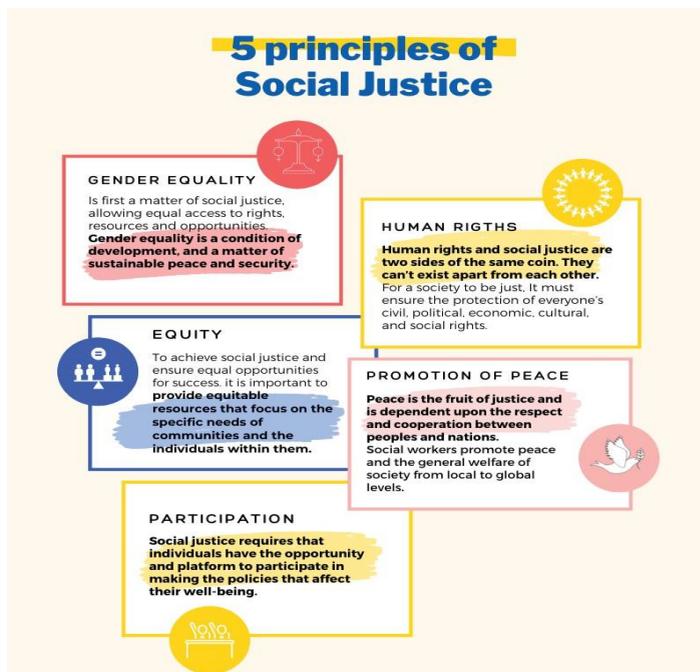
- o **Gender Equality:** Women face **gender inequality** in education, employment, and resources. Initiatives like **NREGA** and **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao** aim to empower them.
- o **Poverty Alleviation:** Programs like **MGNREGA** provide employment and social security to rural households, addressing **poverty**.
- o **Legal Reforms:** Laws like the **Protection of Civil Rights Act** and **Prevention of Atrocities Act** aim to prevent discrimination and atrocities against marginalised communities.
- o **Education and Healthcare:** Initiatives like **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan** and the **National Health Mission** improve access to education and healthcare, particularly for marginalised communities.
- o **Environmental Justice:** Advocacy focuses on equitable distribution of environmental resources and addressing the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on **vulnerable populations**.
- o **Civil Society and Activism:** Grassroots movements and civil society organisations advocate for **social justice** by raising awareness, mobilising communities, and holding the government accountable.

India's journey toward social justice involves tackling these challenges while promoting equality, fairness, and inclusion across all segments of society.

PROVISIONS IN THE CONSTITUTION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Fundamental Rights	Other Provisions
Equality: • **Article 14:** Guarantees the **right to equality before law.** • **Article 15(1):** Prohibits **discrimination** on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. • **Article 15(4):** Allows for **special provisions** for the advancement of **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** & **Scheduled Tribes (STs)**. • **Article 16(1):** Ensures **equality of opportunity** in public employment. • **Article 16(4):** Provides for **reservation** for backward classes. • **Dignity: Article 17:** Abolished **untouchability**. • **Freedom: Article 19:** Guarantees **freedom of speech and expression**. • **Life and Liberty: Article 21:** Ensures the **right to life & liberty**. **Protection:** • **Article 23:** Prohibits **trafficking** and **forced labour** (beggary and similar practices). • **Article 24:** Prohibits **employment of children** in factories.	**Preamble:** Guarantees all its people **social, economic, and political justice**; **equality of status** and **opportunity**. **Directive Principles for State Policy:** • **Social Welfare: Article 38:** Directs the State to strive to promote a **social order** for the **welfare** of the people. • **Right to Livelihood: Article 39(a):** Ensures citizens have an **adequate means of livelihood**. • **Equal Work, Equal Pay: Article 39(d):** Promotes **equal pay** for **equal work** for both men and women. • **Worker Protection: Article 39(e):** Safeguards **health** and **strength** of workers. • **Child Protection: Article 39(f):** Protects **children** and **youth** from **exploitation** and **abandonment**. • **Equal Justice: Article 39A:** Provides for **equal justice** and **free legal aid**. • **Work, Education, Public Assistance: Article 41:** Aims to secure rights to **work, education**, and **public assistance** in certain situations. • **Upliftment: Article 46:** Promotes the **educational** and **economic interests** of **Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes**, and other **weaker sections**.

NEED FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN INDIA

As **Amartya Sen** states, the government should adopt a **capability approach** to addressing poverty issues by increasing its spending on nutrition, health, education and social security. India faces a complex challenge in achieving social justice. Here's a breakdown of key issues and the need for increased social spending:

- **Economic Growth and Human Capital:** Amartya Sen's capability approach emphasises investing in people. Increased government spending on **healthcare, education, nutrition, and social security** fuels **economic growth** by creating a healthier, more educated workforce. This boosts **consumer demand** and overall economic activity.
- **Reduce Inequalities**: **Oxfam's Recent "Inequality Inc" Report 2024**, reveals a concerning trend: Global inequality between the wealthy and impoverished has worsened for the first time in 25 years. This wealth surge contrasts starkly with the increasing impoverishment of nearly five billion people. In 2023 alone, billionaires gained $3.3 trillion, marking a 34% net wealth surge compared to 2020.
- **Reduce Poverty and Hunger**: Reduced social sector spending by governments forces the poor to spend more on non-food essential items squeezing their expenditure on Human resource development, health and Education.

- **Inclusive Development:** In the 2023/24 Human Development Report, India's **Human Development Index (HDI)** value had improved to 0.644 (In 2022), but still the country ranks at 134 out of 193 countries.
- **Regional Disparities:** The literacy rate in Bihar is around 61.8%, while in Kerala, it is over 94%, illustrating the regional disparities in educational attainment.
- **Social Exclusion:** Dalits, historically marginalised communities, continue to experience caste-based discrimination and are often subjected to social exclusion, limiting their opportunities for social and economic mobility.
- **Gender Inequality**: Female labour force participation rate in India stands at around 37%, significantly lower than the global average of 47%, indicating the gender gap in economic participation.

CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **Lack of Awareness:** Despite well-intentioned **social welfare schemes**, many beneficiaries remain unaware of their entitlements. For instance, under **MGNREGA**, some are unaware of provisions like **unemployment allowance**.
- **Poor Design:** Inadequate understanding of target group needs leads to poorly designed policies, as seen in the **Public Distribution System (PDS)**, criticised for neglecting specific **nutritional requirements**.

Oxfam's Inequality Inc Report 2024

Key Findings
1. Richest five men doubled fortunes since 2020
2. Five billion people became poorer in same period
3. Global poverty remains at pre-pandemic levels
4. Billionaires $3.3 trillion richer than in 2020

Wealth Distribution
1. Rich countries own 69% of global wealth
2. Top 1% own 43% of all global financial assets

Corporate Profits
1. Large firms breaking profit records
2. $1.8 Trillion in net profits by 148 big corporations

Specific Cases
1. Bernard Arnault
2. Aliko Dangote
3. Jeff Bezos

Worker Conditions 800 million workers lost $1.5 trillion due to inflation

Corporate Taxation Effective corporate tax rate fallen by a third

- **Implementation Challenges:** Weak implementation, often marred by **mismanagement** and **corruption**, hinders the effectiveness of schemes like **MGNREGA**, highlighting the need for greater **accountability**.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Inadequate **monitoring** in schemes like **ICDS** results in issues such as **irregular food supply** and **hygiene lapses**, underscoring the need for improved oversight.
- **Persistent Challenges:** High poverty rates, low educational attainment, and prevalent **malnutrition** persist, necessitating targeted interventions and comprehensive social justice initiatives to address multifaceted issues.

WAY FORWARD

1. **Participatory Planning:** Involving **vulnerable sections** in scheme design ensures their **needs** are met. For example, Kerala's "People's Plan Campaign" empowered locals to prioritise and allocate funds effectively.
2. **Capacity Building:** Providing **training** empowers target groups. SEWA in Gujarat trains women workers, enhancing their advocacy and access to support programs.
3. **Information Dissemination:** Utilising digital platforms, like the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme, enhances **awareness** and service access. DBT reduces leakages and improves transparency.

CONCLUSION

- Fostering **awareness** and **active involvement** of target groups is vital for scheme success. Through participatory planning, capacity building, and digital outreach, governments can enhance scheme effectiveness, benefiting the intended beneficiaries.
- Social justice is associated with fairness and equality in society. It includes fairness in healthcare, employment, housing, and more. Discrimination and social justice are not compatible. India is a welfare state, thus it is the prime responsibility of government to support various vulnerable and marginalised sections of the society to attain the dream of the forefathers of the Constitution.

INCLUSIVE GROWTH, INCOME INEQUALITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

A recent **World Inequality Report** (2022) highlights significant **income inequality** in India, with the **top 10% holding 57%** of the national income. India's high growth rate hasn't translated into high human development indicators.

INCLUSIVE GROWTH

- **Inclusive growth**, as defined by the **OECD**, refers to **economic growth** that is shared fairly and creates opportunities for everyone. Inclusiveness encompasses **equity**, **equality of opportunity**, and protection in market and employment transitions, essential for successful growth strategies.
- **Importance**: It is crucial for achieving complete development, reducing poverty and inequality, and ensuring a **dignified life** for all citizens.

CHALLENGES THAT HINDER PROGRESS

- **Inadequate Social Investments**: Underinvestment in **healthcare**, **education**, and **social protection** weakens human capital development. **Example**: The shortage of healthcare facilities in rural areas limits access to essential medical services.
- **Other Socio-Economic Challenges**: **Illiteracy** and **poverty** persist, hampering overall development. Declining growth rate and stagnant manufacturing sector exacerbate economic challenges. **Monsoon dependence** in agriculture and high unemployment rates add to the complexity of the situation.
- **Social Injustices**: Wage gap and minority disparities perpetuate inequality. **LGBTQ** oppression and limited education access, especially for girls, impede social progress. Child welfare issues, including labour and abuse, demand urgent attention.
- **Government Initiatives:** SETU **(Self Employment and Talent Utilisation),** Skill India, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana & MUDRA (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency) Bank.

STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **Enhancing Education**: Implementing schemes like the **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)** to promote universal elementary education. Kerala's literacy campaigns, achieving near-universal literacy rates through community engagement and innovative teaching methods.
- **Poverty Alleviation**: Implementing targeted poverty alleviation programs like the **National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)** to provide economic opportunities and social protection.
- **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** in states like Andhra Pradesh, empowering women to become economically self-sufficient.
- **Promoting Gender Equality**: Enforcing policies like the **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP)** scheme to address gender disparities in education and healthcare. The **Kudumbashree** initiative in Kerala, empowering women through self-help groups, entrepreneurship, and skill development.
- **Regional Development**: Implementing regional development schemes like the **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)** to improve rural infrastructure. The **Balaram Yojana** in Odisha, focusing on agricultural development and livelihood enhancement in tribal areas.
- **Social Welfare Schemes**: Strengthening existing schemes like the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** to provide employment and social security. Telangana's **Rythu Bandhu** scheme, providing financial assistance to farmers for every acre of land they own.
- **Community Engagement**: Encouraging community participation in local governance through initiatives like **Gram Sabhas**. The **Shakti Kendra** program in Rajasthan, empowering women to participate in decision-making at the grassroots level.
- **Enhancing Healthcare Infrastructure**: Investing in the expansion of healthcare facilities and telemedicine services to improve access to healthcare. The **Aarogyasri** scheme in Telangana, providing cashless healthcare services to below-poverty-line families.

THE WAY FORWARD: CORE PRINCIPLES FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH & SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **Equality of Opportunity**: Ensuring fair access to resources and opportunities for all.
- **Focus on Human Development**: Investing in health, education, and social protection to build a skilled and empowered workforce.
- **Bridging the Digital Divide**: Providing equitable access to technology to facilitate participation in the modern economy.
- **Promoting Social Inclusion**: Eliminating discrimination and fostering social cohesion to achieve shared prosperity.

Achieving inclusive growth and social justice in India requires a multi-pronged approach. By addressing these challenges and implementing effective policies, India can create a more equitable and prosperous future for all its citizens.

STEPS TAKEN TO ENSURE SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) by International Labour Organization ILO:** Signed in December 2022, DWCP for India 2023-27 focuses on creating **decent job opportunities** and **sustainable livelihoods** while strengthening **social protection systems**. It aligns with national priorities, emphasising adequate job generation and robust social safety nets.
- **SMILE-75 Initiative:** Launched by the Government of India, SMILE addresses **destitution** and **beggary** through comprehensive welfare measures across seventy-five Municipal Corporations. It includes **rehabilitation**, **medical aid**, **counselling**, **education**, and **skill development**, aiming to uplift marginalised individuals and integrate them into mainstream society.
- **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment:** Responsible for formulating and implementing policies for vulnerable sections, including **Scheduled Castes**, **Scheduled Tribes**, **Other Backward Classes**, **Persons with Disabilities**, and **Senior Citizens**. The ministry focuses on enhancing their **socio-economic status** and overall **well-being** through targeted interventions and support mechanisms.
- **Legislative Measures:** India has introduced laws like **the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** to combat oppression and discrimination against historically disadvantaged groups, aiming to enhance their **socio-economic positions** and promote **social inclusion**.

WAY FORWARD

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> **KEYWORDS:** Dehumanisation of vulnerable section, Breaking the shackles of poverty cycle, **Vulnerability:** Exposed, At-risk, Insecure, Unprotected, Susceptible; **Vulnerable Sections:** Marginalized groups, Disadvantaged communities, Socially excluded, People with disabilities, Social inclusion, Bridge the gap, Leveling the playing field, Poverty alleviation, Leakages and targeting errors, Infrastructure bottlenecks, Direct benefit transfers, Equity, Gender inequality, Shared prosperity, Reducing inequality, Uplifting the bottom of the pyramid, Creating a just society

Previous Year Questions		
1.	"Development and welfare schemes for the vulnerable, by its nature, are discriminatory in approach." Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.	2023
2.	Despite the consistent experience of high growth, India still goes with the lowest indicators of human development. Examine the issues that make balanced and inclusive development elusive. (150 words, 10 marks)	2019
3.	Performance of welfare schemes that are implemented for vulnerable sections is not so effective due to absence of their awareness and active involvement at all stages of policy process. Discuss. (250 words, 15 marks)	2019

2 SCHEDULED CASTES, SCHEDULED TRIBES G OTHER BACKWARD CLASS (OBC)

SCHEDULED CASTES

DEFINITION

Scheduled castes refer to the castes or races within the country experiencing severe social, educational, and economic disadvantage due to historic practices of untouchability. These communities require special attention to safeguard their interests and promote their rapid socio-economic progress.

The designation **"Scheduled Caste"** was first conceptualised and defined within the Government of India Act of 1935. Subsequently, Article 341 of the constitution officially recognized scheduled castes.

The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1950, issued under Article 341, initially limited SC status to marginalised **Hindu** communities. However, the Order was subsequently amended in 1956 and 1990 to include **Sikhs and Buddhists**, respectively, within the ambit of Scheduled Castes.

STATISTICS/INDICATORS REGARDING SCHEDULED CASTES: CENSUS 2011

The census 2011 recorded the presence of SCs at approximately 16.6% of the nation's total population. The sex ratio among Scheduled Castes (SCs) stands at 945, surpassing the national average of 940. However, the literacy rate among SC women is notably lower at 57%, compared to the national average of 65%. Similarly, the overall literacy rate among the SC population is 65%, which is lower than the national average of 74.04%. Despite this, the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLPR) among SCs is relatively higher.

Constitutional Provisions for upliftment of SCs	
Article	**Description**
Article 14	Right to Equality
Article 15 (4)	Refers to special provisions for the advancement of Scheduled Castes.
Article 16 (4A)	Speaks about reservation in matters of promotion to any class or classes of posts in the services under the State in favor of SCs/STs.
Article 17	Abolishes Untouchability.
Article 46	Requires the State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, particularly Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
Article 335	Provides that the claims of SC/ST members shall be considered, along with maintaining the efficiency of administration, in appointments to services and posts concerning the Union or a State.
Article 338	Establishes a National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, responsible for investigating and monitoring safeguard matters, addressing specific complaints, and advising on socio-economic development planning.
Article 330 and Article 332	Provide for reservation of seats for SCs and STs respectively in the House of the People and legislative assemblies of States. Reservation in local bodies is also included.
Article 341 (1)	Authorizes the President, after consulting with the Governor, to specify the castes, races, tribes, or groups within castes or races deemed Scheduled Castes.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL SAFEGUARDS FOR SCs:

- **Protection of Civil Rights Act (1955):** This act was enacted in 1955 with the aim of safeguarding the civil rights of Scheduled Castes (SCs), providing legal protection against discrimination and ensuring their equal treatment under the law.

- **Bonded Labour System Abolition Act (1976):** Introduced in 1976, this act aimed to abolish the bonded labour system, which disproportionately affected SCs, by legally prohibiting the practice and providing mechanisms for the liberation and rehabilitation of bonded labourers.

- **Prevention of Atrocities Act for SC & ST (1989):** Enacted in 1989, this act sought to prevent and punish atrocities committed against SCs and Scheduled Tribes (STs), providing legal recourse and protection to marginalised communities against various forms of discrimination, violence, and exploitation.

- **Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act (2006):** Passed in 2006, this act mandated reservation for SC students in admission to central educational institutions, ensuring equal opportunities for access to higher education and promoting social inclusion and empowerment.

- **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers & their Rehabilitation Act (2013):** Implemented in 2013, this act aimed to eradicate the inhumane practice of manual scavenging by prohibiting the employment of individuals, particularly from marginalised communities like SCs, as manual scavengers, and providing for their rehabilitation and alternative livelihoods.

INSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS

National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC): The National Commission for Scheduled Castes is an Indian constitutional body established with a view to provide safeguards against the exploitation of Scheduled Castes and Anglo-Indian communities to promote and protect their social, educational, economic and cultural interests, special provisions were made in the Constitution. Article 338 of the Indian constitution deals with the National Commission for Scheduled Castes.

Its objectives encompass protecting scheduled castes from discrimination and exploitation, promoting their socio-economic development, and ensuring equality of opportunity. The commission conducts inquiries into complaints of rights violations, monitors the implementation of welfare measures, and advocates for policies conducive to the advancement of scheduled castes.

> **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE)**
> The MoSJE has two Departments vis-a-vis the **Department of Social Justice and Empowerment**, and the **Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.**
> - It has two Constitutional bodies vis-a-vis the **National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC)** set up under **Article 338** of the Constitution, and the **National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)** set up under **Article 338B** of the Constitution of India.
> - It also has statutory bodies under it vis-a-vis the **Rehabilitation Council of India** which was set up in 1992 for the PwDs, and the **National Council for Transgender Persons** which was set up in 2019.
> - The **National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK)**, and the **National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic & Semi-Nomadic Tribes** also work under it.

CHALLENGES FACED BY SCHEDULED CASTES

The historical practice of untouchability, deeply ingrained in the Hindu caste system, has left a legacy of social, economic, and political marginalisation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India. Despite constitutional protections and advancements, SCs continue to face numerous challenges in their pursuit of equality and well-being.

SOCIAL STIGMA AND EXCLUSION

- **Contamination and Purity:** The notion of "pollution" associated with SCs continues to fuel social exclusion, restricting access to public spaces, opportunities, and interactions with upper castes.
- **Limited Necessities:** Historically, SCs were denied access to basic necessities like clean water, education, and healthcare, contributing to their current disadvantages.

ECONOMIC DISPARITY

- **Poverty:** As of 2011, 34% of SCs lived below the poverty line compared to 9% of other castes (World Bank). This translates to limited access to resources, education, and healthcare.
- **Wealth Disparity:** SCs own only 7% of India's wealth, significantly lower than their population share (25.2%) (Economic and Political Weekly, 2023).
- **Landlessness:** Historically denied land ownership, SCs continue to grapple with limited access to land and resources, hindering their economic mobility.

POLITICAL UNDERREPRESENTATION

- **Limited Representation:** Despite reserved seats in government bodies, SCs only hold 4% of senior positions (Joint Secretary and Secretary) in the Indian government (DoPT).
- **Emerging Political Force:** While political participation is increasing, SCs still struggle to gain significant political power and representation.

VULNERABILITY AND EXPLOITATION

- **Overrepresentation in Jails:** 20.74% of prison population belong to the SC category (NCRB 2019).
- **Human Rights Violations:** Violence, discrimination, and atrocities against SCs persist, hindering their security and dignity.
- **Manual Scavenging:** Despite legal bans, manual scavenging, a dehumanising practice primarily performed by SCs, remains prevalent in many parts of India.

OTHER ISSUES

- **Poor education access:** Despite progress, illiteracy rates remain higher among SCs, limiting their upward mobility.
- **Inadequate access to basic utilities:** Lack of clean water, sanitation, and reliable transportation exacerbates their hardships.
- **Cultural humiliation:** SCs often face exclusion from religious practices and cultural events.
- **Intersecting discrimination:** SC women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalised groups face compounded discrimination based on caste, gender, and sexual orientation.

The 2022 edition of the **National Crime Records Bureau's** 'Crime in India' report sheds light on the susceptibility of Scheduled Castes. In 2022, there were 57,582 registered cases of crimes committed against Scheduled Castes (SCs), marking a 13.1% rise from 2021, where 50,900 cases were recorded.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS THE GRIEVANCES OF SCHEDULED CASTE

EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

- **Upgradation of Merit of SC Students (1987-88):** Facilities for education in residential/non-residential schools are provided to SC students in classes IX to XII.
- **Dr. Ambedkar Foundation (1992):** The primary objective is to promote Dr. Ambedkar's ideology and philosophy, alongside administering schemes emerging from the Centenary Celebration Committee's recommendations.

SOCIAL INITIATIVES

- **Protection of Inter-Caste Marriages:** The MoSJE gives financial assistance to couples where one spouse belongs to the Scheduled Caste, and other to the non-Scheduled Caste.

ECONOMIC INITIATIVES

- **National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) (1989):** Established to finance income-generating activities of SCs living below double the poverty line.
- **National Safai Karamchari Finance and Development Council (NSKFDC) (1997):** Provides credit facilities to beneficiaries among safai karamcharis, manual scavengers, and their dependents.
- **Self-employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (2007):** Designed to facilitate the self-employment of manual scavengers.
- **Credit Enhancement Guarantee Scheme for SC (2014):** Provides a credit guarantee facility to young and startup entrepreneurs belonging to the SC community.
- **Ambedkar Social Innovation & Incubation Mission (ASIIM):** This scheme by MoSJE aims to support 1000 Startups of SC Youth over next 4 Years via venture capital fund.

THE WAY FORWARD

Despite constitutional protections and decades of efforts, Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India continue to face significant challenges in accessing opportunities and achieving equality. To create a truly inclusive society, a multi-pronged approach integrating data-driven insights and community participation is crucial.

- **Strengthening Policy and Legal Frameworks:**
  - **Data-Driven Legislation:** Utilise data from sources like Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) to identify specific needs and tailor policies accordingly.
  - **Review Existing Laws:** Update laws like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (POCA) to address contemporary issues like online harassment and cybercrime.
- **Ensuring Effective Implementation:**
  - **Institutional Capacity Building:** Allocate adequate resources and training to strengthen investigative and prosecutorial capacity of Special Courts dedicated to SC cases.
  - **Sensitise Law Enforcement:** Train police personnel on SC issues and ensure prompt and impartial investigations in cases of atrocities.
  - **Community-Level Monitoring:** Empower SC communities to report discrimination and monitor implementation of laws through mechanisms like Gram Sabhas.
- **Promoting Social Inclusion and Empowerment:**
  - **Focus on Education:** Address high dropout rates, improve quality of education for SC students, and ensure access to scholarships and higher education opportunities.
  - **Economic Empowerment:** Provide targeted skill development programs, access to microfinance and markets, and support entrepreneurship initiatives for SC populations.

- **Building Partnerships and Community Engagement:**
  - **Collaboration:** Foster collaboration between government, civil society organisations, and SC communities to develop and implement inclusive solutions.
  - **Community Participation:** Empower SC communities to actively participate in decision-making processes and advocate for their rights at all levels.
  - **Raise Awareness:** Launch public awareness campaigns and educational programs to combat caste discrimination and promote social inclusion.

Amendment to the Prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes Act 1989.
- The Act has been enacted keeping in view the express constitutional safeguards enumerated in Articles 15 (Prohibition of Discrimination), 17 (Abolition of Untouchability) and 21 (Protection of Life and Personal Liberty) of the Constitution, with a twin-fold objective of protecting the members of these vulnerable communities as well as to provide relief and rehabilitation to the victims of caste-based atrocities.
- In the amended SC/ST Act (2018), a preliminary inquiry is not a must and no prior approval is also required for appointing authorities for senior police officers to file FIRs in cases of atrocities on SC and ST.

Other Legal Provision:

The 'Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013' (PEMSRA, 2013):
- **Purpose of the Act:** For eradication of dry latrines and manual scavenging and rehabilitation of manual scavengers in alternative occupations. This law makes it an offence to:
  - Employ people as manual scavengers to clean insanitary latrines
  - Employ people to clean sewers and septic tanks without protective gear
  - Construct insanitary latrines
  - Not demolish or convert insanitary latrines within a certain period of this Act coming into force
- **National Commission for Safai Karamcharis**: A statutory body to look into matters concerning the Safai Karamcharis' welfare and make recommendations to the government.
- **National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation**: Provides financial assistance to the Safai Karamchari, Scavengers and their dependents for any viable income-generating schemes. It has empanelled 22 training institutions and identified a variety of skill training in an attempt to boost alternative employment and encourage entrepreneurship.

Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS): Provide assistance in alternative occupations.
- **Safai Mitra Suraksha Challenge**: Aims to completely mechanise all septic and sewage tank cleaning operations in 243 cities across India, by April 30, 2021.

NAMASTE:
- The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MoSJE) has formulated a scheme "National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem" (NAMASTE).
- The process of extending the Scheme to all the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) of the country has been initiated.
- **Main features of the Scheme to be implemented in all ULBs are:**
  I. **Identification:** NAMASTE envisages identifying the **Sewer/Septic Tank Workers (SSWs).**
  II. **Training:** Occupational Training and distribution of PPE Kits to SSWs.
  III. Assistance for Safety Devices to **Sanitation Response Units (SRUs).**
  IV. Extending Health Insurance Scheme Benefits to identified SSWs and their families under the **Ayushman Bharat- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).**
  V. **Livelihood Assistance:** The Action Plan will promote mechanisation and enterprise development by providing funding support and subsidy (Capital + Interest) to the sanitation workers, to procure sanitation-related equipment.
  VI. **IEC Campaign:** Massive campaigns would be undertaken jointly by the ULBs & NSKFDC to spread awareness about the interventions of NAMASTE.

In News:

Bandicoot - Kerala to Become First State to Use Robotics Tech Extensively for Manhole Cleaning:
- Kerala became the first state in the country to use robotics technology for cleaning all its commissioned manholes by pressing into service the robotic scavenger Bandicoot in the temple town of Guruvayur.
- Bandicoot is a robotic machine that is engineered for cleaning any type of sewer manholes.

- It has been developed by Kerala-based Genrobotics, and is already in use in urban bodies across the country, phasing out the practice of sanitation workers physically entering the manholes.

SUB CATEGORISATION OF SCHEDULED CASTES

The Union government has formed a five-member committee of Secretaries, chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, to evaluate and work out a method for the equitable distribution of benefits, schemes and initiatives to the most backward communities amongst the over 1,200 Scheduled Castes across the country, that have been crowded out by relatively forward and dominant ones.

WHAT IS SUB CATEGORISATION OF CASTE?

It refers to further classifying broader caste groups into sub-groups based on various criteria.

Over time, some castes and communities have sought recognition and specific privileges based on their unique characteristics, historical backgrounds, or socio-economic status. Sub-categorisation attempts to address the diversity within larger caste groups and provide targeted benefits to specific sub-groups that may be perceived as socially and economically disadvantaged.

WHY IS SUB CATEGORISATION WITHIN CASTE NEEDED?

- **To Address Inequalities Among Scheduled Caste Communities:** There have been graded inequalities among SC communities and even among the marginalised, some communities have less access to basic facilities.
  - The relatively more forward communities among them have managed to avail benefits consistently while crowding the more backward ones out.
- **Disproportionate Share in Opportunities:** The policy of protective and compensatory discrimination leads to disproportional representation of sub-castes in employment, education, and legislature.
  - In Tamil Nadu, a 3% quota within the Scheduled Caste quota is accorded to the Arundhatiyar caste, after Justice M S Janarthanam report stated that despite being 16% of the SC population in the state, they held only 0-5% of the jobs.
- **Overcoming Hierarchy Practised within Scheduled Castes:** The Scheduled Caste category is not homogenous and comprises a wide range of communities with distinct cultural, social, and economic characteristics.
  - Some SC communities may have made progress in education, employment, and socio-economic development, while others continue to face significant disadvantages.
- **Help Scheduled Castes to Secure Social Mobility:**
  - The acquisition of political power, educational improvement, and occupational change could become the major assets for Scheduled Castes' upward mobility, which acts as a major factor for the demand for sub-categorisation.
- **Ensuring Social Justice:**
  - Sub-categorisation allows for a more targeted approach in addressing the specific vulnerabilities and needs of particular SC sub-groups.
- **Ensuring Equitable Distribution of Resources:** Sub-categorisation could help avoid the concentration of benefits in certain communities while others remain underserved.
  - For this, States have tried to divide the scheduled caste quota on the grounds that caste is a form of graded inequality. Punjab created an order of preferences in 1975 within scheduled castes for recruitment.

WHAT CHALLENGES ARE ASSOCIATED WITH THE SUB CATEGORISATION OF CASTE?

- **May Not Address the Problem of Inequality within Scheduled Castes (SCs):** According to the National Commission for Scheduled Caste (NCSC), the most backwards Scheduled Castes are lagging so far behind forward Scheduled Caste communities that a separate quota would not help.
  - The NCSC had thus recommended that existing schemes and government benefits first reach these sections before any sub-categorisation.
- **Issue of Federalism:** The Supreme Court held in 2004 that the State did not have the power to unilaterally sub-categorise communities in the list of SCs. The Constitution has provided that these lists can only be made by Parliament and notified by the President.
  - However, a five-judge Bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra had held in a 2020 judgement that deciding on the quantum of benefits in the lists of SCs/STs already notified would not amount to "tinkering" with it and that States could do it. The judgement has been referred to the larger Bench.
- **Identification and Criteria:** Determining the criteria for sub-categorisation can be challenging. Parameters such as socio-economic status, educational attainment, or regional factors may be considered, but reaching a consensus on these criteria can be difficult.

- o In a 1976 case, **State of Kerala v N M Thomas**, the Supreme Court laid down that "Scheduled Castes are not castes, they are class."
- o In the **E V Chinnaiah case in 2005**, the court had held that special protection of SCs is based on the premise that "all Scheduled Castes can and must collectively enjoy the benefits of reservation regardless of interse inequality" because the protection is not based on educational, economic or other such factors but solely on those who suffered untouchability.

- **Data Accuracy and Availability:** Concrete population numbers of each community and sub-community and their respective socio-economic data are necessary, which can provide a reasonable ground to decide how castes can be categorised, how much percentage should be given, etc.
  - o Obtaining accurate and up-to-date data on the socio-economic status of different Scheduled Caste communities is a challenge.

- **Potential for Intra-group Disputes:** Sub-categorisation may lead to internal divisions and disputes among SC communities. Some groups may feel marginalised from the benefits, leading to social tensions within the broader Scheduled Caste category.
  - o For instance, backwardness among Scheduled Castes also draws from the practice of untouchability, and sub categorisation may sharpen differences within and bring in competitive affirmative action.

Concentraion of ST population across various states (as % of total population of the state)
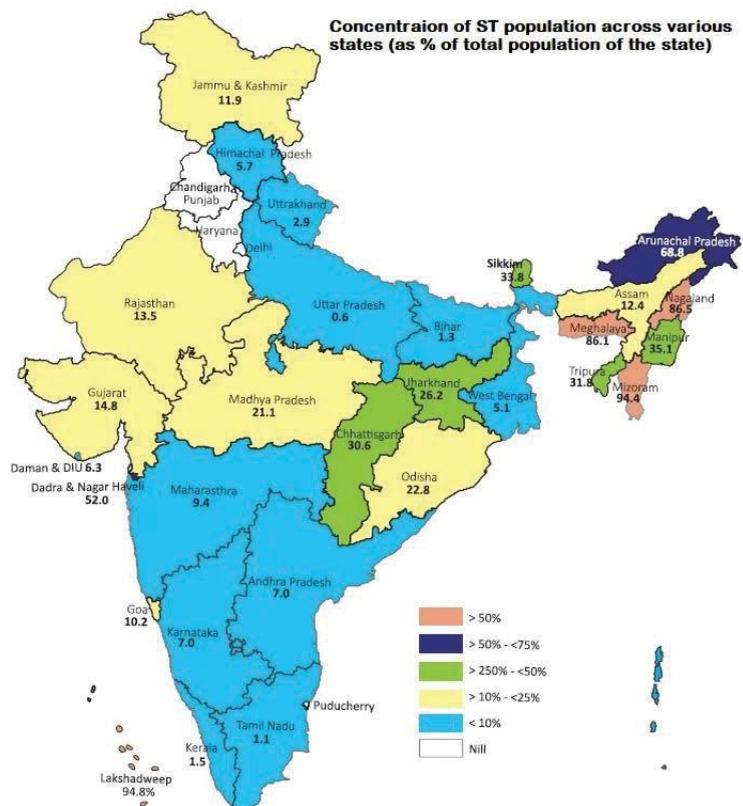
WAY FORWARD

- **Exploring Alternatives to Introduce Sub-Categorisation:** The Union government needs to explore legal options for the same. For instance, the Attorney General of India (AGI) had opined that a constitutional amendment could be brought in to facilitate this.

  - o The NCSC and NCST had opined that Article 16(4) of the Constitution already provided for States to create special laws for any backward classes it felt were under-represented.

  - o The Usha Mehra committee recommended the inclusion of Clause (3) in Article 341 through a constitutional amendment empowering state legislature to enact reclassification of the Scheduled Caste category subject to Presidential confirmation.

- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Ensuring comprehensive and accurate data collection on the socio-economic conditions of different Scheduled Caste communities.

  - o For instance, a caste-based census could provide more accurate and up-to-date data on the social and economic status of various caste groups, helping formulate and evaluate affirmative action policies and welfare programs.

- **Concept Of Creamy-Layer:** The concept of a **"creamy layer"** within SCs was upheld by the court in a 2018 judgement in **Jarnail Singh v Lachhmi Narain Gupta.**

  - o The "creamy layer" concept puts an income ceiling on those eligible for reservation. While this concept applies to Other Backward Castes, it was applied to promotions of Scheduled Castes for the first time in 2018.

- **Criteria Development:** Develop transparent and inclusive criteria for sub-categorisation, considering factors such as socio-economic status, educational attainment, and regional disparities.

  - o The Andhra Pradesh government in 1996 formed a Commission of Justice Ramachandra Raju, which recommended sub categorisation of Scheduled Caste in the State based on evidence that some communities were more backward and had less representation than others.

SCHEDULED TRIBES

Definition:

The term 'Scheduled Tribes' first appeared in the Constitution of India. Article 366 (25) defined scheduled tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this constitution".

STATISTICS/INDICATORS REGARDING SCHEDULED TRIBES: CENSUS 2011

According to the 2011 census, Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute approximately **8%** of the total population of the country. Their **sex ratio stands at 990, surpassing the national average of 940**. However, despite this favourable sex ratio, the **overall literacy rate among STs is 60%,** which is lower than the national average of 75%.

- **Percentage of Scheduled Tribes (ST):** Lakshadweep has the highest percentage, followed by Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.
- **Absolute Number of Scheduled Tribes (ST):** Madhya Pradesh has the highest absolute number, followed by Maharashtra, Odisha, Jharkhand, Gujarat, and Rajasthan.
- **Literacy Rate**: 59% (Male - 68.5 %, Female - 49.40 %). The PLFS 2018-19 report reveals an improvement in the literacy rate of STs at 69.4% as compared to 78.1% overall.

CRITERIA FOR SPECIFICATION OF A COMMUNITY AS A SCHEDULED TRIBE

- Traits such as **primitiveness, geographical isolation, shyness, and social, educational, and economic backwardness** are key factors distinguishing Scheduled Tribe communities from others.
- The specifications are influenced by the definitions of tribal communities adopted in the 1931 Census.
- **Article 342(1)** mandates the specification of tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities as Scheduled Tribes concerning a particular State or Union Territory.
- Therefore, the list of Scheduled Tribes is specific to each State/UT, and a community designated as a Scheduled Tribe in one State may not hold the same status in another State.
- Presidential notifications under Clause 1 of Article 342, known as Constitution Orders, are issued to enact these specifications.

Recently, the Paddari Tribe and Pahari Ethnic Group of Jammu and Kashmir and Hattee community of Himachal Pradesh are included in the Scheduled Tribes list.

Process for Inclusion in ST List

- The State government makes a recommendation to the Tribal Affairs Ministry.
- The Tribal Affairs Ministry reviews the recommendation and sends it to the Registrar General of India for approval.
- Simultaneously, The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes approved the recommendation.
- The Cabinet decides to include the tribe in the ST list.
- The final decision rests with the President's office issuing a notification specifying the changes under powers vested in it from Articles 342.
- Any community's inclusion in the Scheduled Tribes becomes effective only after the President assents to a Bill amending the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, following its passage by both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS

- **The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**: Aims to prevent the commission of offences of atrocities against members of SCs and STs.
- **The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA)**: To extend the provisions of the Panchayati Raj system to the Scheduled Areas, aiming to enable tribal self-governance
- **The Forest Rights Act, 2006 (The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006)** : Recognizes the rights of STs and other forest-dwelling communities to forest resources

which they have been traditionally using. It includes land rights, access to collect, use, and dispose of minor forest produce, and rights to protect, regenerate, or conserve or manage any community forest resource.
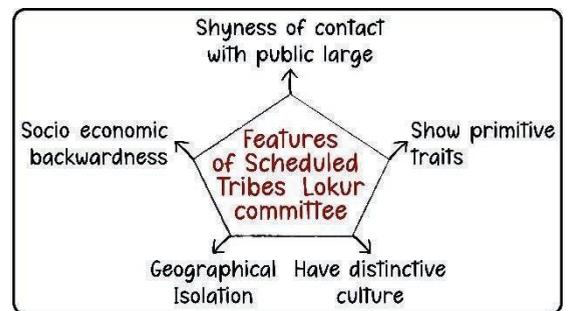
- **The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013**: It mandates informed consent for land acquisition in Scheduled Areas and outlines provisions for fair compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement.
- **The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955**: To ensure the civil rights of all individuals, including those from Scheduled Tribes, by prohibiting discrimination based on untouchability.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL SAFEGUARDS FOR THE STs

LEGISLATIVE MEASURES FOR THE PROTECTION OF SCHEDULED TRIBES

- **Andaman and Nicobar (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956:** This regulation was established to safeguard the Sentinelese and other aboriginal tribes residing in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. It provides legal protection and measures for the preservation of their cultural heritage and way of life.
- **Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963:** The Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order of 1963 declares the Andaman & Nicobar Islands as "Restricted Areas," limiting foreigner access without a Restricted Area Permit (RAP). This measure is designed to protect the privacy and cultural integrity of the indigenous tribes inhabiting the islands.
- The Bonded Labour Act of 1976 and the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 which have been discussed earlier applies to the Scheduled Tribes as well.

Constitutional Provisions for upliftment of STs	
Article	**Description**
Article 15(4)	Special provisions for the advancement of OBCs, including STs.
Article 29	Protection of the interests of minorities, including STs.
Article 46	Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) emphasizing the promotion of educational and economic interests of weaker sections, particularly SCs and STs.
Article 350	Right to conserve distinct language, script, or culture, and instruction in the mother tongue.
Articles 23 and 24	Prohibition of traffic in human beings and begar, and other forms of forced labor.
Article 164	Provision for a minister of Tribal Affairs in Bihar, Odisha, and MP.
Article 243	Reservation of seats in Panchayats for STs.
Article 244 (1)	Defines Scheduled Areas designated by the President and mentioned in the fifth schedule of the Constitution, present in 10 states.
Article 330	Reservation of seats for STs in the Lok Sabha.
Article 334	Provides for a 10-year period for reservation to STs, with extensions granted multiple times.
Article 371	Special provisions for North Eastern states and Sikkim.
5th Schedule	Specifies the administration and control of scheduled areas and scheduled tribes.
6th Schedule	Provides for the administration of tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram
Article 275 (1)	Provides Grants-in-Aid to states with scheduled tribes covered under the fifth and sixth schedules of the constitution.

- **The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA):** The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996 extends the scope of Panchayati Raj institutions to Scheduled Areas across India. It seeks to empower tribal communities by ensuring their participation in local governance and decision-making processes.
- **The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA):** The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006 includes provisions recognising the

forest and habitat rights of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). It aims to protect the traditional land and resource rights of tribal communities, especially those dependent on forest resources for their livelihoods.

### CONSTITUTIONAL MEASURES

- The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST), established under the Article 338A of the Constitution, has been entrusted with safeguarding the rights and interests of Scheduled Tribes. It is a constitutional body under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. With a mandate to inquire into specific complaints regarding the deprivation of rights or

exploitation of scheduled tribes, the commission plays a pivotal role in advocating for their rights and ensuring their equitable treatment.

- **Impact on Tribal Culture and Resultant Identity Crisis**: Education, urbanisation, industrialization and Sanskritization has affected tribal culture and led to an identity crisis among them.
  - Due to the impact of globalisation and modernization, traditional practices and rituals of the Great Andamanese tribes are on the verge of extinction.
- **Crime:** In 2022, 10,064 crimes against Scheduled Tribes were reported in India, marking a 14.3% increase from 8,802 cases in 2021. The crime rate rose from 8.4 to 9.6. Notably, the year saw 1,347 rape cases and 1,022 assault cases against tribal women.
- **Encroachment on Forest Rights**: Forest policies and regulations have jeopardised the traditional rights of tribal people and thus activities such as food gathering, and shifting cultivation have been affected.
- **Political representation:** They are not well represented in the political process and their voices are not heard in the policy-making process.
  - Tribal communities of the Northeast region of India have not had a fair representation in the political process, and their issues are not fully addressed by the government.
- **Lack of Quality Education**: Inadequate schools, absence of quality education, absence of competent teachers, and lack of education in the **mother tongue** have led to low literacy among tribals.
  - The tribal drop-outs at the primary and secondary level are much higher than the general population.
- They have limited access to education and healthcare, which has a negative impact on their overall well-being and development.
  - As per the 2011 census, the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribe was 59%.
- **Lack of Access to Basic Infrastructure**: Absence of roads, pucca houses, electricity, drinking water and sanitation facilities, schools, hospitals etc.
  - The 2011 census data shows that access to tap water, sanitation facilities, drainage facilities and clean cooking fuel is much lower among the tribal population.
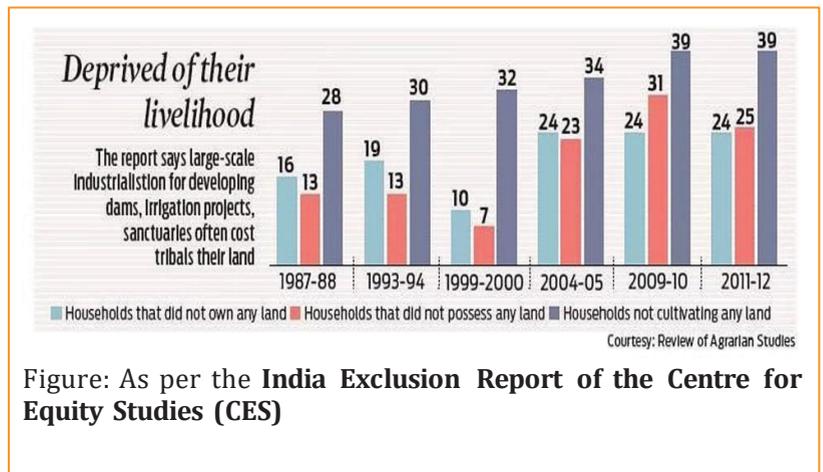
Figure: As per the **India Exclusion Report of the Centre for Equity Studies (CES)**

Living on the edge of poverty and social seclusion it is pertinent on the part of the government to take efforts to ensure the all-round inclusive development of tribals. The government on its part has taken the following measures:

- **Educational Empowerment:**
  - **Scholarship Schemes - Pre-Matric Scholarship, Post-Matric Scholarship and Merit-cum-Means based Scholarship.**
  - **Vocational Training Centres in Tribal Areas**: To upgrade the skills of the tribal youth in various traditional/ modern vocations. **E.g,** The Ministry of Road & Transport announced the government is working to set up Driver Training Centres in tribal areas and in the 115 poorest districts in the country.
  - **Eklavya Model Residential School/Ashram Schools:** Provide residential education for ST students. In 2018, the Government announced the setting up of **Eklavya Model Residential Schools** in every block with more than 50 per cent of the Scheduled Tribes population and at least 20,000 tribal persons.

Scheme of Strengthening Education among the ST Girls in Low Literacy Districts
The scheme aims to bridge the gap in literacy levels between the general female population and tribal women, in the identified districts or blocks.
- **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (for SC, ST, OBCs, minority & BPL):** To ensure access and quality education to girls from disadvantaged groups by setting up residential schools at the upper primary level.

- **School Innovation Ambassador Training Program (SIATP):** To give wings to the creativity of tribal children. The students of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) will greatly benefit from SIATP since it is also the endeavour of the Tribal Affairs Ministry to give the best possible education to the tribal children.
- **Scheme for Teachers - Experiential Learning for the 21st Century Programme:**
  - **Beneficiaries**: Experiential Learning for the 21st Century Programme has been launched for the Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) Principals and Teachers.
  - **Purpose**: It is conceptualised as an online programme for educators i.e. teachers and principals to help them adapt classroom learning to real-life experiences.
  - **Training**: The program was offered free of cost to all the selected teachers and principals. The selected teachers were trained as "Teacher Leaders".

Empowering Women:
- **Tribal Women's Property Rights:** It refers to the legal recognition and protection of the rights of women belonging to tribal communities to own, inherit, and control land, property, and resources. These rights aim to address historical gender disparities and promote equality within tribal societies.

These measures contribute to empowering tribal women, enhancing their economic opportunities, and fostering gender equity within tribal societies.

- **Economic Empowerment:**
  - **Institutional Support for the Development and Marketing of Tribal Products/Produce**: However, the scheme has a poor record as only 8 states have been granted aid under the scheme. **Tripura** is the only State to have been granted funds each year from 2014 until 2018 and it has utilised all the funds allocated to it.
  - **Micro Credit Scheme for Self Help Groups Comprising ST Members**: As per Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) data, Rs 2.8 lakh crore have been leveraged from the banking system to SHGs and the number of enterprises per village went up by 79 per cent, per capita monthly income by 22 per cent. STs also benefited greatly.

Fig: Increase in Budgetary allocations over the years

- **Social Empowerment:**
  - **The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996**: The Act extended the provisions of Panchayats to the tribal areas of nine states that have Fifth Schedule Areas.
  - **Swasthya Portal**: Its **e-portal**, provides all health and nutrition-related information of the tribal population of India in a single platform.
  - **Pradhan Mantri Dakshta Aur Kushalta Sampann Hitgrahi (PM-DAKSH) Yojana (2021):** It is a National Action Plan for skilling marginalised persons covering SCs, OBCs, EBCs, DNTs, Sanitation workers including waste pickers.
    - To increase the skill levels of the target youth by providing them with short-term and long-term skills, followed by assistance in wage/self-employment.
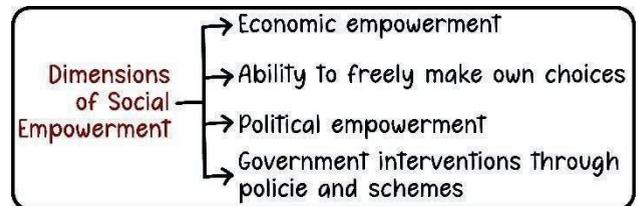
- **Education and Skill Development**
  - **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)**: Provides quality education to tribal students in remote areas.
  - **Pre and Post matric scholarship for ST students:** Provides remedial and special coaching in classes IX to XII.
- **Healthcare**
  - **National Tribal Health Care Plan**: Aims to improve healthcare access and address the unique health challenges of tribal populations.
  - **Mobile Health Units (MHUs)**: Deployed to provide healthcare services in remote tribal areas.
  - **Tribal Health and Nutrition Portal**: Launched to address health and nutritional needs of tribal populations.
  - **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)**: Enables access to quality healthcare without the financial burden

Underutilization of Funds under TSP in Karnataka: The overall progress in SCP and TSP were a dismal 15 % and 9% respectively, of the total fund allocated. 73 members of the legislative assembly and 36 members of the legislative council have not proposed/taken up any work under the TSP and SCP for 2019-20.

