ISSN: 0974-2735

BIHAR JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

New Series
Vol. XXIII, No. 1

(A Bi-Annual Refereed Research Journal of IIPA Bihar Regional Branch, Patna)
(Placed in UGC-CARE Reference List of Quality Journals)
IMPACT FACTOR - 6.880

Vol. XXIII No. 1 Jan.-June, 2026



Editor
R.K. Verma

Indian Institute of Public Administration
Bihar Regional Branch, Patna

Indian Institute of Public Administration
Bihar Regional Branch, Patna

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New Series ISSN: 0974-2735

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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Bihar Regional Branch
Vermas, Shiva Path, New Purendrapur, Patna - 800 001

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Name of Beneficiary: Editor, BJPA

A/C No. 110235001100017, IFSC: YESB0BSCB01 (fifth letter is ZERO)

Bank: Bihar State Cooperative Bank Ltd,

Branch: New Secretariat, Patna.

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From the Desk of Chief Editor

I have immense pleasure to present the Vol. XXIII No. 1, January - June 2026 of Bihar Journal of Public Administration before the readers. The present Issue of the Journal contains such important subjects that are useful for policy masters and academics. It is a matter of pride for Bihar Regional Branch of Indian Institute of Public Administration which renders a commendable service to the discipline of Public Administration and Policy Science by publishing a nationally reputed journal regularly for over last two decades. It will be evident from the fact that it has been continuously maintained quality and has earned Impact Factor 6.880 by Cosmos indexing. Chairman & members of IIPA Bihar Branch and the editorial team always put their hundred percent efforts for which I must appreciate their vigor and rigor in getting the contributions edited and reviewed to maintain standard. The Journal intends to incorporate innovative ideas on Public Administration, Governance, Policy Process and development, especially of Bihar.

Finally, I express my thanks (for rendering service to the discipline of Public Administration) to the learned contributors, the entire Editorial Team and the anonymous referees for carrying the venture of publication of the Journal in regular frequency and that too by maintaining quality. I would like to appeal the Principals of the Colleges to render financial support for the publication of the Journal, as the Journal neither charges for publication from the contributors nor does receive any publication grant.

Prof. S.P. Shahi
Principal
A N S College, Barh (Patna)

Editorial

In this era of transforming India, it is high time to prefer innovative ideas for all-round development, especially development of Bihar by harnessing its available natural resources (land, water, labour and rich vegetation) and indigenous knowledge vis-à-vis new information technology like AI. It is also an urgent imperative to assess the grassroots level governance, particularly effectiveness of local self-governments in terms of development and sound working of grassroots democracy.

The present number of BJPA incorporates the discussions on Bihar-specific issues and development prospects like innovative framework for application of artificial intelligence in agriculture, especially for signature crops, marking the social change by identifying dalits and mahadalits, upliftment of SCs, assessing village republic, achievements in female reproductive health and factors responsible for decline of industries especially, sugar industry.

The pre-requisites of effectiveness of local self-governments are - adequate finances, people's surveillance over expenses, and ensuring food security etc., as such topics like financial status of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Punjab and Goa, efficacy of social audit of expenditure of local self-governments, aspects of food security, community-led development for women in UP, grievance redressal mechanism, emerging trends in Indian federal system, and effectiveness of Indigenous Knowledge System and so on have found place in this number of the Journal.

The international community at present is adversely effected by ongoing wars, hence the issue of Indian foreign policy towards international peace acquires significance. The present number of the Journal has included a serious discussion on prospects of BRICS Plus for international peace and security.

The discipline of Public Administration has been dynamic and experiencing shifts in paradigms of governance for last few decades. Thus, the comparative analysis of varied paradigms of public administration like NPM, NPG and PVF, constitutionality of public finance in India, social media in relation to the policy process and problems, community governance among tribes and prospects of justice delivery have become the special features of the present issue of BJPA. Besides, a few research notes in the present number of BJPA will stimulate the mind of researchers for tracing the gap areas for research in public administration.