GOAL (Going Online as Leaders) Programme: It is a joint initiative of Facebook India with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs to provide mentorship to tribal youth through digital mode.

National Tribal Research Institute (NTRI): It will work as a premier national-level institute and nerve centre of tribal concerns, issues and matters in academic, executive and legislative fields.

Other Legal Provision: The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA); The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA); The Andaman and Nicobar (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956; Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963 and Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956.

WAY FORWARD

- To study their condition and to ameliorate their suffering, the government has appointed several commissions. Such as the **Dhebar Commission, Xaxa Commission etc.** The recommendations of these commissions must form the basis for further actions.

Recommendations of Dhebar Commission (1960) (Regarding Education):
- Provide the mid-day meal, clothing, free book, reading and writing materials, etc. to all the tribal children in backward areas, the opening schools in localities where there were at least 30 school-going children.
- Adjustment of timing, vacations, and holidays of schools to suit the tribal social and cultural life, create an atmosphere of tribal culture in the schools etc.
- The Kothari Commission endorsed the recommendations of the Dhebar Commission and also suggested the need to educate parents simultaneously.

Xaxa Committee Recommendations for the Welfare of STs:
- **Regarding Legal & Administrative Framework:**
  o Empower Tribes Advisory Council, widening its scope and responsibilities and transforming it into the Tribes Advisory, Protective and Developmental Council.
  o Autonomous Councils must be covered under the State Finance Commission and FC must lay down appropriate principles of resource distribution between the State and the Autonomous Council.
- **Socio-Economic Development:**
  o Ensure due share in socio-economic progress for tribals, including facilities like health, education, livelihood, drinking water, sanitation etc.
  o Reservation for tribal women (one-third) as well as smaller tribal groups in the ADCs and other political institutions.
  o Establish agro-based training institutions and related labour-intensive processing industries in tribal regions
- **Regarding Land Alienation:**
  o Laws protecting tribal land from alienation must be upheld at all costs.
  o A reasonable share of the wealth generated by the resources in their homelands must accrue to them by law.
  o Prevent all kinds of tribal land alienation through strict enforcement of laws and restore alienated land to the tribal owners as per the provisions of the PESA.
- **Regarding Education:**
  o Teachers for schools in the tribal regions should be recruited locally.
  o New teacher training institutions should be opened and the curriculum for the training should be compatible with the socio-cultural milieu, tribal ethos, language etc
  o The State Governments should develop a policy for multilingual education so that early learning is conducted in the local language.
  o Inclusion of local culture, folklore and history in the curriculum can help in building the confidence of tribal children and enhance the relevance of education in their lives.
- **Regarding Culture:**
  o Respect and protect tribal customary rights to land, forest, culture and sources of livelihood. Allow to participate in the protection and management of forests.

The right to preservation of their language, culture and traditions, and to protect themselves against the loss of identity, must be recognized, protected, documented and allowed to thrive as a dynamic living culture.

MSP FOR MINOR FOREST PRODUCE (MFP)

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has revised the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for the MFP list and has included 14 additional MFPs in the list.

IMPORTANCE OF MFPS

- MFP refers to **non-wood forest products.** It includes products like bamboo, canes, fodder, leaves, gums, waxes, dyes, resins, and many forms of food including nuts, wild fruits etc.
- MFPs are a major source of livelihood for Tribals. Collection and sale of MFPs **contribute 40 – 60 % of tribal annual earnings**.
- Since most of the MFPs are collected and **used/sold by women, it also ensures women's empowerment.**

SCHEDULED TRIBES AND OTHER TRADITIONAL FOREST DWELLERS (RECOGNITION OF FOREST RIGHTS) ACT, 2006

Popularly known as **Forests Rights Act, 2006,** the act was enacted to protect the marginalised socio-economic class of citizens and balance the right to the environment with their right to life and livelihood. It recognizes the rights of the **forest-dwelling tribal communities and other traditional forest dwellers** to resources of forest, on which these communities are dependent for a variety of needs including livelihood.


Govt Calls It Rationalisation

MINOR FOREST PRODUCE	EXISTING MSP	REVISED MSP
Tamarind*	22	18
Honey	132	150
Karanj seed	21	18
Mahuwa seed	22	20
Chironjee pods*	100	60
Myrobalan	11	8
Rangini lac	230	100
Kusumi lac	320	150

(In ₹/kg) *with seeds

The decision had to be taken because MSPs had been fixed on the higher side and needed to be rationalised. From now, the prices would only increase" –Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram

- **The Act encompasses:**
  o Right to Self-cultivation and Habitation which are usually regarded as Individual rights; and
  o Community Rights such as Grazing, Fishing, and access to Water bodies in forests, Habitat Rights for PVTGs etc.

IMPORTANCE

- It aims to undo the **historical injustice** against the forest-dwelling communities.
- It **ensures land tenure, livelihood and food security** of the forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers.
- It expands the mandate of the **Fifth and the Sixth Schedules of the Constitution** which protect the claims of indigenous communities.
- It **democratises forest governance** by recognising community forest resource rights.
- **Implementation of Act:**
  o Till September 2018 end, a total of 4,219,741 claims (individual and community claims) have been filed and 1,889, 835 titles (individual and community claims) amounting to 17,848,733 acres of forest lands have been distributed. But this also means that a total of **1,934,345 claims were rejected.**

Development along the line of their own genius without compulsion from outsiders

Administration for Tribals, by tribals and from amongst tribals with minimum involvement of outsiders

Preservation of tribal relationships with their surrounding without encroachment by outsiders

Tribal Panchsheel (Nehruvian Approach)

Administration through their own social and cultural institutions

Result to be judged by evolution of human character and not by money spent or statistics

CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACT

- **Lack of Political Will**: There is a visible lack of political will in the implementation of the act as an assertion of the power of forest-dwelling communities is in direct conflict with the neo-liberal development paradigm.
- **Functional/Implementation Barriers:** These barriers are due to systematic issues reflected in:
  o **Lack of coordination** between the tribal, revenue and forest department on implementation of the Act.
  o **Lack of documentation and acceptance evidence:** For instance, In the initial stages of implementation, there was the insistence on satellite images as evidence while other admissible proofs were ignored, as happened in Gujarat resulting in mass rejections of claims.
- **Institutional Issues:** Institutional Issues such as **Rough maps of community and individual claims** prepared by Gram Sabha often lack the technical know-how and suffer from educational incapacity.
  o **Illiteracy and unawareness** among forest dwellers, Naxalisam etc.
  o As a result, many claims are being rejected; pending or limited rights are recognised. In fact, the area recognized has been drastically reduced, which has been claimed without any proper reasons.
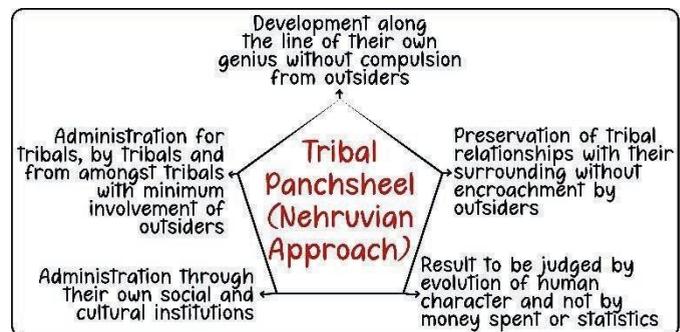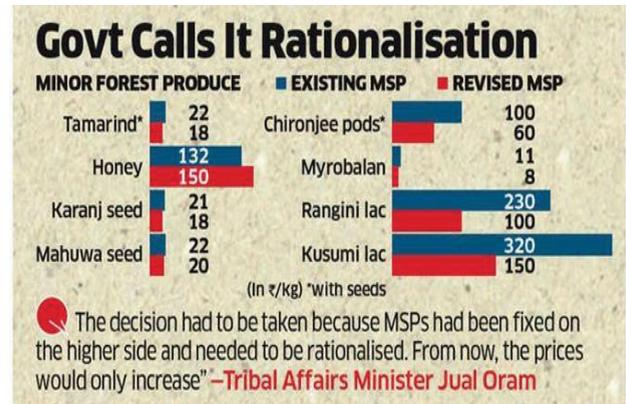
- **Lacunas in the Act**: A section of environmentalists raise concern that FRA gives lesser scope for community rights as it bends more in favour of individual rights..

PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TRIBAL GROUPS (PVTGs)

ABOUT PVTGs

- **PVTGs:** They are **less developed among the tribals**. In 1973, the **Dhebar Commission** first recognised them as Primitive Tribal Groups. In 2006, the Government renamed the PTGs as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
- **Basic Characteristics of PVTGs:** They are mostly **homogenous**, with a **small population** and relatively physically isolated, social institutes cast in a simple mould, and there is an absence of written language, relatively simple technology, and a slower rate of change,
- **Data:** 75 PVTGs are residing in 17 States and UT of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. These tribal groups are widely different culturally, thus their problems are also very different from group to group.
- **Criteria for identifying PVTGs:**
  - Pre-agricultural level of technology
  - Low level of literacy
  - Economic backwardness
  - A declining or stagnant population
- **Facts**
  - Recently, Bharia PVTG in Madhya Pradesh and Kamar and Baiga tribes in Chhattisgarh were granted Habitat Rights under the Forest Rights Act, 2006.
  - Odisha houses the highest number (13) of PVTGs in India.

ISSUES CONCERNING PVTGs

- **Inequalities:** The level of inequalities in social and economic conditions is very high amongst PVTGs.
- **Declining Population**: In 1858, the Great Andamanese were estimated at nearly 3500, in 1901 their number declined to 625. According to the **2001 Census,** the Great Andamanese stood at just 43, Jarawas were 241, Onges were 96, Sentinelese were 39 and ShomPens were 398.
- **Poor Health:** They fare poorly in health indicators due to factors like poverty, illiteracy, lack of safe drinking water, bad sanitary conditions, difficult terrain, malnutrition, poor maternal and child health services, unavailability of health and nutritional services, superstition etc.
- **Illiteracy:** Average literacy rate of PVTGs varies 10% to 44%.
- **Livelihood**: Due to deforestation, climate changes and new forest conservation policies, their Non-timber forest produce collection is getting hampered. Because of the lack of awareness about the value of NTFP produce, PVTGs have been exploited by the middlemen.

Reaching The Last Mile
No One To Be Left Behind

UNION BUDGET 2023-24

- **Pradhan Mantri PVTG Development Mission** to be launched
- **Financial assistance** for sustainable micro irrigation in drought prone regions of Karnataka
- **38800 more teachers** for 740 Eklavya Model Residential Schools
- **Free food grain** to all Antyodaya and priority households for **one year**, under PMGKAY
- **Bharat SHRI** to be set up for digitization of ancient inscriptions
- Outlay of **PM Awas Yojna** enhanced by 66 %

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT PVTGs

THE SCHEME FOR DEVELOPMENT OF PRIMITIVE VULNERABLE TRIBAL GROUPS:

- Launched in 2008 to ensure the socio-economic development of PVTGs.
- Activities supported under the scheme include housing, land distribution, land development, agricultural development, cattle development, construction of link roads, installation of non-conventional sources of energy, social security, etc.

DEVELOPMENT OF PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TRIBAL GROUPS (PVTGs):

- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs implements this as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme having a provision of 100% Central assistance.
- It aims at the socio-economic development of PVTGs in a comprehensive manner, while retaining their culture and heritage.
- Financial assistance is provided to the States/UT under the scheme for activities like Education, Housing, Agricultural development, Animal husbandry etc.

VULNERABLE TRIBES IN NUMBERS

75 No. of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

18 Number of states (17) and UT (1) where they are present

27,68,322 Total PVTG population in 2001

23,000* Population of Abujhmaria, a PVTG in the Bastar range of Chhattisgarh

PVTGs include Khond Porja, Asur, Birhor, Kadar, Saharia, Kurumbas, Baiga, Toda, Jarawa, Shompen, Sentinelese

*Based on a 2015-16 survey quoted by Tribal Research and Training Institute of Chhattisgarh

Source: Tribal Affairs Ministry

PRADHAN MANTRI PVTG DEVELOPMENT MISSION

- It will saturate PVTG families and habitations with basic facilities and stress on education for PVTGs.
- A fund of Rs 15,000 crore for the next three years has been allocated for the socio-economic development of the group.
- Rs.15,000 crore will be made available to implement the Mission in the next three years under the Development Action Plan for the Scheduled Tribes.

WAY FORWARD

- **Promote Research and Data collection efforts** to understand the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities for PVTGs. can help in evidence-based policy-making and the effective implementation of programs aimed at improving their status.
- **Foster partnerships with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)** and civil society groups working in the field of education and tribal development.
- Encourage PVTGs to actively **participate in decision-making processes and policy formulation** related to education and tourism.

Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN)

Hon'ble Prime Minister launched the PM JANMAN Mission on Janjatiya Gaurav Divas on 15th November, 2023 with a resolve to reach out to tribal groups and primitive tribes most of whom still dwell in the forests.

Vision

The PM-JANMAN vision is aimed to improve the socio-economic status of PVTGs by bridging gaps in health, education, livelihoods; by improving basic infrastructure in Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) communities, habitations, and families aligning with existing schemes of Nine Ministries/Departments.

Objectives

The basic objective of the PM-JANMAN is to improve socio-economic conditions of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), by saturating PVTG families and habitations with basic facilities and services. The broader objectives of the Mission are as under:

Safe Housing	Clean Drinking Water and Sanitation	Education	Healthcare and Nutrition	Road and Telecom Connectivity	Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities
Ensuring that every PVTG household has access to secure and habitable housing, protecting them from environmental challenges and providing them with a sense of security	Guaranteeing access to clean and safe drinking water sources and promoting proper sanitation facilities, reducing health risks and improving overall well-being	Enhancing accessibility to quality education, with a focus on increasing enrollment and retention rates among PVTG children, thus empowering them with knowledge and skills for a better future	Ensuring PVTG communities have easy access to healthcare services, including regular check-ups and nutrition programs, to improve overall health outcomes	Establishing road infrastructure, electricity and telecom connectivity to connect PVTG habitations facilitating economic opportunities and access to information	Promoting sustainable livelihood options within or near PVTG habitations, empowering them economically and reducing their dependency on marginal resources

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	Previous Year Questions	
1.	What are the two major legal initiatives by the State since Independence, addressing discrimination against Scheduled Tribes (STs)?	2017
2.	Why are the tribals in India referred to as the Scheduled Tribes? Indicate the major provisions enshrined in the Constitution of India for their upliftment.	2016
3.	Multiplicity of various commissions for the vulnerable sections of the society leads to problems of overlapping jurisdiction and duplication of functions- Is it better to merge all commissions into an umbrella Human Rights Commission? Argue your case.	2018

OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES (OBCs)

The expression 'OBC' was coined to denote backward/ marginalised communities and castes that were not Scheduled Castes (SCs) or Scheduled Tribes (STs). It is recognised that social backwardness in India has traditionally been a direct consequence of caste status, and that other types of backwardness have flowed from this initial handicap.

Affirmative action for OBCs is mandated by Article 15(4) of the Constitution: "Nothing in this article or in clause (2) of Article 29 [non-discrimination with regard to admission into state educational institutions on grounds of religion, caste,

etc] shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens...".

Article 16(4) allows the state to make "any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State".

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE OBCs

- **Educational Disparities:** OBCs face challenges in accessing quality education, leading to lower literacy rates and limited opportunities for skill development and employment.
- **Economic Marginalisation:** Many OBC communities are engaged in traditional occupations with limited earning potential, resulting in economic marginalisation and poverty.
- **Social Discrimination:** OBCs encounter social discrimination and stigma based on their caste and socio-economic status, restricting their social mobility and opportunities for advancement.
- **Political Underrepresentation:** Despite their significant population size, OBCs are often underrepresented in political decision-making bodies, hindering their ability to advocate for their rights and interests.

SCHEMES/INITIATIVES FOR OBCs

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

The National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) is a constitutional body empowered to address the concerns and welfare measures of socially and educationally backward classes in India. The 102nd Constitution Amendment Act, 2018, conferred constitutional status upon the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC). The NCBC has the authority to examine complaints and welfare measures concerning socially and educationally backward classes.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR THE OBCs

- **Pre and Post Matric Scholarship:** The government offers scholarships to OBC students at both pre and post-matric levels to support their education. For example, the Central Sector Scheme of Scholarship for College and University Students provides financial assistance to OBC students pursuing higher education.
- **National Fellowship:** OBC students pursuing higher education are eligible for national fellowships which provides financial assistance to OBC students pursuing M.Phil and Ph.D. programs in universities and colleges.
- **Saksham Scheme for loan to OBC youth:** Under the Saksham Scheme, OBC youth are provided with access to loans at concessional rates to support their entrepreneurial ventures and skill development initiatives. For instance, schemes like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana offer loans to OBC entrepreneurs to start or expand their businesses.
- **National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation (NBCFDC):** NBCFDC facilitates economic empowerment among OBCs by providing financial assistance, training, and entrepreneurial support to individuals and groups belonging to backward classes. For example, the corporation offers various loan schemes and skill development programs.
- **Constitutional status to National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC):** The government accorded constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC), empowering it to investigate and monitor matters related to the welfare of OBCs and recommend measures for their upliftment. The National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993 provides the legal framework for the functioning of the commission.
- **Reservation in Education and Employment:** OBCs benefit from reservation policies in educational institutions and government jobs. Examples include reservation quotas in government colleges, universities, and public sector jobs, as mandated by the Constitution of India.
- **Skill Development Programs:** Various skill development programs are initiated by the government to enhance the employability of OBC youth. Examples include the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), which offers skill training to youth from all sections of society, including OBCs.

ECONOMICALLY WEAKER SECTIONS (EWS)

"EWS" refers to a category of individuals or families who fall within a certain income threshold set by the government for the purpose of providing them with various benefits, such as reservations in education and employment, as well as other welfare schemes. This classification aims to address socio-economic disparities and provide support to those who are economically disadvantaged.

WHO ARE ECONOMICALLY WEAKER SECTIONS?

The economically weaker section is the section of the society in India that belongs to the un-reserved category and has an annual family income of less than 8 lakh rupees. This category includes people that do not belong to the caste categories of ST/SC/OBC and who already enjoy the benefits of reservation.

STATUS OF EWS IN INDIA

Approximately **18.2% of India's general population falls under the Economically Weaker Section category**, which translates to around 350 million people, based on the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index utilised by Niti Ayog.

The concept of EWS gained prominence with the introduction of reservation for economically weaker sections in educational institutions and public employment through the **103rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2019**.

- **Article 15(6)** of the Indian Constitution allows for reservation of up to **10% of seats** in educational institutions and public employment for individuals belonging to the economically weaker sections.
- The Constitution (One Hundred and Third Amendment) Act, 2019 inserted Article 15(6) and Article 16(6), providing for reservation to economically weaker sections in educational institutions and public employment.

CONSTRAINTS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF WELFARE SCHEMES FOR SC/ST/OBC – CRITICAL EXAMINATION

- **Poverty and Inequality:** Problems of isolation, exclusion and occupational subjugation are major obstacles to mainstreaming these social groups in the socio-economic development of the country.
- **Insufficient and Inefficient Funding**: While the due allocation for SCs in this year's budget should be Rs 1,39,172 crore as per NITI Aayog guidelines, the allocation was Rs 83,257 crore or 60%.
  - o **Moreover, Funds are Not Allocated efficiently**: Resources are distributed thinly among many schemes, especially under the scheduled caste sub-plan (SCSP) and tribal sub-plan (TSP), instead of among a few targeted schemes.
  - o **Further,** Each ministry is supposed to set aside 15 % of its spending in a Scheduled Caste Sub Plan, but often their outcomes are insignificant.
- **Poor Governance** - Governance including lack of inter-ministerial convergence and suboptimal targeting of beneficiaries is another major issue.
- **Ground Realities are Ignored** - Mainstreaming these groups has also been hampered by the inability to incorporate specific cultural and social requirements of SC/ST groups while designing interventions.
- **Top-to-down approach** - Absence of people's participation in design, planning and implementation, and the absence of accountability.
- **Negligence of Dalit and Adivasi women** - The 2020-21 Budget allocates 0.8% (Rs 7,986.34 crore) for Dalit women and 0.34% (Rs 3,174.91 crore) for tribal women from the Centrally Sponsored Schemes and Central Sector Schemes.
- **Unawareness** - There is limited awareness about the schemes resulting in leakages and denial of benefits.

WAY FORWARD

- Make existing government efforts more effective and participatory.
- **Initiate ranking of states** for their innovation, effectiveness, and impact of social schemes.
- **Identify key social practices** across the country that still segregate Dalits—whether in schools, homes, or workplaces — and run targeted communication campaigns for students and teachers, villagers, companies, etc.
- **The budget allocation** for the SC/ST communities should be proportionate to their share in the population.

> **KEYWORDS:** Marginalized groups, Disadvantaged communities, Socially excluded, Bridge the gap, Uplifting the bottom of the pyramid, Creating a just society, Uplift the Marginalized, Break Caste Barriers, Dalit Rights Matter, Eradicate Untouchability, Tribal Heritage Celebration, Preserve Indigenous Culture, Tribal Rights Advocacy, Indigenous Peoples' Rights, Uplifting the Underprivileged, Bridging Social Divides, Equal Opportunities for All, Breaking Barriers, Building Futures, Affirmative Action in Action, From Margins to Mainstream, Advancing Economic Equality, Empowerment through Education, Elevating Voices of the Voiceless, Catalysts for Change, Social Mobility, Caste-Based Inequality, Dalit Inclusivity, Dalit Liberation, Adivasi Heritage, Economic Upliftment

3	WOMEN

"You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation" - **Brigham Young**
"Man can never be a woman's equal in the spirit of selfless service with which nature has endowed her"
- **Mahatma Gandhi**
"There is considerable evidence that women's education and literacy tend to reduce the mortality rates of children" -
**Amartya Sen**

INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, women face a multitude of challenges that render them vulnerable in various aspects of life. These challenges can be deeply rooted in societal norms, cultural practices, and systemic inequalities. Understanding the complexities they encounter is crucial in fostering meaningful dialogue and pursuing strategies for their empowerment. This exploration delves into the challenges faced by women in a vulnerable world while also highlighting avenues for empowerment that can pave the way for a more just and equitable future for all.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN

- **Article 15 (3)** - Allows for **affirmative action in favour of women**.
- **Article 23** - Prohibition of **traffic in human beings and forced labour**.
- **Article 39 (a)** - The State shall ensure that men and women equally, have the **right to an adequate means of livelihood**.
- **Article 39 (d)** - **Equal pay for equal work** for both men and women.
- **Article 51(A) (e)** - Renounce practices derogatory to the **dignity of women**.

- **Article 42** - Allows for provisions to be made by the State for **securing just and humane conditions** of work and for maternity relief.
- **Article 243D** - Mandates **not less than one- third reservation for women in panchayats at all levels**. 20 states have made provision for **50% reservation for women in PRIs** in their respective State Panchayati Raj Acts.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA- FACT AND DATA

- **Literacy:** The **literacy rate in the country** is **74.04 percent, 82.14% for males and 65.46% for females (2011 Census).**
- **Sex Ratio**: The sex ratio in the country has always remained **unfavourable to females**. It was **940 in 2011 (2011 Census).**
- **Child Sex Ratio**: As per the **NFHS - 5** the **child sex ratio** at birth for children born in the **last five years** (female per 1,000 male) is **929.**
- **Women Workforce Participation Rate**: The PLFS data indicates that for women in the working age group (15-59 years), LFPR is only 35.6 per cent in India.The participation rate stands at 39.3 percent and 26.5 percent, respectively, in rural and urban areas in 2021-22.
- **Gender Gap**: India was ranked at 127 out of 146 countries in terms of gender parity — an improvement of eight places from last year according to the recently published annual Gender Gap Report, 2023.
- **Sexual Harassment**: **35% of women** in full time corporate sector jobs have experienced sexual harassment (**The Women in the Workplace Report**).
- **The Maternal Mortality Ratio**: Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-Agency Group (MMEIG) provides global estimates of MMR. As per UN MMEIG 2020 report, "Trends in maternal mortality 2000 to 2020", MMR of India has declined from 384 in 2000 to 103 in 2020 whereas Global MMR has declined from 339 in 2000 to 223 in 2020.
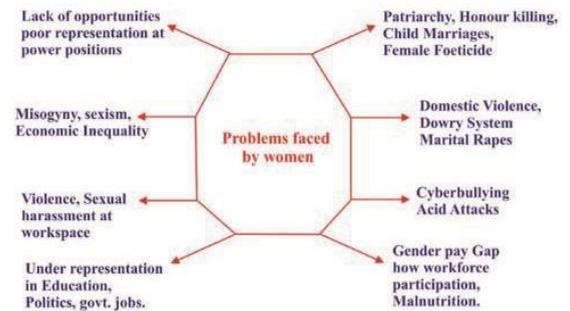

Fig: Challenges faced by Women

- **Health: More than 50 percent women are anaemic** in most of the states. (**National Family Health Survey - 5,** 2019-20).
- **Domestic Violence:** According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), **nearly one-third (33%) of women above the age of 15 have experienced domestic violence** in some form.

- **NCRB Crime in India Reports (2021):** Over 30% of crimes against women were registered under cruelty by husband or relatives.
- **SDG Target 3.1:** To reduce the **global MMR to less than 70/lakh live births by 2030.**
- **SDG 5**: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"
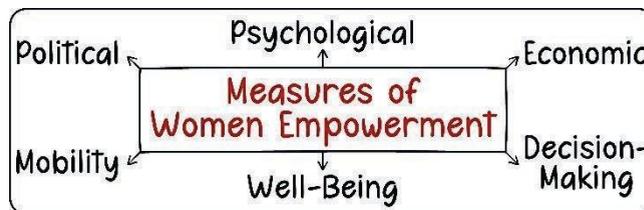
> **Political Exclusion of women**
> - **Parliament -** In current **Lok Sabha - 14% (78 MPs)** female MPs, ie. the highest number of women MPs since 1952. **In Rajya Sabha only 25 (10.2%)** out of 245 members are women.
> - **Assemblies -** Only 9% of 4,120 MLAs were women (ADR report). In **recent assembly elections (2021)** only **5 % women in Tamil Nadu and only 11 women were elected to the 140-member Kerala state Assembly.**

STATUTORY MEASURES TO MAKE WOMEN EMPOWERED AND SAFE

- **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace** (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 was passed with the aim of giving insurance to the ladies at work environment.
- **Acid Attack**: **Section 326B** of the **Indian Penal Code**, **1860** deals with utilisation of corrosive substances and intentional tossing or endeavouring to toss corrosive separately.
- **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005:** This Act protects women from any act/conduct/omission/commission that harms, injures or potential to harm is to be considered as domestic violence.
- **Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961** has stringent provisions for punishment and prevention of dowry-related atrocities against women.
- **The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019:** It makes all declarations of talaq, including in written or electronic form, to be void and illegal. It makes declaration of talaq a **cognizable offence**, attracting up to three years' imprisonment with a fine.

CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
- It was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and is often described as an international bill of rights for women.
- The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life.

Key Provisions
- It focuses on non-discrimination, sex stereotypes, and sex trafficking.
- It outlines women's rights in the public sphere with an emphasis on political life, representation, and rights to nationality.
- Describes the economic and social rights of women, particularly focusing on education, employment, and health.
- It outlines women's right to equality in marriage and family life along with the right to equality before the law.

SCHEMES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

- **Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav Mahila Samman Bachat Patra:** One-time new **small savings scheme, Mahila Samman Savings Certificate (MSSC),** will be made available for a **two-year period** up to March 2025. This will offer **deposit facility upto ₹2 lakh** in the name of women or girls for a **tenor of 2 years at fixed interest rate of 7.5%** with partial withdrawal option. **(Union Budget 2023 - 24).**
- **One Stop Centre Scheme**: One Stop Centres (OSC) are **intended to support women affected by violence**, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace.
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme:** Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao is a campaign of the Government of India that aims **to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services intended for girls in India.**
- **UJJAWALA**: A comprehensive scheme for **prevention of trafficking and rescue**, rehabilitation and **reintegration of victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.**
- **SWADHAR Greh**: A scheme for women in **difficult circumstances** so that they could lead their life with **dignity and conviction.**
- **Mahila Police Volunteers (MPV)**: An MPV will serve as a **public-police interface in order to fight crime against women.**

- **Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK)** aims to **empower rural women with opportunities for skill development and employment.**

VARIOUS COMMITTEE COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

Jaya Jaitley Committee, 2020	**Increasing the age of marriage for women** from **18 to 21 years.** - Government has to look into **increasing access to schools and colleges for girls, including their transportation.** **Ensuring skill and business training** to girls. - The committee also recommended **Sex Education in Schools.** **Large scale awareness campaign** to be undertaken for encouraging social acceptance of the new legislation.
Justice Verma Committee, 2012	- In place of the **Internal Complaints Committee** (ICC), it was recommended that **an Employment Tribunal be set up** because for in-house ICC, women would be discouraged to complain. - The committee recommended **inclusion of Domestic Workers in the Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act.**

WAY FORWARD

However, despite these efforts there is a **visible lack of progress on the women empowerment front** and thus there is an urgent need to take reformative steps. A suitable course of action can be:

- **Adopt Sound gender transformative policies**, from policies around childcare to equal pay, and laws that support gender equality,
- **Strengthen health system response** to ensure access to **survivor-centred care** and referral to other services as needed.
- **Transformation in School education** to challenge discriminatory attitudes and beliefs, including comprehensive sexual education and Gender Sensitization.
- **Targeted investment in sustainable** and effective **evidence-based prevention strategies** at local, national, regional, and global levels, and
- **Strengthening data collection** and investing in high quality surveys on violence against women and improving measurement of the different forms of violence experienced by women, including those who are most marginalised.
- **Focus on Gender sensitization:** A gender sensitization of all stakeholders is an important component of effective responses to domestic violence. It should form part of the curriculum of training of the police, judiciary, bureaucracy, policymakers, social workers, counsellors, and other service providers.
- **Awareness generation and information Dissemination:** Many women are unable to escape domestic violence because they are unaware of available legal services and agencies working in this area. Therefore, disseminating information on the range of services available is essential.

INSTITUTIONS FOR WOMEN WELFARE

MINISTRY OF WOMEN & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- The broad mandate of the Ministry is to have **holistic development of Women and Children.**
- The Ministry formulates plans, policies and programmes; enacts/ amends legislation, guides and coordinates the efforts of both governmental and **NGOs** working in the **field of Women and Child Development.**

THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

It was set up as **statutory body** in January **1992** under the **National Commission for Women Act, 1990 to:**

- Review the Constitutional and Legal safeguards for women.
- Recommend remedial legislative measures.
- Facilitate redressal of grievances.
- Advise the Government on all policy matters affecting women.

STEPS TAKEN BY NCW ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

- The Commission completed its visits to all the States/UTs **except Lakshadweep** and prepared Gender Profiles to **assess the status of women and their empowerment.**
- It received a large number of complaints and acted suo-moto in several cases **to provide speedy justice.**
- It took up the **issue of child marriage, sponsored legal awareness programmes, Parivarik Mahila Lok Adalats.**

- It reviewed laws such as **Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, PNDT Act 1994, Indian Penal Code 1860 and the National Commission for Women Act, 1990** to make them more stringent and effective.
- It conducted **workshops/seminars for gender awareness** and took up publicity campaigns against female foeticide, violence against women etc. in order to generate awareness in the society against these social evils.

LEGISLATIVE INTERVENTIONS FOR WOMEN WELFARE

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013
It was enacted to **protect women from sexual harassment at their place of work.** It also provides safeguards against false or malicious charges.

KEY PROVISIONS

Broad Definition of Sexual Harassment:
The act defines sexual harassment as any unwelcome physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct, including:

- Demands or requests for sexual favours.
- Making sexually suggestive remarks or jokes.
- Displaying pornography or sexually explicit material.
- Any other act that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive work environment.

Five Circumstances of Sexual Harassment:
- Offering or implying preferential treatment in return for sexual favours.
- Threatening detrimental treatment in employment based on refusal of sexual advances.
- Threats or coercion related to present or future employment status.
- Interfering with work or creating a hostile, intimidating, or offensive work environment.
- Humiliating treatment likely to affect the woman's health or safety.
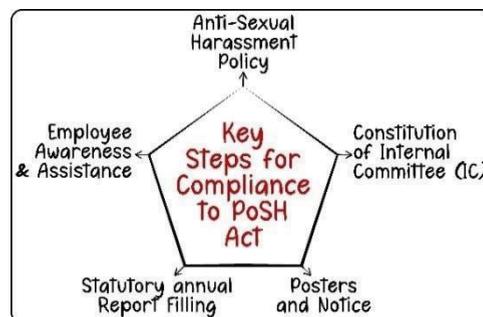
> **Recent SC Judgement on Sexual Harassment at the workplace**
>
> Sexual harassment at the workplace is an affront to the fundamental rights of a women to equality under Articles 14 & 15 and her right to live with dignity under Article 21 of the constitution as well as her right to practice any profession/occupation/trade/business.

WOMEN'S RESERVATION ACT 2023

The **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam or the Women's Reservation Act 2023** was recently passed by the Parliament. The Women Reservation Act aims to **reserve one-third of all seats to women in Parliament and State Legislatures.**

KEY FEATURES OF THE NEW LAW
- **33% Reservation:** The law mandates 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha, State Legislatures, and the Delhi Legislative Assembly. This reservation also applies to seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Constitutional Modifications:** Two new articles, **330A (Reservation in Lok Sabha) and 332A (Reservations in State Legislatures)**, will be incorporated into the Constitution to reflect the changes for Lok Sabha and Assemblies, respectively.
- **Implementation Timeline:** Reservation will come into effect after the next census and subsequent delimitation exercise. It will remain in place for 15 years unless extended by Parliament.
- **Seat Rotation:** The reserved seats will be rotated after each delimitation, ensuring wider representation over time.

ADVANTAGES OF THE WOMEN'S RESERVATION ACT
- **Political Empowerment and Gender Equity:** The Act serves as a critical tool to tackle the glaring underrepresentation of women in legislative bodies (currently at 14.3% in Parliament). Increasing their presence promotes **gender equity** and empowers women to raise their voices on issues vital to them and society as all.
- **Leadership for Social Development:** Studies, like the 2001 West Bengal analysis, reveal that women leaders prioritise social infrastructure **directly impacting rural women** (e.g., water, fuel access). This shift in policy focus holds immense potential for addressing critical societal needs.
- **Expanding Representation and Democratic Values:** The Act's provision for nominating women from **minority communities** addresses their historic underrepresentation in legislatures, strengthening **democratic values** by ensuring diverse voices are heard.

- **Balancing the Equation:** Implementing dual-member constituencies maintains voters' freedom of choice without diluting democratic principles, as concerns about diminished democratic rights lack empirical support. The reservation doesn't discriminate against male candidates but strives for fairness and balanced representation.

ISSUES WITH THE ACT

- **Proxy Fears:** Doubts loom around women becoming mere "proxies" for male counterparts. While addressing power dynamics within families is crucial, studies show increased female representation positively impacts women and children's welfare.

- **Implementation Hurdles:** Linking the Act to delimitation delays its enactment. Decoupling these processes or exploring alternative timelines could be key.
- **Expanding Representation:** Demands to include OBC women within the quota highlight the need for intersectionality. Addressing this necessitates careful adjustments to ensure inclusivity.
- **Allocation Dilemmas:** Clarity on how reserved seats will be identified is crucial. Establishing transparent guidelines and considering regional dynamics are essential.
- **Beyond Reserved Seats:** The merits debate often stems from ingrained biases. Studies suggest reservations don't diminish governance quality, and reserved seats provide opportunities for overlooked women.
- **More Than Just Quotas:** While the Act tackles one aspect, comprehensive electoral reforms, including tackling criminalization of politics and black money influence, remain crucial for a holistic solution.

WAY FORWARD

- **Promote Inclusive Political Spaces:** Encourage political parties to adopt internal reforms fostering women's leadership and mentorship programs, empowering them to act independently.
- **Consider Seat Rotation Alternatives:** Evaluate alternative models like lottery-based allocation or geographically fixed reserved seats to address concerns about re-election prospects.
- **Promote Blind Recruitment Practices:** Encourage political parties to adopt anonymous candidate selection processes to minimise biases and focus on competence.
- **Highlight Success Stories:** Showcase the achievements of women elected through reserved seats in other countries to counter merit-based arguments.

WELFARE SCHEMES/ PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN

PRADHAN MANTRI UJJWALA YOJANA

- It was launched in 2016 to **safeguard the health of women and children** by providing **free LPG connections** to women of **Below Poverty Line (BPL) families.**
- The active domestic LPG consumers have increased from **14.52 crore in April 2014** to **31.36 crore** as of **March 2023**. (PIB)Performance of the Scheme
- **8 crore free LPG connections** were provided to **poor women households**. In just four years (2016-20) household LPG coverage grew to 98% from 56% in 2014-15.
- The scheme led to an increase in LPG consumption by 56% in 2019 as compared to 2014.
- Before Ujjwala, India was the second largest contributor to the global morbidity due to household and ambient air pollution.

IMPACT ON WOMEN

- It will ensure universal coverage of cooking gas in the country. This measure will empower women and protect their health.
- It will reduce drudgery and the time spent on cooking.

CONCERNS

- Ujjwala beneficiaries return to unclean cooking fuel because of the **high cost of refilling cylinders.**
- There has been only a **20%** increase in the overall usage of clean cooking fuel despite **98 %** LPG coverage.
- **WHO estimates about 5 lakh deaths in India alone due to unclean cooking fuels**. Most of these premature deaths were due to non-communicable diseases.

SCHEMES FOR HEALTH/NUTRITION/MATERNITY

- **Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission:** Mission to eliminate Sickle Cell Anaemia by 2047 will be launched. (Union Budget 2023 – 24)
- **National Nutrition Programme (Poshan Abhiyan):** The programme through the targets strive to reduce the level of stunting, under-nutrition, anaemia and low birth weight babies.
- **The Mother and Child Tracking System 2009**: To monitor the health care system to ensure that all mothers and their children have access to a range of services, including pregnancy care, medical care during delivery, and immunizations.
- **Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana**: Provides Conditional Maternity Benefit for pregnant and lactating women aged 19 and over for their first two live births.
- **SUMAN (Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan)**: Aims to provide dignified and quality health care at no cost to every woman and new-born visiting a public health facility. Under it All pregnant women, new-borns and mothers up to 6 months of delivery are able to avail several free health care services.
- **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Yojana**: Envisages to improve the quality and coverage of **Antenatal Care (ANC), Diagnostics and Counselling services** as part of the **Reproductive Maternal Neonatal Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A)** Strategy. Under the PMSMA, the pregnant ladies will be given **free health check-up** and required treatment for free on 9th of every month. The scheme will be applicable for pregnant women to avail in **all Government hospitals** across the country.
- **Labour Room & Quality Improvement Initiative (LaQshya)**: This program will benefit every pregnant woman and newborn delivering in public health institutions. It will improve the quality of care for pregnant women in the labour room, maternity Operation Theatre and Obstetrics Intensive Care Units (ICUs) & High Dependency Units (HDUs).

SCHEMES FOR WOMEN SAFETY

- **Universalisation of Help line** - A single uniform number (181) to provide 24 hours emergency and non-emergency response to women affected by violence.
- **Mahila Police Volunteers** - To report to authorities/police the incidences of violence against women such as domestic violence, child marriage, dowry harassment and violence etc.
- **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal** - This portal caters to complaints pertaining to cybercrimes only with special focus on cybercrimes against women and children.
- **Sexual Harassment electronic–Box (SHe-Box)** - Online complaint management system for registering complaints related to sexual harassment at workplace by women.
- **Nirbhaya Fund** – Set up to support initiatives towards protecting the dignity and ensuring safety of women in India. The fund is administered by Ministry of Finance.

Nirbhaya Fund

- In its **316th report,** the **standing committee on education, women, children, youth, and sports** raised concern about the **underutilization of the Nirbhaya Fund** and requested that the government work with the states **to hasten the execution of projects and programmes funded by it.**
  - **A 10 billion corpus** was **declared** by the Indian government in the **2013 Union Budget.**
  - **The fund's purpose** is **to aid programmes that defend the safety and dignity of women in India.**
  - **Nirbhaya (fearless)** was the pseudonym given to the **victim of the 2012 Delhi gang rape.**
  - Several ministries, including the **Ministry of Women and Child Development**, made the decision of **how to use the fund.**
  - To support women who are the victims of violence, one usage was **to establish One Stop Centres.**
  - The finance ministry's **Department of Economic Affairs** is **in charge of managing the fund.**

TO INCREASE WFPR (WORK FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE)

- **Reservation in police force** - GOI directed to all State Governments to increase representation of women in police to **33%** of the total strength.
- **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh** - The main objective of RMK is to provide **micro-credit** to poor women for various livelihood support and income generating activities.
- **Scheme for working women hostel** - To promote availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women, with day care facilities for their children.

- **Digital Laado** - It is a nationwide initiative in which **every daughter will be taught** and **trained to develop their talent and skills** to work from home itself.

SCHEMES FOR POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

- **Training for women heads of panchayats** - In order to empower women heads of panchayats, **MoWCD** has initiated a massive programme to **train over 2 lakh women heads of Panchayats.**
- **Gender Champions** - It is being implemented through educational institutions to sensitise young students and create awareness on laws, legislations, legal rights and life skills education.

SCHEMES FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

- **Women of India Exhibitions/Festivals** - To provide a platform for women entrepreneurs and farmers especially from rural India to exhibit and sell their products.
- **Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA)** - To help young women become self-reliant, including nutritional supplementation and education, health education and services, and life skills and vocational training. 5.6.6 Schemes to help Women in distress
- **The Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act (ITPA), 1956** - Prohibits commercial sexual exploitation and all cases relating to prostitution registered under the Act.

SCHEMES REGARDING MARRIAGES

- **Dhanlaxmi Scheme** - Aimed at doing away with child marriage by offering parents an attractive insurance cover, and encouraging parents to educate their children as well as covering certain medical expenses for girl babies.
- **NRI Matrimonial Disputes** - **MoWCD** has prepared **Standard Operating Procedures** for women involved in NRI matrimonial disputes. These SoPs narrate the step wise correct legal recourse to be undertaken by women to facilitate speedy access to justice.

SC Judgement (2020) about Permanent Commission for Women
- **Women officers in the Indian Army can get command positions** at par with male officers. The government's arguments against it were discriminatory, disturbing and based on stereotypes.
- The court also said that permanent commission to all women officers should be made available regardless of their years of service.

INDIA'S MEASURES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Legislative Interventions	Institutions	Schemes/programmes	Other measures
The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006)	Set up Nodal Ministry of Women and Child Development	Beti Bachao Beti Padhao	Gender Budgeting
The Criminal Law (Amendment), Act 2013	National Commission for Women (NCW)	Integrated Child Protection Scheme	National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal
The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013	National Commission for Protection of Child Rights	Ujjawala scheme, Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK), Nirbhaya Fund	POSHAN Abhiyan
The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, (2012)	Working women hostels, universalisation of helpline	One Stop Centre Scheme, SWADHAR Greh	Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women

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Gender Budgeting
- Gender budgeting is a strategic approach aimed at **achieving gender mainstreaming in development and ensuring equitable distribution of benefits between men and women.**
- The Indian government publishes a Gender Budget Statement (GBS) annually, which examines the budget through a gender lens and provides information on allocations for women.
- The **recent Union Budget for 2023-24** reflects some noteworthy trends in gender budgeting:
- The Gender Budget saw a **23% increase,** rising to 2,23,219.75 crore compared to the previous year. It accounted for **4.9% of the total budget, up from 4.23%.**

PAM RAJPUT COMMITTEE

It was set up in **2012** to study and make recommendations to improve the status of women in India.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **50 percent reservation** for women in all decision-making bodies.
- **The Parliamentary Committee** on the Empowerment of Women must examine the gender implications of all proposed legislation.
- The **National Commission for Women**, must go beyond 'reactive interventions' to fulfil the proactive assisted Reproductimandate of studying, recommending and influencing policies, laws, programmes and budgets to ensure full benefits to the stakeholders
- Suggested to appoint a separate panel to study the status of Muslim women in the country.
- **Mandatory payment** of maintenance to wife and children in the event of separation or divorce.
- **Separate law** to fight "**honour" killings** and changes in the Muslim and the Christian family laws as they are loaded against women.
  - **Complete ban** on the practice of **"oral, unilateral and triple talaq (divorce)"** and polygamy.
- **Reforms in Criminal Justice system**
  - overhaul of the criminal justice system to ensure justice for women.
  - More gender sensitive enforcement machinery
  - Greater awareness of different legislation and their interconnectedness,
  - Accountability for securing women's rights.

ISSUES IN NEWS

RIGHTS OF SEX WORKERS IN INDIA

- Recently, the Supreme Court recognized sex work as a profession, affirming that sex workers are entitled to dignity and equal protection under the law by invoking its special powers under Article 142 of the Constitution.

SUPREME COURT GUIDELINES

- **Non-Interference:** Police instructed not to interfere or take criminal action against adult, consenting sex workers.
- **Avoidance of Victimisation:** Sex workers should not face arrest, penalties, harassment, or victimization during brothel raids, recognizing voluntary sex work legality versus brothel operation illegality.
- **Constitutional Recognition:** Affirmation of the right to a dignified life under Article 21 of the Constitution for all individuals.
- **Family Integrity:** Children of sex workers should not be separated from their mothers solely due to maternal involvement in the sex trade.
- **Presumption of Trafficking:** Absence of presumption of trafficking when minors are found in brothels or with sex workers.
- **Equal Treatment:** Police instructed not to discriminate against sex workers filing criminal complaints, particularly regarding sexual offences.
- **Identity Protection:** Media directed to safeguard the identities of sex workers during arrest, raid, and rescue operations, avoiding publication or telecast of identifying photos.

WAY FORWARD

- **Combating Violence:** The 2016 report by the Justice Verma Committee recommends dedicated units within police forces to handle complaints from sex workers and ensure sensitive investigations.
- **Healthcare Access:** Ensuring access to comprehensive healthcare services, including regular screenings and preventive measures for STDs and cervical cancer, is vital. Additionally, providing culturally sensitive services in brothels and other community settings can overcome barriers to accessing healthcare.
- **Destigmatization:** The 22nd Law Commission of India report (2018) recommends incorporating sex work into anti-trafficking training programs for law enforcement and service providers to combat misconceptions and discriminatory practices.

CARE ECONOMY

The **care economy** is often misunderstood, frequently conflated with domestic work or relegated to the shadows of formal economic discourse. In reality, it encompasses a much broader and crucial aspect of human well-being and economic activity-

MORE THAN JUST DOMESTIC DUTIES

- **Beyond Stereotypes:** While domestic work forms a significant part of the care economy, it's essential to move beyond limiting stereotypes. The care economy also includes vital sectors like **education, healthcare, social work, childcare, eldercare, and community services**.
- **Addressing Diverse Needs:** These activities fulfil the **physical, psychological, and emotional needs** of individuals across the lifespan, from **children and young adults to the elderly and individuals with disabilities**.

A HIDDEN ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

- **Significant Contribution:** The care economy represents a substantial portion of global GDP, estimated at **8-10% by the World Economic Forum**. Its contribution is often invisible due to undervaluing unpaid care work and informal sectors.
- **Employment Generation:** Millions of people, predominantly women, find employment in the care economy, making it a key source of livelihoods and economic participation.

CHARACTERISTICS

Other than above' following are the characteristics of Care Economy-

- **Employment Generation:** Millions, predominantly women, find employment in the care economy, making it a crucial source of livelihoods and economic participation.
- **Gender Inequalities:** Women often face lower wages, fewer benefits, and precarious working conditions in the care economy compared to men in other sectors.
- **Global Interconnectedness:** Globalised care chains, where care workers from developing countries migrate to provide care in developed countries, raise ethical and policy challenges.

IMPACT ON WOMAN

- **Time Poverty:** Juggling paid work, household chores, and childcare leaves women with **limited time for themselves**. A 2022 Oxfam report revealed women in India spend **15.8 hours daily** on unpaid care work, compared to just 5.3 hours for men. This **"time poverty"** leads to sleep deprivation, social isolation etc.
- **Opportunity Cost: Education and Skills Development:** A OECD report reveals that Indian women spend around 5.6hours everyday on unpaid care work while men spend just 52minutes for the same
- **Workplace Discrimination: The "Mommy Penalty":** Mothers often face **hiring biases, lower wages, and limited promotions** due to perceived lack of commitment or flexibility.
- **Underemployment and Segregation:** Women may choose **jobs below their skill level** to accommodate demanding care schedules, perpetuating gender segregation in certain sectors.
- **Gender Inequality at Home: Unequal Domestic Burdens:** Reinforces traditional gender roles within families, hindering women's decision-making power and autonomy.
- **Amplified Vulnerability:** Women burdened with care work are often more vulnerable to climate shocks and economic downturns due to limited resources and social protection.

WAY FORWARD

Quantifying the Invisible: Move beyond mere acknowledgement. Utilise time-use surveys and economic valuation models to **quantify the economic contribution of unpaid care work**, raising awareness and advocating for its rightful recognition.

- **Valuing Domestic Work:** Develop **formal compensation frameworks** for domestic work, ensuring fair wages, social security benefits, and professional development opportunities.
- **Investing in Social Infrastructure:** Increase public sector investments in **affordable and accessible childcare, eldercare, and long-term care facilities**, reducing reliance on unpaid family care. E.g. Sweden's universal childcare system.
- **Leveraging Technology:** Explore technological solutions like **telehealth, assistive technologies, and care robots** to alleviate care demands and promote independent living for individuals with disabilities and older adults. E.g. Japan's Robot Revolution Initiative.

LOW FEMALE LABOUR WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR), reflecting the share of working-age women employed or actively seeking work, acts as a key indicator of gender equality in the workforce.

- While the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2021-22 shows a glimmer of hope with **FLFPR rising to 32.8%**, it still paints a concerning picture. Compared to the historical low of 23.3% in 2017-18, the progress remains slow, signifying continued underrepresentation of women in the Indian job market.

- Although the **primary sector continues to witness a decline in female employment**, the **services sector has shown steady growth**, creating 14.2 million jobs for women between 2017-18 and 2021-22. This trend underlines the evolving economic landscape and potential opportunities.

- Despite a slight narrowing, the **rural FLFPR (39.3%) remains significantly higher than its urban counterpart (26.5%) in 2021-22**. This highlights persistent challenges faced by urban women in accessing and sustaining employment, demanding targeted interventions.

CAUSES FOR LOW FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION
Education-Employment Mismatch and Gender Pay Gap

- **Skills gap and unfulfilled aspirations:** The growing supply of educated women, particularly graduates, often outpaces the demand for jobs matching their aspirations and qualifications. This leads to underemployment and discourages many from seeking work.

- **Limited formal opportunities:** The scarcity of salaried positions suitable for women with moderate education levels (clerical, sales) creates further barriers to their participation.

- **Persistent gender pay gap:** The Global Gender Gap Report 2022 highlights India's staggering 28.7% gap, attributed to:
    - **Occupational segregation:** Women remain confined to lower-paying sectors.
    - **Cultural barriers:** Limited educational opportunities and ingrained social norms contribute to the disparity.
    - **Unpaid household work:** This burden disproportionately affects women, impacting their earning potential.

COMPETING DEMANDS

- **Marriage and household income:** A significant portion of women exiting the workforce are married, with husbands' income influencing their withdrawal through the "household income effect."

- **Maternity and childcare challenges:** Many women struggle to re-enter the workforce after childbirth due to:
    - **Maternity benefits act:** While encouraging, the 2016 Act can still create additional employer costs, potentially dissuading female hiring.
    - **Limited childcare options:** Lack of quality daycare remains a significant obstacle for mothers seeking to return to work.

LIMITED MOBILITY AND DEEP-ROOTED SOCIAL NORMS

- **Limited international migration:** According to the World Bank, in 2020, only **22.5% of India's international migrants were women**, compared to the global average of 48%. This gap has widened since 2010, when it stood at 19%

- **Unexplained wage gap:** Even after accounting for education, experience, and skills, a significant portion of the gender pay gap remains unexplained, suggesting widespread discrimination.

- **Stigma and family pressure:** In some communities, stigma associated with women working outside the home, especially in certain "menial" jobs, can lead to them dropping out due to family and societal pressures.
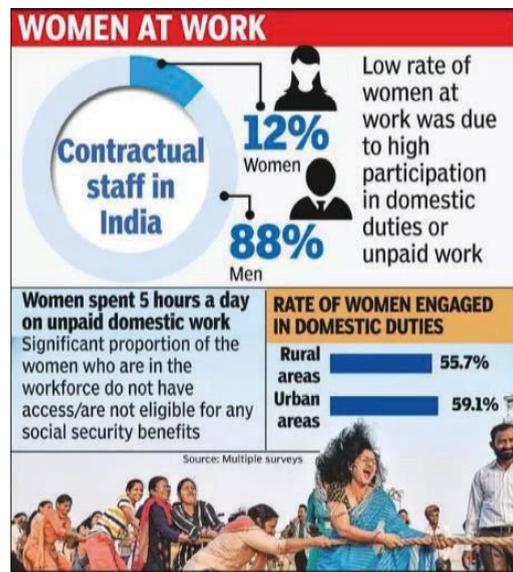
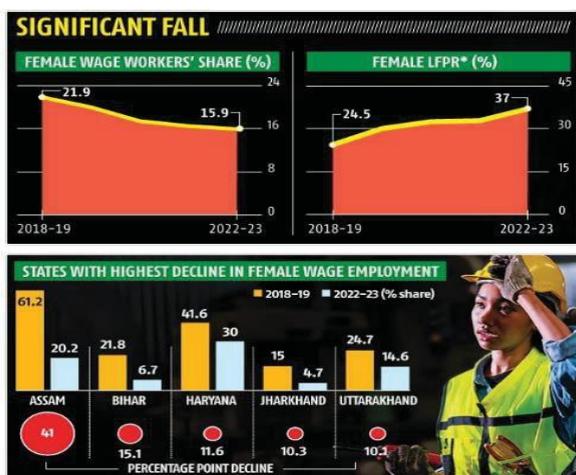FIG. LOW PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AT PAID WORK

FIG. PLFS DATA ON FEMALE WORKFORCE

FIG. FLFP's IMPACT IN INDIAN ECONOMY

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORK

- **Compliance issues:** As of 2020, around 31% of firms still fail to comply with the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act (POSH), hindering its effectiveness in protecting women.
- **Prevalence of sexual harassment:** Despite the POSH Act, NCRB data shows that in 2021, 28,014 cases of sexual harassment at the workplace were reported in India, representing a **26% increase** from 2020 (22,206 cases).

POLICY INEFFICIENCIES AND IMPLEMENTATION GAPS

- **Support services deficit:** Existing policies often overlook crucial support structures like safe transportation, childcare, and migration assistance, hindering women's access to skilling programs and workforce participation.
- **Misaligned priorities:** Many national policies fail to prioritise essential support services, leaving women struggling to connect with skilling programs and enter the workforce effectively.

WAY FORWARD

RESHAPING POLICY DESIGN

- **Beyond Outcomes:** To empower women, it's crucial to reorient metrics by incorporating **"enabling factors"** like safety, career aspirations, and skill alignment with desired opportunities.
- **Bridging the Gap:** The **NITI Aayog's Women in Work Action Plan (2020)** recommends **integrating vocational training within school curriculums** and **targeting skill development programs towards emerging sectors** with high job growth potential for women.

DRIVING INNOVATION

- **Tax Incentives:** Enacting **tax breaks** for companies with **gender-friendly practices** like internal complaint mechanisms and safe transport facilities can incentivize both employers and women.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Building collaborations between government and private entities can foster innovative solutions to address challenges like childcare and transportation barriers. E.g. **"She-Box" initiative** in India, for **grievance redressal mechanisms**.

TRANSFORMING SOCIAL NORMS

- **Large-Scale Campaigns:** Investing in **social awareness campaigns** is crucial to challenge ingrained gender stereotypes. E.g. The **"Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" campaign** in India has helped improve girls' enrollment rates.

ENSURING EQUAL PAY

- **International Alignment:** India's commitment to **UN SDG-8's "equal pay for equal value"** by 2030 necessitates concrete action. India in the annual Gender Gap Report, 2023, and is ranked 127 out of 146 countries in terms of gender parity, from 135 last year. But this improved statistic, closing 64.3% of the overall gender gap highlights the need for urgent interventions.
- **Constitutional and Legal Framework:** Existing laws like the **Equal Remuneration Act (1976)**, **Maternity Benefit Act (1961)**, and **Factories Act (1948)** provide a legal foundation for equal pay. However, enforcing and strengthening these policies remain crucial.

BUILDING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- **Childcare Solutions:** The **Kerala State Social Security Mission's "Anganwadi Creche Scheme"** offers affordable childcare services to working mothers, showcasing a successful model.
- **Facilitating Migration:** Providing support to women seeking work opportunities by offering guidance, networking opportunities, and potential financial assistance can encourage and facilitate safe migration.

SARPANCH PATI

The Mundona Rural Development Foundation, an NGO, brought the issue of "sarpanch-patism" to the Supreme Court's attention. This practice involves unelected male relatives wielding power behind the scenes while elected women panchayat leaders serve as a public face. While the Court acknowledged the concern regarding undermining women's empowerment within the panchayat system, it clarified that addressing the issue directly was beyond its jurisdiction. Nonetheless, the Court highlighted the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj's** responsibility to explore improved mechanisms for implementing women's reservation objectives. This aligns with recommendations from a 2022 report by the **Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA)**, which identified "sarpanch-patism" as a significant obstacle to realising women's reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN PRIS

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 marked a significant milestone in Indian democracy by mandating **one-third reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)** through **Article 243D**. This landmark decision aimed to empower women at the grassroots level and ensure their equal participation in local governance.

KEY PROVISIONS

- **National Mandate:** Article 243D guarantees **not less than 33% reservation for women** in the total number of seats and offices of Chairpersons in PRIs across all three tiers – Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zilla Parishads.
- **State-Level Initiatives:** Several states have taken the lead in exceeding the national mandate. **Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar,** and others have implemented **50% reservation for women** in their respective State Panchayati Raj Acts.
- **Rotational System:** To ensure equitable representation and prevent concentration of power, the reserved seats and positions for women are allotted by **rotation** to different constituencies within each Panchayat.
- **Inclusive Representation:** The 33% reservation for women applies **within the existing quota for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)**, ensuring inclusive participation across diverse communities.

REASONS BEHIND PANCHAYAT PATI SYNDROME

- **Deep-Seated Gender Inequality:**
  - **Patriarchal Norms:** The bedrock of Panchayat Pati lies in deeply ingrained patriarchal norms that prioritise male authority and decision-making. This relegates women to the domestic sphere, diminishing their agency and legitimacy in public affairs.
  - **Social Stigma:** Traditional gender roles often portray women as unfit for governance, amplifying the stigma associated with their participation in public life.
- **Lack of Awareness and Empowerment:**
  - **Limited Education:** Restricted access to education, particularly in rural areas, leaves women unaware of their rights and the significance of their participation in local governance.
  - **Discriminatory Practices:** Lack of awareness among women, families, and communities perpetuates discriminatory practices that accept and even normalise Panchayat Pati.
- **Power Dynamics and Resistance to Change:**
  - **Male Dominance:** Entrenched male dominance in political spheres fosters resistance to gender equality, creating an environment conducive to Panchayat Pati.
  - **Strategic Control:** In some instances, male family members or influential leaders might exploit Panchayat Pati to maintain their power and influence over local governance, manipulating female leaders' decisions for their own benefit.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

RASHTRIYA GRAM SWARAJ ABHIYAN (RGSA)

Launched in 2018, RGSA aims to bolster the capacities of PRIs for responsive and sustainable rural governance, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One of its key objectives is to **incentivize women's participation**. This is achieved through several means:

- **Financial support:** RGSA provides grants to PRIs, with an **additional 10% allocated to panchayats with more women representatives**.
- **Capacity building:** Training programs specifically designed for women elected representatives are conducted to equip them with essential skills and knowledge.
- **Technology for empowerment:** Initiatives like the eGramSwaraj platform and mobile applications aim to facilitate women's participation in planning, budgeting, and decision-making processes.

GRAM PANCHAYAT DEVELOPMENT PLAN (GPDP)

The GPDP guidelines play a crucial role in promoting women's empowerment within PRIs. Key features include:

- **Proactive participation:** Encouraging women's active involvement in various stages of the GPDP process, including budgeting, planning, implementation, and monitoring.
- **Mahila Sabhas:** Convening meetings exclusively for women (Mahila Sabhas) prior to the general Gram Sabhas to foster their voice and participation in community discussions.
- **Inclusive Gram Sabhas:** Ensuring Mahila Sabhas' recommendations and concerns are integrated into the Gram Sabhas and subsequently reflected in the GPDP.

WAY FORWARD

- **Shifting the Narrative:** Promote campaigns challenging harmful stereotypes and patriarchal norms that hinder women's political participation. Initiatives like UN Women's "HeForShe" campaign can serve as a model.
- **Mentorship and Sponsorship:** Encourage successful male leaders to mentor and sponsor aspiring women politicians, providing them with guidance and access to networks.
- **Advocacy and Awareness:** Engage men in advocacy efforts, encouraging them to speak out against gender-based discrimination and promote equal opportunities for women in PRIs.
- **Capacity Building Programs:** Design training programs tailored to the specific needs of women leaders, covering topics like public speaking, policy analysis, leadership skills, and navigating political processes. Utilise successful models like the "Unleashing Leadership Potential" program by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).

CONCLUSION

Advancements in maternal healthcare have reduced mortality rates in India, but disparities due to socioeconomic factors, rural-urban divides, and gender bias remain. Women also face health threats from nutritional deficiencies and non-communicable diseases, as well as issues like violence, discrimination, and unpaid labour that limit their economic participation. Effective government initiatives need consistent implementation, more funding, and a focus on education, legal reforms, and economic empowerment to address gender inequality and achieve an inclusive society.

> **KEYWORDS:** Gender Equality, Shattering the Glass Ceiling, Empowering Women, Empowering India, She Means Business (economic empowerment), Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, Nari Shakti for New India, Women-Led Development, Mahila Sashaktikaran, Equality Begins with Women, Women Entrepreneurs, Digital Literacy for Women, Nari Shakti Puraskar, She Leads, Gender Parity, Feminist Movement, Shepreneur, Breaking Glass Ceilings, Women's Solidarity, Gender Sensitization, Balance for Better, No Gender, No Barrier

	Previous Year Questions	
1.	Which steps are required for constitutionalisation of a commission? Do you think imparting constitutionality to the national commission for women would ensure greater gender justice and empowerment in India? Give reasons.	2020
2.	In order to enhance the prospects of social development, sound and adequate health care policies are needed in the fields of geriatric and maternal health care. Discuss.	2020
3.	What are the continued challenges for women in India against time and space?	2019
4.	"Empowering women is the key to control population growth". Discuss	2019
5.	"The reservation of seats for women in the institution of local self-government has had a limited impact on the patriarchal character of the Indian political process". Comment.	2019
6.	How does patriarchy impact the position of a middle-class working woman in India?	2014
7.	Male membership needs to be encouraged in order to make women's organisations free from gender bias. Comment	2013

INTRODUCTION

According to UNICEF, India boasts the world's largest adolescent population, as defined by WHO as individuals aged 10 to 19, with a staggering total of 253 million people. The nation stands to benefit socially, politically, and economically if this large number of adolescents are safe, healthy, educated, and equipped with information and life skills to support the country's continued development.

WHO IS A CHILD?

- The definition of 'child' in India varies in different statutes.
- To maintain uniformity and avoid confusion, Internationally accepted definition of child as defined by the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNICEF) **is "a person male or female who is below 18 years of age."**
- Children are the first call on the agenda of human resource development because the foundation for lifelong learning and human development is laid in these crucial, early years.
- However, **Children are also the most vulnerable section of the society** and need special attention and care.

ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

- The World Health Organization (WHO) defines **adolescents** as people between the ages of **10 and 19 years**, and **youth** as people between the ages of **15 and 24 years.**
- **Adolescence** is the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, from ages 10 to 19.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- **Child Population:** India holds the title for the world's largest child population, estimated at around **472 million** in 2023 according to the United Nations Population Division.
- **School Attendance:** There has been improvement in school enrollment rates with a gross enrollment ratio of **99.2%** for primary education in India.
- **Child Dependency Ratio:** In 2020, the dependency ratio for children aged **0-14** in India was **34.2%** according to **The World Bank**.
- **Government Budget Allocation:** According to **PRS Legislative Research**, The allocation for children in the interim Budget for fiscal year 2024-25 has witnessed a notable increase, reaching **₹109,493.08 crore**, **17.5%** increase over the revised estimate of FY 2023-24.
- **Child Internet Usage:** Data from **Statista** suggests that in 2021, children made up about **14%** of India's internet users.
- **Literacy Rates:** According to the **World Bank**, **53%** of girls aged **5-9** are illiterate in India.
- **Teacher Shortages:** In nearly **60%** of schools, there are less than two teachers to teach Classes I to V, and on average, there are less than three teachers per primary school according to the **Pratham Education Foundation**.
- **Child Labour:** According to the **International Labour Organization**, India has the highest number of child labourers in the **5-17** age range in South Asia.
- **Child Labor Statistics:**
  - In rural areas, **13.9%** of children are involved in child labour, compared to **4.7%** in urban areas.
  - **70%** of child labourers are in agriculture, **20%** in services, and **10%** in industry.
  - As per **census 2011**, **10.1 million** children, or **3.9%** of the total child population, are "main workers" or "marginal workers".
- **Mortality Rates:**
  - The under-5 mortality rate (U5MR) is **42** per **1,000** live births, the neonatal mortality rate (NNMR) is **25** per **1,000** live births, and the infant mortality rate (IMR) is **35** per **1,000** live births.
  - The perinatal mortality rate has also decreased from **36** per **1,000** pregnancies to **32** per **1,000** pregnancies. **(NFHS-5)**
- **Nutritional Status:**
  - Stunting has reduced from **38.4%** to **35.5%**, Wasting has reduced from **21.0%** to **19.3%**, and Underweight prevalence has reduced from **35.8%** to **32.1%**.

- o The number of children per woman in urban areas has decreased from **2.7** in **1992-93** to **1.6** in **2019-21**. **(NFHS-5)**

CHILD RIGHTS IN INDIA

WHAT ARE CHILD RIGHTS?

- Child rights are fundamental human rights that apply to all children under 18, regardless of background.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out these basic rights.
- In India, the definition of a child can vary across laws (e.g., 18 in Juvenile Justice Act, 14 in Child Labour Act).

CATEGORIES OF CHILD RIGHTS

- **Right to Survival:** Basic needs like food, shelter, and healthcare.
- **Right to Protection:** Freedom from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
- **Right to Participation:** Involvement in decisions affecting them.
- **Right to Development:** Physical, mental, and emotional growth.

VULNERABILITY OF CHILDREN

- All children, due to their age, are considered at risk for exploitation, abuse, violence, and neglect.
- Particularly vulnerable groups include **orphans**, **street children**, **refugee or displaced children**, **child workers**, **children trapped in prostitution or sexual abuse**, **disabled children**, and **delinquent children**.

FACTORS AFFECTING VULNERABILITY

- **Disabilities:** Physical and mental disabilities can increase vulnerability.
- **Provocative Behaviours:** Misunderstood behavioural problems can lead to neglect or abuse.
- **Powerlessness:** Lack of control over their situation makes children vulnerable.
- **Defenselessness:** Absence of protection from abuse leaves children vulnerable.
- **Passivity:** Inability to seek help due to their situation makes children vulnerable.
- **Illness:** Children with health issues are more vulnerable.
- **Invisibility:** Children outside the system's radar are highly vulnerable.
- **Age Group:** Younger children, especially under six, are more dependent on protection.

ISSUES FACED BY VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN INDIA:

- **Child Labour:** Census 2011 indicates that there are **33 million** child labourers aged 5-18 in India, with **10.13 million** aged 5-14.
- **Education Disparities:**
- **Dropout Rate:** The all-India average dropout rate of primary students is **4.13%**, rising to **17.06%** at the secondary level.
- **Learning Gap:** Malnutrition and lack of access to quality early childcare and education contribute to learning gaps in primary and secondary education.
- **Child Abuse:** According to NGO Child Rights and You (CRY), sexual violence against children increased by 96% from 2016 to 2022. In 2022, there were 38,911 reported cases of child rape and penetrative assaults, up from 36,381 in 2021(NCRB). NCRB data shows that 28.9% of Indian children have experienced some form of sexual crime, with 90% of cases occurring within the family.
- **Child Marriages:** India harbours the highest number of child brides globally, with **42%** of married women married as children.
- **Cyberbullying and Child Pornography:** Significant concerns with one in three children reporting cyberbullying and thousands of images of child sexual abuse uploaded daily.
- **Malnutrition:**
- Despite efforts, India's child malnutrition rates remain alarming, ranking India 111th out of 125 countries, with a score of 28.7, indicating a severe level of hunger in the Global Hunger Index 2023.
- NFHS-5 data indicates high prevalence of underweight, stunted, and wasted children under five. Stunting has reduced from **38.4%** to **35.5%**, Wasting has reduced from **21.0%** to **19.3%**, and Underweight prevalence has reduced from **35.8%** to **32.1%**.
- **Gender Disparity:** Census 2011 shows a Child Sex Ratio (CSR) of **918 girls per 1000 boys** in the age group of 0–6 years.
- **Natural Disasters and Climate Change:** India's vulnerability to natural disasters exposes millions of children to protection and health risks, with more than **20 million** affected between 2013 and 2015

INITIATIVES & SOLUTIONS TO DEAL WITH CHILDREN RELATED ISSUES

CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS FOR CHILDREN

Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 19(1) (a), 21, 21(A), 23, 24, 39(e) 39(f) of the Constitution of India contain provisions for the protection, safety, security and well-being of all its people, including children.

- **Article 243G:** Provides for institutionalisation of childcare by seeking to entrust programmes of women and child development to Panchayat (item 25 of Schedule 11).
- **Article 39:** The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing.
- **Article 39(e)**: that the **health and strength** of workers, men and women, and the **tender age of children** are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter vocations unsuited to their age of strength.
- **Article 39(f)**: Directs that children are given **opportunities and facilities to develop** in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.
- **Article 45**: The State shall endeavour to provide **early childhood care and education** for all children until they complete the age of six years.
- **Article 46**: **Right of weaker sections** of the people to be protected from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
- **Article 47**: **Right to nutrition and standard of living** and improved public health.
- **ARTICLE-51A(k)**: It shall be the duty of every citizen of India who is a parent or guardian to provide opportunities to provide **education for his child** or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD PROTECTION IN INDIA

PREVENTION OF SEX DETERMINATION AND FEMALE FOETICIDE

- **Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994**: Prohibits sex determination of foetuses and killing of female children in the womb. Also, bans advertisements related to prenatal sex determination.

REGULATION OF CHILD LABOR

- **Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986**: Prohibits children's engagement in certain employments and regulates conditions of work for children in other employments.
- **Children Pledging of Labour Act, 1933**: Prohibits the pledging of children's labour.

PROTECTION AND WELFARE OF CHILDREN

- **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015**: Specifies procedural safeguards for children in conflict with law and addresses challenges in existing laws related to adoption processes, pendency of cases, etc.

PREVENTION OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

- **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**: Prohibits child marriage and provides relief to victims while enhancing punishment for those involved.
- **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012**: Protects children from sexual assault, harassment, and pornography. Establishes Special Courts for trial of such offences.

POCSO AMENDMENT ACT 2019

The Act has enhanced punishment under various sections of the Act.
It also increased the minimum punishment for penetrative sexual assault from seven years to 10 years and, if the child is below 16 years of age, the minimum punishment has been increased to 20 years.
Punishment for aggravated penetrative sexual assault is increased to include death penalty.
Punishment for possessing pornographic material in any form involving a child, even if the accused persons have failed to delete or destroy or report the same with an intention to share it.

LEGAL PROTECTIONS UNDER INDIAN PENAL CODE

- **Indian Penal Code Sections 82 & 83**: Exempts children below seven years from criminal liability and considers their lack of maturity.
- **IPC Sections 305, 315, 316, 317, 369, 366A, 372, and 373**: Provide legal provisions against offenses like suicide, infanticide, foeticide, abandonment, kidnapping, and prostitution involving children.

OTHER ACTS ENSURING CHILD WELFARE

- **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009**: Guarantees free and compulsory education for children aged 6-14 years.
- **Apprentices Act, 1961**: Regulates the engagement of apprentices, ensuring minors' rights and protections.
- **Orphanages and Other Charitable Homes (Supervision and Control) Act, 1960**: Provides supervision and control over orphanages and homes for abandoned women.
- **Guardian and Wards Act, 1890**: Governs the appointment and removal of guardians for children, ensuring their welfare.
- **Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956**: Deals with adoption and maintenance provisions for Hindu adults and children.
- **Probation of Offenders Act, 1958**: Imposes restrictions on the imprisonment of offenders under 21 years, aiming to prevent their transformation into habitual criminals.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR PROTECTION OF CHILD RIGHTS (NCPCR)

It is a **statutory body** established under the **Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) Act 2005** to protect, promote, and defend child rights in the country.

STEPS TAKEN BY NCPCR TO SAFEGUARD CHILD RIGHTS

- **Providing Legal Aid to Children:** The **NCPCR** offers legal aid to children facing **abuse, neglect, or exploitation**. Assistance includes access to **counselling** and **medical care**.
- **Providing Training to Professionals:** The **NCPCR** trains **teachers**, **police officers**, and **social workers** to **identify and respond** to child abuse and neglect effectively.
- **Raising Awareness About Child Rights: Awareness campaigns** by the **NCPCR** target **parents**, **teachers**, and the **public** to increase understanding of **child rights** and how to protect them.
- **Preventing School Harassment During Pandemic:** The **NCPCR** urges education departments to **prevent harassment** by schools towards children during lockdowns due to **non-payment** of fees.
- **Safeguarding Children:** The **NCPCR** has a proactive role in **protecting children**, notably in preventing severe **corporal punishments** in schools.
- **Collaboration with PRI for Child Protection: Panchayat Raj Institutions** collaborate with the **NCPCR** to enhance **child protection**, leading to significant outcomes like reporting missing children cases.
- **Abolition of Child Labour:** The **NCPCR** devises strategies to **eradicate child labor**, showcased in reports presented during the Eleventh plan.
- **Education Helpline:** An **education helpline** established by the **NCPCR** addresses concerns related to the **Right to Education Act**, ensuring access to **free and compulsory education**.

CHALLENGES FACED BY NCPCR:

- **Limited Enforcement Power:** NCPCR lacks the authority to enforce its recommendations, relying on local authorities burdened with other responsibilities. For instance, in 2021, NCPCR highlighted the plight of **child labourers** in brick kilns, but enforcement remains a challenge.
- **Uncertain Timelines:** Investigations by NCPCR can linger indefinitely, leaving vulnerable children awaiting action. For example, a 2020 case involving **child sexual abuse** in a Chennai school still awaits resolution over two years later.
- **Questions of Independence:** Government appointment leaves NCPCR vulnerable to accusations of lacking true independence. For example, the critics pointed out the commission's tepid response to **Manipur brutalities**
- **Resource Constraints:** Inadequate resources hamper NCPCR's effectiveness in investigating child rights violations and providing support services. A 2022 report by **CRY** highlighted the lack of manpower and infrastructure hindering NCPCR's work.
- **Coordination Challenges:** Poor collaboration with other child rights agencies leads to duplicated efforts and inefficiencies. A 2019 study by the **National Law University** found that a lack of centralised data-sharing between NCPCR and state commissions impeded coordinated action.

THE WAY FORWARD

- **Increased Independence:** Granting NCPCR longer terms, implementing a more independent selection process for commissioners, and enhancing investigative powers would bolster its autonomy.
- **Resource Augmentation:** Providing adequate financial and human resources is essential to enable effective investigations, better support for victims, and improved coordination with other agencies.

- **Collaborative Efforts:** Strengthening coordination with state child rights commissions and **NGOs** would streamline efforts and optimise resource utilisation.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Raising public awareness about child rights and available support mechanisms is critical to empower communities to identify and report child rights violations.

Addressing these limitations is crucial for NCPCR to become a more effective force in safeguarding India's children.

CENTRAL ADOPTION RESOURCE AUTHORITY (CARA)

- It is an **autonomous body under the MoWCD.** It primarily deals with adoption of orphan, abandoned and surrendered children through recognised agencies.
- As per the provisions of Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoptions, 1993, it is designated as the Central Authority to deal with in-country and inter-country adoption of children.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC COOPERATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT (NIPCCD)

- The **NIPCCD**, overseen by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, is an autonomous organisation based in Delhi.
- With a 50-year track record, NIPCCD strategically advances women and children's development.
- It provides programmatic research, capacity building, and advisory services to the Ministry, supporting initiatives like **Mission Poshan 2.0/Saksham Anganwadi, Mission Vatsalya for child welfare, and Mission Shakti** for women's protection and empowerment.

WELFARE SCHEMES FOR CHILDREN

EDUCATION & HEALTH

- **The Integrated Child Protection Scheme**: ICPS brings together multiple existing child protection schemes under one comprehensive umbrella, and integrates additional interventions for protecting children and preventing harm.
- **National Health Mission**: **Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent (RMNCH+A) Strategy** of NHM comprehensively integrates interventions that improve child health and nutrition status and addresses factors contributing to **neonatal, infant, under-five mortality and malnutrition.**
- **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**: Aimed at the **universalisation of primary education "in a time bound manner**.
- **Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat**: It is a **sub-programme** of **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan** to improve comprehensive early reading, writing and early mathematics programmes for children in **Classes I and II.**
- **Mid-Day Meal:** To enhance the enrollment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improve nutritional levels among school going children studying in **Classes I to VIII.**
- **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan:** It was launched in 2018. It **subsumed the three Schemes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE).**
  - **Objectives of the Scheme:** Provision of quality education and enhancing learning outcomes of students; Bridging Social and Gender Gaps in School Education; Ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of school education; Ensuring minimum standards in schooling provisions; Promoting Vocationalisation of education; Support States in implementation of RTE Act, 2009.

FOR CHILDREN IN DISTRESS

- **Khoya-Paya Portal**: To provide a platform to the public to share the details of missing/found/ sighted children with the public at large. Over 3355 children have been united/rehabilitated between 2015 -2017.
- **MoWCD signed an MOU with Railways**: For rescue and rehabilitation of runaway, abandoned, kidnapped, trafficked children via railways. 33 main railway stations have been equipped with facilities for rescue, rehabilitation, and restoration of missing families.
- **CHILDLINE:** Nation-wide **1098 helpline number** for rescuing and assisting children in distress conditions.
- **POCSO e-Box**: It is an **online complaint box for reporting child sexual abuse**.

SCHEMES FOR GIRL CHILD

- **Udaan:** Initiative of the **Central Board of Secondary Education** to enable girl students to soar to **higher education** from schools, and to eventually take various leadership roles in future.
- **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojna (2015)**: A small deposit scheme, launched as a part of the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' to encourage parents of a girl-child to stock a fund for their education and marriage. Within 2 months of launch, 1,80,000 accounts had been opened under the scheme.
- **Ladli Laxmi Yojana (MP):** To improve the health and educational status of the girls. It seeks to prevent female foeticide and to bring the positive attitude among people towards girl child birth and with the aim of preventing child marriages.

- **Kanyashree Prakalpa (West Bengal)**: To improve the status and wellbeing of girls, specifically those from socio-economically disadvantaged families through Conditional Cash Transfers. **Female gender ratio in higher education institutions** in **Bengal** has gone up from **42% in 2010 to 47.3 % in 2020**. The **scheme won the UN Public Service Award in 2017.**
- **Bhagyalaxmi Scheme (Karnataka):** To promote the birth of girl children in below poverty line families and to raise the status of the girl child in the family in particular and society in general.

APPS & PORTALS INITIATIVES FOR CHILD, ADOLESCENT, AND YOUTH WELFARE IN INDIA

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES
- **Childline (1098)**: A national, toll-free helpline for children in distress, providing support and assistance.
- **PENCIL (Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labour)**: An online portal to track child labor cases and educate on child rights and labor laws.
- **National Scholarship Portal**: Facilitates applications for various scholarships offered by the Central Government.
- **UMANG App**: Provides access to various government services, including education and healthcare.
- **SARTHAK- National Portal for Career Guidance**: Offers career guidance resources and tools for students and youth.

STATE GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES
- **Bal Rakshak App (Karnataka)**: Allows users to report child sexual abuse and exploitation.
- **She-Box App (Kerala)**: Provides a platform for women and children to report violence and harassment.
- **Sukhi Vatan App (Gujarat)**: Offers information on government schemes and services for children and adolescents.
- **Kishori Shakti Yojana (Karnataka)**: Empowers adolescent girls through life skills training and nutritional support.
- **e-Bal Suraksha (Kerala)**: A mobile app for reporting child sexual abuse directly to the police and accessing support services.
- **Bal Raksha Mobile App:** The Bal Raksha App has been developed to raise awareness among parents about paediatric preventive healthcare using Ayurvedic interventions. The app will gather feedback from parents regarding the effectiveness of the kit in improving their children's health and immunity.

NATIONAL POLICY ON CHILDREN, 2013
- **The policy reiterates commitment to the right based approach** in addressing continued and emerging challenges in the situation of children.
- It recognizes that every child is unique, and a supremely important national asset and special measures and affirmative action are required to diminish or eliminate conditions that cause discrimination.
- Survival, health, nutrition, development, education, protection, and participation are the **undeniable rights of every child** and are the key priorities of this Policy.

THE WAY FORWARD
India faces a complex array of challenges related to child well-being, including child labour, malnutrition, lack of access to education, and vulnerability to abuse and exploitation. Tackling these issues requires a multi-pronged approach that addresses both immediate needs and long-term solutions.
- **Prioritising Education:**
  - **Data:** 25.8% of children (5-16 years) remain out-of-school, hindering their future prospects.
  - **Action:** Increase funding for public schools, incentivise enrollment, and improve teacher training and infrastructure.
  - **Example:** The "Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan" program has shown progress, but needs further expansion and focus on quality education.
- **Eradicating Child Labor:**
  - **Data:** 10.1 million children (5-14 years)(Census 2011) are engaged in child labour, impacting their health and education.
  - **Action:** Strengthen enforcement of existing laws, provide alternative livelihoods for families, and invest in rehabilitation programs for rescued children.
  - **Example:** The "National Child Labour Project" focuses on education and vocational training, offering a potential model for expansion.
- **Combating Malnutrition:**
  - **Data:** 35.5% of children under 5 are stunted (NFHS-5, 2019-21), leading to long-term health and developmental issues.

- o **Action:** Expand access to nutritious food through anganwadis and school meals, promote breastfeeding, and educate mothers on nutrition practices.
  - o **Example:** The "Poshan Abhiyan" program aims to address malnutrition, but requires increased reach and community involvement.
- **Protecting Children from Violence and Abuse:**
  - o **Data:** NCRB data shows a rise in crimes against children, including sexual offences and trafficking.
  - o **Action:** Strengthen child protection mechanisms, empower communities to report abuse, and improve access to legal and psychological support for victims.
  - o **Example:** The "Integrated Child Protection Scheme" provides a framework, but needs stronger implementation and community awareness campaigns.
- **Investing in Mental Health:**
  - o **Data:** Limited data exists, but studies suggest high prevalence of mental health issues among children, including anxiety and depression.
  - o **Action:** Integrate mental health services into school systems and primary healthcare, train teachers and healthcare professionals to identify and manage mental health concerns.
  - o **Example:** The "Manodarpan" initiative provides a starting point, but requires scaling up and integrating into existing systems.
- **Sustainable Financing:**
  - o **Action:** Allocate sufficient and sustained funding for child-related programs and initiatives from government, private sector, and international partnerships.
  - o **Example:** Innovative financing mechanisms like social impact bonds can attract additional resources.

Addressing the multifaceted issues of children in India requires a holistic approach that combines policy reform, community engagement, and sustained investment. By prioritising children's rights and well-being, India can unlock its true potential and build a brighter future for its young generation.

ISSUES IN NEWS

CHILD MARRIAGE IN INDIA: INSIGHTS FROM LANCET GLOBAL HEALTH

Study Findings
- A recent study in Lancet Global Health reveals that **one in five girls** and **one in six boys** in India still marry below the legal age.
- Researchers analysed five National Family Health Surveys spanning from **1993 to 2021** to compile the study.

**Lancet Global Health - Key Highlights**
- **Policy Urgency:** Researchers stress the need for robust national and state-level policies to eliminate child marriage by **2030**.
- **Regional Disparities:** Significant variation exists in child marriage prevalence across **states** and **Union Territories**.
- **Decline in Girl Child Marriage:** Except for Manipur, all states witnessed a decline in girl child marriage from **1993 to 2021**.
- **Prevalence Data:** In **2021**, approximately **13.5 million girls** and **1.45 million boys** were married as children.
- **State Burden:** Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra accounted for over half of the total girl child marriage burden, while Gujarat, Bihar, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh accounted for over **60%** of the boy child marriage burden.
- **Jharkhand's Increase:** Jharkhand showed the highest percentage increase in child marriage headcount between **1993 and 2021**.
- **State Trends:** Most states witnessed a decrease in girl child marriage headcount, with Uttar Pradesh leading in absolute decrease, while West Bengal observed a significant absolute increase.

Child Marriage Overview
- Child marriage involves marrying off a girl before the **age of 18** or a boy before **21**, including formal and informal unions where children live with a partner as if married.
- **Legislation:** The **Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021,** sets **21 years** as the marriageable age for women.
- **Global Issue:** Child marriage is fueled by **gender inequality, poverty, social norms**, and **insecurity**, leading to devastating consequences worldwide.
- **Prevalence in India:** UNICEF estimates that **one in three** of the world's child brides live in India.

Facts and Figures
- **1.5 million girls** under 18 are married annually in India, the highest globally.
- Nearly **half** of Indian brides are married as children.
- Progress in reducing child marriage is slow, especially for **girls aged 15-18**.
- **Rural areas** exhibit higher prevalence (48%) compared to urban areas (29%).
- Variations exist among **different communities** and ethnic groups.
- Child marriage impacts girls' education, employment, and decision-making.
- India accounts for **40%** of global child marriages, ranking **14th** globally.
- **West Bengal** has the highest prevalence (42%), while **Goa**, **Himachal Pradesh**, and **Kerala** have lower rates (6-7%).
- **39%** of child marriages occur among **Adivasis** and **Dalits**.
- **Advantaged social groups** represent 17% of child marriages, with the rest among **Other Backward Classes**.
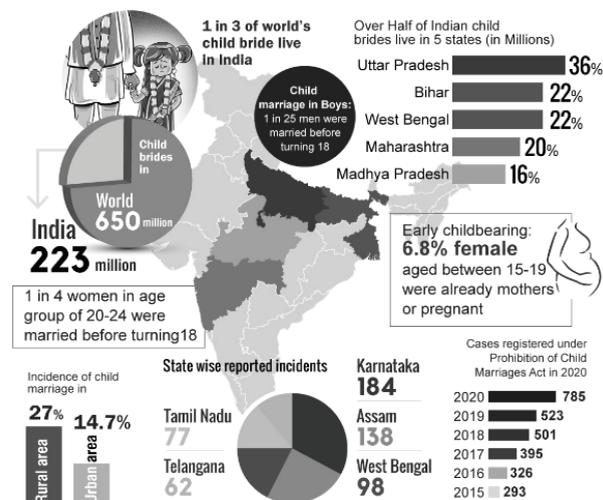
Why Child Marriage Persists in India
- **Financial Burden:** Poor families view marrying off daughters as a way to reduce dependency and potentially gain dowry income.
- **Limited Opportunities:** Girls are seen as an economic burden, with limited earning potential compared to sons.
- **Dowry System:** The pressure of providing dowry increases with a girl's age, incentivizing families to marry her off young. **Gender Discrimination & Societal Pressures**
- **"Protecting" Girls:** Early marriage is wrongly seen as a way to control girls' sexuality and safeguard family honour.
- **Social Norms:** Child marriage is more prevalent in rural areas, among lower castes, and where girls' education is neglected.
- **Trafficking:** Some families are lured into selling their daughters for marriage or prostitution due to extreme poverty. **Lax Law Enforcement & Lack of Awareness.**
- **Weak Implementation:** Laws against child marriage are often not strictly enforced, making it easier for the practice to continue.
- **Unregistered Marriages:** Many child marriages go unreported, hindering efforts to track and prevent them.
- **Limited Knowledge:** Families, especially in disadvantaged communities, may be unaware of the legal and social repercussions of child marriage.

Interplay of Poverty and Child Marriage: Poverty fuels child marriage in several ways:
- **Large Families:** Large families strain resources, pushing parents to marry off daughters early to lessen the burden.
- **Limited Education:** Lack of education reduces girls' opportunities, making marriage seem like the only option.
- **Debt Settlement:** Some families resort to marrying daughters to creditors to clear debts.
- **COVID-19 Impact:** Job losses and financial hardships during the pandemic forced some families into child marriage.

Impact of Child Marriage on India

Economic Impact
- **Lost Productivity:** Child brides and grooms lack education and job skills, hindering their ability to contribute to the economy.
- **Increased Burden:** Early marriage leads to more children, straining household finances.
- **GDP Loss:** Child marriage is estimated to cost India **1.7%** of its GDP.

Health Issues
- **Maternal Mortality:** Girls under 15 are **five times** more likely to die during childbirth or pregnancy.
- **Infant Mortality:** Babies born to young mothers have higher death rates and are more likely to be premature or low birth weight.
- **Health Complications:** Early marriage leads to premature pregnancies, increasing risks for young mothers and their babies.
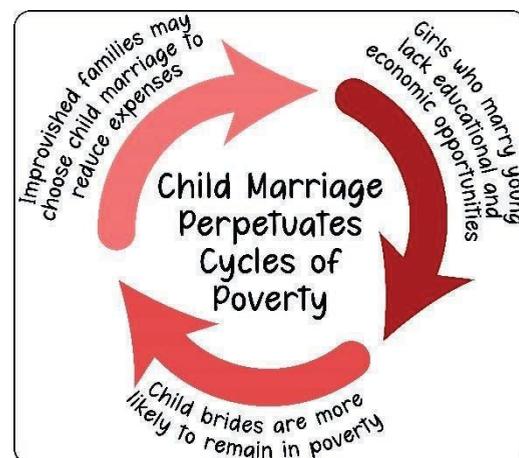
Education
- **Limited Opportunities:** Child brides are often forced to leave school, limiting their education and future prospects.
- **Intergenerational Cycle:** Lack of education in child brides perpetuates the cycle of poverty for their children.

Other Harmful Impacts
- **Child Rights Violations:** Child marriage deprives children of their right to education, safety, and development.
- **Increased Poverty:** Child marriage traps families in a cycle of poverty due to limited opportunities.
- **Teen Widows:** Child marriage increases the number of teen widows, creating social and economic challenges.

Financial Benefit of Ending Child Marriage:
- Studies estimate a global welfare benefit of **$22.1 billion** in the first year from ending child marriage.
- Considering India's high prevalence of child marriage, the potential economic benefits are significant.

Efforts for Prevention of Child Marriage

Existing Laws:
- **The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 (CMRA)**: Set the minimum marriage age at 18 for females and 21 for males.
- **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA):** Replaced CMRA, defining a child as below 18 (female) and 21 (male). Imposes imprisonment and/or fines for violations.
- **The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO):** Protects children from sexual abuse, including child marriage.

Gaps and Proposed Changes:
- **Hindu Marriage Act, 1956:** Lacks provisions for punishing parents or officiants in child marriages.
- **Muslim Personal Law:** Allows child marriage with "option of puberty" to annul the marriage later.
- **Proposed Increase in Minimum Age:** A parliamentary committee is considering raising the minimum marriage age for females to 21.

Government Measures
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Through media, International Women's Day, and National Girl Child Day.
- **Sabla Programme:** Educates adolescent girls about their legal rights, including the PCMA.
- **Strengthening Child Protection:** Integrating child protection workers into essential health services during emergencies.
- **Gender Sensitization Programs:** Training police and NGOs on gender issues and child marriage prevention.
- **Law Enforcement:** Building capacity on laws and implementing child marriage hotlines (e.g., Odisha Child Marriage Resistance Forum).

The Way Forward
- **Education:** Promoting girls' education to empower them and change community attitudes.
- **Community Mobilisation:** Working with influencers, using oaths, pledges, counselling, and media outreach.
- **Girls' Empowerment:** Providing life skills, protection training, higher education, and employment opportunities.
- **Promoting Convergence:** Aligning programs across sectors like education, social protection, and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao.
- **Incentives:** Implementing conditional cash transfer schemes to address individual needs and encourage education.

Combating child marriage requires a multi-pronged approach, including legal frameworks, public awareness, community engagement, and empowering girls. Government initiatives and collaboration with NGOs are crucial to achieve a child marriage-free India.

DRUG ABUSE IN INDIA

WHAT IS DRUG ABUSE?
- **Definition:** According to the World Health Organisation, Drug Abuse refers to the **harmful or hazardous use** of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs.
- **Addiction:** It represents an advanced stage of substance abuse characterised by a compulsion to take drugs, despite harmful consequences, leading to social withdrawal.
- **Symptoms:** Loss of appetite, weight loss, loss of interest in daily activities, physical symptoms like sweating, reddening of eyes, nausea, vomiting, body pain, drowsiness or sleeplessness, and psychological symptoms like acute anxiety, depression, and mood swings. **Psychoactive substance use** can lead to **dependence syndrome** - a cluster of behavioural, cognitive, and physiological phenomena, which are marked by social withdrawal.

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE'S REPORT

- Recently, the Committee submitted a report on 'Drug Abuse among Young Persons - Problems and Solutions,' emphasising stricter enforcement, rehabilitation, and community engagement.
- Members of Parliament highlighted the urgency of addressing drug abuse and suggested measures like better enforcement, rehabilitation centres, and sports complexes for youth.

IMPLICATIONS OF DRUGS FOR SOCIETY

- **Serious Health Problem:** Drug abuse not only affects individuals but also their families, societies, and nations at large. It fosters antisocial behaviour like stealing, crime, and violence.
- **Economic Impact:** It adversely affects economic growth by generating unaccounted money used for funding terrorism and anti-national activities.
- **Global Prevalence:** Approximately 230 million people globally use illegal drugs annually, with over 2 lakh deaths attributed to illicit drug use.
- **Youth Phenomenon:** Drug abuse, especially among ages 18-25, poses a significant challenge worldwide.
- **Political Implications:** Drug cartels subvert the authority of the state and lead to widespread corruption. It affects the national security due to prevalence of money laundering, terrorism financing etc.

INDIA'S DRUG ABUSE MAGNITUDE & LANDSCAPE

According to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment's report on the **"National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India" (2019),** the magnitude of substance use is:

- **Alcohol Use**: Around **16 crore** individuals (14.6% of the population aged 10-75) are current alcohol users, with **5.2%** classified as alcohol dependents.
- **Cannabis Use**: Approximately **3.1 crore** individuals (2.8%) are cannabis users, and **72 lakh** (0.66%) suffer from cannabis-related issues.
- **Opioid Use**: Overall, **2.06%** of the population are opioid users, and approximately **0.55%** (60 lakh) require treatment services for opioid use disorders.
- **Sedatives**: About **18 crore** (1.08%) are current users of sedatives for non-medical purposes.
- **Inhalant Use**: **7%** of children and adolescents use inhalants, compared to **0.58%** among adults, with nearly **18 lakh** children needing help for inhalant use.
- **Injecting Drugs**: An estimated **8.5 lakh** people are injecting drugs.
- According to the **World Drug Report, 2022**, India ranked fourth in terms of seized opium quantity in 2020, with a total of **5.2 tons** confiscated, and third for seized morphine quantity, totaling **0.7 tons**.
- **Survey Findings:** India has over 50 **million drug addicts**, with different drugs prevalent in various states.
- **Suicide Cases:** About 10 suicides occur daily due to drug or alcohol addiction, with Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala reporting the highest cases.
- **Geographical Factors:** Proximity to major heroin producers like the Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent, along with Nepal's cannabis trade, fuels drug trafficking.
- **Narco-terrorism:** Cross-border smuggling has led to narco-terrorism, posing security threats to India.