Finally, we feel immense pleasure to present Vol. XXIII, No. 1, January-June, 2026 of Bihar Journal of Public Administration before the readers. The IIPA Bihar

Regional Branch and the Editorial team express thankfulness to external support from expert reviewers and the contributors as well. At last, though utmost care has been taken to maintain the quality, yet we shall feel obliged to have suggestions from readership for improvements in the Journal.

- Editor

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निशांत कुमार

BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

ASSESSING GRAM PANCHAYAT AS VILLAGE REPUBLIC: A STUDY IN CONTEXT OF BIHAR

Shashi Pratap Shahi*

Abstract

Panchayati Raj System is ingrained in Indian socio-political texture evident from its existence since ancient times, but the system disappeared from the politico-legal arrangements during medieval period. However, the system persisted at society level. Later it was revived as a representative political institution by British rule in modern times (Rippon's initiatives in 1880s). During the freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi advocated for establishing panchayat system as self-reliant village republic (Gram Swaraj). After independence, the Gandhian idea of Gram Swaraj was, though included in Indian Constitution under Directive Principles of State Policy (Art. 40), but not in enforceable part. On the recommendation of Balwant Roy Mehta while assessing Community Development Programme, a three tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) was introduced in 1960s. With the passage of time, the system lost its credibility, as result 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) reconstituted strong PRIs with two objectives – first realising the Gandhian dream of Gram Swaraj and second, making them effective instrument for fast pace of rural development. Now we have experiences of working of PRIs for more than three decades. Thus it is high time to assess the working of PRIs at grassroots democracy or village republic. As such, the present paper, based on secondary sources of data, examines the parameters of village republic in PRIs, especially Gram Panchayat and Gram Kutchahari.

Keywords: Village Republic, Gram Panchayat, Gram Katchahary, Participatory Government, Self-Reliance, Finance, Bihar.

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INTRODUCTION

If we look into the history of panchayat system in India, we find that the system has been inbuilt in our socio-political system since ancient times, right from Vedic period. In Rigveda, it is clarified that "ब्राह्मणपतिर्नराजान्यो न वैश्यः ततसूर्यप्रबुवन्नेतिपंचभ्योमानवेभ्य'': (AtharvaVed – Brahmana, who has attained Brahma, is the Master, neither the warrior nor the trader. This, God of Light (Knowledge) says unto the Panchas (representatives of the people). During Vedic period 'Sangh Shakti' was recognised and the institution of Gram Sabha evolved to manage the village affairs. But later it was realised that these Gram Sabhas should work unitedly for macro level governance, known as Samiti ('साउदक्रामत् सासमितौन्यक्रामत्।' –अथर्ववेदः 8/10/1/8). As such the national level governance by Samiti was based panchayat system (Singh: 1987). In Panch Parmeshwar (6-40-10-13 and 18), it was recognised that the panchayat system became the model of governance from village level to the world level. The system was spread to Chel, Chol and Pandeya dynasties in south. In Ramayan, the village head was known as Gramini who enjoyed the high status before the royal court (Malaviya: 1956). The system of managing village affairs and resolution of conflicts by panchayats continued till the 8th century CE. The invasion of foreigners and establishment of Moughal empire, panchayat institutions disappeared, however, at village level, the management of affairs (not concerned with rulers) and resolution of conflict still was done by elders of the village, known as panchs. During the East India Company rule, same situation prevailed.

After the first freedom struggle 1857, the British Crown took over the governance of India and attempted to include Indians in the governance. In the process, Lord Rippon's Local Self-Government resolution of 1882 introduced panchayat bodies with two thirds of elected representatives along government nominees. Again on the recommendation of Royal Commission in 1907 expanded the scope of election of local bodies. In 1930s Mahatma Gandhi pondered upon self-reliant panchayat system in the midst of freedom struggle. He was not satisfied with the British arrangement as it did not establish panchayats as he desired. He wanted to see a village as true republic. He said, "Any village can become such a republic today without much interference, even from the present Government whose sole effectual connection with the village is the exaction of the village revenue. . . Any lover of democracy and village life can take up a village, treat it as his world and sole work, and he will find good results. He begins by being the village scavenger, spinner, watchman, medicine-man and school master all at once." (Harijan: July, 1942).

In post-independence period, the idea of people's participation in rural development process was manifested by introduction of Community Development Programme (CDP) in 1952. It did not show much promise, as such Balwant Roy Mehta Committee was constituted to review the CDP who recommended in 1959 to establish three tier PRIs to facilitate genuine people's participation. But the

system failed to sufficiently realise the two basic objectives of PRIs – realising the Gandhian dream of Gram Swaraj and making them effective instrument of rural development. Studies indicate several reasons like reluctance of state politician, absence of constitutional protection, lack of finances and irregular elections (Mishra: 1991, Verma: 2009). Several steps were taken to make PRIs strong and effective as village republic, important of them were Ashok Mehta Committee, G V K Rao Committee and efforts of Rajiv Gandhi government in shape of 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill 1989. Finally, the 73rd CAA was passed in 1992 which overcome the previous maladies. It provided a) constitutional status to PRIs, assured representation of all weaker sections in society, clear devolution of functions (Schedule 11 of Constitution), devolution of funds (State Finance Commission), mandatory regular elections made mandatory (State Election Commission), representation through direct elections to all the three tiers and bottom-up development planning. These constitutional provisions are sufficient to strengthen the VILLAGE REPUBLIC.

But several study reports reveal that the substantial participation of weaker sections in decision making process at PRI's level still lacking. Studies on the functioning of PRIs in Bihar reveal a persistent gap between constitutional mandates and ground-level realities. Researches highlight four major areas of concern, primarily caused by restricted financial autonomy, bureaucratic centralization, and patriarchal barriers.CAG reports (2017) have pointed out the three pitfalls, namely partial devolution of funds through budgetary control, negligence of utilisation of own and local resources. It has largely been argued that weaker section entered into the arena through reservation are either not sufficiently enabled or not allowed by traditional dominants to exert self-assertive roles by the panchayat representatives of reserved categories especially, the women panchayat representatives evident from the phenomenon of proxy leadership commonly called 'Mukhiya Pati'.

Bihar is considered to be the birth place of republic government, exercised by Lichchavidynasty during 600 BCE. Further, 'panchayati' system has been ingrained in its society since long. The institution of caste 'Manjan' has been still active for resolution of conflicts among particular caste in Bihar (Verma: 1991). Bihar introduced panchyayati raj system soon after independence by Bihar Gram Panchayat Act 1947 and has been experiencing the new PRIs under 73rd CAA for nearly last three decades. The above discussion attracts our attention to assess the republican character of working of PRIs in Bihar. Thus the present paper intends to assess the working of the PRIs as village republic by examining the level of people's participation in elections, role of weaker sections of panchayat representatives in decision making process and achievements of the PRIs in the process of rural development.

CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

As discussed above the PRIs have been so evolved that it becomes a village republic near to Gandhian idea of Gram Swaraj. As per western concept, a republic is a form of government where supreme power is held by the citizens and their elected representatives, and it operates on the principle that the state belongs to the people. In a republic political authority originates from the citizens, who delegate that power to representatives through a free voting system. The Roman idea of republic is a regime which sought to realise those principles by means of particular institutional devices, and particularly by the division of power. Livy paid greater premium on morality, advocating that 'republic is sustained by civic virtue, discipline and shared sense of duty rather than just by its law or letters in constitution'. He further argued that republic 'requires citizens and leaders to prioritize the common good over personal ambition or wealth.'

The terms democracy and republic are often used interchangeably in the context of governance, but there is a gladiatorial dividing line between these two terms. Democracy refers to holding power by majority elected by the people whereas, republic rests on how power is exercised through elected representatives acting on behalf of the public and of course republic recognises the rule by majority (of elected representatives) but respecting the rights of minorities. Cicero posits that 'none of the three classical forms of government, monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, especially in their degenerate forms of tyranny, oligarchy and mob-rule, can properly be described as republics, because each of those forms allows one element (in a democracy, a faction) to rule others.'