REASONS FOR WIDESPREAD DRUG ABUSE IN INDIA

- **Social Factors:** Disintegration of joint families, declining moral values, and loosening traditional social controls contribute to drug abuse.
- **Peer Pressure:** Influence from peers, especially in educational institutions, drives many youths to start using drugs.
- **Easy Availability:** India's geographical location facilitates drug trafficking from major producing regions like the Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent.
- **Economic Prosperity:** Rising income levels in regions like Punjab and Maharashtra increase disposable income, making drugs more accessible.
- **Psychological Factors:** People who suffer from depression, stressful lifestyles and low self esteem result in drug usage.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AGAINST DRUG ABUSE

- Article **47** of the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution of India directs states to improve public health and endeavour to bring about the prohibition of the consumption of intoxicating drinks and drugs.

- **Legal Framework:** Enactment of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, and the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1988.

- **International Conventions**: India is a signatory to **three United Nations drug conventions**, **Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)**, **Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971), Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988**) ,providing a legal framework for controlling drug abuse

- **Enforcement Agencies**: **Narcotics Control Bureau e**stablished as a nodal agency to combat drug trafficking and enforce stringent penalties. Other agencies like the **Narcotics Control Division**, and **Department of Central Excise & Customs** work towards drug control.

- **National Action Plan:** The National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR) focuses on awareness generation, community outreach, and treatment.

- **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment:** Spearheads efforts for drug demand reduction, awareness, education, and rehabilitation.

- **Integrated Rehabilitation Centres for Addicts (IRCAs)**, funded by the ministry, provide treatment and rehabilitation services.

- **Comprehensive Drug Survey:** Periodic surveys assess drug abuse situations and inform policy-making.

- **Technological Intervention:** Launch of portals like **NCORD portal** and **e-portal SIMS** for digitization of drug seizure data and adoption of modern technology for detection and prevention.

- **Awareness Programs:** Nasha Mukt Bharat campaign and integration of drug awareness in educational curricula.

- **Border Security:** Empowerment of paramilitary forces to combat drug trafficking along India's borders.
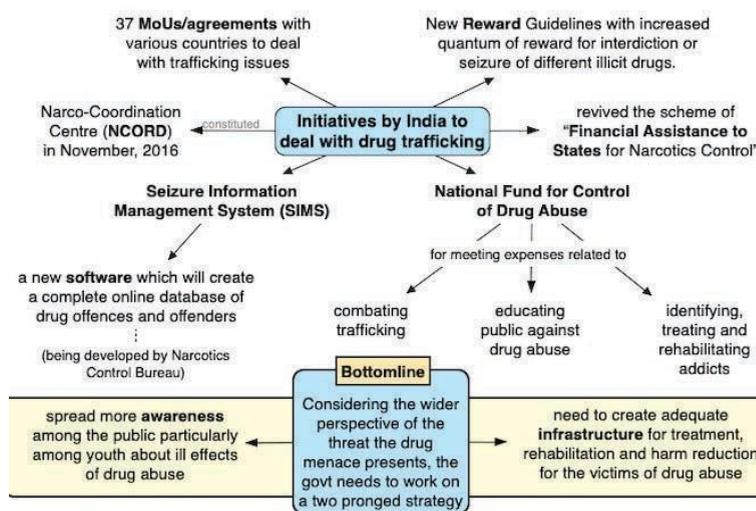
WAY FORWARD

- **Policy Focus:** Informed policy-making based on periodic surveys and assessment of drug abuse situations.

- **Legal Reforms:** Creating a conducive legal and policy environment to control drug problems effectively.

- **Community Involvement:** Engaging local bodies, NGOs, and citizens in awareness and rehabilitation efforts.

- **Reducing Stigma:** Changing societal perceptions to view drug addiction as a health condition rather than a moral failing.

- **Enhanced Treatment Facilities:** Scaling up evidence-based treatment services to bridge the treatment gap and address addiction effectively.

Combating drug abuse requires a multi-pronged approach involving law enforcement, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. By addressing these challenges, India can work towards a drug-free future for its citizens.

ANALYSIS OF IMPORTANT SCHEMES RELATED TO CHILDREN

BETI BACHAO BETI PADHAO
- **Objective of the Scheme:** To address **issues from declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR),** women empowerment, **removal of gender inequality** to protecting a girl child.
- The key elements of the scheme include the **enforcement of the PC and PNDT Act,** and a **nationwide awareness and advocacy campaign**.
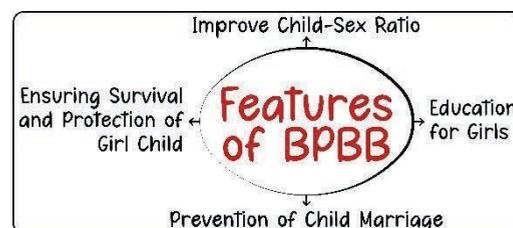
BBBP's emphasis is on changing mindsets through training, sensitisation, awareness-raising and community mobilisation on the ground.

PERFORMANCE OF THE SCHEME

- **National SRB Index**: Upward trend from 918 (2014-15) to 934 (2019-20), an improvement of 16 points in five years.
- **District-Level Improvements**: 422 out of 640 districts under BBBP showed SRB improvement from 2014-15 to 2018-19.
- **National GER of Girls**: Improved from 77.45 (2014-15) to 81.32 (2018-19)—3.87 points in four years.
- **School Toilet Facilities**: Proportion increased from 92.1% (2014-15) to 95.1% (2018-19).
- **Health Indicators**: 1st trimester ANC registration rose from 61% (2014-15) to 71% (2019-20), while institutional deliveries increased from 87% to 94% over the same period.

Concerns: States across India have utilised just 45 per cent of the funds allocated under the scheme in the last five years (2015-16 to 2019-20).

WAY FORWARD

A change in mindset towards the girl child is not only essential for gender equality and women empowerment but also to realise the vision of a new India because any nation cannot progress, leaving its 50% population behind. A first step towards women empowerment is to ensure the survival of girl children and the BBBP campaign is a right step in the right direction.

> **Innovative BBBP Initiatives**
> - **Digital Guddi-Gudda Board** showcases gender disparity;
> - **Udaan** allows girls to shadow professionals;
> - **My Aim My Target** recognizes academic excellence;
> - **Lakshya Se Rubaru** offers internships;
> - **Noor Jeevan Ka Betiyan** promotes empowerment;
> - **Bitiya and Birba** combine BBBP with environmental awareness;
> - **Aao School Chalein** ensures school enrolment;
> - **Collector Ki Class** provides free coaching;
> - **Bal Cabinet** fosters youth leadership.

INTEGRATED CHILD DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The Integrated Child Development Services (**ICDS**) scheme, initiated in 1975, remains pivotal for early childhood development in India, offering services such as **food supplementation**, **pre-school education**, and **healthcare** for children under 6 and their mothers.

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

- **Expansion:** Over **13.91 lakh** operational **Anganwadi Centres (AWCs)** nationwide as of March 2022.
- **Number of beneficiaries for supplementary nutrition increased** from 705.43 lakh at the end of X Plan to 1022.33 lakh in March 2015.
- **Number of beneficiaries [Children (3-6 years)] for pre-school education increased** from 300.81 lakh at the end of X Plan to 365.44 lakh in March 2015.
- **Increased Beneficiaries:** Rising numbers of children benefiting from **supplementary nutrition** and **pre-school education**, although recent data is unavailable.
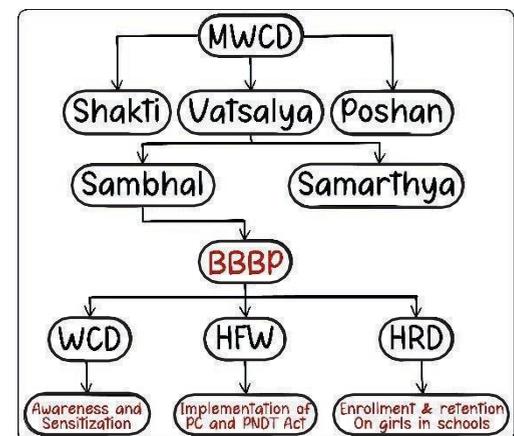
SHORTCOMINGS

- **Equity Concerns:** Challenges persist in reaching the **poorest** and most **vulnerable populations**, including **uneducated mothers**.
- **Staffing Issues:** AWC workers often face **overburdening**, **low pay**, and inadequate **training**.
- **Infrastructure Deficiencies:** Some AWCs lack basic amenities like clean **water** and **toilets**, affecting service quality.
- **Resource Constraints:** Universalizing the scheme faces hurdles due to limited **resources** and potential fund **misuse**.
- **Targeting Challenges: Wealthier children** may benefit more than the **poorest** and most **undernourished**, as per **World Bank studies**.

WAY FORWARD

- **Convergence:** Integrating ICDS with other programs can enhance its impact.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Strengthening monitoring systems is crucial for service quality assurance.
- **Human Resource Development:** Investing in staff **training** and improved working conditions is vital.
- **Infrastructure Upgrade:** Ensuring basic amenities in AWCs is essential for service delivery.

- **Community Engagement:** Utilising platforms like **Gram Sabhas** can raise awareness and empower communities.
- **Targeted Interventions:** Focused strategies are needed to reach the most vulnerable populations effectively.

ICDS aligns with SDGs **2**, **3**, and **4**, focusing on **zero hunger**, **good health**, and **quality education**. By addressing shortcomings and maximising potential, ICDS can significantly contribute to achieving these goals and fostering a healthier future for India's children.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE ASER REPORT 2023

The **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023** titled '**Beyond Basics**' based on a survey led by the **Pratham Foundation** has been released.

- **Status of Youth Activities:** Across all enrolment categories, a **higher proportion of females than males were doing household work** daily. It was found that a **higher percentage of males (40.3%) than females (28%) had done work other than household work** for more than 15 days. Around **30% of youth** are working for their parents.
- **Aspirations: Boys and young** men aspired for **army (13.8%) and police (13.6%)** and girls and young women aspired to be **teachers (16%) and doctors (14.8%).**
- **Age Gap in Enrollment:** Overall, **86.8%** of 14-18-year-olds are enrolled in an educational institution. The percentage of youth not enrolled is **3.9%** for 14-year-olds and **32.6%** for 18-year-olds.
- **Choice of Streams:** More students enrolled in Arts/Humanities (**55.7%**), with females less likely to choose Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (**28.1%**) compared to males (**36.3%**).
- **Status of Vocational Training:** Only **5.6%** of surveyed youth are taking vocational training or related courses.
- **Assessment of Basic Skills and Literacy levels:** About **25%** of youth cannot read a standard II-level text fluently in their regional language.
- **Division Problems:** More than half of 14-18-year-olds struggle with division (3-digit by 1-digit) problems, with only **43.3%** solving them correctly.
- **Digital Divide in Smartphone Proficiency:** Around **90%** of households surveyed had smartphones, with almost **95%** of boys and **90%** of girls proficient in smartphone usage.

CHALLENGES HIGHLIGHTED IN THE REPORT

- **No Improvement in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Skills (FLN):** There has been no significant change in students' FLN. In 2017, 76.6% of 14-18-year-olds could read a grade 2-level text, dropping to 73.6% in 2023. Low levels of foundational numeracy affect everyday calculations and practical situations.
- **Poor Quality Labourforce:** Deficits in foundational numeracy impact the quality of the country's labour force.
- **Balancing Academics and Family Responsibilities:** Youth face challenges balancing academic requirements with family responsibilities, affecting aspirations.
- **Poor Utilisation of Smartphones for Education:** Smartphones are underutilised for educational purposes, with close to 80% used for entertainment.
- **Gender Disparity in Reading and Arithmetic Skills:** Males outperform females in arithmetic and English reading. Gender disparity observed in tasks such as telling time and measuring length.
- **Gender Disparity in Digital Skills:** More males own smartphones compared to females, with boys outperforming girls in digital tasks.

WAY FORWARD

- **Reorienting Vocational Education:** Align vocational education with aspirations outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP). Collaborate with Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and Polytechnics for aspirational vocational training.
- **Empowering Underprivileged Learners:** Enable underprivileged individuals to study while earning a living through open schooling and digital technology.
- **Need for Non-Formal Education:** Offer non-formal education to supplement formal processes, especially in subjects like agriculture.
- **Smartphone Usage and Education Opportunities:** Encourage the use of smartphones for learning, especially in rural areas where they are widely used.

Prudent reforms in technical and vocational education are essential to support youths in building foundational literacy and numeracy skills for academic improvement and everyday needs.

THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL OFFENCES (POCSO) RULES, 2020

The Centre has notified a set of new rules enabling implementation of the recent amendments to the POCSO Act.

KEY PROVISIONS:

- **Mandatory police verification** of school and care home staff.
- Procedures to report sexual abuse material such as **pornography** and imparting **age-appropriate child rights education**.
- The state government has been asked to formulate a **child protection policy** based on the principle of **zero tolerance to violence against children**.
- The central government and every state government shall provide periodic training including **orientation programmes**, **sensitisation workshops**, and **refresher courses** to all persons, whether regular or contractual, coming in contact with the children, to sensitise them about child safety and protection.
- The Centre and state governments have been asked to prepare **age-appropriate educational material and curriculum** for children, informing them about various aspects of personal safety.

CHILDREN IN STREET SITUATIONS (CISS)

To aid in the rehabilitation of Children in Street Situations (CiSS), the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has introduced a "CiSS application" under the Baal Swaraj Portal.

Key Provisions:

- It is used to track the **rescue and rehabilitation** of children who are living on the streets by collecting data from all the states and union territories.
- **Open shelters**, counselling, medical care, sponsorships, addiction recovery programmes, educational services, legal/paralegal services, volunteering, and other forms of assistance are all possible.
- The platform's primary purpose is to gather data, which is then reported to the District Child Protection Officer (DCPO) so they can take the appropriate action.

NORMS TO PROTECT KIDS WORKING IN OTT PLATFORMS

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has issued new guidelines to protect the rights of children working in the entertainment industry, including social media and OTT platforms.

KEY PROVISIONS

- The guidelines expand the scope to cover various forms of commercial entertainment involving children. They address **child protection**, **health**, **mental health**, the **producer's responsibilities**, the role of guardians, and **income protection for children**.
- The guidelines require **permission from the District Magistrate**, **disclaimers** against abuse or exploitation, and provision for the child's education. Content created by children or their families is treated as a family enterprise.
- The guidelines also include **penalties for violations**.The significance of these guidelines lies in the need to cover the increasing influence of social media and OTT platforms, protect children from exploitation, and ensure compliance with existing Acts (Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, Child Labour Amendment Act, 2016, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021). UMMEED - Draft Guidelines for Schools to Prevent Student Suicides

The draft guidelines released by the Union Ministry of Education, titled UMMEED (Understand, Motivate, Manage, Empathise, Empower, Develop), aim to address student suicides in schools by enhancing sensitivity, understanding, and support for students, with a focus on the well-being of every child.

Key Components of the Guidelines:

- **Formation of School Wellness Team (SwT)**: Led by the school principal, these teams will be trained to handle crisis situations and provide immediate support to students exhibiting signs of self-harm.
- **Teacher and Family Orientations**: Annual orientations will be conducted for teachers and family members to raise awareness about student suicides and build capacity among various stakeholders.
- **Response to Warning Signs**: Specific actions are outlined for school individuals or members of the wellness team when encountering students displaying warning signs or attempting self-harm.
- **Destigmatization of Mental Health Issues**: Schools are encouraged to destigmatize mental health concerns through activities like storytelling, rallies, posters, exhibitions, and other initiatives.
- **Safety Measures**: Practical safety measures, including locking empty classrooms and ensuring well-lit school premises, are recommended to create a safe environment for students.

SENIOR CITIZENS

INTRODUCTION

India is currently experiencing a unique demographic transition, marked by a **bulge** in its **youth population** alongside a significant rise in the number of **elderly citizens**. This demographic shift poses both challenges and opportunities for the country's economic growth trajectory.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

- **Ageing Process**: Ageing is a **continuous, irreversible, universal process**, beginning from conception until death, with the onset of economic dependency typically occurring as one's productive contribution declines.
- **Definition of Senior Citizen**: As per the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, a **senior citizen** in India is anyone who has attained the age of **sixty years or above**.

FACTS & FIGURES

- As per the **Census figures of 2011**, the population of senior citizens (60 + age) in India is **10.38 crore i.e., 8.6% of the total population.** The share of elderly persons increased from 5.6% in 1961 the proportion has increased to 8.6% in 2011.
- **Projected Growth**: A report released by the **United Nations Population Fund and Help Age India** suggests that the number of elderly persons is **expected to grow to 173 million by 2026.** By **2050**, it is estimated that **one out of every five individuals** in India will be over **sixty years old**. Additionally, **India** is home to **one-eighth** of the **world's elderly population**.
- **Population Distribution**: The age division of the Indian population stands at **30.8% (0-14)**, **60.3% (15-59)**, and **8.6% (60+)**.
- **Rural-Urban Distribution**: Around **71%** of the elderly population resides in **rural areas**, while **29%** are in **urban areas**.
- **Rising Elderly Population**: According to the **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)**, India's elderly population is expected to **triple** from **104 million** in **2011** to **300 million** by **2050**, constituting **18%** of the total population.
- The **old-age dependency ratio** is on the rise, projected to reach **20.1%** by **2031**, indicating a significant increase in the number of elderly persons per 100 individuals in the age group of **15-59 years**.
- States like **Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal**, and **Maharashtra** are already witnessing significant **ageing phenomena**.

Elderly People in India

I POPULATION	Male	Female	Total
Total Population (in millions)			
Rural	427.8	406.0	833.8
Urban	195.5	181.6	377.1
Total	623.3	587.6	1210.9
Population Aged 60+ (in millions)			
Rural	36.0	37.3	73.3
Urban	15.1	15.5	30.6
Total	51.1	52.8	103.9
Share of Elderly Population in Total Population (%)			
Rural	8.4	9.2	8.8
Urban	7.7	8.5	8.1
Total	8.2	9.0	8.6
II ECONOMY			
Old-Age Dependency Ratio			
Rural	14.5	15.8	15.1
Urban	11.8	13.1	12.4
Total	13.6	14.9	14.2
Elderly Population Working (%)			
Rural	66.4	28.4	47.1
Urban	46.1	11.3	28.5
Total	60.4	23.4	41.6
III HEALTH			
Life Expectancy 60+ (Years)			
Total	16.9	19.0	17.9
Death Rate (60-64years) (Per Thousand)			
Rural	22.3	17.2	19.7
Urban	16.6	13.4	15.0
Total	20.7	16.1	18.4
Physically Disabled Among 60+(Per Hundred Thousand)			
Rural	5713	5476	5593
Urban	4361	4007	4181
Total	5314	5045	5177
IV EDUCATION			
Literacy Rate 60+			
Rural	50.5	18.4	34.2
Urban	79.6	52.7	66.0
Total	59.1	28.5	43.5

Source: Census, 2011

Decadal growth in elderly population compared to that of general population
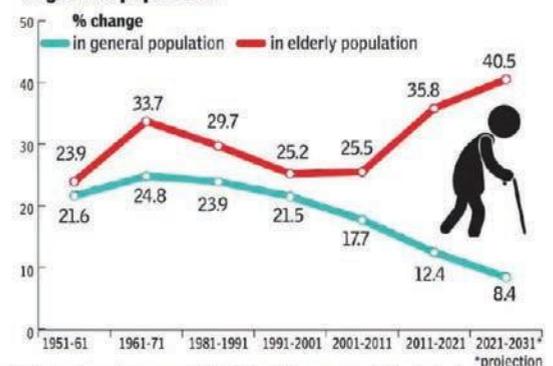
Population Census Data, Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections November 2019, Population. Projections for India and States 2011-2036, Census of India 2011
Source: MOSPI

- The **Economic Survey 2018-19** suggests that India may face an increasingly ageing population, similar to developed nations like **Germany** and **France**.

FEMINIZATION OF AGEING IN INDIA

- The **UNPF report** identifies the **feminization** of ageing as a key challenge in India.
- **Sex ratio** of the elderly has risen steadily, projected to reach **1,060 women** per **1,000 men** by 2026.
- **Elderly women**, especially **widowed and dependent**, are expected to constitute a significant portion of the population.
- **Dependency ratio** for females is estimated at **14.8%** in 2021, highlighting the need for **gender-sensitive policies**.
- **Policy focus** should address the **unique needs** of elderly women to ensure their **inclusion** and **well-being**.

SIGNIFICANCE OF ELDERLY CARE IN INDIA

- **Utilisation of Experience**:
  - **Importance**: Elderly individuals possess **valuable personal and professional experience**.
  - **Example**: Their experiences can be channelled for societal benefit through proper care and support.
- **Generational Connection**:
  - I**mportance**: Elderly serve as crucial **links between generations**.
  - **Example**: Grandparents in joint families play a vital role in **transferring values and morals** to younger generations.
- **Promotion of Social Harmony**:
  - **Importance**: Elderly contribute to **social harmony** with their rich cultural heritage.
  - **Example**: Their wisdom acts as a buffer against **intolerance, violence, and hate crimes**.
- **Moral and Ethical Obligation**:
  - **Importance**: Society has a **responsibility to care** for its elderly.
  - **Example**: This acknowledges their **lifetime contributions** and ensures **preservation of societal values**.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF SENIOR CITIZENS TO SOCIETY

Senior citizens are a treasure trove of experience, both personal and professional. Here's how they significantly contribute to society:

MENTORSHIP AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

- Their wealth of experience bridges the generational gap.
- They can mentor younger individuals, fostering personal growth and professional development.

FAMILY STABILITY AND SUPPORT

- Seniors are often the pillars of families, especially in multigenerational households.
- They provide emotional and practical support, fostering a sense of stability and well-being for all members.

CHARACTER BUILDING

- Grandparents play a crucial role in shaping younger generations.
- By instilling values and morals, they contribute to raising responsible and empathetic citizens.

PROMOTING TOLERANCE AND SOCIAL COHESION

- Having witnessed significant social and cultural shifts, seniors offer a unique perspective.
- Their experiences can act as a buffer against societal division, promoting tolerance and understanding.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- With honed conflict resolution skills and a deep understanding of human behaviour, seniors can help mediate disputes within families and communities.
- They foster peace and social harmony.

Recognizing these contributions is essential for creating an age-inclusive society. When we bridge the generational gap, everyone benefits, leading to a more prosperous and harmonious future.

CHALLENGES FACED BY SENIOR CITIZENS IN INDIA

NITI Aayog has released a position paper titled **"Senior Care Reforms in India: Reimagining the Senior Care Paradigm" in February 2024** discussing the current trends, challenges and reforms for the ageing population.

Healthcare Concerns:

- **Chronic Illness:** High prevalence of mental health issues and chronic diseases among the elderly.
- **Geriatric Care:** Rising demand for specialised care facilities and services for ageing population.

MORBIDITY AND DISABILITIES
- High prevalence of chronic diseases, disabilities, and mental health issues among the elderly.
- Lack of access to affordable healthcare and geriatric care services exacerbates health challenges.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES
- **Depression:** Feelings of powerlessness, inferiority, and reduced competence.
- **Emotional Harm:** Verbal or emotional abuse exacerbates psychological distress among seniors.
- **Loneliness:** Loss of companionship due to widowhood and retirement.
- **Identity Crisis:** Adjustment difficulties post-retirement, leading to feelings of isolation and lack of purpose.

SOCIAL CHALLENGES
- **Urbanisation:** Shift from joint to nuclear families, reducing familial support for the elderly.
- **Elder Abuse:** Growing problem with various manifestations, including physical, emotional, and financial abuse.
- **Isolation:** Rising rates of loneliness and neglect among the elderly, impacting mental health.
- **Ageism:** Stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination based on **age**, leading to perceived lack of productivity in old age. It creates societal barriers for the elderly, affecting their opportunities and well-being.

CHANGE IN FAMILY STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL MILIEU
- **Traditional Role:** Historically, families provided care for the elderly; however, increasing nuclearization has shifted this responsibility.
- **Migration Trends:** Economic opportunities and urbanisation have led to separation of families, leaving elderly members without support.
- **Gender Dynamics:** Rise in education and employment among women has altered traditional caregiving dynamics, affecting elderly care.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES
- **Financial Strain:** Lack of income and rising healthcare costs contribute to elder poverty.
- **Housing Needs:** Insufficient housing options and living conditions for elderly citizens.
- **Lack of Access to Pension and Economic Security:**
  - **Financial Strain:** Many elderly live below the poverty line and lack access to pension benefits.
  - **Continued Employment:** Financial insecurity forces seniors to work beyond retirement age.
  - **Limited Pension Coverage:** Low availability of pension and financial products for the elderly.
  - Inadequate government spending on social security systems and lack of physical infrastructure for elderly care.

TECHNOLOGY BARRIERS
- **Digital Divide:** Inability to adapt to modern technologies like smartphones and the internet.
- **Access Issues:** Limited understanding and usage of digital services, exacerbating social isolation.
- **Digital Illiteracy:** Inability to navigate online services and access digital platforms.
- **Trust Deficit:** Fear of cyber threats and complications associated with digital technologies.
- **Reduced Personal Ties:** Disconnect with younger generations due to communication barriers.

CHALLENGES OF OLDEST OLD (80+)
- **Dependency:** Increased reliance on others due to physical limitations.
- **Healthcare Burden:** Higher prevalence of non-communicable diseases, coupled with limited access to health insurance, increases financial strain.

CHALLENGES OF ELDERLY WOMEN
- **Gender-Based Discrimination:** Lifelong disparities in access to resources and opportunities.
- **Health Disparities:** Higher rates of chronic illness and disability among elderly women.
- **Widowhood:** Majority of women over 80 are widows, facing social and economic challenges.

MEASURES TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE OF ELDER PERSONS

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK
- **Right to Equality**: Guaranteed by the Constitution, with concurrent responsibilities on Central and State governments.
- **Article 41**: Emphasises rights to employment, education, and public assistance for elder persons.
- **Article 46**: Mandates educational and economic rights for senior citizens.
- **Article 47**: Directs the government to elevate nutrition, standard of living, and public health for all citizens, including the elderly.

- **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 (amended in 2019)**: Protects senior citizens and parents from neglect, making children and relatives financially responsible for their care.
- **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Amendment Bill 2019**: Expands protection for neglected senior citizens and ensures their well-being and safety.

> **Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002**
> - Provides a roadmap for **addressing challenges of an ageing society and realisation of human rights of older persons.**
> - It **focused on three priority areas -** 1. Older persons and development 2. Advancing health and well-being into old age 3. Ensuring enabling and supportive environments.
> - **The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals** also recognises the importance of realising their full potential and their contribution for inclusive development.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND INITIATIVES

- **Integrated Programme of Older Persons (IPOP) (1992):** This initiative was launched with the objective of improving the quality of life for elderly individuals by addressing their basic needs and ensuring their overall well-being.
- **National Social Assistance Programme, 1995:** The National Social Assistance Programme was introduced to provide social assistance to destitute senior citizens, aiming to ensure they have access to essential resources and support for their sustenance.
- **National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP), 1999:** The National Policy on Older Persons, formulated in 1999, aims to provide comprehensive government support to address the financial, healthcare, shelter, and other needs of senior citizens. Additionally, it focuses on safeguarding them against abuse and exploitation while facilitating access to various services to enhance their overall quality of life.
- **National Programme for Healthcare of Elderly (1999):** The National Programme for Healthcare of Elderly, initiated in 1999, is a response to both international and national commitments of the Government, particularly under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).
- **National Policy for Older Persons, 2011**: Promotes income security, home care services, pensions, health insurance, and age-friendly living environments.

IMPORTANT SCHEMES FOR WELFARE OF SENIOR CITIZENS

Atal Vayo Abhyudaya Yojana (AVYAY): It provides four basic needs of senior citizens: financial security, food, health care, and life of dignity

Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana: The scheme is available to people in the age group of 18-70 years, with risk coverage of 2 lakhs in case of accidental death and 1 lakh for partial permanent disability.

Varishtha Pension Bima Yojana: Ensures guaranteed pension to subscribers on payment of a lump sum amount.

Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana: It aims to protect elderly persons against a future fall in their interest income due to the uncertain market condition.

Atal Pension Yojana: It provides a universal social security system in the form of pensions for all Indians, especially the poor, underprivileged, workers in the unorganised sector.

National Social Assistance Program: It is a scheme under which the elderly, widows, and disabled persons belonging to BPL category are provided financial assistance ranging from `200/- to `500/- p.m.

- **Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY)**: Offers guaranteed monthly pension to senior citizens in exchange for an initial investment.
- **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)**: Provides financial assistance to elderly individuals from BPL families.
- **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY)**: Distributes assistive living devices to senior citizens with age-related disabilities.
- **Vayoshreshtha Samman**: Recognizes outstanding contributions by senior citizens and institutions.
- **Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP)**: Provides basic amenities like shelter, food, and medical care.
- **Elder Line**: Toll-free helpline for guidance on pensions, healthcare, and legal matters.
- **SAGE (Seniorcare Ageing Growth Engine) Initiative**: Promotes development of innovative products and services for elderly care.
- **SAMPANN Project**: Online pension processing and payment system for Department of Telecommunications pensioners.
- **SACRED Portal for Elderly**: Provides job and work opportunities for citizens above 60 years of age.
- **Senior Citizen Welfare Fund**: Established in 2016 to fund activities benefiting the elderly population.

- **National Awards for Senior Citizens - Vayoshreshtha Samman**: To recognize the efforts made by eminent senior citizens and Institutions involved in rendering distinguished services for the cause of elderly persons, especially indigent senior citizens.
- **National Council of Senior Citizens (NCSrC)**: It was constituted in 1999 under the Chairpersonship of the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment to oversee implementation of the Policy and advise the Government in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes for the aged.
- **National Action Plan for the Welfare of Senior Citizens (NAPSrC)**: This Plan takes care of the top four needs of the senior citizens viz., financial security, food, health care and human interaction /life of dignity. It is an umbrella scheme, effective since 1st April 2020, has four sub-schemes under it, namely:
  - **Scheme of Integrated Programme for Senior Citizens (IPSrC)**
  - **State Action Plan for Senior Citizens (SAPSrC)**
  - **Convergence with Initiatives of other Ministries/Departments in Government of India in the field of Senior Citizens Welfare (CWMSrC)**

NATIONAL POLICY FOR SENIOR CITIZENS (NPSC) 2011

The National Policy for Senior Citizens (2011) focuses on:
- **Empowering Seniors:** Including their voices and needs in national discussions, especially for women.
- **Financial Security:** Providing pensions, homecare support, and access to healthcare and housing.
- **Respectful Care:** Promoting independent living with institutional care as a last resort.
- **Inclusive Society:** Creating accessible environments and protecting senior citizens' rights.
- **Valuing Experience:** Recognizing seniors as a national asset.
- **Financial Planning:** Encouraging long-term savings and access to credit for all.

ISSUES WITH EXISTING GOVERNMENT MECHANISMS

- **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)**
  - Provides a stagnant monthly pension of Rs. 200 since 2006.
  - Depreciated value, now less than a day's minimum wage.
- **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007**
- Fails to ensure effective maintenance by children/relatives.
  - Inadequate enforcement and implementation.
- **Integrated Programme for Older Persons**
  - Underfunded and poorly administered.
  - Reached only 23,095 beneficiaries in 2015-2016.
- **Low Social Protection Spending**
  - India's social protection spending at 1.45% of GDP, among Asia's lowest.
- **Immature Pension Industry**
  - Only 7.4% of the population is covered under any pension plan.
  - Challenges in covering informal sector employees.
- **Reluctance Towards Long-term Investment**
  - Difficulty in committing income over a prolonged period.
  - Lack of willingness to invest for the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY NITI AAYOG: THE WAY FORWARD

HEALTH DOMAIN
- Promote health literacy among seniors and caregivers.
- Strengthen primary healthcare services.
- Increase accessibility of home healthcare, mental health services, and nutrition programs.
- Establish a national senior care centre for data collection and policy development.

SOCIAL INCLUSION
- Raise awareness about the needs and challenges of senior citizens.
- Encourage peer support groups for knowledge sharing.
- Strengthen legal frameworks to address abuse and neglect.

ELDERLY-FRIENDLY LIVING/HOUSING

- Develop a single window portal for senior living projects.
- Create a national senior care portal for easy access to services.
- Recognize and support care workers in the senior care sector.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

- Foster age-friendly labour markets and employment opportunities.
- Offer "grey internship" programs for seniors.
- Promote financial literacy and protect seniors from financial fraud.
- Encourage the "silver economy" catering to senior citizens' needs.
- Offer tax and GST reforms on senior care products.
- Implement a mandatory savings plan for senior citizen deposits.

DIGITAL INCLUSION

- Increase access to affordable digital devices for seniors.
- Organise campaigns and workshops to improve digital literacy.
- Utilise technologies like AI and Big Data to simplify routine tasks.

PRIVATE PARTICIPATION

- Strengthen Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models.
- Encourage CSR funds for elder care initiatives.
- Explore private sector involvement in elder care homes, mobile medical units, and skill-building programs.

CONCLUSION

The Indian government has implemented various schemes and policies to improve the lives of senior citizens, but further investment is needed in healthcare, social inclusion, and economic empowerment. By following Niti Aayog's recommendations and encouraging private participation, India can create a more age-friendly society for senior citizens.

SENIORCARE AGING GROWTH ENGINE INITIATIVE (SAGE INITIATIVE)

- **Objective**: Government-led effort to promote innovative products and services for the elderly in India.
- **SAGE Portal**: One-stop access for elderly care products and services by credible startups.
- **Startups Selection**: Chosen based on innovative solutions addressing health, housing, technology, finance, legal needs.
- **Implementation**: Ministry facilitates access to products through identified startups.
- **Areas Covered**: Health, travel, finance, legal, housing, food, among others.
- **Funding**: Rs. 100 crore allocated for promoting the silver economy, catering to the needs of older populations.

QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ELDERLY INDEX, 2021

- **Released by**: Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM).
- **Purpose**: Identifies regional ageing patterns and assesses overall ageing situation in India.
- **Key Findings**:
  - India is currently enjoying the demographic dividend. But the age group above the age of 65 will become the fastest-growing age group by 2050.
  - The share of elders, as a percentage of the total population in the country, is expected to increase from around 7.5% in 2001 to almost 12.5% by 2026, and surpass 19.5% by 2050.
- **Top-Scoring Regions**:
  - Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh in Aged and Relatively Aged States, respectively.
  - Chandigarh and Mizoram in Union Territory and North-East States category.

SILVER ECONOMY

- The silver economy refers to the **economic opportunities arising from the public and consumer expenditure related to elderly citizens**.
- It includes **the products and services** they purchase directly and the indirect economic activities they stimulate.

silver economy

- The Government has launched initiatives to promote the idea of a silver economy:
  - **Senior Able Citizens for Re-Employment in Dignity (SACRED) portal**: It will connect senior citizens with job providers in the private sector.
  - **Senior Ageing Growth Engine (SAGE) initiative:** It will promote and incentivize senior care products and services

UN DECADE OF HEALTHY AGEING PROGRESS REPORT

- **Objective**: Improve lives of older people, families, and communities globally.
- **Decade Duration**: 2021–2030.
- **Global Commitments**: Builds on WHO's Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health (2016–2030) and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002).

KEY FINDINGS

- **Rights Protection**: Over 60% of countries have mechanisms to promote and protect older people's rights.
- **Age-Friendly Cities**: More countries have national programs supporting WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities.
- **Resource Limitations**: Limited resources for healthy ageing efforts; increased commitment and investment are crucial.
- **Action Necessity**: Concerted and accelerated action needed in low- and middle-income countries, where 80% of the world's older population will reside by 2050.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES/DIVYANGS

WHO ARE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)?

- **UN Definition:** The UN CRPD defines PWD as those with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, hinder their full participation in society.
- As per **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016,** Persons certified with at least 40% of specified disabilities are considered **benchmark disabled.**
- **World Report on Disability:** Disability is complex, dynamic, and contested.
- **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016:** Uses the UN CRPD definition. It also defines "Person with Benchmark Disability" as someone with at least 40% of a specified disability. The Act increased the recognized disabilities from 7 to 21.
- **WHO:** 1 billion people (15%) experience some form of disability, mostly in developing countries. 15% of the world's population experiences some form of disability, with over 80% in Low- and Middle-Income Countries.

Proportion of Disabled Population by Type of Disability India : 2011 (%)			
Type of Disability	Persons	Males	Females
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
In Seeing	18.8	17.6	20.2
In Hearing	18.9	17.9	20.2
In Speech	7.5	7.5	7.4
In Movement	20.3	22.5	17.5
Mental Retardation	5.6	5.8	5.4
Mental Illness	2.7	2.8	2.6
Any Other	18.4	18.2	18.6
Multiple Disability	7.9	7.8	8.1

CURRENT STATUS OF PWDS IN INDIA

- **Numbers:** Around 26.8 million (2011 Census), constituting 2.21% of the population.
- **Gender:** 14.9 million men and 11.9 million women.
- **Location:** 69% reside in rural areas.
- **Types of Disabilities:** Movement (20%), Visual Impairment (19%), Hearing Impairment (19%), Multiple Disabilities (8%).
- **Age Group:** Highest in 10-19 years (4.62 million).
- **Employment:** 34% reported as workers (highest in Nagaland, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh).

MODELS OF DISABILITY

- **Medical Model:** Disability lies within the individual and requires medical intervention.
- **Social Model:** Disability arises from societal barriers that restrict PWD participation.

TYPES OF DISABILITIES

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 expanded the types of disabilities **from 7 to 21.** The 21 disabilities are given below:-

- **Physical Disability –** Locomotor Disability; Leprosy Cured Person; Cerebral Palsy; Dwarfism; Muscular Dystrophy; Acid Attack Victims; Visual Impairment (Blindness; Low Vision); Hearing Impairment (Deaf; Hard of Hearing); Speech and Language Disability.
- **Intellectual Disability –** Specific Learning Disabilities; Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- **Mental Behaviour –** Mental Illness
- **Disability caused due to –** Chronic Neurological Conditions (Multiple Sclerosis; Parkinson's disease); Blood Disorder (Haemophilia; Thalassemia; Sickle Cell Disease) and other Multiple Disabilities.

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH PWDS

HEALTH CHALLENGES

- **Preventable Disabilities:** A significant portion of disabilities in India are preventable, stemming from issues such as medical complications during birth, maternal conditions, malnutrition, and accidents or injuries.
- **Lack of Access to Healthcare:** Many individuals with disabilities face challenges in accessing affordable healthcare services, as well as aids and appliances essential for managing their conditions effectively.

EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS

- **Non-Inclusive Education System:** The education system in India often fails to cater to the needs of differently abled individuals, lacking inclusivity in its approach.
- **Shortcomings in Special Education:** Special schools are scarce, and even where they exist, access to them, availability of trained teachers, and appropriate educational materials remain inadequate.

EMPLOYMENT DISPARITIES

- **Low Employment Rates:** Despite being capable of productive work, disabled adults encounter significantly lower employment rates compared to the general population.
- **Private Sector Challenges:** The situation worsens in the private sector, where the number of disabled individuals employed is disproportionately low.

According to WHO, people with disability encounter a range of barriers in accessing health care

✓ **Attitudinal Barriers**
- Prejudice, stigma, discrimination by health service providers.
- Service providers lack knowledge about needs of the disabled.
- Women with disability face barriers to sexual, reproductive health services and information.

✓ **Physical Barriers**
- Lack of appropriate infrastructure to access healthcare facilities like ramps to access passages, doorways, toilets on wheelchairs.
- Fixed-height furniture, including examination beds and chairs, can be difficult for people with disability to use.
- Lack of healthcare facilities in remote areas.

✓ **Communication Barriers**
- Limited availability of written material or sign language interpreters at health services for persons with hearing impairment.
- Lack of information and prescription in accessible formats, like Braille or large print for persons with vision impairment. *Source: WHO*
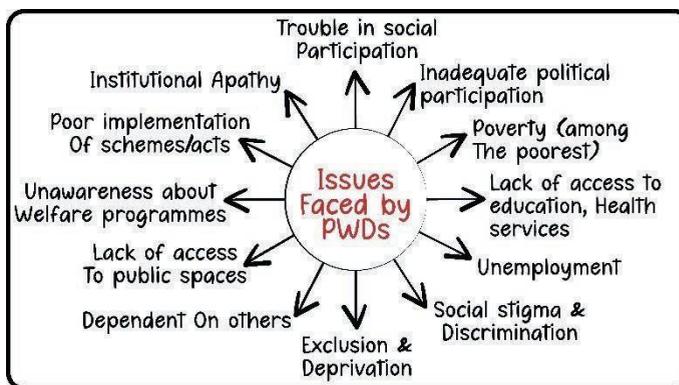
✓ **Financial Barriers**
- Over half of all people with disability in low-income countries cannot afford proper health care.
- Inability to afford the costs associated with travelling to a health service and paying for medicine.

ACCESSIBILITY HURDLES
- **Physical Barriers:** Physical access to buildings, public transportation, and essential services remains a major challenge for individuals with disabilities.
- **Limited Service Access:** Many public services lack the necessary infrastructure to accommodate the needs of disabled individuals, further hindering their access.

DISCRIMINATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION
- **Negative Social Attitudes:** Negative attitudes toward disability persist within families and society, contributing to discrimination against individuals with disabilities.
- **Stigma Surrounding Mental Health:** People with mental illnesses or intellectual disabilities face particularly severe stigma, often leading to their exclusion from social interactions and opportunities.

In order to address these challenges, both the government as well as civil society require concerted efforts to promote inclusivity, enforce disability rights, and provide adequate support systems for individuals with disabilities in India.

PROVISIONS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWD) IN INDIA

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK
- **Preamble:** Ensures social, economic, and political justice for all, with equality of status and opportunity.
- **Fundamental Rights (Articles 14, 15, 21, 23, 32):** Guarantee PwDs the right to equality, non-discrimination, life, liberty, protection from trafficking, and legal recourse.
- **Directive Principles (Article 41):** Directs the state to provide PwDs with work, education, and public assistance.
- **Seventh Schedule:** Lists "relief of the disabled and unemployed" as a state subject.
- **Eleventh and Twelfth Schedules:** Include "welfare of the Disabled and mentally retarded."

NATIONAL LEGISLATIONS
- **Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992:** Regulates and monitors services for PwDs, standardises syllabi, and maintains a qualified professional register.
- **National Trust Act, 1999:** Provides for a national body to support PwDs with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation, and Multiple Disabilities.
- **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017:** Provides mental healthcare and protects the rights of persons with mental illness.
- **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act):** Key Act with several provisions:
  - **Increased Reservations:** 4% in government jobs and 5% in higher education institutes.
  - **Free Education:** For children with benchmark disabilities (age 6-18) in government-funded and recognized institutions.
  - **Accessibility:** Ensures accessibility in public buildings within a timeframe (Accessible India Campaign).
  - **Grievance Redressal:** Chief Commissioner and State Commissioners monitor implementation and address grievances.
  - **Financial Support:** Creates National and State Funds for PwDs.
  - **Guardianship:** Provides for joint decision-making between guardians and PwDs.
  - **Penalties:** Imposes penalties for offences against PwDs and violations of the Act.
  - **Special Courts:** Designates courts in each district to handle PwD rights violation cases.
  - **Alignment with UNCRPD:** Brings Indian law in line with the international convention.

WELFARE PROGRAMS FOR PERSON WITH DISABILITIES
- **Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan)** - A separate Department of Disability Affairs was established for welfare and empowerment of the Persons with Disabilities.
- **National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2006** - Aims to create an environment that provides equal opportunities for protection of their rights and full participation in society. It outlines specific measures and strategies for ensuring protection of rights of PwDs and their inclusion in the society.
- **Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)** - The campaign targets at enhancing the accessibility of built environment, transport system and Information & communication Ecosystem.
- **Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme** - To create an enabling environment to ensure equal opportunities, equity, social justice and empowerment of persons with disabilities.
- **Deen Dayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (2003):** Under this scheme, financial assistance is provided to NGOs to offer a range of services to Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), including vocational training centres, community-based rehabilitation, preschool and early intervention programs, and special schools.

- **National Fellowship for Students with Disabilities (RGMF) (2012):** This initiative seeks to increase opportunities for students with disabilities to pursue higher education by providing financial support and other necessary resources.
- **Community Based Inclusive Development (CBID) Program –**
  - A **six-month Community Based Inclusive Development (CBID) Programme** for the rehabilitation of Divyangjan was inaugurated by the **Union Minister of Social Justice.**
  - In order to tackle cross-disability issues and facilitate the integration of people with disabilities in society, the programme **intends to develop a pool of grassroots rehabilitation workers at the community level who can collaborate with ASHA and Anganwadi workers**.
  - The programme has been developed to give these employees **competency-based knowledge and skills to improve their capacity for successfully carrying out their responsibilities**. These employees will be referred to as **"Divyang Mitra,"** or friends of disabled people.
- **Assistance to Disabled persons for purchasing / fitting of aids / appliances scheme** (ADIP Scheme)- To assist the needy disabled persons in procuring durable, sophisticated and scientifically manufactured, modern, standard aids and appliances.
- **Unique ID for Persons with Disabilities**: This project is being implemented with a view of creating a **National Database for PwDs**, and to issue a **Unique Disability Identity Card (UDID)** to each person with disabilities.
- **Mobile Aided Note Identifier (MANI):** It is a mobile application for aiding visually impaired persons to identify the denomination of Indian Banknotes. It has been developed by the Reserve Bank of India.
- **Scheme for Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (SIPDA):** SIPDA provides grant-in-aid to State Governments, Central and State Government bodies, autonomous bodies, and universities for the effective implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, promoting the rights and welfare of disabled individuals.
- **Accessible Elections**: ECI has implemented several measures to make a conducive environment for PwDs to cast their vote. **Example** -
  - Braille signage on the Ballot Unit of EVM
  - Entering polling stations without waiting in the queue.
  - Facility granted to take wheelchairs inside polling stations.
  - permits a companion to accompany a blind/infirm elector.
  - Poll personnel were trained & sensitised regarding special needs of PwDs.

GLOBAL MEASURES

- India signed the **UN Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities**. It puts an obligation to take appropriate measures to ensure persons with disabilities access, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, and to other facilities and services.
- India is a signatory to the '**Declaration on the Full Participation and Equality of People' with Disabilities** in the **Asia-Pacific Region.**
- India is also a signatory to the **Biwako Millennium Framework** working towards an **inclusive, barrier free and rights-based society.**
- **Incheon Strategy:** Aims to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.
- **United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disability:** An international treaty promoting and protecting the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.
- **International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3rd December):** An annual observance to raise awareness about disability issues and promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities.

CONSTRAINTS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF WELFARE PROGRAMMES

- **Undercounting:** PwDs hide disabilities due to stigma, leading to inaccurate data.
- **Poor Implementation:** Existing schemes for PwDs often lack proper execution.
- **Limited Accessibility:** Public infrastructure hinders PwDs' mobility.
- **Attitudinal Barriers:** Stigma and misconceptions lead to discrimination and exclusion.
- **Education Gap:** Lack of inclusive education infrastructure and trained teachers.
- **Employment Issues:** Inaccessible workplaces and negative perceptions limit job opportunities.
- **Lack of Empathy:** PwDs are treated with sympathy, not empowered through inclusion.

- **Enhanced Employment Opportunities:**
  - Create more job opportunities across sectors.
  - Tailor training programs to diverse needs.
  - Implement RPWD Act provisions for workplace inclusivity.
  - Promote CSR initiatives supporting accessible workplaces.
- **Improved Accessibility and Infrastructure:**
  - Adopt universal design principles in public spaces.
  - Upgrade infrastructure with ramps, lifts, signage, etc.
  - Monitor Accessible India Campaign for effectiveness.
- **Raising Awareness and Sensitivity:**
  - Conduct public awareness campaigns and workshops.
  - Promote positive media portrayal and integrate disability awareness in education.
  - Include PwDs in decision-making roles.
- **Strengthened Legal and Policy Support:**
- Allocate resources for PwD welfare schemes.
- Ensure participatory policymaking involving PwDs.
- Train judiciary and administration to address PwD issues effectively.
- **Capacity Building at the Grassroots Level:**
  - Train community leaders to advocate for PwD rights.
  - Bridge the gap between policies and communities through outreach.
- **Preventive Actions:**
  - Implement comprehensive healthcare programs for early disability screening.
  - Provide early intervention services for identified disabilities.
- **Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Approach:**
  - Empower PwDs and integrate them within communities.
  - Provide accessible rehabilitation services at the grassroots level.
- **Increasing Public Awareness and Understanding:**
  - Launch social campaigns to change negative attitudes.
  - Encourage positive media representation of PwDs.
  - Rethink special education for inclusivity.
- **Collaboration with States:**
  - Advocate for decentralised healthcare for better accessibility.
  - Provide centralised support to states for addressing disability challenges.

India is committed to ensure welfare and social justice for the PWDs. It has initiated several measures to enable a conducive environment for PWDs to realise their true potential. Empowerment of PWDs is also fruitful for India as the World Bank estimated that leaving PWDs, outside the economy, translates into a foregone GDP of about 5% to 7%.

Ministry for Divyang (Maharashtra)
- **A distinct government agency for the divyang (those with various abilities)** has recently received state approval in **Maharashtra.** This development was announced in honour of the **International Day of Disabled Persons**. It has been demanded for **20 years** that there be **a distinct department for the welfare and security of people with disabilities.**
- It **aims to guarantee the Divyangs' wellbeing** and successfully carry out a number of **government initiatives** aimed at them.

KEYWORDS: Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPD) Act, Quality Vocational Training, Attitudinal Barriers, Community Based Inclusive Development.


Previous Year Questions	
1.	Does the rights of persons with disabilities act, 2016 ensure effective mechanisms for empowerment and inclusion of the intended beneficiaries in society? Discuss.	2017

LGBTQIA+

The LGBTQIA+ community is a diverse group of people who identify as **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual Or Questioning.** The community is united by a shared history of oppression and discrimination, as well as a shared goal of achieving equality and acceptance.

LGBTQIA+ : The plus sign represents people with diverse **SOGIESC** (sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics) who identify using other terms. In some contexts, **LGB, LGBT,** or **LGBTI** are used to refer to particular populations. **SOGIESC** encompasses sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics.

Community Inclusion: They are the people who don't identify with **cisgender** heterosexual ideals. In

India, the LGBTQIA+ community also includes a specific social group, a distinct community: the **Hijras**. They are culturally defined either as "neither men, nor women", or as men who behave like a woman. At present they are referred to as the **Third Gender**.
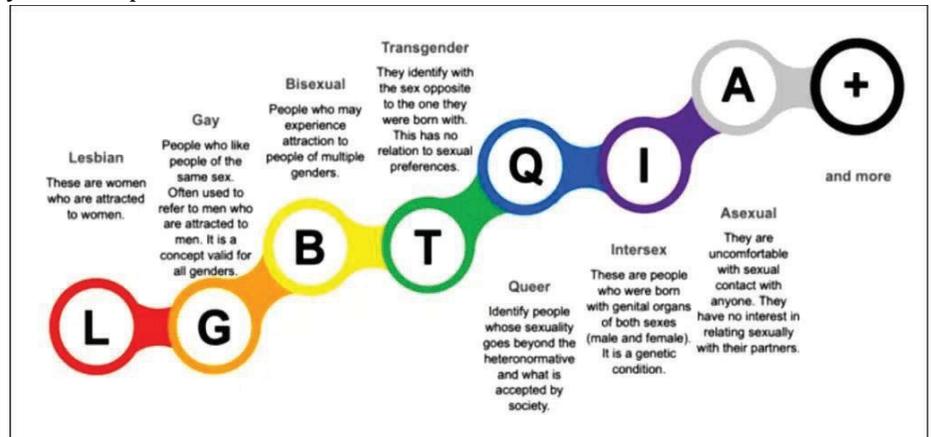
BASIC DATA

- **As per the 2011 census** about **6 Lakh transgender people live in India**. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) face certain social and legal difficulties.
- **Census 2011** also reported **55,000 children as transgender identified by their parents.**
- **SDG 3:** "Ensuring healthy lives and well-being for everyone at all stages."
- **SDG 5**: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"
- **SDG 10:** "Reducing inequalities within and among countries."
- **SDG 16:** "Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for everyone, and building effective, accountable, inclusive institutions at all levels."

EVOLUTION OF LGBTQIA+ RIGHTS IN INDIA- FROM COLONIAL STIGMA TO CULTURAL ACCEPTANCE

- **Colonial Era Stigma (1860-1949):**
  - **Section 377:** British-imposed law criminalized homosexual acts as unnatural.
  - **Post-Independence:** Right to Equality under Article 14 did not repeal discriminatory law.
- **Cultural Acceptance and Historical References:**
  - **Nineteenth-Century Evolution:** Rise of homosexuality amidst British influence.
  - **Mediaeval Insights:** Ancient texts like Bhagavata Purana and Valmiki Ramayana acknowledge LGBTQ+ themes.
  - **Modern Insights:** Studies like Shakuntala Devi's "The World of Homosexuals" and legal recognitions like voting rights and third gender status in 1994 and 2014, respectively.
- **First Stirrings of Activism (1992-1999):**
  - **Emergence:** Gay rights activism began in 1992.
  - **Calcutta Rainbow Pride:** India's inaugural Gay Pride Parade held in Kolkata in 1999.
- **Legal Turning Point (2009):**
  - **Delhi High Court:** Decriminalized consensual homosexual acts in Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi case, affirming constitutional rights.
- **Setback and Rekindled Hope (2013-2017):**
  - **Supreme Court Reinstatement:** Section 377 reinstated in 2013.
  - **MP Shashi Tharoor:** Attempt to legalise homosexuality in Lok Sabha rejected in 2015.
- **Privacy Triumph (2017): Puttaswamy Decision:** Right to privacy recognized as fundamental by Supreme Court in 2017.
- **Triumph Over Section 377 (2018): Historic Verdict:** Supreme Court declared Section 377 unconstitutional concerning consensual same-sex relations in 2018.

- **Ongoing Struggle (Post-2018): Broader Fight:** Despite Section 377 repeal, battle for LGBT equality continues, shaping India's societal landscape.
- **2019:** Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act enacted for welfare and rights protection.
- **17 October 2023**: Supreme Court of India rejected same-sex marriage legalization but affirmed LGBT citizens' rights under the constitution, empowering legislatures to enact laws addressing community challenges and regulating rights.

LGBTQIA+ ISSUES IN INDIA

- **Discrimination**: LGBTQIA+ individuals face discrimination in various aspects of life, including employment, housing, healthcare, and education.
- **Social Stigma**: Homophobia and transphobia are prevalent, leading to marginalisation and mental health issues.
- **Lack of Awareness**: Both the LGBTQIA+ community and the general public often lack awareness about rights and resources.
- **Violence and Abuse**: LGBTQIA+ individuals experience violence, harassment, and abuse from family members and society at large. Transgender people are especially vulnerable.
- **Limited Access to Services**: Education, employment opportunities, and healthcare services are often inaccessible due to discrimination and exclusion.
- **Lack of Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Laws**: No laws specifically address discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Limited Representation**: LGBTQIA+ voices are underrepresented in politics and media, hindering progress on legal and social fronts.
- **Implementation Gaps**: Existing legal protections need better implementation to ensure full realisation of LGBTQIA+ rights.
- **Rural LGBTQIA+ Community**: Lack of exposure and internet access restricts their ability to access support and resources.

CONSEQUENCES OF DISCRIMINATION

- **High Dropout Rates**: Discrimination in schools leads to many LGBTQIA+ youth dropping out.
- **Poverty and Exploitation**: Limited job opportunities force many into poverty and risky situations like prostitution.
- **Mental Health Issues**: Social exclusion, discrimination, and violence contribute to depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.
- **Homelessness**: Rejection from families leads to homelessness, especially among LGBTQIA+ youth.

While India has made some progress in LGBTQIA+ rights, significant challenges remain. Creating a more inclusive and accepting society requires addressing social stigma, enacting comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, and ensuring access to education, employment, and healthcare for all.

A study by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India
- **99 % of transgender people** have experienced **social rejections on multiple occasions.**
- **52 % of the community** has faced harassment by their school classmates and **15 percent** from their teachers, resulting in their dropping out of school.
- As per **Census Report 2011, 4.8 lakh people** in India are Transgenders.
- **50%-60% transgenders** have **never attended schools.**
- **89% of Transgenders** said there are **no jobs for even qualified ones.**

STEPS TAKEN FOR LGBTQIA+ WELFARE

Safeguards for Sexual Minorities in India Constitution:
- **Preamble:** Ensures justice, equality of status, and socio-economic-political equality.
- **Article 14 (Right to Equality):** Guarantees equal treatment before the law and prohibits discrimination based on factors like sex.
- **Articles 15 & 16 (Right against Discrimination & Equality of Opportunity):** Prohibit discrimination based on sex, including gender identity and sexual orientation.
- **Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty):** Protects a person's right to life with dignity and autonomy.
- **Article 23 (Right against Exploitation):** Prohibits exploitation and inhuman acts.

Legal Safeguards:
- **The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019:** Prohibits discrimination against transgenders in employment, education, and other areas.

- **The Citizenship Act, 1955:** Doesn't discriminate based on gender identity for acquiring citizenship.
- **The Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969:** Gender-neutral, allowing registration without specifying sex.
- **The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (ITPA), 1956:** Protects both male and female sex workers, including those with indeterminate gender identity.
- **UGC Anti-Ragging Regulations (2009):** Prohibits ragging and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in universities.

Landmark Judgments:
- **Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi (2009):** Declared Section 377 of IPC (criminalising homosexuality) unconstitutional, violating Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21. (Later overturned)
- **Suresh Kumar Koushal v. Naz Foundation (2013):** Re-criminalized homosexuality by overturning the Naz Foundation judgement.
- **National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India (2014):** Recognized transgender as a third gender and guaranteed them equal rights under the Constitution.
- **K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017):** Recognized the Right to Privacy, including the right to sexual orientation.
- **Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018):** Declared Section 377 unconstitutional, legalising consensual same-sex relationships.
- **Arun Kumar v. Inspector General of Registration (2019):** Recognized a marriage between a male and a transwoman.

Government Measures:
- **National Portal for Transgender Persons** - To help a transgender person in applying for a Certificate and Identity card digitally from anywhere in the country.
- **Garima Greh** - To provide shelter to Transgender persons, with basic amenities like shelter, food, medical care and recreational facilities. It will provide support for the capacity-building/skill development of them.
- **Kerala State** - **First state to announce** a **transgender policy.** Launched a continuing education programme called **Samanwaya** aimed at transgender persons. Also directed all universities and affiliated **arts and science colleges to reserve two seats** for transgender people.
- **Sweekruti Scheme (Odisha)** - It's an umbrella scheme to enable the environment to ensure equal opportunities, equity, social justice & empowerment of transgender persons of the state.
- **Smile Scheme**: **Union Minister for Social Justice & Empowerment** has launched the **Central Sector scheme** SMILE: Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise.
  - It is set to provide welfare and rehabilitation to the Transgender community and the people engaged in the act of begging.
  - It includes **two sub-schemes** –
  - **Central Sector Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of persons engaged in the act of Begging:** It will focus on Survey and identification, Mobilisation, Rescue/ Shelter Home and Comprehensive resettlement.
  - **Central Sector Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Persons:**
    - It provides scholarships for the Transgender students
    - It has provisions for Skill Development and Livelihood under the **PM-DAKSH scheme.**
    - The Housing facility in the form of '**Garima Greh**' ensures food, clothing, recreational facilities, skill development opportunities, recreational activities and medical support etc.
    - Provides a comprehensive package in convergence with **PM-JAY** supporting **Gender-Reaffirmation surgeries** through selected hospitals.

Civil Society:
- Popular TV shows such as **Satyamev Jayate** and **The Tara Sharma Show** have helped **raise awareness** among parents about LGBT issues.
- Social media and corporate initiatives have created increasing awareness of LGBT rights.
- **UGC Regulation on Ragging in Higher Educational Institutions**: Prohibits discrimination, bullying and ragging targeted at a student on the ground of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

THE WAY FORWARD

I. Recognition of Fundamental Rights
- **Human Rights Recognition**: Ensure LGBTQ rights are fundamental human rights, covering marriage, adoption, and guardianship.

- **Legal Reforms**: Enact or amend laws to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in areas like marriage, education, and employment.
- **Anti-discrimination Policies**: Implement gender-neutral harassment laws and anti-discrimination policies in both public and private sectors.

II. Government and Legislative Initiatives
- **Combating Stigma**: Implement initiatives to eliminate stigma, discrimination, and abuse against the LGBTQIA+ community.
- **Legal Safeguards**: Formulate new laws or amend existing ones to protect LGBTQ+ rights, particularly those of transgender individuals.

III. Social Awareness and Sensitization
- **Educational Programs**: Implement educational programs to educate people about LGBTQ rights and train staff to address abuse and discrimination.
- **Yogyakarta Principles**: Adopt international human rights standards recognizing freedom of sexual orientation and gender identity.

IV. Next Steps for Society
- **Inclusive Environments**: Challenge stereotypes and promote inclusivity in all aspects of life.
- **Promoting Acceptance**: Encourage societal acceptance through support from educational institutions and Pride month initiatives.

V. The Way Forward
- **Supportive Laws**: Enforce policies and laws to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals from discrimination, hate crimes, and violence.
- **Parental Acceptance**: Encourage parental acceptance to foster a more inclusive society.
- **Equality, Not Special Treatment**: Treat LGBTQIA+ individuals with equality and integrate them fully into collective development.

VI. Specific Needs of the Transgender Community
- **Public Awareness Campaigns**: Eliminate social stigma associated with the transgender community through awareness campaigns.
- **Sensitization Programs**: Train legal and law enforcement systems on transgender issues and take action against perpetrators of violence.
- **Inclusive Approach**: Adopt inclusive policies and regulations to remove barriers to social acceptance for transgender individuals.

This comprehensive **approach** addresses legal, social, and educational aspects to create a more inclusive society for sexual minorities in India.

TRANSGENDER PERSONS (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS) ACT, 2019

The act was enacted with the objective to provide for **protection of rights of transgender people**, their welfare, and other related matters.

KEY PROVISIONS
- **Defines a trans person** as someone whose gender does not match the one assigned at birth.
- **Prohibits discrimination** against them in employment, education, healthcare and other services.
- **Allows self-perception of gender identity.** But mandates their recognition on the basis of a certificate of identity issued by a district magistrate.
- **It criminalises begging.**
- **It prescribes offences against transgender persons along with the penalties.**
- Established **National Council for Transgender Persons** - The **Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment will be Chairperson** and Union Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment will be Vice-Chairperson. The council has following **functions** -
  - To advise the Central Government on the formulation of policies, programmes, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons.
  - To monitor and evaluate the impact of policies and programmes designed for achieving equality and full participation of transgender persons.
  - To redress the grievances of transgender persons.

CRITICISM

- **Ignore NALSA judgement.**
  - The act goes **against the very crux of the NALSA judgement** as it does not allow for self-determination of transgender status.
  - The Act also **does not offer the reservations in public employment** and education as had been directed by an earlier Supreme Court judgement.
- **Silent on civil Rights** - Civil Rights such as marriage, adoption, succession are ignored. The Act is also unclear on the trans individuals' access to welfare benefits.
- **Inequal Treatment** - The act provides for maximum two years' imprisonment for sexually assaulting a transgender person, whereas the minimum penalty for raping a cisgender woman is 10 years.
- **Focuses more on Trans women and Hijra** - There is **little emphasis on the intersex, gender queer and transmen.**
- **Criminalise Begging** - Without providing an alternative for livelihood for transgenders the act criminalises begging on which most of them survive.

WAY FORWARD

- LGBT community is increasingly **gaining tolerance and acceptance**, especially in large cities but for most LGBT people in India, home and school, acceptance of their sexuality and **freedom to openly express their gender choices** still remain a constant struggle.
- Thus, the government needs to provide equal constitutional rights to empower them, reduce social stigmas and improve their socio-economic position.

TRANSGENDER PERSONS (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS) RULES, 2020

- **Recognition and Non-Discrimination**: Rules under the Act prohibit discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, property rights, and public services.
- **Identity Recognition**: Provides a right to self-perceived gender identity and mandates district magistrates to issue identity certificates without medical examination.
- **Medical Intervention**: Guidelines for revised identity certificates post-sex reassignment surgery, with medical certification.
- **Equal Opportunity Policies**: Mandates establishments to formulate equal opportunity policies for transgender persons, fostering inclusivity.
- **Infrastructure Requirements**: Encourages inclusive facilities like separate wards in hospitals and unisex toilets.
- **National Council for Transgender Persons (NCT)**: Advises on policy formulation, monitoring, and grievance redressal, ensuring transgender rights protection.
- **Offences and Penalties**: Offences like forced labour, denial of access to public places, or abuse carry imprisonment of six months to two years, plus fines.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR TRANS-GENDERS

National Portal for Transgender Persons:

- **Launched** to facilitate digital application for **certificates** and **identity cards**.
- Enables tracking of application status and **grievance redressal**.
- Strict timelines for processing applications ensure **transparency**.

National Council for Transgender Persons:

- Constituted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- Members include government officials, representatives from transgender communities, and NGOs.
- Aims to advise on policies, monitor their impact, and address grievances.

Garima Greh:

- Scheme for setting up **shelter homes** for destitute transgender persons.
- Pilot project launched in Vadodara, Gujarat, in collaboration with the Lakshya Trust.

Allowance for Transgender Persons:

- Subsistence allowance of **Rs. 1500** provided to each transgender person.
- NGOs tasked with spreading awareness about the assistance.

Counselling Services Helpline:

- Free helpline (**8882133897**) established by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- Professional psychologists provide counselling services Monday to Saturday.

Vaccination of Transgenders:

- The Ministry ensures no discrimination at vaccination centres.
- Mobile vaccination centres initiated in states like Haryana and Assam.

State Laws to Protect Transgender Population:

- Examples include Odisha's **'Sweekruti'** scheme, Kerala's transgender policy, Tamil Nadu's welfare policy, and Chandigarh's transgender board.

WAY FORWARD

- **Public awareness campaigns** and sensitization at the school level are crucial.
- **Legal** and **law enforcement systems** must be empowered and sensitised.
- The National Council for Transgender Persons plays a crucial role in increasing awareness and fostering acceptance.
- **Inclusive policies** and regulations, along with efforts to change negative attitudes, are essential for advancing transgender rights and welfare.

ISSUES IN NEWS

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN INDIA: A LEGAL OVERVIEW
Key Observations of the Supreme Court:

- **Same-Sex Marriage:** The Court ruled that there is no unqualified right to same-sex marriage under the Constitution.
- **Civil Unions:** Legal status for civil unions was not granted for same-sex couples (3:2 verdict).
- **Transgender Persons:** Transgender persons can marry under existing laws based on their identified gender.
- **Parliament's Domain:** The authority to legalize same-sex marriage lies with Parliament, according to the Court.

SAME SEX MARRIAGE
SUPREME COURT JUDGMENT IN A NUTSHELL

MAJORITY OPINION	MINORITY OPINION
No right to marriage;	No right to marriage;
No right to civil union; it can be only through laws;	Have right to civil union;
No right to adopt children;	Have right to adopt children;
Have the right to choose their own partner;	Transgender persons have right to marry.
Transgender persons have right to marry.	

RIGHTS OF SAME-SEX COUPLES

- **Right to Cohabit:** Same-sex couples have the right to cohabitate, as acknowledged by the Court.
- **Discrimination:** Prevention of discrimination against same-sex couples is emphasised by the Court.

LEGALITY OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGES IN INDIA

- **Statutory Right:** Marriage is a statutory right, though not expressly recognized as a fundamental right.
- **Judicial Interpretation:** Previous Supreme Court decisions highlighted the right to marry and LGBTQ+ individuals' equal rights.
- **Legal Authority**: The Constitution empowers both **Parliament** and the **States** to enact marriage regulations.
- **Adoption**: While current adoption regulations are seen as discriminatory to the queer community, the court refused to strike down **CARA regulations**. The **Union Government** pledged to form a committee to determine benefits for queer unions.
- **Protection from Natal Family Violence**: The **Chief Justice** recognized "atypical families" and directed police not to force queer individuals to return to their families.
- **Civil Union**: Refers to a legal status granting same-sex couples rights and responsibilities similar to those of married couples.

SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT (SMA) 1954

- **Features:** The SMA facilitates civil marriage regardless of religious background, promoting secularism.
- **Interpretation:** The Court deliberated on whether the SMA can be made gender-neutral to include same-sex couples.
- Enacted to facilitate civil weddings for couples of different faiths.
- Conditions include age requirements, consent, mental fitness, and prohibition of certain relationships.

- Parties must give notice to the marriage officer, objections can be raised, and appeals can be made to the district court.
- Marriage under SMA results in severance from the family for some religions.

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

FOR
- **Equality:** All individuals deserve equal rights and protections under the law, regardless of sexual orientation.
- **Fundamental Rights:** The right to marry and choose one's partner is argued to be intrinsic to various articles of the Indian Constitution.
- **Strengthening Families & Communities:** Marriage provides social and economic benefits that should extend to same-sex couples.

AGAINST
- **Religious & Cultural Beliefs:** Many oppose same-sex marriage due to traditional views on marriage.
- **Procreation:** Some argue marriage is primarily for procreation, which same-sex couples cannot achieve biologically.
- **Legal Issues:** Concerns exist about legal complexities arising from same-sex marriage, such as inheritance and adoption rights.

OTHER KEY POINTS:
- **Civil Unions:** A minority opinion favoured extending civil unions to same-sex couples, offering some legal rights.
- **Transgender Rights:** The court upheld the right of transgender persons to marry under existing laws.

Supreme Court Verdicts on the Right to Marry:
- **2014 NALSA judgment:** Recognized transgender people's fundamental rights.
- **KS Puttaswamy vs. Union of India (2017):** Upheld the right to privacy.
- **Navtej Singh Johar vs. Union of India (2018):** Decriminalized homosexuality by repealing Section 377 IPC.
- **Shafin Jahan vs Union of India:** Recognized the right to choose one's partner.
- **Shakti Vahini vs Union of India:** Recognized the right to choose a life partner as a fundamental right.

- **Adoption Rights:** The court did not grant adoption rights to same-sex couples but acknowledged discriminatory regulations.
- **Committee for Queer Rights:** The government might form a committee to address issues faced by same-sex couples.

CHALLENGES AND PATH AHEAD
- **Discrimination:** Prevention of discrimination against the queer community in access to goods, services, and legal rights is crucial.
- **Awareness and Legislation:** Raising awareness, enacting legal reforms, and establishing guidelines to prevent harassment and discrimination are essential.
- **Legal Precedent:** Legal challenges can pave the way for the recognition of same-sex marriages, requiring collaboration and societal acceptance.

FUTURE OUTLOOK
- **Legal Challenges:** The LGBTQIA+ community may seek a legal precedent for same-sex marriage through further legal battles.
- **Legislative Efforts:** Parliament could enact laws legalizing same-sex marriage.
- **Public Awareness:** Raising awareness about LGBTQIA+ rights is crucial for societal acceptance.

WAY FORWARD

- **Awareness:** Promote public awareness and acceptance of LGBTQ+ rights.

- **Legal Reforms:** Amend laws like the SMA to allow same-sex marriages or introduce alternative legal recognition.

- **Dialogue and Engagement:** Foster dialogue with religious leaders and communities to bridge gaps in understanding.
- **Collaboration:** Stakeholders, including the LGBTQ+ community, government, and civil society, should collaborate for progress.

The Supreme Court's decision is a setback for same-sex marriage in India. However, it opens doors for further legal battles and legislative action. Achieving marriage equality will require a multi-pronged approach, including legal reforms, public awareness campaigns, and collaboration among stakeholders.

MINORITIES

DEFINING MINORITIES

- The National Commission for Minorities Act defines a **minority** as "a community notified as such by the Central government."
- **Article 1 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.** They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."
- The Indian Constitution acknowledges **religious** and **linguistic minorities** but does not provide a specific definition of "minority."
- **Religious Minorities:** Currently, six communities are notified minorities: Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, and Jains (Jains were added in 2014).
- **Linguistic Minorities:** Not explicitly defined in the Constitution, but can be inferred based on regional demographics.
- Supreme Court rulings suggest minorities are identified at the state level, not nationally (T.M.A Pai Foundation case).

GLOBAL CONTEXT

- The rise of anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiments is observed worldwide, leading to incidents of hate crimes and discrimination.
- Instances like the "El Paso" massacre and anti-minority attacks in Europe highlight the challenges faced by minority communities globally.

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA: DEMOGRAPHICS AND DISTRIBUTION
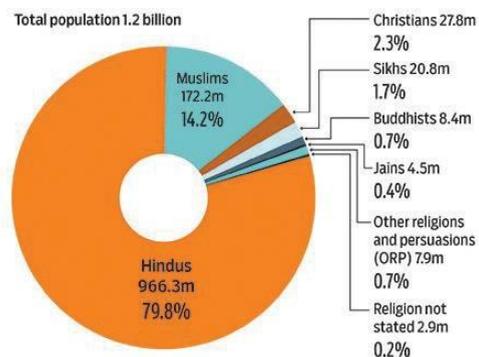
Key Statistics (2011 Census)

- **Total Minority Population:** 19.3% of India
- **Largest Minority:** Muslims (14.2%)
- **Other Minorities:** Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.7%), Buddhists (0.7%), Jains (0.4%), Parsis (0.006%)

Geographic Distribution

- **Nationally:** Minorities are spread throughout India, with some states having higher concentrations.
- **Rural vs. Urban:** A slightly higher percentage of minorities reside in urban areas compared to rural areas (16% vs. 12% for Muslims, 3% vs. 2% for Christians).
- **Minority Concentration Districts:** The Indian government identified 121 districts with at least 25% minority population (excluding states where minorities are the majority).

Examples of Concentration

- **Muslims:** Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan
- **Christians:** Nagaland (88%), Mizoram (87%), Meghalaya (74%), Goa (25%), Kerala (18.4%)
- **Sikhs:** Punjab (58%)
- **Buddhists:** Sikkim (27%), Arunachal Pradesh (12%), Maharashtra (6%)
- **Jains:** Maharashtra (1.3%), Gujarat (1%), Delhi (1%)

Total population 1.2 billion

Christians 27.8m 2.3%
Sikhs 20.8m 1.7%
Buddhists 8.4m 0.7%
Jains 4.5m 0.4%
Other religions and persuasions (ORP) 7.9m 0.7%
Religion not stated 2.9m 0.2%
Muslims 172.2m 14.2%
Hindus 966.3m 79.8%

Fig: Split up religions among the Indian population

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA (BASED ON 66TH ROUND NSS SURVEY)

Indicator	Rural	Urban	Best Performing Religion	Worst Performing Religion
Literacy Rate (2011 Census)	-	-	Christians (Highest)	Muslims (Lowest)
School Attendance	Lower	Higher	Christians (Highest)	Not Available
Educational Attainment (Secondary & Above)	Lower	Higher	Christians (Highest)	Not Available
Labor Force Participation (Gender Gap)	Wider	Narrower	Christians (Lowest Gap)	Not Available
Main Source of Income (Rural)	Self-employment	Not Applicable	Sikhs (Agriculture)	Muslims (Rural Labor)
Main Source of Income (Urban)	Self-employment	Salary	Christians (Salary)	Muslims (Self-employment)
Average Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE)	Lower	Higher	Sikhs (Highest)	Muslims (Lowest)
Land Ownership (Small Holdings < 0.4 Hectares)	Higher	Lower	-	-
Land Ownership (Large Holdings > 4 Hectares)	Lower	Lower	Sikhs (Highest)	Not Available

PROBLEMS FACED BY MINORITIES

- **Prejudice & Discrimination**
  - o **Prevalence of Prejudices:** Common stereotypes such as "Hindus are cowards and Muslims are rowdies" contribute to widening social distances among religious communities.
  - o **Global Issue:** Discrimination against minorities, especially women, is a global problem.
  - o **Disproportionate Marginalisation:** Minority women suffer disproportionately from economic, social, and political marginalisation, facing abuse, discrimination, and stereotypes.
- **Problem of Identity:** Differences in socio-cultural practices and history lead to identity issues, making adjustment with the majority community challenging.
- **Problem of Security:** Small numbers relative to the rest of society and different identities foster feelings of insecurity regarding life, assets, and well-being, particularly during strained relations between majority and minority communities.
- **Problem Relating to Equity:** Discrimination against minority communities often results in the deprivation of developmental opportunities, fostering a sense of inequity.
- **Problem of Communal Tensions and Riots:** Communal tensions and riots, increasingly prevalent since independence, threaten minority interests during outbreaks.
- **Lack of Representation in Civil Service and Politics:** Despite constitutional provisions for equality, minority communities, especially Muslims, feel neglected in civil service and politics.
- **Problem of Providing Protection:** Minorities, especially during communal violence, seek police protection, but it's difficult and expensive for governments to provide comprehensive security.
- **Problem Relating to the Introduction of Common Civil Code:** Introducing a common civil code faces opposition from some communities, further straining relations between religious communities.

PROBLEMS FACED BY MINORITY WOMEN IN INDIA

- **Gender Inequality:** Minority women face multiple challenges due to gender inequality and lack of development within their communities.
- **Vulnerability:** Being part of a minority community and facing a male-dominated society makes minority women more vulnerable to abuse and discrimination.

- **Inequality Across Various Aspects:** Minority women face unequal treatment in education, job opportunities, security, and healthcare compared to their male counterparts and majority communities.

CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS FOR MINORITIES

- **Article 14: Equality Before the Law**
  - Guarantees people's right to **equality before the law** and **equal protection of the laws**.
- **Article 15 (1) & (2): Prohibition of Discrimination**
  - Prohibits discrimination against citizens on grounds of **religion**, **race**, **caste**, **sex**, or **place of birth**.
- **Article 15 (4): Special Provisions**
  - Grants the authority to the State to make **special provisions for the advancement** of socially and educationally backward classes of citizens.
- **Article 16(1) & (2): Equality of Opportunity**
  - Ensures citizens' right to **equality of opportunity** in matters relating to **employment** or **appointment to any office** under the State.
- **Article 16(4): Reservation of Appointments**
  - Authorises the State to make provisions for the **reservation of appointments or posts** in favour of any backward class of citizens.
- **Article 25(1): Freedom of Religion**
  - Grants people the **freedom of conscience** and the right to **freely profess, practice, and propagate religion**.
- **Article 26: Right of Religious Denomination**
  - Ensures the right of every **religious denomination** to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes.
- **Article 27: Prohibition Against Compulsion**
  - Prohibits compelling any person to pay taxes for the promotion of any particular religion.
- **Article 28: Freedom as to Attendance at Religious Instruction**
  - Ensures people's freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or worship in educational institutions.
- **Article 29(1): Right to Conserve Distinct Language or Culture**
  - Grants the right of any section of the citizens to conserve its distinct language, script, or culture.
- **Article 29(2): Right to Admission**
  - Restricts the denial of admission to any citizen to any educational institution maintained or aided by the State based solely on religion, race, caste, language, or any of them.
- **Article 30(1): Right of Religious and Linguistic Minorities**
  - Grants the right of all religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- **Article 30(2): Freedom from Discrimination**
  - Ensures freedom of minority-managed educational institutions from discrimination in receiving aid from the State.
- **Article 38(2): Obligation to Eliminate Inequalities**
  - Obligates the State to endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities, and opportunities among individuals and groups of people.
- **Article 46: Promotion of Weaker Sections**
  - Requires the State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people.
- **Article 347: Special Provision for Language**
  - Provides special provisions relating to the language spoken by a section of the population of any State.
- **Article 350 A: Facilities for Mother-Tongue Instruction**
  - Provides facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage.
- **Article 350 B: Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities**
  - Establishes provisions for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities and outlines his duties.

LEGISLATIVE PROTECTION

- **National Commission for Minority Act, 1992:**
  - Established the **National Commission on Minority** by the Union Government.
  - Consists of a chairperson and 6 members, with at least 5 belonging to **minority communities**.

- **Waqf Act:**
  - Governs donations in the **Muslim community.**
  - **Central Waqf Council** manages the administration of waqfs in India.
  - **Waqf** is a permanent dedication of movable or immovable properties for religious, pious, or charitable purposes.
- **Citizenship Amendment Act:**
  - Grants citizenship to persecuted minorities from **Pakistan**, **Bangladesh**, and **Afghanistan** within 6 years instead of 12.
  - Eligible minorities include **Hindus**, **Christians**, **Sikhs**, **Jains**, **Buddhists**, and **Parsis** (excluding Hindus) who migrated before 2014.
- **Ministry of Minority Affairs:**
  - Formed in 2006 to address issues related to notified **minority communities**.
  - Formulates policies, plans, and coordinates development programs for minority communities.
- **Ministry of External Affairs:** Manages matters related to the **Haj Committee**.
- **Ministry of Human Resource and Development:**
  - Implements schemes for quality education in **madrasas**.
  - Focuses on infrastructure development for **minority institutions**.
- **National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions:**
  - Statutory body safeguarding educational institutions established by **religious minorities**.
  - Comprises a chairman (High Court Judge) and two others nominated by the Central government.
- **National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation:**
  - Aims to promote economic and developmental activities for minorities.
  - Registered as a non-profit company under the **Companies Act**.

International Norms:
- Protection of minority rights is ensured under **Article 27** of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- The "**United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities**" sets standards and guidance for securing minority rights.

GOVERNMENT WELFARE MEASURES FOR MINORITIES

Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities
- Formulated by the Government of India, the Prime Minister's New 15-Point Programme aims to address the welfare needs of minorities.
- **Objective**: Ensure that an appropriate percentage of priority sector lending targets minority communities, and extend benefits of government schemes to the underprivileged, including disadvantaged minority sections.
- Implemented by Central Ministries/Departments through State Governments/Union Territories, emphasising the allocation of development projects in minority concentration districts.

Educational Empowerment
- **Scholarship Schemes:** Pre-Matric Scholarship, Post-Matric Scholarship and Merit-cum-Means based Scholarship.
- **Maulana Azad National Fellowship (MANF):** For students of M.Phil/Ph.D degree.
- **Padho Pardesh**: Scheme providing Interest Subsidy on Educational Loans for Overseas Studies for Minority Community Students.
- **Naya Savera**: Free Coaching and Allied Scheme.
- **Nai Udaan**: Support for Students preparing for Main Examinations after clearing Prelims conducted by UPSC/SSC, State Public Service Commission (PSC), etc.

Economic Empowerment
- **Skill Development**
  - **Seekho aur Kamao (Learn & Earn)**
  - **USTTAD (Upgrading the Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development)**
  - **Nai Manzil**: Bridge course addressing academic and skill development gaps between madrasa students and mainstream counterparts.
- Concessional credit through **National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC)**

Infrastructure Development
- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK)**

Special Needs
- **Nai Roshni**: Leadership Development of Minority Women

- **Hamari Dharohar:** Preservation of Heritage of minority communities in India
- **Jiyo Parsi**: Scheme for Containing Population Decline of Parsis in India
- **Waqf Management**
  - **Qaumi Waqf Board Taraqiati Scheme**: Computerization of Records and Strengthening of State Waqf Boards
  - **Shahari Waqf Sampatti Vikas Yojana**: Grants-in-Aid to Waqf for Urban Waqf Properties Development

Research/Studies, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Development Schemes Including Publicity Support to Institutions

- Corpus Fund to Maulana Azad Education Foundation (MAEF)
- Equity to National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC)
- Grant-in-Aid Scheme to State Channelizing Agencies of National Minorities Development & Finance Corporation

COMMITTEES FOR WELFARE OF MINORITIES

Sachar Committee:

The Sachar Committee, commissioned in 2005 to assess the socio-economic and educational status of Muslims in India, revealed stark disparities compared to the general population. The committee submitted its report in 2006.

Breakdown of its key findings:

- **Educational Deprivation:**
  - **High dropout rates:** 25% of Muslim children (6-14 years) never attended school or dropped out, highlighting significant educational gaps.
  - **Limited access to higher education:** Only 4% of undergraduates and 8% of postgraduates in premier colleges were Muslims, indicating a lack of access to quality education.
- **Gender Disparity:**
  - **Low female workforce participation:** Only 25% of Muslim women were employed compared to 80% of Hindu women, reflecting limited opportunities for female empowerment.
- **Employment Challenges:**
  - **Informal sector dominance:** Only 27% of urban Muslim workers had regular jobs compared to 49% of upper-caste Hindus, suggesting a concentration in vulnerable informal sectors.
  - **Overrepresentation in street vending:** 12% of Muslim male workers were street vendors compared to the national average of 8%, indicating limited access to formal employment opportunities.
  - **Underrepresentation in defence forces:** The share of Muslims in the defence forces was only 4%, raising concerns about representation in key sectors.
- **Recommendations:**
  - The report recommended targeted interventions in education, employment, and healthcare to address these disparities.
  - It called for increased investment in Muslim-majority districts, scholarships, skill development programs, and quotas in government jobs.

Rangnath Mishra Commission:

The Ranganath Mishra Commission, established in 2004, aimed to improve the socio-economic conditions of religious and linguistic minorities in India. The commission submitted the report to the Government on 21 May 2007. Here's a breakdown of key recommendations focusing on **educational and economic rights**:

- **Strengthening Minority Educational Institutions:**
  - **Empowering the Commission:** Expand the **composition, powers, and functions** of the Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, transforming it into a robust **watchdog** for enforcing minority educational rights.
- **Enhanced Financial Support:**
  - **National Coordination Committee:** Establish a **National-Level Coordination Committee** involving representatives of nationalised banks and financial institutions under the RBI's supervision to **monitor and facilitate credit flow** towards minority communities.
- **Reservations in Education and Employment:**
  - **Central Government Jobs:** Implement **10% reservation for Muslims and 5% for other minorities** in central government jobs, ensuring wider representation.
  - **Government Schemes:** Extend **reservations** in popular schemes like MNREGA, allocating **10% for Muslims and 5% for other minorities**, aiming for equitable participation.

- **Additional Recommendations:**
  - **Regular Monitoring:** Conduct **regular assessments and evaluations** of existing schemes and policies to gauge their effectiveness in addressing minority needs.
  - **Budgetary Allocation:** Increase the **budgetary allocation** dedicated to minority welfare programs, considering the significant minority population in India.

Global Minority Index

Global Minority Report published by the Centre for Policy Analysis (CPA), ranks countries based on their treatment of religious minorities. India tops the index among 110 countries in 2022.

Key Findings:
- **India's Ranking**: India leads, followed by South Korea, Japan, Panama, and the United States.
- **Evaluation Parameters**: The report assesses countries based on constitutional provisions, government policies, and legal frameworks.
- **India's Minority Policy**: India promotes diversity and lacks outlawed religious sects.
- **Inclusivity**: India's non-discriminatory approach towards religions and sects sets a potential model.
- **UN Recognition**: India's minority policy is recognized by the UN as inclusive and non-discriminatory.

WAY FORWARD

Collaborative Solutions:
- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Actively pursue PPPs to **leverage private sector resources and expertise** for sustainable funding and innovative education initiatives for minorities. Encourage **corporate social responsibility programs** targeted at minority education and skill development.
- **Community-led Initiatives: Empower local communities** to manage and participate in education programs, cultural preservation projects, and conflict resolution mechanisms. This fosters **ownership and accountability**, boosting their effectiveness.

Digital Inclusion:
- **Targeted Digital Literacy Programs:** Design and implement **digital literacy programs** tailored to the specific needs and languages of minority communities. This can be done through partnerships with community organisations and NGOs, ensuring **culturally appropriate and accessible learning**.
- **Bridging the Digital Divide:** Invest in **infrastructure and technology** to ensure equitable access to the internet and digital devices in minority communities. This allows them to **participate fully in the digital economy and access online education, healthcare, and other essential services**.

Interfaith Dialogue and Harmony:
- **Promote Interfaith Dialogue:** Support and encourage **interfaith dialogue programs, workshops, and exchanges** at various levels, from youth groups to religious leaders. This fosters **understanding, empathy, and cooperation** between different communities.
- **Community-based Conflict Resolution:** Establish **accessible and culturally sensitive conflict resolution mechanisms** at the local level, staffed by trained mediators and counsellors. This helps address disputes peacefully and **build trust within communities**.

Cultural Preservation and Economic Empowerment:
- **Traditional Knowledge Preservation: Document and support** the preservation of traditional knowledge systems and practices of minority communities. This can be done through **digital archives, educational programs, and cultural festivals**, fostering cultural identity and pride.
- **Social Impact Investments:** Encourage impact investing in minority-owned businesses and startups. This provides access to capital and fosters economic independence and job creation within these communities.

Policy and Advocacy:
- **Increase Budgetary Allocation:** Advocate for a **significant increase in the budget allocation** for minority welfare programs, reflecting the size and needs of minority communities.
- **Ensure Equitable Representation:** Support measures to increase minority representation in government bodies and legislatures, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are addressed effectively.
- **Protect Minority Rights:** Uphold and protect the constitutional and legal rights of minorities, including freedom of religion, cultural expression, and access to education and employment.

These are ongoing efforts requiring continuous evaluation and adaptation. By actively engaging with diverse stakeholders, implementing these strategies with sensitivity and inclusivity, and working towards long-term systemic change, we can create a more equitable and prosperous future for all communities in India.

DOMESTIC WORK & WORKERS: MEANING

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) **Domestic Workers Convention**, 2011, Article 1:

(a) The term 'domestic work' means work performed in or for a household or households;

(b) The term 'domestic worker' means any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship;

(c) A person who performs domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and not on an occupational basis is not a domestic worker. Domestic workers are those workers who perform work in or for a private household or households. They provide direct and indirect care services, and as such are key members of the care economy.

Types of Domestic Workers

- A domestic worker may work on full-time or part-time basis.
  - They may be employed by a single household or through or by a service provider.
  - They may be residing in the household of the employer (live-in worker) or may be living in his or her own residence (live-out).
  - **Migrant Domestic Worker:** A domestic worker that may be working in a country of which she/he is not a national.
- **Higher Contribution by Females:** Of the 75.6 million domestic workers worldwide, 76.2 percent are women, meaning that a quarter of domestic workers are men.

Estimated numbers: Domestic Workers in India

- 4.8 million domestic workers
- 2.9 million female domestic workers (ILO)
- Percentage of women's total employment in domestic work: 3.5%
- Rank of domestic workers among working categories: 3rd
- Percentage of domestic workers working in urban areas: 66%
- Percentage increase in the number of domestic workers in the last decade: 75%

Challenges Faced by Domestic Workers:

- **Substandard Working Conditions:** Denial of **minimum wages** and **social security coverage.** Vulnerability to **exploitation**, particularly for live-in workers.
- **Legal Protection Gaps**
  - Absence of specific Acts for **legal protection**
  - Proposed bills awaiting approval since 2010 and 2017
- **Implementation Challenges**
  - Inadequate enforcement of laws like the **Minimum Wages Act**
  - Lack of compliance with **social security mandates**
- **Insufficient Data**
  - Widely varying estimates from 4 million to 50 million domestic workers
  - Hampers planning and policymaking efforts
- **Role of Informal Placement Agencies**
  - Lack of scrutiny leading to **exploitation** by profit-focused agencies
  - Prioritisation of profits over **worker rights**
- **Neglect of Domestic Labour Rights**
  - Legislation fails to recognize domestic work as legitimate '**work**'
  - Impedes workers' rights and protections
- **Limited Unionisation**
  - Low unionisation rates diminish bargaining power and support in cases of **exploitation**

IMPACTS AND VULNERABILITIES OF INFORMAL SECTOR WORKERS

- **Lack of Social Security:** Informal sector workers lack benefits, leaving them vulnerable to economic and political shocks.
- **Economic Vulnerability:** Casual workers, many migrants, are susceptible to economic shocks due to low-paid, unskilled jobs.
- **Structural Disadvantages:** Limited literacy and skills contribute to exploitation, worsened by discrimination in urban labour markets.
- **Government Failure:** Urban informal workers face wage inequality and lack of gainful employment opportunities, perpetuating precarious conditions.

Draft National Policy on Domestic Workers: Under consideration by the Central Government, key features include:

- **Inclusion in Legislation:** Proposal to incorporate domestic workers into existing labour laws.
- **Right to Register:** Workers granted the right to register, facilitating access to benefits.
- **Formation of Associations:** Empowering workers to form associations and unions for collective bargaining.
- **Minimum Wages and Social Security:** Ensuring minimum wages, social security, and protection from abuse.
- **Access to Justice:** Providing access to courts and tribunals for dispute resolution.
- **Regulation of Placement Agencies:** Establishing mechanisms for oversight and regulation of placement agencies to prevent exploitation.

MEASURES TAKEN TO SUPPORT DOMESTIC WORKERS

Constitutional Safeguards:

- Article **23** (Fundamental Rights) prohibits human trafficking, forced labour, and begar, safeguarding individuals' rights against exploitation.
- Article **39(e)** (Directive Principles) encourages the state to prevent abuse of individuals' health and strength, ensuring work suitability based on age and strength.

Legislative Inclusions:

- **Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008** provides social security to domestic workers.
- **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013** addresses workplace harassment, including domestic work settings.
- **Child Labour Act** restricts children under 14 from engaging in domestic work.
- **Juvenile Justice Act, 2000** rescues workers under 18 from exploitative conditions.

Government Schemes: Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) extended to cover domestic workers, ensuring health coverage. **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana** encompasses domestic workers for comprehensive health benefits.

Digital Initiatives: e-Shram Portal aims to register 38 crore unorganised workers, including domestic workers.

Voluntary Pledge for Employers: Employers' Pledge for Decent Work launched and adopted by major employer organisations, promoting fair work practices for domestic workers.

Global Collaborations:

- **Palermo Protocol** integrated into Indian law, defines and combats trafficking in persons.
- **ILO** and **European Commission Collaboration** develops operational indicators to combat human trafficking.
- **ILO Convention 29 (1930)** defines forced labour.
- **ILO Convention 189** advocates for decent working conditions for domestic workers globally.

THE WAY FORWARD

- **All India Survey on Domestic Workers (DW)** initiated by the Union Minister for Labour and Employment, aiming to gather comprehensive data.**Way Forward for Supporting Domestic Workers:**
- **Enhanced Social Welfare Schemes:** Strengthen existing schemes to protect informal sector workers from economic disruptions and provide financial aid under Garib Kalyan Yojana.
- **Explore Agri-Value Chains and Utilise Excess Grain Stocks:** Engage returning migrants in building new agricultural value chains for employment opportunities and distribute excess grain stocks from government godowns to benefit migrant workers.
- **Scale-up "One Nation, One Ration Card" Scheme:** Expand access to subsidised grains in urban areas, supporting migrant workers, and ensuring food security.
- **Stronger Social and Political Commitment and National Policy on Domestic Workers:** Address exploitation and abuse faced by domestic workers through stronger commitment and establish a binding national policy framework.
- **Standardisation of Work Categories and Improved Data Management:** Define types and workloads for different domestic worker categories to determine minimum wages effectively and ensure reliable data collection on migrant workers for understanding domestic worker demographics.

6 HEALTH G NUTRITION

Health along with education is a foundational investment in **human capital and in economic growth**. Its importance lies in the simple fact that it multiplies the productivity of an individual and the nation, as a whole. To paint the picture on the other side; without good health, children are unable to go to school and adults are unable to go to work. Therefore, the world over there is a great emphasis on health and education.

HEALTH

- **Access to timely, acceptable, and affordable health care of appropriate quality is** the right of every person.
- **The WHO Constitution (1946) envisages** "the highest attainable standard of health as a fundamental right of every human being."
- **SDG 3 is to** "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages".