But here it will not be fair to consider village republic with above tenets of idea of republic. However,the idea of village republic originally stems from descriptions of early Indian village communities. British administrator Charles Metcalfe famously described Indian villages as 'little republics' possessing nearly all the powers required for self-government. For centuries, these traditional communities managed their own resources, settled local disputes, and maintained social order largely independent of changing central empires (Mukerji: 1920). In our discussion the concept of 'village republic' means thelocalized, self-sustaining, and self-governing rural communities functioning as the fundamental building blocks of a nation's political and economic structure. It champions decentralization, prioritizing participatory democracy and economic independence over centralized state power.

Mahatma Gandhi envisioned that every village would act as a 'complete republic'. It would be politically independent, conducting its own administration, defense (security of village which was provided in Bihar Gram Panchayat Act 1947 as Gram Raksha Dal headed by Dalpati), and conflict resolution (at present Gram Kutchahary) via a Panchayat (a council of five elected members. Further, Gandhiji

wanted that village community would produce what it consumes. Vital necessities would be grown or made locally first, preventing exploitation by outside mass markets while encouraging cooperative trade with neighbouring villages. Gandhiji writes, "The villagers should develop such a high degree of skill that articles prepared by them should command a ready market outside. When our villages are fully developed there will be no dearth in them of men with a high degree of skill and artistic talent. There will be village poets, village artists, village architects, linguists and research workers. In short, there will be nothing in life worth having which will not be had in the villages. . . Craft, art, health and education should all be integrated into one scheme." (Harijan: 1946).

PARTICIPATORY VILLAGE SELF-GOVERNMENT

People's political participation has been considered as essential prerequisite for healthy republic. Political participation, to be precise, is people's voluntary participation in political activities and decision making process. L W Milbrath (1965) has dealt the concept comprehensively and categorised it threefold – spectator activities (voting and instigating others to vote), transitional activities (donating or collecting funds, attending meetings, procession, etc. in addition to voting) and gladiator activities (contesting elections, holding positions in party, etc.). Similarly, Nie and Verba (1975) consider influencing decision making process as participation. Gandhi ji also dreamt for assure people's participation (involvement of every individual in managing village affairs) for achieving the goal of Gram Swaraj (Majumdar: 2004). Gandhi ji believed that involvement of every individual at village level in the process rural reconstruction is essential (Laik and Roy: 2025). Here we are concerned with the four parameters – inclusive representation, voting, contesting elections and substantial participation in decision making process.

There are 8,053 functional Gram Panchayats divided into approximately 1.15 lakh electoral wards. Uniquely, each of these Gram Panchayats features an elected judiciary system locally, with 8,463 Gram Katchahries operational across the state to settle petty civil and criminal disputes. The caste category wise reservation denotes that 20 percent panchayat representatives are from Scheduled Caste Category, 25 percent from Extremely Backward castes, 18 percent from Other Backward Castes and 2 percent from Scheduled Tribes. Rest 35 percent seats are unreserved. Bihar provides a mandatory 50% horizontal reservation for women in seats across all three tiers of the Panchayati Raj system, including the positions of Panchayat members and chairpersons. The above statistics depicts that all the weaker sections – SC, ST, OBC, EBC and Women have been given reservation of seats in proportion of their population in society. The Bihar Panchayati Raj Act 2006 (BPRA) provides rotational reservation for single post like Mukhiya and Sarpanch. The politico-legal arrangements have made the assured entry for all weaker sections.

Besides, all the adult (voters) of the village/Wardshall constitute the Gram Sabha/Ward Sabha. It is the significant organ of GP as the accounts, budget, development schemes have to be approved by GS/WS and keeping vigil on the ongoing schemes for which there shall be vigilance committee at this level (section 3 to 10 of BPRA 2006).

Gram Panchayat consisting of elected Ward Members and directly elected Mukhiya. There is provision of the Up-Mukhiya elected from among the Ward members. The GP will meet every month and with seven days of notice. The reservation provisions, election of Up-Mukhiya and the procedures of summoning meetings of GP, notice of meetings etc. have so provided that every elected Panchayat Representatives (EPRs) get opportunity to participate in the decision making at GP level. (sections 11 to 18 of BPRA).

The provisions have been made for six standing committees on the subjects like planning, coordination and finance, production (agriculture and allied), social justice, education, public health and public works. The committees are required to look into their respective matters and recommend suggestions. Each committee shall consist of not less than three members and are free to co-opt expert members from outside (section 25 of BPRA 2006).

The judicial organ to deliver easy and amicable settlement of small conflicts at gram panchayat level. Like Gram Panchayat, Gram Katchahary (GK) is also an elected body. The head of GK - Sarpanch is directly elected and one Panch is elected from every ward to constitute the GK. There is a provision of Up-Sarpanch from among the elected Punchs.There are similar provisions of reservation for weaker sections including women in the GK. Besides, The GK has been empowered with magisterial powers under certain provisions of Indian Penal Code (now Bhartiye Nayay Sanhita BNS). Though there is no provision of standing committees for GK, yet there are provisions of forming bench for hearing of disputed parties, not the subject to control of district level judiciary. The provision of appeal against the decision of previous bench can abe put before bigger bench of GK. The upper level judiciary cannot take cognizance of cases under trial of GK. The GK is entitled to hear both civil and criminal cases by forming bench from 2 to seven (full bench) member bench (sections 102 to 105 of BPRA). The law has made detailed provisions of procedure of delivery of justice. The justice delivery is handled by all sections of society irrespective of caste, class and gender.

Though there is dearth of literature on working of Gram Katchaharies, yet a few studies reflect encouraging trends in role of GKs in quick, low cost and amicable settlement of disputes of both civil and criminal nature through either arbitration or trial. A study conducted in nine Divisions of state present a rosy picture. It finds that'the people are generally satisfied with functioning of the GK and its procedure of justice delivery. It depicts that out of 1,059 cases (55.7 percent of civil

nature and 44.3 percent of criminal nature), handled by selected 15 GKs of Bihar around 88.6 percent (85.6% civil and 92.3% criminal) cases were settled amicably and 9 percent (11.9% civil and 6.4% criminal) through trial. Around 80.5 percent cases were disposed of within six weeks from filing date. The annual pendency of cases was 5.9 percent for civil disputes and 8.8 percent for Criminal cases' (Sigma Foundation: 2022). Another study by S C Jha, based on empirical enquiry, finds that the politico-legal arrangements are conducive to women but the GK headed by women Sarpanch and women Panchs, especially of SC, OBC and EBC categories, had to face challenges in discharge of their duties. It enumerates the challenges in four types namely –

1. Lack of legal knowledge,
2. Non-Coopration from male Panchayat representatives
3. Non-cooperation of village dominants and
4. Inadequate cooperation from local bureaucracy (Jha: 2023).

The above discussionslead us to the conclusion that the politico-legal arrangements of Gram Panchayat and Gram Katchahary are conducive to the parameters of VILLAGE REPUBLICBut actual functioning as village republic is inadequate or require reforms.

ASSESSING SELF-RELIANT VILLAGE GOVERNMENT

Gandhi's Gram Swaraj or the idea of village republic places greater premium on self-reliant village local self-government. The fundamentals of Self-reliance are: (a), empowerment with devolved power for deciding, managing their affairs, delivery of public services and problem solving, (b) appropriate devolution of finances, generating financial resources or use of local resources and (c) bottom up participatory planning for development like utilizing community assemblies – like the Gram Sabha – to identify community needs, approve budgets, and prioritize local infrastructure. While self-sufficient in daily, vital needs, these republics are meant to handle the roles of the executive, judiciary, and legislature combined, utilizing local consensus rather than punitive systems. In practice, the modern state rarely looks like a network of isolated village republics. Critics historically argued that absolute village autonomy can breed insularity and perpetuate entrenched local inequalities like casteism or feudalism. However, the foundational ideals of the village republic heavily influenced India's adoption of the Panchayati Raj system – a constitutional framework designed to devolve decision-making and resource management to the grassroots level. In other words, villages should be made liveable and productive.