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

The Indian constitution also realises the value of healthy citizenry and therefore has following provisions:

• **Article 39 (E) -** Directs the State to secure the health of workers, men, women and children. • **Article 42 -** Directs the State to create just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. • **Article 47 -** State to raise the nutrition levels and standard of living of people and to improve public health.	• **Article 243G -** Endows the Panchayats and Municipalities to strengthen public health under Article 243G. • **Fundamental Right -** The SC in Bandhua Mukti Morcha v Union of India & Others interpreted **the right to health under Article 21.** • **SC Judgment-** In State of Punjab & others v Mohinder Singh Chawla the SC reaffirmed that the right to health is fundamental to **the right to life.**

KEY FACTS

World Malaria Report, 2022
• **Malaria Progress in India:**
  o India achieved an 85.34% reduction in malaria morbidity and a 94% decrease in malaria mortality between 2000 and 2020.
  o This progress signifies a substantial decline in malaria cases, aligning with Goal 6 of the Millennium Development Goals.
• **Regional Context:**
  o India contributed to 83% of malaria cases in the WHO South-East Asia Region.
• **Global Achievements:**
  o Sri Lanka attained malaria-free certification in 2016 and maintains its status.
  o China and El Salvador were certified malaria-free by WHO in 2021.
  o The Islamic Republic of Iran achieved three consecutive years of zero indigenous cases in 2020.
• **WHO Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016–2030 Update:**
  o WHO updated the Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016–2030 in 2021, incorporating insights from the global malaria response from 2016 to 2020.
Lessons learned include addressing stalled progress, navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, and implementing a high burden to high impact approach.
	• **Sample Registration System (2020) Findings:**
	  o The Neonatal Mortality Rate decreased by 2 points, from 22 per 1,000 live births in 2019 to 20 per 1,000 live births in 2020, marking a 9.1% annual decline.
	  o Infant Mortality Rate saw a 2-point decline, dropping to 28 per 1,000 live births in 2020 from 30 per 1,000 live births in 2019.
	  o The Under-5 mortality rate for females surpasses that of males.
	• **Disease Burden in India:**
	  o In 2017, India recorded around 9.7 million deaths and 486 million DALYs (Disability-Adjusted Life Years).
	  o More than one-third of national DALYs were attributed to communicable, maternal, perinatal, and nutritional disorders (Lancet Report).
	  o The contribution of major non-communicable disease groups to the overall disease burden has risen across India since 1990.
	  o In 2016, three of the five leading individual causes of disease burden in India were non-communicable diseases.
	  o Household air pollution accounted for 5% of India's total disease burden in 2016, while outdoor air pollution contributed 6%.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

Indicator	NFHS-5 (2019-20)	Sample Registration System, 2020
Total Fertility Rate (TFR): number of children per woman	2.0	2.3
Full immunisation in kids aged 12-23 months	76%	-
Sex Ratio (females per 1000 males)	1,020	-
Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR): Number of deaths among all live births during the first 28 days of life expressed per 1000 live births	24.9	26
Infant Mortality Rate (IMR): Death of an infant before their first birthday	35.2	39
Institutional Births	89%	-

NATIONAL HEALTH ACCOUNT (NHA) ESTIMATES, 2018-19

Indicator	Findings
Total Health Expenditure (THE) as a %age of GDP and per capita	Decreased from 4% (2013-14) to 3.2% (2018-19)
Current Health Expenditure (CHE) as a %age of THE	Decreased from 93% (2013-14) to 90.6% (2018-19)
Out of Pocket Expenditure (OOPE) as a %age of THE	Decreased from 60% (2013-14) to 48.2% (2018-19)
Social Security Expenditure (SSE) on health as %age of THE	Increased from 6% (2013-14) to 9.6% (2018-19)

HEALTH STRUCTURE IN INDIA

- The healthcare system is organised into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.
- India has a mixed health-care system, inclusive of public and private health-care service providers.

CHALLENGES IN THE HEALTH SECTOR

Despite health being one of the most important aspects of human existence, health services in India suffer from multiple issues and challenges. Some of them are:

- **Policy and Governance Challenges:**
  - **Poor investment in health -** According to the Economic Survey 2022-23, India's expenditure on healthcare touched 2.1 % of GDP in FY23 and 2.2% in FY22, against 1.6% in FY21. This is among the lowest in the world while in developed countries, it is somewhere between 10-18 percent.
  - **Poor governance of the health sector -** Malpractices such as overbilling, unnecessary diagnostic tests and surgical procedures etc are prevalent in hospitals. There is also a lack of accountability across both private and public clinics in India.
  - **Inter-state variation in health expenditure –** Developed states like Kerala, Delhi spend more than the poorer states such as Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh etc.
- **Infrastructural Challenges:**
  - **Lack of basic infrastructure:** According to the NITI Aayog report 2021 titled 'Reimagining Healthcare in India through Blended Finance', 50% of India's population has access to 35% of hospital beds, thus indicating a strong need to strengthen healthcare infrastructure.
  - **Unequal public health systems:** According to the Rural Health Statistics from MoHFW 2021, **there are a total of 5439 Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs) in the urban areas** and of 3966 PHCs in the tribal area

- **Resource Constraints:**
  - Inadequate number of trained health professionals: A 2021 WHO report highlighted that India fell short of the recommended ratio of healthcare workers, with just above the 2006 standard.
- **Issue Related to ASHA Workers**
  - Lack of diagnostic tools availability
  - Growing reluctance of qualified practitioners to work in under-resourced rural areas.

- **Service Delivery Challenges**
  - **Low quality care:** Misdiagnosis, insufficient training of health workers, and incorrect medication contribute to prevalent low quality care.
  - **Access barriers:** Social and financial disparities prevent access to healthcare services, particularly for disabled, mentally challenged, and elderly populations.
- **Dominance of Private Hospitals:** Private sector control: In the financial year 2020, 70% of the hospital market share and 63% of hospital beds were controlled by private sector providers.
- **Out-of-pocket Expenditure (OOPE):** Decrease in OOPE: National Health Account Estimates for 2018-19 indicated a decrease in out-of-pocket expenditure to 48.2% from 60% in 2013-14.
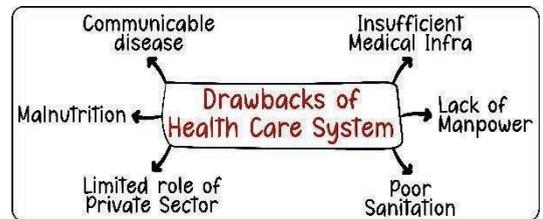
GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO HEALTH

NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY, 2017

The primary aim of the National Health Policy, 2017, is to inform, clarify, strengthen and prioritise the role of the Government in shaping health systems in all its dimensions- investments in health, organisation of healthcare services, prevention of diseases and promotion of good health through cross sectoral actions, access to technologies, developing human resources, encouraging medical pluralism, building knowledge base, developing better financial protection strategies, strengthening regulation and health assurance.

- **Goal -** The attainment of the highest possible level of health and wellbeing for all at all ages, through a preventive and promotive health care orientation in all developmental policies, and universal access to good quality health care services.
- **Key Targets**
  - **Increase health expenditure by Government as a percentage of GDP from the existing 1.15 % to 2.5 % by 2025.**
  - Increase Life Expectancy at birth from 67.5 to 70 & reduce TFR to 2.1, reduce Under Five Mortality to 23 by 2025.
  - Reduce MMR from current levels to 100 by 2020, reduce neonatal mortality to 16 and still birth rate to "single digit" by 2025.
  - Achieve target of 90:90:90, for HIV/AIDS i.e, - 90% of HIV infected people know their HIV status, 90% **of HIV patients receive sustained antiretroviral therapy and 90% of all people receiving ART will have viral suppression.**

SCHEME TO ENSURE HEALTH FOR ALL

- **National Health Mission -** Envisages universal access to equitable, affordable & quality health care services that are accountable and responsive to people's needs. Core components - universal coverage, achieving quality standards, Continuum of Care and Decentralised Planning.
- **India Newborn Action Plan -** For accelerating the reduction of preventable new-born deaths and stillbirths in the country with the goal of attaining 'Single Digit Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR) by 2030' and 'Single Digit StillBirth Rate (SBR) by 2030'.
- **PM Swasthya Suraksha Yojana** - Aims at correcting the imbalances in the availability of affordable healthcare facilities in the different parts of the country in general, and augmenting facilities for quality medical education in the under-served States in particular.
- **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN)**
  - It is a non-lapsable reserve fund for Health in the **Public Account.**
  - Proceeds of share of health in the Health and Education Cess will be credited into PMSSN.
  - Accruals into the PMSSN will be utilised for the flagship schemes of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare namely –
    - **Ayushman Bharat** – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)
    - **Ayushman Bharat** – Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs)

- National Health Mission Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)
- Emergency & disaster preparedness and responses during health emergencies
- Any future programme/scheme that targets to achieve progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the targets set out in the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017.
  - Administration and maintenance of the PMSSN is entrusted to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW)
  - **Significances of PMSSN:**
    - **Improved Developmental Outcomes:** From an economic standpoint, better health improves productivity, and reduces losses due to premature death, prolonged disability, and early retirement.
    - **Enhance Opportunities:** One extra year of population life expectancy raises GDP per capita by 4%, investment in health creates millions of jobs, largely for women, through a much-needed expansion of the health workforce.
- **Ayushmann Bharat** - It has two components which are complementary to each other.
  - **Health and Welfare Centres (HWCs)** - 1,50,000 HWCs will be created to deliver Comprehensive Primary Health Care, that is universal and free to users.
  - **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana -** It provides health insurance cover of Rs. 5 lakhs per year to over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families seeking secondary and tertiary care.
- **National Programme for the Health Care for the Elderly** - To provide accessible, affordable, and high-quality long-term, comprehensive and dedicated care services to an Ageing population.
- **e-Sanjeevani (Telemedicine Service Platform)**- It comprises of two variants namely - doctor to doctor (e-Sanjeevani AB-HWC) telemedicine platform and patient to doctor telemedicine platform (e-SanjeevaniOPD) which provides outpatient services to the citizens in the confines of their homes.
- **Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana** - It offers cash compensation to insured persons when they are rendered unemployed.

WAY FORWARD

Despite previous efforts, the health sector in India faces numerous shortcomings, demanding urgent solutions to foster national development. Recognizing the crucial role of health services in national development, it's imperative to surmount these challenges.

- **Proposed Strategies:**
  - **Strengthening Public Sector Healthcare**
    - Expand and fortify the public healthcare system to reduce reliance on expensive and often inaccessible private healthcare services.
    - Increase government health expenditure to 2.5% of GDP, prioritising clean water and sanitation.
  - **Efficient Resource Utilisation:** Redesign financial and managerial systems for optimal resource utilisation and improved health outcomes.
  - **Coordinated Service Delivery:** Implement coordinated service delivery within and across sectors, emphasising accountability and innovation.
  - **Public-Private Collaboration:** Foster cooperation between private and public healthcare providers to achieve health objectives.
  - **Human Resource Development:** Expand medical and nursing education to address the shortage of skilled professionals, with a focus on public sector institutions.
  - **Medication Reforms:** Reform prescription drug policies, promote essential generic medicines, and ensure universal availability in public facilities.
  - **Regulatory Measures:** Implement effective regulations in medical practice, public health, and food and drug safety to protect against risks and unethical practices.
  - **Infrastructure Strengthening:** Increase government spending to bridge gaps in health infrastructure and services.
  - **Public-Private Partnership:** Strengthen collaboration between public and private sectors to meet public health goals.
  - **Digital Integration:** Harness integrated digital technologies to prepare for future challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - **Research Focus:** Direct research towards preventive measures for future outbreaks of infectious diseases.
  - **Governance Improvement:** Enhance health-related governance to curb undesirable practices such as over-billing through regulatory measures.

Importance of Primary Health Care

- **Significance of Primary Health Care:**
  - **Fundamental to Welfare State:** Primary health care is essential for a welfare state and plays a vital role in fostering sustainable development.
  - **Moral Imperative:** It ensures access to essential health services for all citizens, serving as a cornerstone for a healthy and productive society.
- **Health as a Human Right:**
  - Kerala's Model: Kerala's primary health care system operationalizes health as a human right, providing basic health services through a robust network of centres and community health workers.
- **Equitable Access to Health Services:**
  - **Tamil Nadu's Initiative:** Tamil Nadu ensures equitable access to health services with primary health centres and sub-centers, including initiatives like the "Amma Clinic" for free essential health services.
- **Preventive Care and Cost-Effectiveness:**
  - **Delhi's Approach:** Delhi's Mohalla Clinics emphasise preventive care and cost-effectiveness, offering free services to prevent disease escalation and reduce the burden on tertiary care.
- **Improved Health Outcomes:** Access to primary health care leads to better health outcomes, including reduced infant mortality, increased life expectancy, and lower disease prevalence.
- **Economic Productivity:** Primary health care ensures a healthy and productive workforce, crucial for sustainable economic development.
- **Social Cohesion and Stability:** By addressing the health needs of all citizens, including vulnerable populations, primary health care promotes social cohesion and stability.
- **Overall Impact:** Primary health care, through equitable access, preventive care, improved outcomes, economic productivity, and social cohesion, establishes the groundwork for a healthy, inclusive, and prosperous society capable of sustainable development.

RECENT ISSUES CONCERNING HEALTH

NITI AAYOG REPORT: HEALTH INSURANCE FOR INDIA'S MISSING MIDDLE

NITI Aayog released a comprehensive report titled Health Insurance for India's Missing Middle, which brings out the gaps in the health insurance coverage across the Indian population and offers solutions to address the situation.

MISSING MIDDLE

- The "Missing Middle" concept highlights a group of people who are not considered poor but are still vulnerable to significant health expenses.
- This group includes self-employed individuals in rural areas and a variety of informal, semi-formal, and formal workers in urban areas.
- While the poor receive government-subsidised health insurance and the well-off have coverage through social or private insurance, the Missing Middle lacks adequate financial protection for health.
- Roughly 30% of the population, around 40 crore individuals, fall into this category according to the report.

OTHER FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

- Low Public Expenditure on health has constrained the capacity and quality of healthcare services in the public sector.
  - It diverts the majority of individuals (about two-thirds) to seek treatment in the costlier private sector. However, low financial protection leads to high out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE).
- **Low Insurance Penetration:** Significant challenges will need to be overcome to increase the penetration of health insurance. The government has an important role to play in increasing consumer awareness and confidence, modifying regulation for standardised product and consumer protection, and potentially offering a platform to improve operational efficiency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report has recommended three models for increasing the health insurance coverage in the country:

- **Creation of a Large and Diversified Risk Pool:** The success of a private voluntary contributory health insurance product requires creation of a large and diversified risk pool. For this to happen the Government should build consumer awareness of health insurance through Information Education Communication campaigns.

- **Developing a Modified, Standardised Health Insurance Product:** The cost of health insurance needs to come down, in line with the affordability of the missing middle. For example- Aarogya Sanjeevani can be made affordable.
- **Government Subsidised Health Insurance:** This model can be utilised for segments of the missing middle which remain uncovered, due to limited ability to pay for the voluntary contributory models. In the medium-term, once the supply-side and utilization of PMJAY is strengthened, their infrastructure can be leveraged to allow voluntary contributions to the missing middle.
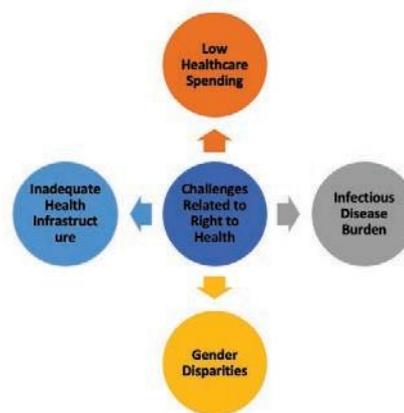
WAY FORWARD
- **Integrated Approach:** A combination of the three models, phased in at different times, can ensure coverage for the missing middle population.
- **Outreach Strategy:** Government databases such as National Food Security Act (NFSA), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) for agricultural households can be shared with private insurers after taking consent from these households. This will increase the outreach of insurance products with the needy section of the population.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

Rajasthan Government has passed the Right to Health Bill, which gives every resident of the state the right to avail free services at all public health facilities.

WHAT IS RIGHT TO HEALTH?
- The Right to Health refers to the minimum standard of health that every human being is entitled to achieve. Its origin dates back to 1946 when the World Health Organisation (WHO) was established to promote health as a human right.
- The Right to Health is a fundamental aspect of human dignity, and it is the duty of governments to safeguard and advance this right for all individuals, irrespective of their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status.
- **Noteworthy Data:** India has only 1.4 beds per 1,000 people, 1 doctor per 1,445 people, and 1.7 nurses per 1,000 people.
  - Over 75% of the healthcare infrastructure is concentrated in metro cities, leaving the rest of the population without basic medical facilities.

> **Constitutional Safeguard for Right to Health**
> - **Fundamental Rights:** Article 21 of the Constitution of India guarantees a fundamental right to life & personal liberty. The right to health is inherent to a life with dignity.
> - **DPSP:** Articles 38, 39, 42, 43, & 47 put the obligation on the state to ensure the effective realisation of the right to health.
> - **Parmanand Katara Vs Union of India (1989) Case:** Supreme Court had ruled that every doctor whether at a government hospital or otherwise has the professional obligation to extend his services with due expertise for protecting life.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO RIGHT TO HEALTH
- **Low Healthcare Spending:** In the fiscal year 2023, the Indian government allocated only 2.1% of GDP to healthcare, significantly lower than the average spending share of GDP for Lower- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC), which stands at 5.6%.
- **Infectious Disease Burden:** More than 33% of individuals in India still suffer from infectious diseases, with a high per capita out-of-pocket expenditure of INR 7.28 for inpatient care and INR 29.38 for outpatient care, as reported by Frontiers in Public Health.
- **Inadequate Health Infrastructure:** India has a scarcity of healthcare infrastructure, with only 1.4 beds per 1000 people and over 75% of facilities concentrated in metropolitan areas, where only 27% of the population resides, leaving 73% without adequate medical facilities.
- **Gender Disparities:** Women in India encounter significant health disparities, including limited healthcare access, elevated maternal mortality rates, and gender-based violence. India consistently ranks among the five worst countries for female health and survival, according to the World Economic Forum 2021.

WAY FORWARD
- **Enhancing Health Expenditure:** The goal of increasing healthcare expenditure to 2.5%, as outlined in the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017, aims to bolster infrastructure within healthcare facilities.
- **Strengthening Primary Health Centers:** Recognizing that 80-90% of an individual's health needs throughout their lifetime can be addressed by primary healthcare centres, there's a need to reinforce these facilities.
- **Effective Policy Implementation:** It's crucial to ensure the proper implementation and awareness of existing policies and regulations related to healthcare.
- **Learning from Other Nations:** India can glean insights from developing countries like Thailand in striving towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC). UHC comprises three key elements: population coverage, disease coverage, and cost coverage.

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGY

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has announced a National Suicide Prevention Strategy which is the first of its kind in the country.
- The suicide prevention policy comes with time-bound action plans and multi-sectoral collaborations to achieve reduction in suicide mortality by 10% by 2030.

> **Data on Suicide Deaths in India**
> - In India, more than one lakh lives are lost every year to suicide, and it is the top killer in the 15-29 years category.
> - In the past three years, the suicide rate has increased from 10.2 to 11.3 per 1,00,000 population, the document records.
> - The most common reasons for suicide include family problems and illnesses, which account for 34% and 18% of all suicide-related deaths.

OBJECTIVE
- To establish effective surveillance mechanisms for suicide within the next three years.
- To establish psychiatric outpatient departments that will provide suicide prevention services through the District Mental Health Programme in all districts within the next five years.
- To integrate a mental well-being curriculum in all educational institutions within the next eight years.
- Developing guidelines for responsible media reporting of suicides, and
- Restricting access to means of suicide.

The policy is In line with global strategy: The UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.4 aims to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by one-third, through prevention and treatment, and promote mental health and well-being.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES
- **National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), 1982** was launched to ensure the availability and accessibility of minimum mental healthcare for all in the foreseeable future, particularly to the most vulnerable and underprivileged sections of the population.
  - Mental Healthcare Programmes- Training community members to provide psychological support to strengthen mental health services in the country. Collaboration with Government would be an important plank to develop a sustainable network for community/locality towards mental health.
- **National Health Policy, 2017:** This policy will take action on the following fronts:
  - Increase creation of specialists through public financing and develop special rules to give preference to those willing to work in public systems.
  - Create network of community members to provide psycho-social support to strengthen mental health services at primary level facilities and
  - Leverage digital technology in a context where access to qualified psychiatrists is difficult.
- **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017** was passed to Decriminalising suicide attempts.
  - The most significant provision in the act was "advanced directives", which allowed individuals with mental illnesses to decide the course of their treatment and appoint someone to be their representative.
  - It also restricted the use of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), and banned its use on minors, finally introducing measures to tackle stigma in Indian society.
- **Manodarpan Initiative** was under Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan to provide psyho-social support to students for their mental health and well-being.

- **Kiran Helpline** was launched with an aim to provide early screening, first-aid, psychological support, distress management, mental well-being, and psychological crisis management and will be managed by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD).

WAY FORWARD
- To work on prevention, we need the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, the MoHFW, among others, to work collaboratively.
- Requirement of an effective implementation of the existing policies and regulations.
- Suicides impact all sections of the society and thus require concerted and collaborative efforts from individuals and the community at large.

PUBLIC HEALTH SURVEILLANCE
- **Definition:** Public health surveillance is "the ongoing, systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of health-related data essential to planning, implementation, and evaluation of public health practice."
- **NITI Aayog released a white paper:** Vision 2035: Public Health Surveillance in India.

VISION 2035: PUBLIC HEALTH SURVEILLANCE IN INDIA
- It is a **white paper released by NITI Ayog**, envisaged to serve as a vision document to propel public health surveillance in India and establish India as a global leader in the area.
- It envisages integration of the three-tiered public health system into Ayushman Bharat.
- It contributes by suggesting mainstreaming of surveillance by making individual electronic health records the basis for surveillance.

BENEFIT OF PUBLIC HEALTH SURVEILLANCE
- Citizen-friendly public health surveillance systems will ensure individual privacy and confidentiality, enabled with a client feedback mechanism.
- Improved data-sharing mechanism between Centre and states for better disease detection, prevention, and control.

CHALLENGES IN MAINTAINING PUBLIC HEALTH SURVEILLANCE
- **Data Management:**
  o Effective data management is crucial for fulfilling the public health surveillance mission.
  o Poor data quality remains a significant constraint in this endeavour.
- **Early Detection of Emerging Diseases:**
  o There's a pressing need to improve the speed of detecting emerging diseases and to bolster public health emergency response and recovery capabilities.
  o However, these goals introduce new analytical challenges.
- **Inadequate Computing Resources:**
  o The growing number of data sources and the increasing volume of data for analysis pose challenges.
  o Insufficient resources in the computing environment may hinder timely data processing and result communication.
- **Shortage of Skilled Staff:**
  o Public health surveillance requires skilled personnel for tasks such as analytic data management, statistical analysis, data visualisation, and effectively communicating uncertainties in health data evidence.
  o However, there is often a shortage of such skilled staff.

SUGGESTIONS
Since Public Health Surveillance has the potential to transform the health system in India, it is thus the duty of all the stakeholders to overcome these challenges. Some of the suggestions to overcome the challenges can be:
- **Developing and mobilising technologies** and methodologies
- **Establish a governance framework** that is inclusive of political, policy, technical, and managerial leadership at the national and state level.
- **Identify broad disease categories** that will be included under Public Health Surveillance.
- **Enhance surveillance of non-communicable diseases** and conditions in a stepwise manner.
- **Prioritise diseases that can be targeted for elimination** as a public health problem, regularly.
- **Improve core support functions**, core functions, and system attributes for surveillance at all levels; national, state, district, and block.
- **Establish mechanisms to streamline data sharing**, capture, analysis, and dissemination for action.
- **Encourage innovations** at every step-in surveillance activity.

WAY FORWARD

The purpose of surveillance is to empower decision makers to lead and manage more effectively by providing timely, useful evidence. It is useful both for measuring the need for interventions and for directly measuring the effects of interventions. Thus, it is essential to strengthen public health surveillance, while protecting the individual's privacy and confidentiality.

AYUSHMAN BHARAT DIGITAL MISSION (ABDM)

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare formulated the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission with an aim to digitise healthcare in India by providing the necessary support for the integration of digital health infrastructure in the country.

FEATURES

- **Health ID:** Every citizen will receive a Health ID, serving as their health account, facilitating unique identification, authentication, and consolidation of health records across various systems and stakeholders with the patient's informed consent. It will encompass details of tests, diseases, medications, and diagnoses.
- **Healthcare Professionals Registry (HPR):** This repository encompasses all healthcare professionals engaged in delivering healthcare services across both modern and traditional medicine systems. Enrollment in the HPR grants access to India's digital health ecosystem.
- **Health Facility Registry (HFR):** A comprehensive database containing information about health facilities nationwide, spanning public and private sectors, including hospitals, clinics, diagnostic labs, imaging centres, and pharmacies.
- **Personal Health Records (PHR):** An electronic platform allowing patients to maintain and manage their health information, as well as that of authorised individuals, in a secure and confidential environment.
- **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission Sandbox:** Part of the mission, this sandbox serves as a testing framework for technology and products, aiding organisations, including private entities, in integrating with the national digital health ecosystem or becoming Health Information Providers or Users efficiently

SIGNIFICANCE OF AYUSHMAN BHARAT DIGITAL MISSION

- Creating interoperability within the digital health ecosystem, like the role played by the Unified Payments Interface in revolutionising payments.
- Improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency of health service delivery.
- Citizens will get access to healthcare facilities at a click.
- Provide choice to individuals to access both public and private health services.
- Facilitate compliance with guidelines and protocols and ensure transparency in pricing.
- Health care professionals will have better access to patient's medical records.

CHALLENGES/CONCERNS

- **Digital Divide:** This could lead to exclusion of digitally illiterate and unconnected remote, hilly, and tribal areas.
- **Concerns related to Privacy/Data Breach:** The Concern becomes more real owing to absence of a comprehensive Data protection bill.
- **Demand-skill Mismatch:** To completely digitise the system there is a huge requirement of skilled manpower in the digital domain but it is in short supply.
- **Inadequate Primary Health Care Data:** Lack of infrastructure and staff at primary level.
- **Issue of interoperability** of systems built by different states & the central repositories.

WAY FORWARD

- **Overhauling Public Health System:** India's public health system requires significant restructuring. While the Ayushman Digital Bharat Mission is a positive step, addressing its challenges is essential.
- **Suggestions for Overcoming Challenges:**
  - Implement robust data protection measures to safeguard personal information.
  - Standardise the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) architecture nationwide while accommodating state-specific regulations.
  - Ensure transparency and simplicity in the mission's communication for the general public.
  - Integrate with other government schemes like Ayushman Bharat Yojana and IT-enabled initiatives such as Reproductive Child Health Care and NIKSHAY.
  - Advocate for health to be recognized as a justiciable right within the NDHM, aligning with the draft National Health Policy, 2015.

WASH PROGRAMME

NABARD announced a special refinance facility to support the government's Water, Sanitisation and Hygiene (WASH) programme.

WHAT IS WASH?

- WASH is an acronym that stands for "water, sanitation and hygiene".
- Universal, affordable and sustainable access to WASH is a key public health issue and is the focus of the first two targets of Sustainable Development Goal 6.
- The World Health Organization in 2019 found that "Worldwide, 1.9 million deaths and 123 million DALYs could have been prevented in 2016 with adequate WASH.

IMPORTANCE OF WASH

- **Hand Hygiene Disparities:** According to the 'Drinking Water, Sanitation, Hygiene, and Housing Condition' Report 2020, 56% of urban households reported handwashing with water and soap before eating, contrasting with only 25.3% in rural areas.
- **COVID-19 Challenge:** The low level of hand hygiene poses a significant challenge amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Health and Socio-Economic Benefits:** Enhancing access to WASH services can yield numerous benefits including improved health, increased life expectancy, enhanced student learning, and promotion of gender equality. It can also mitigate illness, reduce poverty, and foster socio-economic development.
- **Impact on Child Mortality:** Insufficient sanitation contributes to approximately 700,000 child deaths annually due to diarrhoea, primarily in developing nations. The disease burden attributable to WASH-related issues accounts for 3.3% of global deaths.
- **Long-Term Effects:** Chronic diarrhoea can adversely affect children's physical and cognitive development over the long term.
- **Gender Justice:** Inadequate access to WASH facilities hinders students, particularly girls, from attending school, impacting their educational achievements and future work productivity. Conversely, improved access to WASH facilities can promote gender equality and justice.
- **Role in COVID-19 Management:** Water plays a central role in managing COVID-19, with frequent hand washing recommended as a preventive measure and water intake essential for recovery from infection.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES TO PROMOTE WASH

- **Swachh Bharat –** Launched in 2014, to eliminate open defecation and improve solid waste management.
  - The government provides subsidies for construction of nearly 110 million toilets between 2014 and 2019.
  - SBM has changed the behaviour of hundreds of millions of people with respect to toilet access and usage.
  - 500 million people have stopped defecating in the open since 2014.
- **AMRUT –** Launched in 2015 to establish infrastructure that could ensure adequate robust sewage networks and water supply for urban transformation
- **Jal Jeevan Mission –** JJM is envisioned to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India.

CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING WASH

- **Infrastructure:** The migration to urban areas leads to the formation of densely populated poverty clusters, presenting a challenge for sanitation infrastructure development.
- **Urban Slums:** Inadequate supply, demand limitations, and institutional constraints hinder the access of impoverished communities to sufficient urban services, particularly in urban slums.
- **Water Distribution Issues:** The World Health Organization reports that 25%-45% of water in distribution lines is lost due to leaks in developing nations. Additionally, cross-contamination of wastewater into potable water lines has resulted in severe disease outbreaks.
- **Climate Change:** Climate change exacerbates the risks to WASH systems, especially in impoverished and developing regions where access to safely managed basic sanitation is lacking.

WAY FORWARD

- **Need for transformation:** Incorporating longer-term climate change considerations into risk assessment for drinking-water quality and supply and particularly for sanitation is often overlooked, but will become increasingly necessary.
- **Achievement of SDGs:** Goal 3 (Good Health and well-being), Goal 6 (Clean water and Sanitation for all) and Goal 16 (Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies)

- Strengthening inter-sectoral and collaboration of various programmes, at all levels

ASHA (ACCREDITED SOCIAL HEALTH ACTIVIST) WORKERS

ABOUT

- ASHA workers are volunteers from within the community who are trained to provide information and aid people in accessing benefits of various healthcare schemes of the government.
- ASHAs are primarily married, widowed, or divorced women between the ages of 25 and 45 years from within the community.
- The WHO has recognised India's 10.4 lakh ASHA workers as 'Global Health Leaders' for their efforts in connecting the community to the government's health programmes.

ROLE OF ASHA WORKERS

- They act as a bridge connecting marginalised communities with facilities such as primary health centres, sub-centres and district hospitals.
- The role of these community health volunteers under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) was first established in 2005.
- The aim is to have one ASHA for every 1,000 persons or per habitation in hilly, tribal or other sparsely populated areas ASHA workers are also tasked with ensuring and motivating children to get immunised.

CHALLENGES FACED BY ASHA WORKERS

- ASHA workers were not treated in the same manner as doctors despite the fact that both are in the frontline in the fight against the pandemic.
- ASHAs have not been supplied with adequate PPE as they perform contract tracing and interact with newly infected cases in the community.
  o This poses a huge risk to them and their families, resulting in stigma and discrimination by the community for being high-risk COVID-19 contacts.
  o This has also led to multiple cases of violence against ASHAs and their families.
- They also did not have access to priority or free testing. If tested positive for COVID-19, ASHAs were not receiving support for their treatment.

SUGGESTIONS

- **Recognition of ASHAs' Work:** The government and communities should acknowledge ASHAs' contributions through both financial and non-financial incentives.
- **Institutional Mechanisms:** Establish institutional mechanisms to incorporate ASHAs' experiences, needs, and socio-economic realities, including class, caste, and gender, into policymaking processes.
- **Clear Guidelines:** Develop and disseminate clear and concise guidelines for ASHAs promptly to enhance their effectiveness in service delivery.
- **Capacity Building:** Implement a capacity building strategy for ASHAs, especially focusing on technology use, and initiate supervision initiatives to support their professional growth.
- **Support Systems:** Develop support systems to ensure the physical and mental well-being of ASHAs, recognizing the challenges they face in their roles.
- **Health System Reforms:** Initiate broader health system reforms specific to ASHAs, including policies for fair recruitment, retention, financial protection, leave management, protection against sexual harassment, and physical and mental health support, with clear accountability mechanisms at all levels.
- **Convergence with Vertical Programs:** Foster convergence with vertical programs such as livelihoods and nutrition to complement ASHAs' work and enhance overall community health outcomes.

Universal Health Coverage (UHC)
There have been noteworthy strides over the past two decades in the quality of healthcare delivered to citizens and population health outcomes. Yet, there is wide variation across states in the availability of resources, the status of state health programmes, rural-urban differentials and governance capacity. Public health infrastructure in the country expanded considerably following the launch of the National Health Mission in 2005; however, there continues to be a shortfall in several areas.
- UHC means that all individuals and communities receive the health services they need without suffering financial hardship. Achieving UHC is one of the targets (SDG3.8) the nations of the world set when adopting the SDGs in 2015.

- Protecting people from the financial consequences of paying for health services out of their own pockets reduces the risk that people will be pushed into poverty because unexpected illness requires them to use up their life savings, sell assets, or borrow – destroying their futures and often those of their children.
- A lack of universal access to quality, affordable health services also endanger countries' long-term economic prospects and makes them more vulnerable to global health risks.
- **Constraints in achieving Universal Health Coverage:**
  - Inadequate focus on comprehensive preventive care and primary care in the past.
  - The multiplicity of government-sponsored insurance schemes resulting in the fragmentation of the risk pool.
  - Acute shortage of motivated human resources for health.
  - 84 percent of the active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) for drugs manufactured in India are imported.
  - Wide variation in diagnostic tests across the country. For example, a lipid profile test can cost Rs. 90 in some cities, going up to Rs. 7,110 in others.
- **Way Forward:**
  - Galvanise health facilities in the public sector and engage the private sector
  - Ensure access to affordable drugs and medical devices
  - Boost domestic production of APIs by setting up six large API intermediate clusters as per the recommendations of the Katoch Committee
  - Strengthen health research capacity
  - Identify key traditional medicine and facilitate collaboration with modern systems of medicine

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One Health
- The concept of 'One Health' recognises that the health of human beings is connected to the health of animals and the environment.
- It is gaining importance as most of the contagious diseases affecting humans are zoonotic (animal to man origin) in nature and it can be effectively implemented for reducing incidence of emerging zoonotic threats like COVID-19.

NATIONAL AYUSH MISSION (NAM)

Recently highlighted by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare. It was launched in 2014 by the Ministry of Ayush and is aimed at developing, educating, and promoting traditional Indian medical systems (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa, and Homoeopathy).

- **Objectives of NAM:**
  - Enhancing accessibility to Ayush services.
  - Encouraging cultivation of medicinal plants.
  - Strengthening Ayush educational institutions.
  - Spreading awareness about Ayush practices.
- **Duration:** The Mission is operational until 2026.
- **Achievements of NAM:** Notable increase in beneficiaries accessing Ayush services.
- **Challenges Highlighted:**
  - Underutilization of funds.
  - Concerns regarding medicine quality.
  - Infrastructural delays in hospital construction.
  - Administrative bottlenecks.
  - Inadequate setup of Ayush departments in some states/UTs.
  - Exclusion of SowaRigpa from NAM.
- **Recommendations for Improvement:**
  - Enhancing quality control and standardisation.
  - Boosting research and evidence-based practice.
  - Bridging the integration gap between Ayush and allopathic healthcare.
  - Overcoming delays through specific action plans.
  - Building consumer confidence and advocacy through awareness campaigns and responsible advertising.
- **Future Strategies:**
  - Specific action plans for AHWCs.
  - Training programs for staff.

- o Financial incentives for states.
- o Utilising technology for process streamlining.

Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH)

Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the G20 India presidency introduced a new initiative called the Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH).

GIDH aims to:

- Harmonise efforts in line with the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025, which seeks to enhance global health outcomes by expediting the development and implementation of suitable digital health solutions to attain the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Provide high-quality technical support to foster the development and reinforcement of standards-based and interoperable systems that conform to global best practices, norms, and standards.
- Enable the intentional utilisation of quality-assured digital transformation tools, empowering governments to oversee their journey toward digital health transformation.

GIDH intends to tackle challenges such as redundant efforts and a product-centric approach to digital health transformation by focusing on four fundamental pillars.

SPECS2030 Initiative

The SPECS2030 Initiative, led by the World Health Organization (WHO), aims to combat global vision impairment and blindness by ensuring universal access to eye care and treatment.

Its key objectives include:

- Tracking the number of individuals receiving spectacles to gauge progress in vision correction.
- In the context of India, where more than 100 million people may lack access to essential eye care and glasses, the SPECS2030 Initiative is anticipated to generate positive impacts.

Additionally:

- The initiative highlights the significance of correcting various vision conditions:
  - o Myopia (near-sightedness) can be addressed with concave lenses.
  - o Hypermetropia (far-sightedness) can be corrected with convex lenses.

Presbyopia, the age-related loss of near focusing ability, typically requires bifocal lenses for correction.

NUTRITION

NUTRITION OBJECTIVES

- By 2022-23, under POSHAN Abhiyaan had aim to achieve the following outcomes compared to 2015-16 baseline (NFHS-4):
  - o Reduce stunting prevalence among children to 25% or less.
  - o Reduce underweight prevalence in children (0-6 years) to 25% or less.
  - o Reduce anaemia prevalence among young children (6-59 months) to 43% or less.
  - o Reduce anaemia prevalence among adolescent girls and women (15-49 years) to 38% or less.

CURRENT SITUATION

- Under-nutrition is a leading risk factor for over 40% of under-five child deaths.
- Children affected by under-nutrition, anaemia, and iodine deficiency may suffer from low IQ scores and decreased productivity in adulthood.
- Reducing stunting could boost India's GDP by 4-11%.
- Despite progress, NFHS-4 (2015-16) indicates high rates of stunting, wasting, and anaemia among children.
- Other emerging economies like Brazil, China, and Mexico have better nutrition indicators.
- India also faces a rise in obesity and overweight adults, increasing the risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disorders.

WAY FORWARD

- **Policy and Governance:**
  - o Provide states flexibility under POSHAN Abhiyaan for context-specific implementation.
  - o Establish an independent mechanism for annual audits to enhance program implementation.
- **Convergent Action:**
  - o Develop and implement Integrated Health, Nutrition, and Swachh Bharat Mission plans at district level.

- Involve local administration, panchayati raj institutions, and public distribution system for implementation.Integrate health, sanitation, and nutrition services at village level through committees and Village Health, Sanitation, and Nutrition Days.
  - Create implementation guidebooks for district administrators.
- **Mission Mode Action:**
  - Focus on high malnutrition burden districts under POSHAN Abhiyaan with convergence mechanisms at all levels.
  - Develop action plans with timelines, budget allocation, and intensive monitoring by NITI Aayog.
- **Refine Programme Interventions:**
  - Prioritize the first 1000 days with home-based contacts for infants and mothers.
  - Expand interventions beyond food-centric approaches to include healthcare measures and birth spacing.
  - Emphasise immunisation, fortification, and bio-fortification of grains.
  - Establish a national nutrition surveillance system and conduct research studies for program improvements.
    Strengthen Monitoring Mechanisms:
  - Implement real-time IT-based monitoring through Common Application Software.
  - Conduct joint health and nutrition reviews in the field with defined accountability at all levels.
- **Community-Led Movement:**
  - Mobilise POSHAN Abhiyaan as a community-led initiative with political support.
  - Develop behavioural change communication modules for frontline workers and community engagement.
- **Anaemia Control Programme:**
  - Implement evidence-based strategy for anaemia control across home, community, school, and facility levels.
  - Consider the 'screen and treat' approach as part of anaemia control intervention package.

KEY TERMS: Universal Health Coverage (UHC), One Health, ASHA, Neonatal Mortality Rate, Infant Mortality Rate, Institutional Births, Missing Middle

7 EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society, and promoting national development. Providing universal access to quality education is the key to India's continued ascent, and leadership on the global stage in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation.{NEP 2020}

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

- **The 86th Amendment Act, 2002** added the **Right to Education** as a fundamental right under **Article 21 A,** changed the subject matter of **Article 45**, and added a Fundamental duty under article 51 A.
  - o **Article 21 A:** The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years.
  - o **Article 45:** Provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years.
  - o **Article 51 A:** Every parent or guardian to ensure that their child or ward was provided opportunities for education between the ages of six and fourteen years.

IMPORTANT FACTS

- The literacy rate (as per the **2011 census**) is at **74.04 %; 82.14% for males** and **65.46%** for **females**. Kerala has the highest literacy rate of 93.91% and Bihar (63.82 %) ranks last.
- The **42nd Amendment** to the constitution in 1976 made education a **'concurrent subject'.**
- **Gross Enrolment Ratio** in higher education has increased steadily over the past decade, reaching a (GER) of **28.4% in 2021-22.**
- The **pupil to teacher ratio** within the public school system for Upper primary and secondary education is **35:1.**
- India spends only 3.5% **of the GDP on education**, less than some developing countries. For example, South Africa's expenditure on education is 6.1% of its GDP.

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2023

- ASER Report 2023 confirms that boys and girls of elementary school-going age have all come back to school. Making learning attractive for children is possible today with little effort.
- Government schools in many States now have become the most favourable destination for children from marginal and vulnerable social groups, because the parents have limited disposable incomes and the education of girls is just for formality.
- Three-fourths of the children have come back to government schools as incomes and employment have shrunk.

CHALLENGES

- **Primary and Secondary Education:** Main challenges of primary and secondary education include poorly resourced public schools, lack of infrastructure, teacher absenteeism, quality of education, high stakes associated with board examinations, absence of life skills training, poor teacher-student ratio, neglect of Indian languages etc.

- **Higher Education:** Gross Enrolment Ratio (**28.4% in 2021-22**), Unqualified and untrained teachers, absence of fundamental facilities like drinking water, urinals and power, furniture and study materials, poor quality, expensive education, unsafe environments for girls, political interference, inadequate research, privatisation etc.
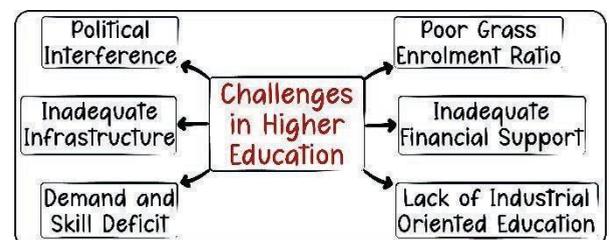
GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS

PRIMARY EDUCATION

- **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan:** Aimed at the universalisation of primary education in a time bound manner.
- **Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat:** It is a sub-programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to improve comprehensive early reading, writing and early mathematics programmes for children in Classes I and II.
- **Mid-Day Meal:** To enhance the enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improve nutritional levels among school going children studying in Classes I to VIII.

- **RTE Act, 2009:** It was enacted to enforce Article 21 A. It states that all children of the age of 6-14 years should be provided free and compulsory education. It also provides 25% reservation for economically disadvantaged communities in admission to Class I in all private schools.

- **NIPUN Bharat Mission:**
  - The Ministry of Education has initiated the National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, known as NIPUN Bharat.
  - NIPUN Bharat operates within the framework of the centrally sponsored scheme of Samagra Shiksha.
  - The mission aims to achieve universal proficiency in basic literacy and numeracy skills for every child by the end of Grade 3, by 2026-27, aligning with the objectives of the National Education Policy 2020.
  - Targeting children aged 3 to 9 years, NIPUN Bharat focuses on:
    - Providing access to education and ensuring retention in the early years of schooling.
    - Enhancing teacher capabilities through training and support.
    - Developing high-quality and diverse learning materials for both students and teachers.
    - Monitoring each child's progress in meeting educational objectives.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

- **National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education** – It aims to promote enrolment of **girl** children in the age group of **14-18** at **secondary** stage.

- **Scheme of Vocational Education** – Integrates **vocational education** with general academic **education**. The major aim is to prepare educated, employable and competitive human resources for various sectors of the economy.

- **Atal Innovation Mission** – To create and promote an ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship across the country at school, university, research institutions, MSME and industry levels.

HIGHER EDUCATION

- **UDAAN** – To enable disadvantaged girl students and other students from SC/ST & minorities to transit from school to post-school professional education especially in Science and Math.

- **SAKSHAM** – To award 1000 scholarships every year to **differently abled students to pursue technical education** based on merit in the qualifying examination to pursue technical education.

- **Ishan Uday** – Special Scholarship Scheme to promote higher education and for encouraging children belonging to **economically weaker sections of the NE region.**

- **SWAYAM Programme** – Under this programme, Professors of centrally funded institutions like IITs, IIMs, Centrally universities will offer online courses to citizens of our country.

- **Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan** – RUSA is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), launched in 2013 aimed at **providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions.**

RECENT MEASURES

PRIMARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

- **Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States (STARS) Project**: Envisions improving the overall monitoring and measurement activities in the Indian School Education System through interventions in selected states.

- **PRAGYATA**: Guidelines for digital education developed from the perspective of learners, for students who are presently at home due to lockdown.

- **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan**: It was launched by subsuming the three Schemes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE) with objective of providing quality education and enhancing learning outcomes of students; ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of school education etc.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Research	• The RISE scheme, funded by a restructured Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA), aims to increase investments in research and related infrastructure within premier educational institutions. • The Prime Minister's Research Fellows (PMRF) Scheme is designed to elevate the quality of technical research. • IMPRINT (IMPacting Research Innovation and Technology) India is a joint initiative between IITs and IISc aimed at boosting original scientific and technological research. • The Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC) aims to improve India's higher education research ecosystem by facilitating collaborations between Indian institutions and world-leading counterparts

Enrollment of Students	• The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to increase the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 50% by 2035.
	   ○ Emphasis is placed on making the curriculum flexible through an interdisciplinary approach.
	   ○ It advocates for the creation of multiple exit points within the education system.
	   ○ Scholarships are provided to ST, SC, OBC, and SEDGs students based on their merit.
	• New UGC regulations for Open and Distance Learning permit reputable institutions to offer education through distance mode.
	• The SWAYAM portal serves as a platform to provide high-quality education to individuals.
	• **YUKTI 2.0 Platform** assists in systematically integrating technologies with commercial potential and information regarding incubated startups in higher education institutions.
	• **Unnat Bharat Abhiyan** facilitates collaboration between higher educational institutions and rural communities to identify development challenges and devise sustainable solutions for rural growth.

Funding and Regulation	• Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), 2013 aims at financing state institutions with respect to their governance and performance. • Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA), created as a joint venture of MoE and Canara Bank in 2018, aims to leverage funds from the market, donations and CSR funds to be used to finance improvement in infrastructure in top institutions. • Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) was proposed to act as an overarching regulator of higher education by replacing UGC or AICTE. • Institutions of Eminence programme has been launched in order to implement the commitment of the Government to empower the Higher Educational Institutions and to help them become world class teaching and research institutions.

Improving Qualities	• The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) 2015 is a methodology established by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to rank higher education institutions in India.
	   ○ Its purpose is to encourage institutes to compete against each other while simultaneously fostering their growth.
	• NIRF rankings also serve as a criterion for assessing private institutions under the Institutions of Eminence (IoE) Scheme.
	   ○ The IoE Scheme aims to establish or upgrade 20 Institutions (10 public and 10 private) as world-class teaching and research institutions.
	• The University Grants Commission (UGC) has mandated NAAC assessments for all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) seeking funding.
	   ○ The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has stipulated that at least half of the programs offered by an HEI must be accredited by the National Board of Accreditation (NBA).

PRACTICABLE SUGGESTIONS
- Allocation of a minimum of 6% of GDP towards education and bolstering primary and secondary education.
  - Emphasising personalised training, skill-oriented learning, and tackling educational disparities.
- Focus on Infrastructure enhancement, technology integration, and catering to the educational needs of children with disabilities.
- Enhanced attention to imparting ethical and moral education, alongside promoting adult literacy.

- Targeting teacher development programs and advocating for gender-neutral educational practices.
- Increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education and ensuring inclusivity for marginalised groups.
- Creating a supportive environment to foster research and innovation.
- Enhancing the employability of graduates by aligning higher education with market demands.
- Recognizing education as a fundamental catalyst for economic, political, and social progress.
- Acknowledging education's pivotal role in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."

Right to Education Act 2009:
- The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, is a landmark legislation in India that aims to **provide free and compulsory education for all children aged 6-14 years.**
- It represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, which means that every child has a right to full time **elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards.**

Aspects of the RTE Act:
- **Increased Access to Education:** By mandating that all children aged 6-14 years receive free and compulsory education, the Act has helped increase enrolment rates and reduce dropout rates. According to the **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2020, the overall enrolment rate for children aged 6-14 years increased from 93.4% in 2006 to 96.3% in 2020.** Thus, the Act has made significant strides in improving **access to education.**
- **Infrastructure and Quality Improvements:** The RTE Act also mandates that schools meet certain minimum standards in terms of infrastructure and teacher qualifications. **Since the Act's implementation, there has been a significant improvement in school infrastructure, with the percentage of schools with functional toilets increasing from 62.6% in 2010 to 79.4% in 2016, according to the District Information System for Education (DISE).**

Limitations of the RTE Act:
- **Limited Focus on Learning Outcomes:**
  - The RTE Act may not effectively promote education if it doesn't emphasise learning outcomes.
  - The ASER 2018 report highlights that only 50.3% of rural grade 5 students can read at a grade 2 level, indicating a learning gap.
- **Inadequate Emphasis on Awareness Generation:**
  - Without widespread awareness of the benefits of schooling, creating incentives for attendance becomes challenging.
  - Initiatives like the "Chalo School Chale" campaign of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan have aimed to raise awareness but need further expansion.
- **Insufficient Incentives for Disadvantaged Groups:**
  - There's a lack of provisions such as scholarships, transportation, or mid-day meals to encourage school attendance among marginalised children.
  - While the Mid-Day Meal Scheme exists, its implementation faces challenges, requiring additional incentives for greater inclusion.
- **Incomplete Implementation:**
  - Challenges in RTE Act implementation include inadequate funding, teacher shortages, and lacking monitoring mechanisms.
  - According to the DISE 2016 report, about 17.51% of schools still don't meet the mandated pupil-teacher ratio.

By adopting a comprehensive approach that addresses the aforementioned limitations, India can harness the full potential of the RTE Act to create an inclusive, equitable, and effective education system that empowers children and contributes to the nation's overall development.

NATIONAL DIGITAL EDUCATION ARCHITECTURE (NDEAR)

- It will provide **education eco-system architecture for development of digital infrastructure,** a federated but interoperable system that will ensure autonomy of all stakeholders, especially States and UTs.
- It will help in building up a new education ecosystem that will create a digital foundation leading to self-governance of all parties involved, particularly states and the Centre.
- It lets educationists do evaluation based on talents and abilities, helping students understand their area of specialties that can be utilised in their future profession.

- Under this, the **government will not be building technology solutions for the education sector** but will act as an enabler, offering a framework wherein technology can be developed and built by anyone.
- It promotes a '**digital first' approach,** supporting teaching and learning activities, and facilitating educational planning as well as governance and administrative activities.

NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR TECHNOLOGY (NEAT)

- The Ministry of Education introduced NEAT as a collaboration between the Government (via AICTE) and Education Technology companies across India.
- It aims to provide access to top-quality technological solutions in education to enhance youth employability, all on a single platform for learner convenience.
- These solutions utilise artificial intelligence to offer personalised and tailored learning experiences, leading to improved learning outcomes and skill development in specialised areas.
- NEAT is poised to significantly reduce the digital divide, particularly among economically disadvantaged students, while meeting India's and the world's knowledge-based needs.
- It acts as a bridge between Ed-Tech companies, academic institutions, and students through its Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Consumer (B2C) model.

REGULATION OF EDTECH

- ED-Tech is essentially a combination of **'education' and 'technology'**. It is a combined use of computer hardware, software and educational theory to facilitate learning.
- During Covid-19, remote learning suddenly became the only alternative as institutions, students, guardians, and authorities switched to the digital mode.
- The Indian ED-Tech industry was valued at **US$ 750 million in 2020** and is expected to reach **US $4 billion by 2025.**

SELF -REGULATION

- The ED-Tech companies have formed a collective — **India ED-Tech Consortium** — under the aegis of the **Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI).**
- This consortium has adopted a code of conduct for their businesses. However, the Government has already hinted at formulating a policy to regulate the ED-Tech sector.

NEED FOR REGULATION

- **Privacy Risk:**
  - Educational apps gather extensive data from learners through devices, analysing it minutely to tailor learning experiences and improve future app versions.
  - Sensors like GPS, gyroscope, and biometric sensors provide detailed information about the learner's surroundings and emotions, raising concerns about privacy and security.
- **Monopoly:**
  - Venture capital-backed EdTech platforms may offer services at low or no cost, potentially leading to monopolistic practices in the industry.
- **Algorithmic Bias:**
  - EdTech platforms often rely on AI-based tools, which can introduce biases with long-term implications for students' academic careers.
  - For instance, in the UK, students from disadvantaged backgrounds received lower grades due to algorithmic biases, highlighting systemic issues.
- **Loan-based Fee System:**
  - The fee structures of EdTech companies may not be affordable for everyone, as they operate as consumer-driven services and charge high fees.
- **Lack of Emphasis on Social Skills:**
  - Ed-Tech platforms cannot fully replace traditional schooling, as schools play a crucial role in fostering important life skills such as collaboration, play, and critical thinking beyond classroom instruction.

WAY FORWARD

- There must be a mechanism to thoroughly map the ED-Tech landscape, especially their scale, reach, and impact. The focus should be on access, equity, infrastructure, governance, and quality-related outcomes and challenges for teachers and students.
- The policy formulation and planning process must strive to enable convergence across schemes (education, skills, digital governance, and finance),
- It must be ensured that ED-Tech policies focus on three key elements: Accessibility, Enabling processes of teaching, learning, and evaluation, Governance – Improving governance systems including planning, management, and monitoring processes.

Key Findings of All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-2022
- **Introduction:** Released by the Ministry of Education, the AISHE has been conducted since 2011 under the Higher Education Statistics and Public Information System (HESPIS) scheme.
- **Participation and Data Collection:**
  - Involvement of major stakeholders like the University Grants Commission, All India Council for Technical Education, and State Governments in data collection.
  - Utilisation of electronic mode and a dedicated portal for conducting the survey.
- **Number of Institutions:**
  - 1,168 Universities, 45,473 Colleges, and 12,002 Standalone Institutions were registered.
  - 17 Universities and 4,470 Colleges are exclusively for women.
- **Student Enrolment:**
  - Total enrollment increased to nearly 4.33 crore in 2021-22 from 4.14 crore in 2020-21.
  - Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education for the age group 18-23 years is 28.4, lower than the global average of 40%.
  - Gender Parity Index (GPI) stands at 1.01, with female GER surpassing male GER for the fifth consecutive year.
- **Infrastructure for Institutions:**
  - High availability of libraries (97%) and laboratories (88%).
  - Increasing connectivity to the National Knowledge Network (56% in 2020-21).
  - Skill Development Centre availability at 61%.
- **Representation of Foreign Students:**
  - India hosts 46,878 foreign students, with Nepal leading at 28%.
  - Majority of foreign students enrolled in Undergraduate courses (74.8%).

PRIVATE SECTOR IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- Most of our premier institutions of education have been funded by the government (State or Central) and they are all run as not-for-profit enterprises.
- Entry of the private sector in the field of education began with professional courses such as engineering, dentistry, medicine, pharmacy, etc.
- The avenues for the private sector increased overtime as it was realised by the private sector that there was a reasonable supply of interested students who could afford the cost of education.

ROLE OF PRIVATE INSTITUTION

- **Academic Freedom:** The government does not play a role in the appointment of faculty and staff. Further, they are not dependent on government aid for carrying out day-to-day activities.
- **Better Infrastructure:** Private institutions promise better academic performance of students by providing better infrastructure and good quality teachers. They use this as a crucial factor for attracting parents towards them.
- **Complement the Government Schools and universities:** They support the universities as the government does not have the capacity to solely accommodate the huge Indian population.
- **Raising Resources from Corporate Sector:** Raising of funds, grants and loans from the Corporate sector under the Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) are improving the ecosystem of higher education in India.
- **Establishment of Private Universities for Not-for-profit Purposes:** These types of universities are making the higher e**ducation cheaper and access to students belonging to lower economic sections.**

CONCERNS

- **Rising Inequalities:**
  - Private institutions exacerbate class divides due to their high costs, excluding many individuals from access.
  - Gender and caste disparities persist within private institutions, with boys and students from upper-caste backgrounds being disproportionately represented.
- **Profit Motive:**
  - Private institutions, often founded by businessmen, prioritise safeguarding business interests, shaping institutional policies to align with government agendas or societal sentiments.
  - Examples include historian Ramachandra Guha's refusal to join Ahmedabad University following protests from a religious group over his appointment.
- **Overnight Closures:**
  - Some private institutions promise quality education at low fees, resulting in inadequate infrastructure and poorly trained teachers.
  - This instability threatens their viability, leading to abrupt closures and leaving many students without access to education.
- **Lack of Transparency:**
  - Higher private institutes employ opaque methods to attract students, lacking clarity in course structures and fee arrangements, which can deter prospective students.
- **Security of Tenure:**
  - Private institutions often lack job security for teachers, who may feel compelled to conform to management directives.
  - Notably, prominent faculty members like Pratap Bhanu Mehta and Arvind Subramanian resigned from Ashoka University reportedly due to management concerns over their criticism of the government.
- **Flawed Results:**
  - Privileged students often achieve better outcomes in private institutions, not necessarily due to superior resources but because of their socio-economic backgrounds.

WAY FORWARD

- Democratic decision Making.
- Proper implementation of the Right to Education act.
- Reviewing the non-profit mandate for the education sector and existing fee regulations Opening corporate governance structures to private schools Classifying private schools as micro, small, or medium enterprises
- Role of state can't be ignored for maintaining a just and equal educational system

CONCLUSION

It's crucial to prioritise education delivery, whether through private or public means. There have been concerns about the condition of public institutions, underscoring the necessity of improving them to match the standards set by private institutions. Additionally, private universities are vital to meet the growing demands and expectations of the population for quality educational institutions.

BRAIN DRAIN

Context

- According to the recent information from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), More than six lakh Indians renounced citizenship in the past five years. This shows the amount of Brain drain from India
- There is a long list of Tech companies which are headed by Indians who migrated to the US. The list includes Twitter, Google, Microsoft, Adobe, IBM, Palo Alto Networks among others. This reflects the talent pool of India which is working abroad.

IMPORTANT DATA

- According to a Global Wealth Migration Review report, in 2022, India came second only to China when it came to high-net-worth individuals (HNIs) leaving the country. As many as 8,000 HNIs left India in 2022.
- Morgan Stanley report, "35,000 Indian Entrepreneurs of High Net Worth Left India between 2014-2020, as NRI/Immigrants. India ranked No. 1 in Exodus in the World."
- India has been a major exporter of healthcare workers to developed nations particularly to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Europe and other English-speaking countries.

WHAT IS BRAIN DRAIN?

The brain drain is the migration of educated persons from one country (often a developing country) to another (often more developed ones). India is a major supplier of skilled and unskilled human capital for the advanced economies.

REASONS

- **Push Factors:**
  - **Lack of Financial Research Support:** India's research expenditure remains stagnant at 0.7% of GDP, notably low compared to other BRICS nations.
  - **Lower Income:** Better-paying opportunities in sectors like health, research, and IT abroad often drive emigration from India.
  - **Lack of Higher Education Opportunities:** Limited openings in top Indian universities prompt students to pursue education abroad, where they perceive advantages in skills and knowledge acquisition.
  - **Non-recognition of Talents:** Despite academic achievements, individuals may feel undervalued compared to celebrities, prompting them to seek recognition elsewhere.
  - **Government Policies:** Restrictive policies to curb brain drain, such as halting NORI certificate issuance to doctors migrating to the US, often fall short of addressing long-term concerns.
  - **Plagiarism and Career Growth Issues:** Issues like time-bound promotions and intellectual property rights challenges can also drive emigration.
- **Pull Factors:**
  - **Better Remuneration:** Developed countries offer higher pay and living standards, attracting emigrants seeking financial stability.
  - **Policies of Developed Countries:** Migrant-friendly policies, like offering citizenship to frontline healthcare workers (e.g., France during the pandemic), incentivize migration.
  - **Ageing Demography:** Developed nations prioritise retaining young workers to maintain efficiency amid ageing populations.
  - **Societal Pressure:** Liberal-minded youth may feel stifled by societal expectations in India, driving them to seek more liberal societies abroad.
  - **Better Standard of Living:** Developed countries offer superior living conditions, healthcare, education, salaries, and tax benefits.
  - **Pandemic Demand:** The pandemic has heightened demand for healthcare workers abroad, leading to migrant-friendly policies such as visa extensions (e.g., UK granting one-year visa extensions to eligible overseas healthcare workers).

MEASURES TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT

- **Vaishvik Bharatiya Vaigyanik (VAIBHAV) Summit:** Under this, Numerous overseas Indian-origin academicians and Indians participated to form ideas on innovative solutions to several challenges.
- **The Ramanujan Fellowship:** It is meant for brilliant Indian scientists from outside India to take up scientific research positions in India.
- The Triad of Scheme for Transformational and Advanced Research in Sciences (STARS), Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC) and Impactful Policy Research in Social Science (IMPRESS) has a common objective of boosting India specific research in social and pure sciences.
- **Promotion for building world class institutions** through schemes such as 'Institutes of Eminence'.
- **Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research (INSPIRE) Programme:** The programme aims to attract talented youth to the study of science at an early stage and build the required critical human resource pool for strengthening and expanding the Science & Technology system and R&D base.

SUGGESTIONS TO ADDRESS BRAIN DRAIN

- **Infrastructure Focus:** Implement systematic changes including increased investment in core infrastructure and ensuring fair compensation to encourage professionals to remain in the country.
- **Policy Intervention:** Develop policies promoting circular migration and return migration, incentivizing healthcare workers to return home post-training or studies.
- **Bilateral Agreements:** Establish bilateral agreements fostering "brain-share" between sending and receiving countries to address brain drain.
- **Investment in Technologies and Research:** Formulate policies to increase Gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) to 2% of India's GDP, fostering cutting-edge research and technological facilities to attract talented individuals back to India.

- **Global Partnerships in Innovation:** Strengthen global innovation partnerships through enhanced public-private partnerships and increased public funds for joint industrial R&D projects.
- **Idea-to-Market Challenge:** Create a special fund to support Indian innovations and startups during challenging times, promoting success domestically rather than seeking employment opportunities abroad.

CONCLUSION
- India needs systematic changes that could range from increased investment in R&D, building world class infrastructure in health, Education Sectors, ensuring decent pay to workers and providing an overall environment that could motivate them to stay in the country.

LEARNING POVERTY

Context
- The World Bank's Global Director for Education raised concerns over learning losses for children due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for concerted efforts to bridge these gaps.
- According to the World Bank's learning poverty calculation, India's learning poverty has shot up from 54% (before the pandemic) to 70% (after the pandemic).

WHAT IS LEARNING POVERTY
- According to the World Bank, Learning Poverty means being unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of 10.
- This indicator brings together schooling and learning indicators. It begins with the share of children who haven't achieved minimum reading proficiency (as measured in schools) and is adjusted by the proportion of children who are out of school (and are assumed not able to read proficiently).
- All foundational skills (basic literacy, numeracy, and transferable skills) are important, but reading is focussed because:
  - Reading proficiency is an easily understood measure of learning.
  - Reading is a student's gateway to learning in every other area.
  - Reading proficiency can serve as a proxy for foundational learning in other subjects, in the same way that the absence of child stunting is a ma**rker of healthy early childhood development.**

NEED TO ELIMINATE LEARNING POVERTY
- It is key to **eliminating poverty** in general and boosting shared prosperity.
- **To Improve Learning Outcomes:** Globally between 2000 and 2017, there has only been a 10% improvement in learning outcomes for primary school-aged children. If this pace continues, 43% of 10-year-olds will not be able to read in 2030.
- **To Achieve SDG Goals:** The target we have set is ambitious but achievable and should galvanise action toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4) ensuring quality education for all. It will require nearly tripling the rate of progress worldwide, which can be done if every country can match the performance of the countries that made the most progress between 2000 and 2015.
- **To Increase Global Productivity:** The learning crisis not only wastes the children's potential, it hurts entire economies. It will negatively impact future workforces and economic competitiveness. As per the World Bank's Human Capital Index shows that globally, the productivity of the average child born today is expected to be only 56% of what it would be if countries invested enough in health and education.

REASONS FOR INCREASE IN LEARNING POVERTY
- **School Closures during the Pandemic:**
  - Closure of schools and shift to online classes during the pandemic exacerbated learning poverty.
  - A World Bank report from 2019 highlights that 55% of late primary age children in India struggle with reading, with a 20% increase observed during COVID-19.
- **Ill-organised School Systems:** Inadequate reading skills often indicate poorly organised school systems that fail to support learning in other subjects like mathematics, science, and humanities.
- **School Dropouts:** Globally, many children lack proficient reading skills, with over 260 million children not attending school, leading to a deepening crisis in learning poverty.
- **Decline in Household Income:** Economic downturns have forced students to switch from private to government schools due to declining household incomes, exacerbating the quality gap between private and public education systems.

- **Quality of Study Material:** Poorly designed textbooks and learning materials contribute to poor academic performance and hinder learning potential.
- **Malnutrition among Children:** Severe deprivation in terms of nutrition and unhealthy environments, as well as lack of caregiver nurturing, contribute to learning poverty among children.
- **Quality of Teachers:** Ineffective guidance, teaching methodologies, and a shortage of trained teachers result in decreased learning outcomes, further contributing to learning poverty.

IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING SKILLS

- **For Sustainable Growth and Poverty Reduction:** Poor education outcomes have major costs for future prosperity, given that human capital is the most important component of wealth globally.
- **Improving Overall Schooling Systems:** when children cannot read, it's usually a clear indication that school systems aren't well organised to help children learn in other areas such as mathematics, science, and the humanities either.
- **Better Quality Workforce:** Countries which have prioritised and invested in foundational learning have produced a better quality of workforce, enabling their economies to take off. Both South Korea and China did this in the 1970s, and the impact on their economies was tremendous.
- **Improves Individual Freedom:** For individuals and families, it can lead to higher productivity and earnings, poverty reduction, higher rates of employment, better health outcomes, and greater civic engagement.
- **Benefits Society:** For societies, it can contribute to faster innovation and growth, better-functioning institutions, greater intergenerational social mobility, higher levels of social trust, and a lower likelihood of conflict.

WAY FORWARD

- **Ensure timely access to more and better age- and skill-appropriate texts** - In Mongolia, better access to books led to a 0.21 standard deviation improvement in student outcomes.
- **Focus on ramping up catch-up learning and Brushing:** It will help in brushing up on the fundamentals, children can revise the syllabus easily.
- **Extra effort of Teachers in Class:** The teachers will require a lot of support to group students within the classroom not according to the grade or age, but according to where they are.
- **Investment in Education Technology:** Impact of school closures in India, the need for re-enrolment campaigns, and reassessment of learning levels as schools reopen after a gap of two years and calls for investment in education technology to complement classroom teaching.
- **Digital Literacy:** The fact that education television and radio came back after being abandoned for many years is a good development. We need such resilient systems because we don't know what the next natural disaster is going to be.
- **Budgetary Allocations:** Increase in budgetary allocation will bring quality and better infrastructure in the education; it helps to reduce Learning Poverty.

NEW EDUCATION POLICY, 2020

- The NEP 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century, replacing the thirty-four-year-old National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986.
- Founded on principles of access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability, it aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Its goal is to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by enhancing the holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary nature of both school and college education, tailored to 21st-century needs and individual student capabilities.
- **Progress and Challenges:**
  - The launch of NEP 2020 signified significant advancement in education and learning.
  - India has now completed one year under the NEP, although the pandemic has hindered its progress.
- **Learning Approach:**
  - NEP emphasises learning through observation, listening, exploration, experimentation, and questioning.
  - However, hands-on experiences are missing in online learning platforms, posing a challenge to the NEP's implementation during the pandemic.

SCHOOL EDUCATION

- The policy focuses on overhauling the curriculum, "easier" Board exams, a reduction in the syllabus to retain "core essentials" and **thrust on "experiential learning and critical thinking".**
- Early Childhood Care & Education with new Curricular and Pedagogical Structure.
- The new NEP pitches for a **"5+3+3+4" design** corresponding to the age groups:
  - 3-8 years (foundational stage),
  - 8-11 (preparatory),
  - 11-14 (middle), and
  - 14-18 (secondary).
- NCERT will develop a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) for children up to the age of 8.
- Emphasizes on **ensuring universal access to school education at all levels** i.e. preschool to secondary.
- Infrastructure support, innovative education centres to bring back dropouts into the mainstream, tracking of students and their learning levels.
- **Recognizing Foundational Literacy and Numeracy** as an urgent and necessary prerequisite to learning, NEP 2020 calls for setting up of a **National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy:**
  - States will prepare an implementation plan for attaining universal foundational literacy and numeracy in all primary schools for all learners by grade 3 by 2025.
- NEP 2020 is in favour of multilingualism and the power of language.
  - The policy has emphasised mother tongue/local language/regional language as the medium of instruction at least till Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond.
- **Standard-setting and Accreditation for School Education:** NEP 2020 envisages clear, separate systems for policy making, regulation, operations and academic matters:
  - States/UTs will set up an independent State School Standards Authority (SSSA).

HIGHER EDUCATION

- Opening up of Indian higher education to foreign universities, dismantling of the UGC and the **All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)**, introduction of a four-year **multidisciplinary undergraduate programme** with multiple exit options, and discontinuation of the M. Phil. programme.
- **Online Education and Digital Education:** A dedicated unit for building of digital infrastructure, digital content and capacity building will be created in the MHRD to look after the e-education needs of both school and higher education.
- **Technology in education:** National Educational Technology Forum (NETF): An autonomous body will be created to provide a platform for the free exchange of ideas on the use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning, and administration.

OTHER PROVISIONS

- **Gender Inclusion Fund** - For assisting the nation in the education of female and transgender children.
- **National Educational Technology Forum** - A platform to facilitate exchange of ideas on technology usage to improve learning.
- **National Research Foundation** - To improve research and innovation.
- **Special Education Zones** - to focus on the education of underrepresented groups in disadvantaged regions.

Financing Education: The Centre and the States will work together to increase the public investment in the Education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CHALLENGES OF NEP 2020

Significance	Challenges
• **Comprehensive Framework:** It provides an overarching vision and comprehensive framework for both school and higher education across the country. • It encourages critical thinking. In the Prime Minister's words, the policy focuses on 'how to think' rather than 'what to think'. • **Stress on Formative Years:** In adopting a 5+3+3+4 model for school education starting at age 3, it recognises the primacy of the formative years from ages 3 to 8 in shaping the child's future. • **Mother Tongue:** It also recognises the importance of learning in the child's mother tongue till at least Class 5. • **Vocational Courses:** The new policy is the breaking of the straitjackets of arts, commerce and science streams in high school, and the laudable goal of introducing vocational courses with internships.	• **Not Mandatory:** Though the NEP only provides a broad direction but it is not mandatory to follow. • **Transferable Job:** The NEP doesn't say anything specifically on children of parents with jobs which are frequently transferable. • Education is a concurrent subject, the reforms proposed can only be implemented collaboratively by the Centre and the States. • **Challenge of 6% GDP:** The government has set a target of 6% spending on education and this is difficult due to the current tax-to-GDP ratio, economic slowdown and pandemic impact. • **No Definition for Top Ranking Universities:** The document states universities from among the top 100 in the world will be able to set up campuses in India. While it doesn't elaborate the parameters to define the top 100.

WAY FORWARD

The effectiveness of any policy hinges on its implementation, which demands coordinated efforts from various bodies. The National Education Policy (NEP) involves multiple stakeholders such as MHRD, CABE, governments, educational ministries, boards, and regulatory bodies. It aims to revamp education from preschool to doctoral studies, emphasising flexibility and self-actualization. Successful execution requires political consensus and collaborative efforts between central and state authorities.

DIGITAL EDUCATION/E-LEARNING

• Recognizing the growing need for good quality digital content, the government launched Vidyadaan 2.0 for inviting e-learning content contributions.

E-LEARNING

• It is a method of delivering educational information through the Internet. It is the process of sharing knowledge through various channels such as e-books, CDs, webinars and more.
• It is flexible and self-paced and suited for distance learning.
• e-Education has revolutionised the conventional method of chalk and board style of learning imparted to the students.

Prerana: An Experiential Learning Program
• The Ministry of Education (MoE) initiated the "Prerana: An Experiential Learning Program" to cultivate leadership qualities among participants.
• **Program Details:**
  o A week-long residential program designed for selected students from classes IX-XII.
  o Each batch comprises 20 students, with equal gender representation (10 boys and 10 girls).
  o Venue: Vernacular School established in 1888, located in Vadnagar, Gujarat.
• **Curriculum:** Developed by IIT Gandhi Nagar, focusing on nine value-based themes.
• **Objectives:** Embody the essence of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," emphasising unity in diversity.

CHALLENGES

• Digital Illiteracy of parents, teachers and students.
• Affordability of electronic gadgets such as tablets, laptops etc.
• Internet connectivity in villages and remote areas.
• Lack of content in the local language.
• Practical oriented subjects such as chemistry has limitation in e learning
• Teachers' unfamiliarity and resistance to change.

ADVANTAGES

- **Convenience and Flexibility** – Teachers can teach from anywhere in their preferred time and students can learn Courses anytime and anywhere.
- **Effective Learning:** Applying e-learning to all levels of schooling helped to ensure students grasp the lessons adequately at a faster pace.
- **Disciplined Learning:** The audio-visual method of teaching leads to a disciplined learning environment. There are effective tutor and student engagements.
- **Cost effective:** Saves time, money and reduces transportation cost.
- **Environment Friendly:** No need for papers like traditional learning. Thus, it's Environment friendly.
- **Global level Education:** Tutors can provide online education in multiple languages and people from different time zones.
- **More Engagement:** Digital learning is a more engaging experience as compared to traditional learning. Through digital learning, a course can be designed in a way that makes it interactive and fun through the use of multimedia.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

- **SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds** - It is an integrated platform for online courses, using information and communication technology (ICT) which covers school (9th to 12th) to Post Graduate Level. It also offers online courses for students, teachers and teacher educators.
- **DIKSHA** - The DIKSHA platform offers engaging learning material, relevant to the prescribed school curriculum, to teachers, students and parents.
- **Vidyadaan** - The programme brings together academicians and organisations to develop and contribute fun and engaging e-learning content aligned to the curriculum.
- **PRAGYATA Guidelines on Digital Education** - The guidelines recommend a cap on the screen time for students. It includes eight steps of digital learning that is, Plan- Review- Arrange- Guide- Yak (talk)- Assign- Track- Appreciate.
- **PM e-Vidya** – It is a unique and innovative initiative to facilitate multi-mode access to digital/online teaching-learning contents of various types among students and teachers.

WAY FORWARD

- Education has been one of the biggest casualties of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In this unprecedented time digital education is being seen as a viable alternative for traditional schools and learning.

> **SWAYAM Plus Platform**
> - The Ministry of Education (MoE) inaugurated the SWAYAM Plus Platform.
> - SWAYAM is a Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) platform dedicated to providing educational opportunities to learners.

- Government and private sector must work together and ensure that education remains available, accessible and affordable for all and realise the SDG 4 i.e., to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

KEY TERMS: Skill Mismatch, Demographic Dividend, Reskilling, Upskilling, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Pupil Teacher Ratio(PTR), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat, Mid-Day Meal, NIPUN Bharat, UDAAN, SAKSHAM, Ishan Uday, SWAYAM, Learning Potential, Learning Poverty, Learning Gap, Foundational Skills, DIKSHA, Vidyadan, e-Vidya, PRAGYATA.

	Previous Years Questions	
1.	National Education Policy 2020 is in conformity with the Sustainable Development Goal-4 (2030). It intends to restructure and reorient the education system in India. Critically examine the statement.	2020
2.	Professor Amartya Sen has advocated important reforms in the realms of primary education and primary health care. What are your suggestions to improve their status and performance?	2016
3.	The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 remains inadequate in promoting incentive-based systems for children's education without generating awareness about the importance of schooling. Analyse.	2022
4.	National Education Policy 2020 is in conformity with the Sustainable Development Goal-4 (2030). It intends to restructure and reorient the education system in India. Critically examine the statement.	2020
5.	The quality of higher education in India requires major improvements to make it internationally competitive. Do you think that the entry of foreign educational institutions would help improve the quality of technical and higher education in the country? Discuss.	2015

8 HUMAN RESOURCE

INTRODUCTION

India is a country today with 65% of its youth in the working age group. If ever there is a way to reap this demographic advantage, it has to be through skill development of the youth so that they add not only to their personal growth, but to the country's economic growth as well. A dedicated Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) was set up in 2014 to implement the National Skill Development Mission, which envisions skilling at scale with speed and standards.

THE HUMAN CAPITAL INDEX 2023

KEY FINDINGS OF THE REPORT:

- The pandemic puts at risk the decade's progress in building human capital, including the improvements in health, survival rates, school enrollment, and reduced stunting.
- The economic impact of the pandemic has been particularly deep for women and for the most disadvantaged families, leaving many vulnerable to food insecurity and poverty.
- Protecting and investing in people is vital as countries work to lay the foundation for sustainable, inclusive recoveries and future growth.
- India has been ranked 116 out of 195 countries in HCI(World Bank), 2023.

FACTS AND DATA ABOUT HUMAN RESOURCE:

- Around 85% of the workforce in the unorganised sector does not imbibe any form of skill development.
- The annual incremental requirement of trainers is approximately 20,000, whereas at present the current annual capacity of the trainers is only 2,000.

CHALLENGES

- **Little or No Job Skills:** The India Skills Report 2021 found that about only 45.9% of young people would be considered employable. The data of UNICEF shows that more than 50% of Indian youth are not on track to have the education and skills necessary for employment by 2030.
- **Unawareness & Apathy Towards Entrepreneurship:** About 70% of Indian youth is not aware of schemes, according to a recent study "Young India and Work" by the Observer Research Foundation and World Economic Forum (WEF).
- **Insufficient Training Capacity:** Current infrastructure facilities available in the educational institutions are inadequate considering the huge demand for skilled labour. In India, around 12 million people are expected to join the workforce every year whereas the current total training capacity of the country is around 4.3 million.
- **Skill Mismatch:** There is divergence between the skill needed by industries and skill imparted by educational and training institutes. Despite various efforts on the part of the Government and its partner agencies, the credibility of vocational courses in India is still questionable.
- **Reskilling and Upskilling:** In the job market, half the global labour force might need reskilling by 2025(WEF). Due to emergence of disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Data Analytics the challenge of reskilling and upskilling is becoming prominent.
- **Absence of Risk-taking Behaviour:** Most of the youth do not prefer entrepreneurship, rather they opt for working in the companies.
- **Job Creation For Skilled Youth:** India needs to create 100 million more jobs by 2030. Creating more jobs is the biggest development challenge. No country can achieve its full potential and meet 21st century challenges without the full participation of the working population.
- **Uneducated Rural Youth:** Private sector provides skill training as required by the service sector mainly to educated youth (especially 12th pass) and largely in urban regions. Ultimately, hundreds of workers in the unorganised sector do not get any kind of skill training.

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS

- **Skill India:** Launched to empower the youth of the country with skill sets which make them more employable and more productive in their work environment.
- **National Policy on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015:** Aimed to provide an umbrella framework to all skilling activities being carried out within the country, to align them to common standards and link the skilling with demand centres.

Fig: Measures to be taken to harness the human resource

- **PM-YUVA Yojana:** Aims at creating an enabling ecosystem for Entrepreneurship development through Entrepreneurship education and training; Advocacy and easy access to entrepreneurship support network and promoting social enterprises for inclusive growth.
- **India Institute of Skills (IIS):** To bring a certain standard and stature in terms of quality and quantity to skills.
- **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana:** To encourage aptitude towards employable skills and to increase working efficiency of probable and existing daily wage earners, by giving monetary awards and rewards and by providing quality training to them.
- **Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana:** To transform rural poor youth into an economically independent and globally relevant workforce.
- **Skills Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement (STRIVE) project:** To improve the relevance and efficiency of skills training provided through Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and apprenticeships.
- **Ministry of Human Resource Development Initiatives:** It has taken following initiatives for human resource development
  - **Operation Digital Board:** To utilise emerging technologies in promoting quality education in India.
  - **Cloud Research Lab on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML):** These labs will provide students with opportunities to use AWS cloud technology to pursue research initiatives that focus on AI and ML innovation in India. It is an initiative under MoU between IIT-BHU and Amazon Internet Services Private Limited (AISPL).
  - **AI for All:** Ministry of Education joined hands with the chip-making giant Intel and Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to announce the launch of - 'AI for All' - an initiative that aims to create a basic understanding of Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- **Skill Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion ("SANKALP"):** To improve short term skill training qualitatively and quantitatively through strengthening institutions, bringing in better market connectivity and inclusion of marginalised sections of the society.
- **Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Program (SVEP):** SVEP, launched by the Ministry of Rural Development, aims to promote rural entrepreneurship. It focuses on marginalised communities, including women, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes, by providing them with training, financial assistance, and mentorship to start their own micro-enterprises.
- **National Career Service (NCS):** The NCS is an online platform developed by the Ministry of Labour and Employment. It provides a variety of services, including job matching, career counselling, skill assessments, and training programs. The platform aims to facilitate equal opportunities and accessibility to employment resources for all individuals, irrespective of their background.
- **Mahila E-Haat:** This initiative by the Ministry of Women and Child Development provides an online platform for women entrepreneurs to showcase and sell their products. It aims to promote women's economic empowerment and create opportunities for them to participate in the mainstream economy.
- **Udaan:** Udaan is a special initiative by the Ministry of Home Affairs and implemented by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). It focuses on skill development and job placement for unemployed youth from Jammu & Kashmir.
- **The Malaviya Mission - Teachers Training Programme (MM-TTP):**
  - It was initiated by the University Grants Commission (UGC).
  - **Overview of MM-TTP:**
    - It proposes a restructuring of current schemes aimed at enhancing the capacity of teachers under the Department of Higher Education.

- The program aims to provide capacity-building training for faculty and staff in higher educational institutions (HEIs) over two years, aligning with the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and utilising multiple training centres.
- As part of the initiative, Human Resource Development Centres (HRDCs) will be renamed as Madan Mohan Malaviya Teachers' Training Centre.

PM DAKSH

Context

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has launched 'PM-DAKSH' (Pradhan Mantri Dakshta Aur Kushalta Sampann Hitgrahi) Portal and 'PM-DAKSH' Mobile App to make the skill development schemes accessible to the target groups - Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Safai Karamcharis.

ABOUT

- Under this, eligible target groups are provided with the skill development training programmes on short term.
- Training program, up-skilling/reskilling, entrepreneurship development programme and long term training programme.
- These training programmes are being implemented through the government training institutes, sector skill councils that have been constituted by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and other credible institutions.

ELIGIBILITY

- Marginalised persons of SC (Scheduled Caste), OBC (Other Backward Classes), Economically Backward Classes, Denotified tribes, Sanitation workers including waste pickers, manual scavengers, transgenders and other similar categories.

IMPLEMENTATION

- It is implemented by the three Corporations under the Ministry:
  - National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC)
  - National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation (NBCFDC)
  - National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL (SDG)

SDG 8: To promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

TARGETS

- By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.
- Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.
- Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.

Migration in India 2020-2021' Report

- **The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation** compiled data on **migrants and temporary visitors** for a study that was released in June, 2022.
- **Key Findings of the Repot:**
  - **Following the Covid-19 pandemic's start in March 2020, 0.7% of India's population** was identified as a "temporary visitor" across all households between July 2020 and June 2021.
  - **Temporary Visitor:** A visitor having a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, **for less than a year, for any main purpose** other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited,
    - Over **84% of these 0.7% "temporary visitors"** relocated for pandemic-related reasons, such as job loss, school closures, and health-related issues.
    - For the period of **July 2020 to June 2021**, the migration rate across all of India was 28.9%, with migration rates of **26.5 %** in rural areas and 34.9 % in urban areas.

- Female migrants made up a bigger percentage of the population, 47.9%, with 48% living in rural and 47.8% in urban regions.
- **Male migration rates** were **10.7%%,** with **5.9%** of them occurring in rural areas and **22.5% in urban ones.**

Circular Migration: Understanding the Phenomenon

- **Definition:** Circular migration involves repeated migration experiences with multiple emigrations and returns, rather than permanent or temporary moves.
- **Characteristics:**
  - Typically seen among low-income groups seeking seasonal job opportunities in different locations.
  - Individuals move in response to work availability rather than settling permanently or temporarily.
- **Benefits:**
  - Balances development needs of states/cities with economic opportunities for individuals.
  - Reduces brain drain by encouraging skill transfer and "brain circulation."
  - Addresses labour shortages without causing permanent population growth.
  - Reduces income instability by diversifying income sources.
  - Alleviates pressures associated with permanent immigration.
  - Encourages higher remittance rates.
  - Facilitates cultural exchange.
- **Challenges:**
  - Exploitation by employers, including poor working conditions and labour rights violations.
  - Subsistence-level employment with limited savings opportunities.
  - Limited government policy support due to data deficiencies and under-reporting.
  - Exclusion from political processes in destination areas.
  - Predominantly driven by distress and vulnerability, affecting disadvantaged groups with poor education backgrounds.
  - **Other issues:** Social isolation, Language barriers, Job uncertainty, anti-migrant sentiments in host states etc.
- **Way Ahead:**
  - Thorough information regarding circular migrant workers can be gathered nationally and regionally, for instance, through the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).
  - Offering safety measures such as affordable insurance policies, occupational safety initiatives, and skill development programs.
  - Ensuring alignment and cooperation between central and state authorities to regulate labour laws, possibly through an interstate migration council.
  - Developing specific governmental strategies aimed at incorporating migrant labour into the formal economic system.
  - Implementing strong safeguards to uphold migrant rights and counter exploitation and mistreatment.

SUGGESTIONS

- **Empowerment:** Capacity Building and empowerment of state skill development missions in many States in order to upscale quality skill development.
- **Skill Development:** Create economic incentive for skilling, and for industry to realise the productivity gains linked with skilled manpower
- **Innovation:** Create an enabling eco-system for entrepreneurship to thrive and instil a mind-set and culture of opportunity & innovation.
- **Integration:** Integration of skill training with formal education.
- **Training:** Increase the capacity and quality of training infrastructure and trainers
- **Human Resource Needs:** Address human resource needs by aligning supply of skilled workers with sectoral requirements of industry and the country's strategic priorities.
- **Skilling Needs:** Ensure that the skilling needs of the socially and geographically disadvantaged and marginalised groups are appropriately taken care of.
- **Increased Participation:** Promote increased participation of women in the workforce through appropriate skilling and gender mainstreaming of training.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM UNICEF

- Integrating education with workforce preparedness, encompassing soft skills, technical competencies, and entrepreneurial training, to enhance youths' adaptability to professional settings.
- To boost women's engagement, offering subsidised child care services and paid leave, along with gender sensitivity workshops to raise awareness of female workforce needs.
- Investing in secondary education, prioritising quality, relevant curriculum, and teacher availability.
- Enhancing technological infrastructure and backing labour-intensive sectors can contribute to job creation efforts.

WAY FORWARD

The success of a nation always depends on the success of its youth and Skill India is certain to bring a lot of advantages and opportunities for these young Indians. The time is not far when India will evolve into a skilled society where there is prosperity and dignity for all.

- **Mapping Skill Requirements for a Demand-Driven Skill Development Ecosystem:**
- Develop skill development plans and strategies by geography and sector.
- Require Talukas/districts to provide necessary information for mapping.
- Incentivize industry stakeholders to provide ongoing data on skill requirements.
- Conduct regular labour market studies in collaboration with SSCs.
- Establish vocational training innovation centres for research and longitudinal studies.
- **Improving Training Delivery and Quality:** Upgrade capacities of teacher training institutes; Establish a single regulatory body to set minimum standards and issue NSQF aligned certificates; Scale up RPL under PMKVY and focus on transferable skills.
- **Vocational Education in Secondary Schools:** Initiate vocational education from class VIII; Incentivize participation by private schools; Consider provisions for credit transfers into higher education.
- **Apprenticeship Programs:** Advocate recent amendments in the Apprenticeship Act and NAPS; Streamline claim process for reimbursement; Integrate MSME sector into apprenticeship system.
- **Skilling:** Integrate skill development with education; Establish Overseas Employment Promotion Agency; Publicise success stories of vocational training.
- **Funding:** Tap alternative financial sources for skill programs.
- **Strengthening Sector Skill Councils (SSCs):**
  - Cluster SSCs based on occupations/functions and new technologies; Integrate job roles with horizontal applicability.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation;** Develop state-level indicators for monitoring programs; Partner with private job counselling agencies for soft skills training.

> **KEYWORDS: HIRE:** Hiring Right, Investing in People, Retaining Top Talent, Empowering Growth; **THRIVE:** Talent Acquisition, Human Development, Reward & Recognition, Inclusion & Diversity, Vibrant Culture; **EMPOWER:** Engage Your Workforce, Manage Performance, Promote Growth, Offer Development, Win Together; **P.E.O.P.L.E.** (Power, Empowerment, Optimization, Potential, Leadership, Engagement); **S.K.I.L.L.S.** (Strive, Knowledge, Innovation, Leadership, Learning, Success); **H.R.E.N.E.W.** (Human Resources, Empowerment, Nurturing, Engagement, Well-being); Empowerment through Education, Engagement, and Excellence **(3Es)**;

	Previous Year Questions	
1.	The crucial aspect of the development process has been the inadequate attention paid to Human Resource Development in India. Suggest measures that can address this inadequacy.	2023
2.	Skill development programmes have succeeded in increasing human resources supply to various sectors. In the context of the statement analyse the linkages between education, skill and employment.	2023
3.	"Earn while you learn" scheme needs to be strengthened to make vocational education and skill training meaningful." Comment	2021
4.	Despite the consistent experience of high growth, India still goes with the lowest indicators of human development. Examine the issues that make balanced and inclusive development elusive.	2019
5.	"Demographic Dividend in India will remain only theoretical unless our manpower becomes more educated, aware, skilled and creative." What measures have been taken by the government to enhance the capacity of our population to be more productive and employable?	2016

9 POVERTY G HUNGER

POVERTY

DEFINITION

According to the World Bank, poverty is pronounced deprivation in well-being, and comprises many dimensions. It includes low income and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. In India, 21.9% of the population lived below the national poverty line in 2011.

Absolute poverty refers to those whose incomes fall below a line set by a given country. Below this line people are unable to meet their basic needs for food, water and shelter.

- Relative poverty refers to a state of living where people can afford necessities but are unable to meet their society's average standard of living.

POVERTY CLASSIFICATION

- **Absolute Poverty:**
  - It is a condition which occurs due to deprivation from basic human needs such as food, clothing, health, education, sanitation facilities, shelter, etc.
  - It is measured through the concept of poverty line and refers to the actual number of people living Below Poverty Line (BPL).

Vicious Cycle of Poverty

- **Relative Poverty:**
  - It is defined from the social perspective, that is living standard compared to the economic standards of the population living in surroundings. Hence it is a measure of income inequality
  - Usually, relative poverty is measured as the percentage of the population with income less than some fixed proportion of median income
  - It is a widely used measure to ascertain poverty rates in wealthy developed nations.
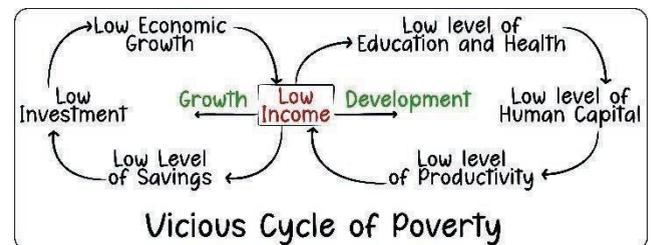
Poverty manifests itself in multiple forms as discussed below:

- **Health-poverty:** Lack of access to nutrition, sanitation, high disease-burden and low productivity create a poverty trap.
- **Skill-poverty:** Poor access to education, lack of early-childhood interventions and poor skill mobility in informal jobs lead to poor employability, income and economic opportunities.
- **Asset Poverty:** Lack of assets like land or house, low access to finances and lack of social capital.
- **Gender-poverty:** Gendered aspect of poverty includes subversion of ownership of assets and incomes to male members including son, husband or brother while women remain dependent.
- **Crimes:** Poverty facilitates regression drug addiction, prostitution, human-trafficking, organised crime, Naxalism etc. It degrades the moral values of the society.

APPROACHES RECOMMENDED BY DIFFERENT COMMITTEES FOR POVERTY CALCULATION

- **Task Force on "Projections of Minimum Needs and Effective Consumption Demand" headed by Dr. Y. K. Alagh (1979)**
  - Official poverty counts began for the first time in India based on the approach of this Task Force.
  - Poverty line was defined as the **per capita consumption expenditure level** to meet average per capita **daily calorie requirement of 2400 kcal per capita per day** in **rural areas** and **2100 kcal per capita per day in urban areas.**
  - Based on 1973-74 prices, the Task Force set the rural and urban poverty lines at 49.09 and Rs.56.64 per capita per month at 1973-74 prices.
- **Lakdawala Expert Group (1993)**
  - It did not redefine the poverty line and retained the separate rural and urban poverty lines recommended by the Alagh Committee at the national level based on minimum nutritional requirements.
  - However, it disaggregated them into state-specific poverty lines in order to reflect the inter-state price differentials.

- o Over the years, this method lost credibility. The price data were flawed and successive poverty lines failed to preserve the original calorie norms
- **Tendulkar Expert Group (2009)**
  - o The Tendulkar Committee suggested several changes to the way poverty was measured
  - o It recommended a shift away from basing the poverty lines from calorie norms used in all poverty estimates since 1979 and towards target nutritional outcomes instead
  - o It recommended **incorporation of private expenditure on health and education** while estimating poverty.
  - o Instead of monthly household consumption, consumption expenditure was broken up into per person per day consumption, resulting in the figure of **Rs 32 and Rs 26 a day for urban and rural areas.**
  - o As a result, the national poverty line for 2011-12 was estimated at Rs. 816 per capita per month for rural areas and Rs. 1,000 per capita per month for urban areas
- **Rangarajan Committee (2014)**
  - o Due to widespread criticism of the Tendulkar Committee approach as well as due to changing times and aspirations of people of India, Rangarajan Committee was set up in 2012.
  - o It reverted to the practice of having **separate all-India rural and urban poverty line** baskets and deriving state-level rural and urban estimates from these.
  - o It recommended separate consumption baskets for rural and urban areas which include food items that ensure recommended calorie, protein & fat intake and non-food items like clothing, education, health, housing and transport.
  - o This committee raised the daily per capita expenditure to **Rs 47 for urban and Rs 32 for rural** from Rs 32 and Rs 26 respectively at 2011-12 prices
  - o Monthly per capita consumption expenditure of Rs. 972 in rural areas and Rs. 1407 in urban areas is recommended as the poverty line at the all India level
  - o However, The government did not take a call on the report of the Rangarajan Committee.

Currently in India, the **identification of impoverished individuals is carried out by State Governments**, drawing on information from **Below Poverty Line (BPL) censuses,** with the latest being the **Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011 (SECC 2011).**

Conducted by the States/Union Territories (UTs) simultaneously for both rural and urban areas, SECC 2011 was supported by the Government of India both technically and financially. The census gathered comprehensive data on households, covering individual particulars, housing, deprivation, employment, income, assets/amenities, and land ownership. It documented the socio-economic status of 17.97 crore rural households and 6.51 crore urban households.

SECC 2011 classified households into three groups:

- **Automatically Excluded:**
  - o Households meeting exclusion criteria, such as any of the 13 assets and income-based parameters, are automatically excluded from welfare benefits.
- **Automatically Included:**
  - o Households meeting inclusion criteria, satisfying any one of the 5 acute social destitution parameters, are automatically included for welfare benefits.
- **Others:**
  - o "Others" are ranked based on 7 indicators of deprivation and, budget permitting, may be eligible for welfare benefits.

Unlike BPL Censuses, **SECC-2011 introduces the ability to track household deprivation**, effectively addressing gaps with a focus on the multi-dimensionality of poverty. Outside the Census Act, it provides a unique opportunity to understand the specific deprivation of each household. The **Sumit Bose Committee (2017) recommended leveraging SECC 2011 data to identify beneficiaries for various government schemes.**

The government has utilised **SECC data** in implementing social welfare programs, including

- Pradhan Mantri Aawas Yojana Gramin,

> **National Sample Survey (NSS): Key Points**
> **Annual national survey:** Covers various socio-economic topics in rotating cycles.
> **Example topics:** Health & education (71st round), household consumption expenditure (68th & 75th rounds).
> **Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (CES):** Conducted every 5 years during NSS rounds.
> **CES purpose:** Estimates household monthly spending and distribution across income classes.
> **Data collected:** Expenditure on food, non-food goods & services.
> **Uses:** Rebase GDP and other macro-economic indicators.
> **79th Round (2022-23):** Focuses on HCES, including data on free government welfare items.

- Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission,
- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana-Ayushman Bharat,
- Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana,
- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana.

Several state governments also use it to implement the National Food Security Act, 2013.

The incorporation of SECC data in government programs facilitates evidence-based developmental interventions. Generating a program-specific priority list, considering the fiscal space of the welfare program, ensures targeted pro-poor interventions. The selection of beneficiaries is validated through Gram Sabhas, and identity is established through Aadhaar where legally allowed, minimising duplication and fraud. This approach significantly enhances the government's effectiveness in addressing multidimensional poverty, transcending income or expenditure-based considerations.

INDIA MAKES SIGNIFICANT STRIDES IN REDUCING MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY: A CLOSER LOOK

A major breakthrough: NITI Aayog's report, "National Multidimensional Poverty Index: A Progress Review 2023," reveals a remarkable achievement – **13.5 crore individuals** (135 million) **lifted out of multidimensional poverty** between 2015-16 and 2019-21. This translates to a **9.89 percentage point decline**, bringing the national multidimensional poverty rate down from 24.85% to 14.96%.

Rural areas lead the charge: While both rural and urban areas saw reductions, **rural areas witnessed the most significant improvement**, dropping from 32.59% to 19.28% multidimensional poverty. Urban areas also saw a decline, from 8.65% to 5.27%.

Uttar Pradesh emerges as a leader: The state with the **highest number of individuals escaping poverty** was Uttar Pradesh, with **3.43 crore people** experiencing an uplift in their living conditions.

A holistic approach: The report utilises the **National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)**, which incorporates data from the latest **National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019-21)** and follows a **globally recognized methodology**. This index goes beyond just income and considers **deprivations across three key dimensions**:

- **Health:** This includes factors like nutrition, child and adolescent mortality, and maternal health.
- **Education:** Years of schooling and school attendance are evaluated.
- **Standard of Living:** This dimension considers access to clean cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, assets, and bank accounts.

Improvements across all indicators: Encouragingly, the report highlights **marked improvements in all 12 indicators** used to calculate the MPI, showcasing progress in various aspects of life.

Indicators of success: The **MPI value** nearly **halved** from 0.117 to 0.066, and the **intensity of poverty** (average deprivation score) **decreased** from 47% to 44%. These positive trends indicate India is on track to achieve **SDG Target 1.2** (reducing multidimensional poverty by at least half) **well before the 2030 deadline**. This achievement reflects the government's commitment to **sustainable and equitable development**, aligning with the broader objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Further insights: The report also provides **multidimensional poverty estimates for all states, union territories, and districts** in India, allowing for a deeper understanding of regional variations and targeted interventions. Additionally, **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Rajasthan** are identified as states with the **fastest reductions in the proportion of multidimensional poor**.

Overall, the report paints a picture of significant progress in India's fight against multidimensional poverty. While challenges remain, the positive trends observed offer a promising outlook for continued improvement in the years to come.

CAUSES OF POVERTY

India's battle against poverty is multifaceted, demanding a nuanced understanding of the interplay between various factors. Let's delve into each layer with data-driven support:

SOCIAL FACTORS

- **The Caste System: A Persistent Barrier to Opportunity**
  - **Entrenched Inequality:** India's caste system is a rigid social hierarchy that has existed for centuries. It assigns individuals to social groups at birth, largely determining their access to education, employment, and resources.

- o **Discrimination and Exclusion:** Dalits ("untouchables") and other lower castes are systematically marginalised and discriminated against. This manifests in social exclusion, limited access to basic services, and higher rates of poverty.
- o **Economic Impact:** Caste-based discrimination perpetuates economic inequality. Even with similar qualifications, Dalits earn 11% less than non-Dalits (World Bank, 2020). This lack of opportunity creates a cycle of poverty that becomes deeply entrenched.

- **Other Social Factors Exacerbating Poverty**
  - o **Gender Inequality:** Women and girls face significant discrimination in India. They often have less access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Gender norms restrict their ability to work outside the home or own assets, creating a gendered poverty trap.
  - o **Social Norms and Traditions:** Certain customs and traditions perpetuate poverty, especially in rural areas. For instance, the dowry system can put excessive financial burdens on families leading to debt and further impoverishment.
  - o **Laws of Inheritance:** Current laws tend to favour male property ownership, resulting in a lack of land and assets for women. This creates a barrier to breaking out of poverty and makes them dependent on male relatives.
  - o **Geographic Disparities:** Poverty is often concentrated in rural areas with limited infrastructure and access to education and healthcare. Discrimination along caste lines is also often more prevalent in rural settings.

- **The Impact of Social Factors on Poverty**
  - o Social factors and discrimination contribute to poverty in India through several mechanisms:
  - o **Limited Economic Opportunities:** Discrimination restricts access to employment and fair wages, hindering individuals from lifting themselves out of poverty.
  - o **Lack of Education and Skills Development:** Children from marginalised communities often lack access to quality education, limiting their future economic prospects.
  - o **Poor Health Outcomes:** Discriminatory practices and limited access to healthcare contribute to higher rates of illness and disability, further trapping people in poverty.
  - o **Intergenerational Poverty:** The cycle of poverty often continues across generations when children born into marginalised groups face the same discriminatory obstacles as their parents.
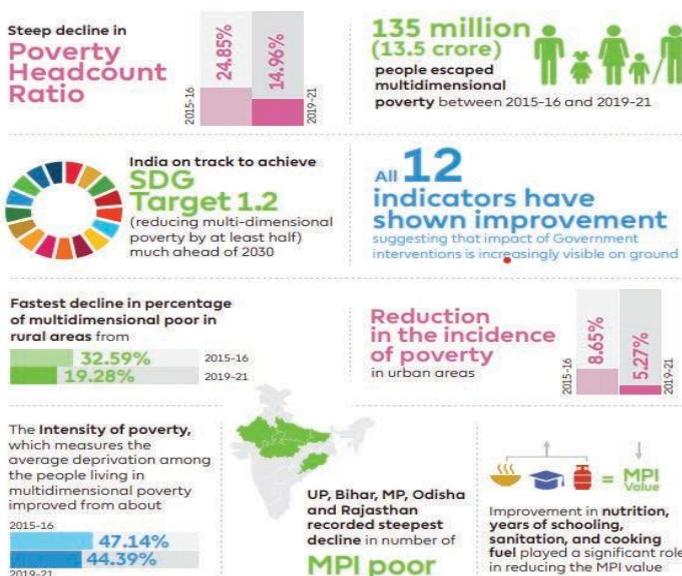
INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- **Limited Education and Skills:** Only 51.3% of India's population aged 25 and above have completed secondary education (UNESCO, 2022). This lack of education limits skill development and traps individuals in low-wage jobs.
- **Healthcare Access Gaps:** India's out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure, at 47.1% (7th National Health Account, 2019-20), significantly burdens the poor.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

- **Soil Degradation:** Overuse, poor farming practices, and deforestation can lead to soil erosion and declining fertility. This severely impacts agricultural productivity, making it difficult for farmers to sustain themselves and their families.
- **Water Scarcity:** Droughts, insufficient rainfall, and overexploited water resources limit agricultural production and access to clean water for drinking and sanitation. This creates a cycle of poor health, food insecurity, and economic hardship.

Highlights: MPI Progress Report 2023

Steep decline in **Poverty Headcount Ratio** — 24.85% (2015-16), 14.96% (2019-21)

135 million (13.5 crore) people escaped multidimensional poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21

India on track to achieve **SDG Target 1.2** (reducing multi-dimensional poverty by at least half) much ahead of 2030

All **12 indicators have shown improvement** suggesting that impact of Government interventions is increasingly visible on ground

Fastest decline in percentage of multidimensional poor in rural areas from 32.59% (2015-16) to 19.28% (2019-21)

Reduction in the incidence of poverty in urban areas — 8.65% (2015-16), 5.27% (2019-21)

The **Intensity of poverty,** which measures the average deprivation among the people living in multidimensional poverty improved from about 47.14% (2015-16) to 44.39% (2019-21)

UP, Bihar, MP, Odisha and Rajasthan recorded steepest decline in number of **MPI poor**

Improvement in **nutrition, years of schooling, sanitation, and cooking fuel** played a significant role in reducing the MPI value

- **Natural Disasters:** Floods, cyclones, and earthquakes can devastate entire regions, destroying homes, crops, and livelihoods. The loss of assets and income sources pushes vulnerable families deeper into poverty and makes rebuilding difficult.

- **Climate Change:** Increasingly unpredictable weather patterns due to climate change disrupt agricultural cycles and threaten livelihoods. Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe, making farming even more challenging in vulnerable regions.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

- **Unequal Playing Field:** India's Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality, stands at 0.402 for AY 2022-23. (SBI Research), indicating significant wealth inequality. This translates to the top 10% of earners controlling 51% of the national income (IMF, 2022).
- **Unemployment and Underemployment**: India's unemployment rate in 2021 was 7.8% (World Bank, 2022), but underemployment remains a significant challenge, with 37% of employed individuals working less than their desired hours (ILO, 2023).
- **Debt Traps:** Household debt in India has risen rapidly, with 77% of rural households and 55% of urban households reporting debt (CMIE, 2022). This high debt burden can trap families in poverty.
- **Low Capital Formation**: India's gross fixed capital formation as a percentage of GDP has been declining, reaching 24.4% in 2021 (World Bank, 2023). This lack of investment hinders economic growth and job creation.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure**: India ranks 38 in the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index (2023), highlighting significant infrastructure challenges that impede economic activity and market access.
- **Lack of Safety Nets**: India's social safety net programs are fragmented and inadequate, leaving many vulnerable to poverty shocks like illness or crop failure.

Sectoral Reliance: Over 50% of India's workforce is employed in the agriculture sector, which is characterised by low productivity and income volatility.

**COVID-19'S DEVASTATING IMPACT ON POVERTY IN INDIA: A DEEPER LOOK**

The COVID-19 pandemic inflicted a harsh blow on India's economy, disproportionately impacting the lives of millions living in poverty. Here's a detailed look at the pandemic's far-reaching consequences:

INDIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO NUMBER OF GLOBAL POOR IS SIGNIFICANT

Source: World Bank 'Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022' report

**Job Losses and Income Decline:**

- **Mass unemployment:** The stringent lockdowns triggered widespread business closures and job losses, particularly in the **informal sector** which employs a significant portion of India's workforce. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) estimates a net **loss of 7 million jobs** between February 2020 and 2021.
- **Hardest hit:** Non-farm workers, salaried employees, daily wage earners, and business owners were significantly impacted, facing **declines in working hours and wage cuts** even in jobs they managed to regain.
- **Increased informality:** Many salaried workers were forced to move into the **informal sector** due to limited job options, leading to **lower income security and vulnerability**.
- **Overall income drop:** Household income experienced an average **fall of 12%** during 2020-2021, further burdening struggling families.

India, poverty and inequality

Share of people in extreme poverty*, %

Rural Hardship:

- **Beyond urban woes:** Initially perceived as an urban phenomenon, the economic disruption swiftly **spread to rural areas** due to interconnectedness across sectors.
- **Disrupted agriculture:** The lockdown not only led to a mass exodus of workers from rural areas, but also **halted agricultural activities**. This **trapped millions of rural labourers** in hardship, hindering their ability to earn a living.
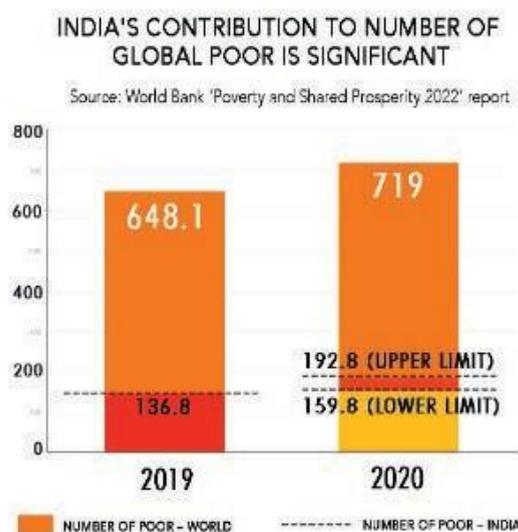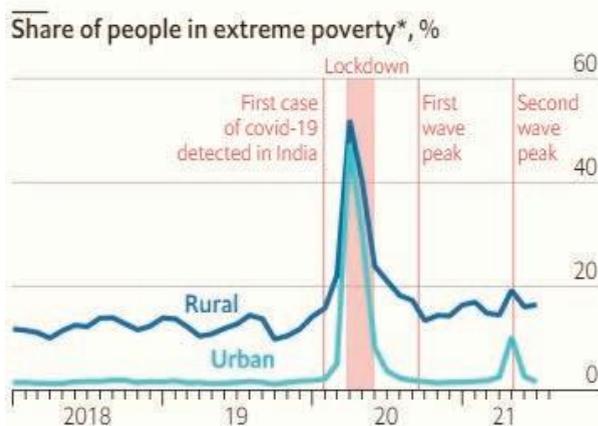
Movement restrictions: Movement restrictions on labour, goods, and essential services **severely impacted rural income and production**, especially for perishable goods like fruits and vegetables.

CHALLENGES TO POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN INDIA

STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

- **Inequality:** Deep-rooted inequality in India perpetuates poverty. Unequal distribution of wealth, assets, and opportunities limits the ability of the poor to break out of the cycle.
- **Caste System:** The persistent caste system fuels discrimination and social exclusion, limiting educational and economic opportunities for individuals from marginalised communities.
- **Corruption:** Corruption at various levels syphons off resources that could be used for development programs. It weakens institutions and erodes trust in systems, hindering effective poverty reduction initiatives.
- **Inefficient Governance:** Inefficiencies in policy implementation, bureaucracy, and a lack of transparency lead to delays and wastage in poverty alleviation programs.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FACTORS

- **Population Growth:** The rapidly growing population strains resources, infrastructure, and job creation efforts. More people means greater demand for food, healthcare, and education, making it more difficult to meet the basic needs of all.
- **High Unemployment:** Despite economic growth, India faces significant unemployment and underemployment, especially among marginalised populations. This lack of formal sector job opportunities traps many in the informal sector, characterised by low wages and limited benefits.
- **Limited Access to Basic Services:** Many impoverished individuals lack access to essentials like education, healthcare, safe water, and sanitation. This creates a cycle of deprivation, impairing their ability to become productive members of society.
- **Rural-Urban Divide:** There is a significant disparity between rural and urban areas regarding poverty rates. Lack of infrastructure and opportunities in rural areas exacerbates poverty and triggers migration to already congested cities.

GEOGRAPHIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

- **Natural Disasters:** Frequent natural disasters like floods, droughts, and cyclones disrupt livelihoods, destroy assets, and push people further into poverty, particularly in vulnerable areas.
- **Climate Change:** The effects of climate change, such as erratic rainfall patterns, desertification, and water scarcity, disproportionately impact the poor, destroying traditional livelihoods and exacerbating food insecurity.
- **Land Degradation:** Soil erosion, deforestation, and unsustainable agricultural practices contribute to land degradation and reduce productivity, harming the economic prospects of poor rural populations.

> **Prof. Amartya Sen - Capabilities approach**
> - Poverty is not just an economic measure but measures of human rights and access. It is no longer confined to the income level but it is the deprivation of choices available to an individual to live a life and the deprivation of the individual's abilities to exercise that choice.
> - He proposed that there are five general freedoms which underpins capabilities, the derogation of which will give rise to poverty –
>   - Political freedom including civil rights.
>   - Economic facilities including access to credit.
>   - Social opportunities include access to health care, education and other social services.
>   - Transparency in relations between people and between people and governments.
>   - Protective security includes social and economic safety nets such as unemployment benefits and famine and emergency relief.
> - Thus, the capabilities approach concerns an individual's ability to enjoy the full range of choices and actual ability to realise that choice.

POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES IN INDIA

- **Integrated Rural Development Program** : Launched on 2nd October, 1980, aims to provide a self-employment program to poor rural families to help them increase their income and cross the poverty line.
- **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana**: To provide housing for the rural poor in India. A similar scheme for urban poor was launched in 2015 as Housing for All by 2022. So far, construction of 2.50 crore houses has also been completed as on 29.11.2023.

- **National Rural Livelihood Mission**: It is a poverty alleviation project to organise the poor into SHG (Self Help Groups) groups and make them capable of self-employment.
- **National Urban Livelihood Mission**: To reduce poverty and vulnerability of the urban poor households by enabling them to access gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities.
- **MGNREGA** : The MGNREGA provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage.
- **National Food Security Act, 2013**: The Act legally entitled up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidised food grains under Targeted Public Distribution System.
- **National Social Assistance Programme** : To provide support to aged persons, widows, disabled persons and bereaved families on death of primary breadwinner, belonging to below poverty line households.

WHY DOES POVERTY STILL PERSIST IN INDIA?
- **Rural Distress**: Rural distress is mainly driven by the agriculture failure due to rising input costs, decreasing land holding, climate change etc. Further lack of industrialisation and employment opportunities in other sectors than agriculture are the main impediment to alleviating poverty.
- **Pandemic Impact** : COVID Pandemic and consequent lockdown resulted in shut down of businesses, job loss and falling incomes. It is estimated that the number of poor in India has more than doubled.
- **Stagnant Manufacturing sector**: The share of the manufacturing sector which leads to the creation of large employment, has stagnated around 15- 16% of the GDP.
- **Failure of anti-poverty schemes**: Insufficient funds, bureaucratic apathy, inclusion & exclusion errors, corruption, poor implementation, Top-to Down approach led to failure of poverty alleviation programmes and limited their success.
- **Left Wing Extremism** : Poverty has a geographical dimension in India. In central India and NE region naxalites and insurgents obstruct the developmental work and thus these are major poverty pockets in India.
- **Other** : Illiteracy, Skill deficit, Lack of employment opportunities, Population explosion , Disasters creates hurdles in poverty alleviation programmes and thus poverty persists in India.

RECENT IMPROVEMENTS
- **Greater opportunities** : The growth-oriented approach has been reinforced by focusing on specific sectors which provide greater opportunities to the people to participate in the growth process.
- **Capacity Building** : Governments have considerably enhanced allocations for the provision of education, health, sanitation and other facilities which promote capacity-building and well-being of the poor.
- **Empowerment of vulnerable sections** : Special programmes have been taken up for the welfare of scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs), the disabled and other vulnerable groups.
- **Bottom up approach** : Rural poverty alleviation programmes were revamped and re-focused to increase their effectiveness. Decentralisation of power, bottom up approach has been integrated in the scheme. Ex - MGNREGA.
- **Curb Corruption**: Initiatives such as Digitalization, Direct Benefit Transfer, Financial inclusion and provisions of social audits have been taken to plug the leakages in implementation of schemes.
- **Sustainable and Inclusive development** : To address regional and sector based growth imbalance in growth, the Government has initiated programmes such as Green Revolution 2.0, Blue Economy, North Eastern Region Vision 2020 for the development of the NER etc.

WAY FORWARD
- Poverty is not only an economic or political problem. It is also an ethical issue and a matter of social justice.
- Poverty also jeopardises the development of the nation as it becomes a hindrance in economic growth.
- Thus government, civil society etc must work together for poverty alleviation through a variety of interventions.

POVERTY AND ASSOCIATED ISSUES

Poverty poses a significant social challenge impacting millions in India and globally. It encompasses more than just financial scarcity, extending to the erosion of dignity, opportunities, and fundamental human rights. Its ramifications extend beyond individuals to communities and society at large, heightening the likelihood of various social issues, including:

THE CYCLE OF POVERTY, CRIME, AND VIOLENCE
There's a complex relationship between poverty, crime, and violence.

- **Economic Deprivation and Limited Opportunities:** Poverty restricts access to basic needs like food, shelter, healthcare, and education. These deprivations severely limit opportunities for economic and social advancement. This can lead to a sense of hopelessness and a perception that legitimate avenues for success are blocked.
- **Survival Strategies:** In the face of limited opportunities, individuals may turn to crime out of desperation to provide for themselves or their families. Property crimes like theft or burglary may seem like the only way to obtain basic necessities.
- **Social Disorganization and Weakened Institutions:** Poverty-stricken communities often suffer from social disorganisation. This includes weakened family structures, lack of positive role models, and a decline in community institutions that could provide support. All these factors increase the likelihood of criminal behaviour, especially among youth.
- **Strain Theory:** Sociological theories like strain theory posit that the gap between societal expectations and the means to achieve them can generate frustration and desperation. This strain can push individuals into deviant or criminal behaviour as a way to achieve goals deemed important by society.
- **Exploitation and Victimisation:** Economic inequality creates power imbalances, making those in poverty vulnerable to exploitation. They might become victims of wage theft, predatory lending practices, or human trafficking. These experiences can fuel resentment and lead to violent responses.
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health:** Poverty is correlated with substance abuse and mental health problems. These conditions can impair judgement and impulse control, leading to violence or increased participation in criminal activities.
- **Gangs and Organized Crime:** Disadvantaged neighbourhoods may see the rise of gangs or organised crime groups seeking to exploit vulnerable individuals. These groups may offer a sense of belonging and an illicit path for economic gain, perpetuating cycles of violence and criminal activity.

NOT A DIRECT CAUSATION, BUT A STRONG ASSOCIATION

It's crucial to remember that poverty doesn't directly cause crime or violence. Many people living in poverty never engage in these behaviours. However, the conditions associated with poverty can dramatically increase the risk of involvement in criminal or violent acts.

Addressing the Issue

Breaking the link between poverty, crime, and violence requires multifaceted, long-term approaches:

- **Economic Opportunities:** Expanding economic opportunities through job creation, vocational training, and support for small businesses is crucial to providing alternative pathways to success.
- **Education and Social Support:** Investing in education and community-based programs helps break generational cycles of poverty, fosters positive life skills, and provides vital support structures.
- **Addressing Inequality:** Reducing economic inequality lessens the sense of hopelessness and marginalisation that contributes to crime and violence.
- **Community Policing and Restorative Justice:** Building trust between communities and law enforcement, alongside restorative justice practices, can address the root causes of conflict and crime.

FEMINISATION OF POVERTY

One of the starkest examples of this phenomenon is the **feminization of poverty**, which refers to the **disproportionate impact of poverty on women**. Here, we delve deeper into how social, economic, and cultural factors contribute to this issue in India:

GENDER NORMS AND VALUES

- **Traditional gender roles** often assign women to **unpaid domestic work**, such as childcare and homemaking, significantly limiting their opportunities for **paid employment** and financial independence.
- **Societal norms** may restrict women's mobility, access to education and skills development, further hindering their ability to participate fully in the workforce and achieve economic empowerment.

UNEQUAL DIVISION OF LABOR AND ASSETS

- Women often carry the **burden** of both **household chores** and **caretaking responsibilities**, leaving them with less time and energy to pursue income-generating activities.
- **Unequal distribution of assets**, such as land and property, overwhelmingly favours men, further marginalising women in terms of economic ownership and control.

POWER IMBALANCES

- **Patriarchal structures** limit women's **decision-making power** and **financial autonomy**. This lack of agency makes them vulnerable to exploitation and hinders their ability to access resources and opportunities.
- **Violence against women**, including domestic abuse and dowry-related harassment, adds another layer of vulnerability, hindering their ability to escape poverty.

LATEST DATA AND TRENDS

- **Female Labor Force Participation:** India's female labour force participation rate remains significantly **lower** than that of men, highlighting the limited opportunities women have in the formal workforce.
- **Access to Education and Health Care:** Women and girls face **challenges** in accessing quality **education and healthcare services**. This creates a cycle of disadvantage, limiting their potential for personal and economic growth.
- **Decision-Making Power:** Women's **participation in decision-making processes** at the household and community levels remains **limited**. This lack of voice further marginalises their needs and perspectives within society.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Empowering women economically and socially is crucial to break the cycle of poverty and foster a more **inclusive and equitable society**. This requires:

- **Strengthening women's economic opportunities** through skill development, vocational training, and entrepreneurship programs.
- **Promoting gender-sensitive policies** that address violence against women, improve access to education and healthcare, and enhance women's agency.
- **Encouraging women's participation in decision-making forums** and leadership roles at all levels, ensuring their voices are heard, and their perspectives are incorporated into policy and development processes.

By addressing the feminization of poverty and other forms of social and economic disparities, we can build a **stronger and more cohesive society** where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

	Previous Year Questions	
1.	Besides the welfare schemes, India needs deft management of inflation and unemployment to serve the poor and the underprivileged sections of the society. Discuss.	2022
2.	Can the vicious cycle of gender inequality, poverty and malnutrition be broken through microfinancing of women SHGs? Explain with examples.	2021
3.	"The incidence and intensity of poverty are more important in determining poverty based on income alone". In this context analyse the latest United Nations Multidimensional Poverty Index Report.	2020
4.	Performance of welfare schemes that are implemented for vulnerable sections is not so effective due to absence of their awareness and active involvement at all stages of the policy process – Discuss.	2019
5.	There is a growing divergence in the relationship between poverty and hunger in India. The shrinking of social expenditure by the government is forcing the poor to spend more on Non- Food essential items squeezing their food – budget.- Elucidate.	2019
6.	How far do you agree with the view that the focus on lack of availability of food as the main cause of hunger takes the attention away from ineffective human development policies in India?	2018
7.	'Poverty Alleviation Programmes in India remain mere show pieces until and unless they are backed by political will'. Discuss with reference to the performance of the major poverty alleviation programmes in India.	2018
8.	Hunger and Poverty are the biggest challenges for good governance in India still today. Evaluate how far successive governments have progressed in dealing with these humongous problems. Suggest measures for improvement.	2017
9.	"An essential condition to eradicate poverty is to liberate the poor from the process of deprivation." Substantiate this statement with suitable examples.	2016
10	Critically examine whether growing population is the cause of poverty OR poverty is the main cause of population increase in India.	2015

HUNGER

Definition

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), hunger is described as a distressing sensation resulting from inadequate intake of **food energy**. The typical minimum energy requirement for an individual is approximately 1800 kilocalories per day, with variations based on factors such as age, body size, physiological state, and level of activity.

- While India produces enough food to feed its population, the country is home to 25 percent of the world's hungry population.
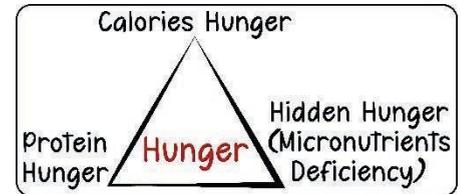
KEY FACTS

- Micronutrient deficiencies cause an estimated 1.1 million of the 3.1 million child deaths (International Food Policy Research Institute, IFPRI).
- Severe anaemia contributes to the death of 50,000 women in childbirth each year. Nearly 18 million babies are born with brain damage due to iodine deficiency each year (IFPRI).

STATUS OF HUNGER IN INDIA

- **National Family Health Survey (NFHS):** NFHS provides comprehensive data on various indicators, including hunger and malnutrition rates in India.
  - According to the NFHS-5 (2019-2020), the prevalence of stunting among children under five decreased marginally from 38.4% (NFHS-4) to 34.7%, while wasting increased from 21% to 24.4%. However, these rates still indicate a substantial burden of malnutrition.
- **Global Nutrition Report:** This report tracks global progress on nutrition and highlights country-specific trends and challenges.
  - The 2022 report noted that India is making progress on maternal, infant, and young child nutrition (MIYCN) targets.
  - Stunting affects 34.7% of children under 5, surpassing Asia's average of 21.8%, while wasting affects 17.3%, exceeding the regional average of 8.9%.
  - Overweight children under 5 stand at 1.6%, with efforts to prevent escalation.
  - India's obesity rates are below the regional average (10.3% for women, 7.5% for men), yet diabetes affects 9.0% of adult women and 10.2% of adult men.
- **State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI):** SOFI underscores the widening gap between the expense of a nourishing meal and the financial challenges encountered by a considerable segment of the Indian populace.
  - In 2021, India ranked fourth among the nations surveyed, with 74% of its population unable to afford a nutritious diet.
- **Regional Disparity:** India's diverse states exhibit varying levels of hunger and malnutrition. For instance, states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh have higher prevalence rates compared to states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2023

- In the 2023 Global Hunger Index, **India secured the 111th position** with a **GHI score of 28.7** among 125 countries, signifying a significant level of hunger.
- India's neighbouring nations, including **Pakistan (102nd), Bangladesh (81st), Nepal (69th), and Sri Lanka (60th),** achieved better scores compared to India.
- **Global trend**
  - According to the GHI 2023 report, **Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Chile, and China are among the top-ranked countries,** indicating a low level of hunger, while **Yemen, Madagascar, and the Central African Republic are at the bottom**.
  - The **global GHI 2023 score stands at 18.3,** considered moderate, with minimal improvement since 2015.
  - Since 2017, the **prevalence of undernourishment has increased** from 572 million to approximately 735 million people.
  - The **stagnation in progress** is attributed by the GHI to various crises, including **climate change, conflicts, economic shocks, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Russia-Ukraine war**. These crises have **exacerbated social and economic inequalities,** hindering global efforts to reduce hunger.

- The Global Hunger Index (GHI), an **annual publication by Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe,** serves as a **peer-reviewed tool** for comprehensively measuring and monitoring hunger worldwide, across different levels - global, regional, and national.
- It assesses multiple aspects of hunger over time, assigning a score on a **scale of 0 to 100**, with 0 indicating no hunger and 100 indicating the worst scenario.
- The GHI score is determined by four indicators**:**

- **Aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**
  - The prevalence of undernourishment corresponds to **SDG 2.1**, which focuses on ensuring access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food for all.
  - Child stunting and wasting rates are indicators for **SDG 2.2**, aimed at ending all forms of malnutrition,
  - reducing preventable child deaths is a target under **SDG 3.2**.
- **Indian Government's Response to GHI Report 2023**
  - **Critique of Methodology:** The Ministry of Women and Child Development has raised objections regarding the methodology used in the report, highlighting "serious methodological concerns" and alleging "malafide intent.
  - **Contradictory Data:** Data from the government's Poshan Tracker consistently indicates a child wasting prevalence below 7.2%, which contradicts the GHI's reported figure of 18.7%.
  - **Emphasis on Child Health:** The government has emphasised that three out of the four GHI indicators focus on children's health, potentially skewing the representation of the entire population.
  - **Questionable Sample Size:** The government has expressed scepticism regarding the accuracy of the "Proportion of Undernourished Population" indicator due to its reliance on a small sample size opinion poll.
  - **Consideration of Complex Factors:** The government argues that indicators such as stunting and wasting result from a multitude of complex factors, including sanitation, genetics, environment, and food utilisation, challenging the notion that they are solely indicative of hunger.
  - **Multiple Determinants of Child Mortality:** Additionally, the government has highlighted that child mortality may not solely stem from hunger, suggesting that other contributing factors should be considered.

CAUSES OF HUNGER IN INDIA

Hunger remains a significant issue despite its growing economy and advancements in agriculture. Several specific factors contribute to hunger in India. Some of the major causes of hunger are as follows:

- **Poverty** : Hunger is a consequence of poverty. Poor living conditions and limited food access lead to malnutrition in children, especially in rural areas with overpopulation.
- **Gender inequality**: Girls suffer more due to the patriarchal mindset, as they are considered secondary and are generally the last to eat in poor families. They are also deprived of mid-day meals due to a lack of access to schools.

- **Poor governance:** Corruption is one of the greatest obstacles to eliminating hunger. This problem is compounded by the lack of awareness among the people.
  - **Example:** Food distribution is inconsistent, with grains being diverted to the open market for profit and poor quality grains sold in ration shops.
- **Unidentified hunger:** Inaccurate classification of households as above or below the poverty line, coupled with poor quality grains, leads to a decline in food consumption.
- **Hidden hunger:** Micronutrient deficiency, caused by poor diet, disease, and inadequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation, leads to hidden hunger.
- **Lack of maternal knowledge:** Inadequate understanding of nutrition, breastfeeding, and parenting among mothers is another area of concern.
- **Resource wastage and climate change:** The consequences of resource wastage are borne by lower strata of society as they cannot adapt to changing events.
  - Further, the expansion of deserts, soil erosion, water scarcity, and extreme weather phenomena as a result of climate change invariably affects poor people more, leading to hunger.
- **Natural disasters:** Weather extremes lead to hunger crises. Droughts and floods destroy harvests and leave the poor vulnerable.
- The **lack of toilet facilities leads women to eat less** to avoid relieving themselves in the open, as highlighted in the Economic Survey of 2018.

HIDDEN HUNGER

Hidden hunger, also referred to as micronutrient deficiency, manifests when the **intake or absorption of essential vitamins, proteins, and minerals falls below the levels required** to sustain optimal health and development in children, and normal physical and mental functions in adults.

Causes of Hidden Hunger: Micronutrient deficiency, Poor diet, Lack of availability, accessibility & affordability of nutritious food. **Example** - Meat, fruits, vegetables etc. Lack of awareness, lack of safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, increased micronutrient needs during certain life stages. **Example** - during pregnancy and lactation, absence of crop diversity in agriculture etc.

HIDDEN HUNGER CRISIS IN WORLD

- More than 2 **billion people worldwide suffer from hidden hunger,** more than double the 805 million people who do not have enough calories to eat (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2014).
- **Much of Africa, south of the Sahara and the South Asian subcontinent** are hotspots where the prevalence of hidden hunger is high.
- Many developing countries face a phenomenon known as the **"triple burden"** of **malnutrition— undernourishment, micronutrient deficiencies, and obesity.**

CHALLENGES IN ADDRESSING HIDDEN HUNGER

- Significant gaps exist in the implementation of programs like Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Public Distribution System (PDS), and Food Security. For instance, there is a severe shortage of paediatric iron syrups in most states that needs immediate rectification.
- Although universal maternity entitlements have been assured under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), their implementation faces numerous hurdles.
- Institutional support systems such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Midday Meal Scheme, and National Rural Health Mission are already in place to combat hidden hunger, but they require reinforcement.
- Implementing weekly iron-folic acid supplementation programs to reduce anaemia among girls represents a positive step in addressing hidden hunger.
- India is promoting the cultivation of iron-rich crops like pearl millet, which are abundant in vitamin B, calcium, iron, potassium, magnesium, and zinc, to combat widespread iron deficiencies.
- Innovative agricultural techniques such as fortification and biofortification, aimed at addressing specific micronutrient deficiencies within target populations, should be encouraged.

IMPACT

- **Children & adolescents :** Stunting & wasting, mental impairment, frequent infections, adverse effects on child health and survival, high mortality rate etc.
- **Pregnant Women** -:Increased mortality, Increased perinatal complications etc
- **Adults :**Poor health, low productivity, and even death, Malnutrition, increased risk of chronic diseases, Even mild to moderate deficiencies can affect a person's well-being and development.

- **Impacts development of nations** :In addition to affecting human health, hidden hunger can curtail socioeconomic development, **particularly in low- and middle-income countries.**

The **'hidden hunger'** due to micronutrient deficiency does not produce hunger as we know it. You might not feel it in the belly, but it strikes at the core of your health and vitality. - **UNICEF**

SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS HIDDEN HUNGER

- **Supplementation :** It is a **technical approach** in which nutrients are delivered directly to the desired population by means of syrup or pills.
  - o Supplementation programs are used only as a **short-term measure** and are then replaced with long-term, **sustainable food-based measures** such as **fortification and dietary modification.**
- **Food Fortification and Biofortification**
  - o **Food fortification, or enrichment, involves the addition of essential trace elements and vitamins to food,** thereby preventing large-scale deficiency diseases.
  - o The addition of micronutrients to staples and condiments can significantly contribute to addressing nutritional deficiencies.
  - o **Biofortification entails breeding crops to enhance their nutritional content**. This can be achieved through conventional selective breeding or genetic engineering.
  - o Unlike conventional fortification, **biofortification focuses on enhancing the nutritional value of plant foods as they grow, rather than adding nutrients during processing**.
- **Food diversification**
  - o It means increasing both the quantity and the range of micronutrient-rich foods consumed.
  - o It is the preferred way of improving the nutrition of a population because it has the potential to improve the intake of many food constituents like antioxidants and probiotics, not just micronutrients simultaneously.

INDIAN GOVERNMENT'S INITIATIVES AIMED AT ERADICATING HUNGER

Indian efforts to end hunger encompass a variety of initiatives and programs aimed at addressing food insecurity and malnutrition. Some key efforts include:

- **National Food Security Act (NFSA):** Enacted in 2013, NFSA aims to provide subsidised food grains to approximately two-thirds of India's population, ensuring food security for vulnerable households. Key Features of the National Food Security Act 2013 are:
  - o **Coverage and Entitlement under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS):** The TPDS extends to 50% of the urban population and 75% of the rural population, with a uniform entitlement of 5 kg per person per month. The poorest households will continue to receive 35 kg per household per month under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY).
  - o **Subsidised Prices and Revision:** For three years from the commencement of the Act, food grains under TPDS are available at subsidised prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per kg for rice, wheat, and coarse grains.
  - o **Household Identification:** Eligible households are identified by States/UTs under the TPDS, with specific criteria determined for each State.
  - o **Nutritional Support for Women and Children:** Children aged 6 months to 14 years, pregnant women, and lactating mothers are entitled to meals meeting prescribed nutritional norms under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mid-Day Meal (MDM) schemes. Malnourished children up to 6 years are provided with higher nutritional norms.
  - o **Maternity Benefit:** Pregnant women and lactating mothers receive a maternity benefit of Rs. 6,000.
  - o **Women Empowerment:** The eldest woman aged 18 years or above in the household is designated as the head for issuing ration cards.
  - o **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:** Grievances are addressed at the District and State levels through established mechanisms.
  - o **Transportation and Handling Costs:** States are assisted by the Central Government to cover transportation, handling of food grains, and the margin for Fair Price Shop (FPS) dealers.
  - o **Transparency and Accountability:** Provisions ensure transparency through disclosure of PDS records, social audits, and the establishment of Vigilance Committees.
  - o **Food Security Allowance:** In case of non-supply of entitled food grains or meals, beneficiaries are provided with a food security allowance.
  - o **Penalties:** Failure to comply with relief recommended by the District Grievance Redressal Officer may result in penalties imposed by the State Food Commission.

- **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS):** ICDS is a government program providing nutrition and healthcare services to pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children under six years old, with a focus on addressing malnutrition.
  - The **Anganwadi system,** initially launched as part of the **Anganwadi Services Scheme** (now renamed as **Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0**), plays a vital role in the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme.
  - The Anganwadi Services Scheme is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under the **Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD),** representing one of the world's largest and most unique programs for early childhood care and development.
  - This scheme aims to **enhance the nutritional and health status of children (0-6 years), pregnant women, and lactating mothers, and to reduce mortality, morbidity, and malnutrition rates**.
- **Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS):** MDMS provides free meals to schoolchildren, aiming to improve their nutritional intake, increase school attendance, and promote education.
- **PM-POSHAN:** In September 2021, the Union Cabinet endorsed the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM-POSHAN), allocating a budget of Rs 1.31 trillion to provide one hot cooked meal in Government and Government-aided schools.
  - This initiative **replaced** the national program for midday meals in schools, known as the **Mid-day Meal Scheme**.
  - The scheme is set to operate for an initial duration of five years, **from 2021-22 to 2025-26**.
  - Coverage: **Primary (grades 1-5) and upper primary (grades 6-8) schoolchildren** receive allocations of 100 grams and 150 grams of food grains per working day, respectively, ensuring a minimum of 700 calories. Additionally, the program **extends to students in balvatikas (ages 3-5)** attending pre-primary classes.
  - The primary goals of the PM POSHAN Scheme (formerly recognized as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme) are **to tackle two critical issues** facing a large portion of children in India: **hunger and education**.
  - This initiative **aims to enhance the nutritional well-being of eligible children attending Government and Government-aided schools**.
  - Additionally, it endeavours to **incentivize underprivileged children from disadvantaged backgrounds** to attend school more consistently, enabling them to better focus on classroom engagements.
- **POSHAN (PM's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment) Abhiyaan:** Launched in 2018, aims to reduce malnutrition among children, adolescents, and pregnant women through various interventions, including nutritional counselling, health check-ups, and micronutrient supplementation.

Target Group	Target
Prevent and reduce Stunting in children (0- 6 years)	By 6% @ 2% p.a.
Prevent and reduce under-nutrition (underweight prevalence) in children (0-6 years)	By 6% @ 2% p.a.
Reduce the prevalence of anaemia among young children (6-59 months)	By 9% @ 3% p.a.
Reduce the prevalence of anaemia among Women and Adolescent Girls in the age group of 15-49 years.	By 9% @ 3% p.a.
Reduce Low Birth Weight (LBW).	By 6% @ 2% p.a.

  - To rally communities and empower people to take action, **India dedicates September to POSHAN Maah,** a nationwide month of nutrition awareness and engagement.
  - **Key Nutrition strategies and interventions:** IYCF (Infant and Young child feeding), Food and Nutrition, Immunisation, Institutional Delivery, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), Deworming, ORS-Zinc, Food Fortification, Dietary Diversification, Adolescent Nutrition, Maternal Health and Nutrition, ECD (Early childhood development)/ECCE (Early Childhood care and Education), Convergence, ICT-RTM (Information and Communication. Technology enabled Real Time Monitoring) and Capacity Building etc.
- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):** Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, PMGKAY aims to provide additional free food grains to vulnerable households to alleviate food insecurity during times of crisis.
- **The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):** MGNREGA provides guaranteed wage employment to rural households, contributing to poverty alleviation and food security by enhancing purchasing power and livelihood opportunities.
- **National Health Mission (NHM):** NHM focuses on improving maternal and child health outcomes, including addressing malnutrition, through various interventions such as immunisation, prenatal care, and nutrition counselling.

- **Food Fortification Program:** The government has initiated programs to fortify staple foods such as rice, wheat, and salt by adding essential vitamins and minerals such as **iron, iodine, zinc, and Vitamins A and D** to improve nutritional outcomes, particularly among vulnerable populations.
- **Eat Right Movement:** It is an initiative spearheaded **by FSSAI** aimed at revolutionising the nation's food ecosystem to ensure safe, nutritious, and sustainable food for all Indians.
  - Its motto, **'Sahi Bhojan, Behtar Jeevan,'** underscores its mission.
  - Aligned with the National Health Policy 2017, it complements initiatives like Ayushman Bharat, POSHAN Abhiyaan, Anaemia Mukt Bharat, and Swachh Bharat Mission, **focusing on preventive and promotive healthcare**.
  - **Eat Right India** employs a balanced approach, incorporating regulatory measures, capacity building, collaboration, and empowerment to promote food suitability for both people and the planet.
  - Related initiatives include.
    - **State Food Safety Index**, designed by FSSAI to assess states' performance across five food safety parameters: **Human Resources and Institutional Data, Compliance, Food Testing Infrastructure and Surveillance, Training and Capacity Building, and Consumer Empowerment**.
    - **Eat Right Awards**: established by FSSAI, acknowledge the efforts of food companies and individuals in promoting safe and healthy food choices.
    - **Eat Right Mela:** organised by FSSAI, serves as a public engagement platform to encourage citizens to adopt healthier eating habits.
- **Identification and Management Of Malnutrition in Children:** The Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD), in collaboration with the Ministries of Health and Family Welfare and AYUSH, launched a protocol to address child malnutrition.
  - The protocol provides detailed guidelines for identifying and managing malnourished children at the Anganwadi level, a crucial component of Mission Poshan 2.0.
  - Key components include growth monitoring, appetite testing, and nutritional management of malnourished children. Children failing the appetite test are referred to Nutritional Rehabilitation Centres.
  - Follow-up care is provided for children achieving requisite growth parameters post-intervention.
  - The protocol introduces the 'Buddy mother' initiative, where mothers of healthy babies mentor mothers of malnourished children.
  - Diet diversity and micronutrient-rich food are encouraged.
  - Notably, 7.7% of children under 5 years suffer from severe wasting.

NITI AAYOG'S STRATEGY FOR NEW INDIA @ 75 TO ENHANCE NUTRITION

NITI Aayog, the policy think tank of the Indian government, has formulated strategies under the New India @ 75 vision to enhance nutrition across the country. These strategies are aimed at addressing malnutrition, improving access to nutritious food, and promoting healthy dietary practices.

- **Address policy and governance issues**
  - Enhance flexibility for states under POSHAN Abhiyan to tailor programs for context-specific implementation and experiment with innovative approaches.
  - Establish an independent institutional mechanism for annual audits to improve program implementation.
- **Ensure convergent action at all levels**
- Develop and implement Annual Integrated Health, Nutrition, and Swachh Bharat Mission action plans for all districts under POSHAN Abhiyaan.
- Integrate health, sanitation, and nutrition services at the village level through committees and regular observance of Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Days.
- **Implement mission mode action in districts with a high burden of malnutrition**
  - Set up convergence mechanisms at state, district, and block levels with specified timelines and sufficient budgetary allocation.
  - Strengthen monitoring systems and coordinate intensively monitored implementation by NITI Aayog.
- **Refine program interventions:** Devise a strategy for additional home-based contacts under the home-based young child care initiative. Focus on healthcare measures, birth spacing, exclusive breastfeeding, and timely access to complementary food interventions. Prioritise immunisation, including RotaVirus and Pneumococcal Vaccines.
  - Consider mandatory fortification of staples and incorporate fortified food grains and double-fortified salt in government programs. Explore approaches to bio-fortification of grains for micronutrient deficiencies.

- **Research**
  - Establish a national nutrition surveillance system.
  - Conduct implementation research studies.
  - Evaluate the effectiveness of conditional cash transfers and supplementary nutrition.
  - Review and redesign nutrition programs targeted at adolescent girls.
  - Test approaches to prevent childhood and adult obesity.
- **Scale up nutrition MIS and strengthen monitoring mechanisms**
  - Implement IT-based real-time monitoring mechanisms.
  - Undertake joint health and nutrition reviews.
  - Establish accountability with defined responsibilities at all levels.
- **Make 'POSHAN Abhiyaan' a Jan Andolan**
  - Foster a community-led movement with political backing.
  - Develop behavioural change communication modules for frontline workers.
- **Galvanise the National Anaemia Control Programme**
  - Implement revised strategy based on evidence.
  - Incorporate home, community, school, and facility-level action. Consider 'screen and treat' as part of the anaemia control intervention package.

NITI AAYOG: NATIONAL CONVENTION ON PREVENTION OBESITY

- NITI Aayog described obesity as a "silent epidemic". Obesity is defined as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health. A body mass index (BMI) over 25 is considered overweight, and over 30 is obese. The vast majority of overweight or obese children live in developing countries, where the rate of increase has been more than 30% higher than that of developed countries.
- **Risk factors for obesity**
  - Unhealthy food environment (accessibility, desirability, affordability of unhealthy foods)
  - Inadequate physical Activity and sedentary lifestyle
  - Inadequate breastfeeding practices
  - Parental obesity, maternal under-nutrition
- **India's action towards reducing obesity**
  - **FSSAI's Eat right India initiative:** Integrates safe and nutritious food intake, promotes healthy eating around school premises.
  - **Fit India initiative:** Spread awareness on fitness and physical activities and make fitness reach every school, college and village.
  - **Mother's Absolute Affection (MAA) Programme:** for Infant and Young Child Feeding.

> **KEYWORDS: Poverty:** Economic Development, Social Justice, Access to Education, Affordable Housing, Microfinance, Sustainable Livelihoods, Gender Equality; "Poverty Ends Now", "Building a Brighter Future, Together", "Empowering Communities, Breaking the Cycle", "Dignity for All", "**SOLVE** - Supporting Opportunity, Offering Education, Lifting Communities, Voicing Needs, Ending Poverty", "**RISE** - Resources & Support, Income & Opportunity, Skills & Education, Empowerment"
> **Hunger:** Food Security, Food Waste Reduction, Malnutrition, Sustainable Agriculture, Global Food Policy, Food Banks & Pantries, Community Food Programs; "Nourishing Hope, Ending Hunger", "No One Left Hungry", "Food for All, Food for Thought", "A World Without Hunger", "**EAT** - Eliminate Hunger, Advocate for Change, Transform Lives", "**SHARE** - Secure Food Sources, Help Communities Thrive, Advocate for Change, Resource Equity, End Hunger".

	Previous Year Questions	
1.	There is a growing divergence in the relationship between poverty and hunger in India. The shrinking of social expenditure by the government is forcing the poor to spend more on Non- Food essential items squeezing their food – budget.- Elucidate.	2019
2.	How far do you agree with the view that the focus on lack or availability of food as the main cause of hunger takes the attention away from ineffective human development policies in India?	2018
3.	Hunger and Poverty are the biggest challenges for good governance in India still today. Evaluate how far successive governments have progressed in dealing with these humongous problems. Suggest measures for improvement.	2017

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1 : 1 MENTORSHIP BEYOND THE CLASSES

- **Diagnosis** of candidates based on background, level of preparation and task completed.
- **Customized solution** based on Diagnosis.
- One to One **Mentorship.**
- Personalized schedule **planning.**
- Regular **Progress tracking.**
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