But there is gross deficiency in financial autonomy. A study conducted in 2011, though 15 years old, yet it indicates the persisting trends. It found that the local self-

governments in the State of Bihar are completely dependent on intergovernmental transfers. There are clear vertical fiscal imbalances between the PRIs and the State of Bihar and the Union government on one hand and Mukhiyas are reluctant to raise revenue and harnessing the locally available resources on the other (Ghosh et al., 2011). Bihar Government's 'sat nishchaya' and cost effective delivery of justice at door steps through Gram Katchaharies have sufficient arrangements for establishment of village republic, but these institutions are not managing things professionally. Further, the fifth State Finance Commission commented that "though there has been increase in funds transfer to the PRIs from various sources, it grossly inadequate for their assigned functions, they are unable to utilize even that. Such unsatisfactory situation is primarily due to the capacity constraints, e.g. serious deficiencies in skilled man-power, office space, IT facility, etc. and non-implementation of much needed reforms" (State Finance Commission: 2016).

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The above discussion depicts that the politico-legal arrangements are so made that it fulfils the prerequisites of Village Republic as generally perceived and as that of Gandhian ideas. The weaker sections of elected panchayat representatives are still not well equipped to exert their self-assertive roles. The issue of self-reliant village government heavily depends on financial resources. The situation shows that PRIs have failed to generate financial resources as envisaged in the Law (BPRA 2006). They are over dependant on share of state revenue and grants-in-aid. Sometimes grants are not sufficiently released on one hand and underutilisation of the received grants on the other. There is an urgent need to conduct study for exploration of reasons of financial weakness and underutilisation of received grants.

The whole gamut of discussion indicates towards need of certain serious reforms in Panchayati Raj System so far actual participation and discharge of duties by the elected panchayat representatives.The reforms should focus on important development priorities on education, health, and clean drinking water. The Government of Bihar should give high priority to establishing a PRI fiscal analysis unit in order to provide technical support and develop strategies to increase the fiscal autonomy of village level local self-governments in the State of Bihar. In addition, the accounting and reporting requirements should be simplified and streamlined. The government should make strategic use of its decentralization policy to promote commercial activity in rural areas of Bihar. Further, in the context of Gandhian idea, the villagers should develop such a high degree of skill that articles prepared by them should command a ready market outside. In short, there should be nothing in life worth having which will not be had in the villages. Gandhiji dreamt, "Today, the villages are dung heaps. Tomorrow they will be like tiny gardens of Eden where dwell highly intelligent folk whom no one can deceive or exploit.The reconstruction

of the villages along these lines should begin now. The reconstruction of the villages should not be organized on a temporary but permanent basis.Craft, art, health and education should all be integrated into one scheme. Nai Talim is a beautiful blend of all the four and covers the whole education of the individual from the timeof conception to the moment of death. Therefore, I would not divide village uplift work into water-tight compartments from the very beginning but undertake an activity which will combine different from education I will regard the former as the medium for the latter. Nai Talim therefore ought to be integrated into the scheme (Harijan: Nov 1946).

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

A.I. FOR AGRICULTURE: A FRAMEWORK FOR GRASSROOTS INNOVATION THROUGH ATAL TINKERING LABS FOR BIHAR'S SIGNATURE CROPS

Vijoy Prakash*

Abstract

Indian agriculture is entering a third great transition. The Green Revolution of the 1960s solved the immediate crisis of food sufficiency through high-yielding varieties of seeds, fertilizers and assured irrigation, and farm mechanization that followed multiplied the muscle available to the cultivator. Neither, however, equipped the farm with the capacity to reason about uncertainty – precisely the capacity that artificial intelligence (AI) now offers. This review synthesizes the state of AI in agriculture and situates it within India's rapidly maturing digital-agriculture ecosystem, including the AI sowing advisory pioneered by ICRISAT and Microsoft, and the Government of India's Digital Agriculture Mission and AgriStack. India loses produce valued at roughly ₹1.5 lakh crore each year. Here we emphasize to apply a regional lens, examining four geographically indicated or culturally signature commodities of Bihar – makhana (fox nut), litchi, mango and inland fish – and identify concrete, presently feasible AI and Internet-of-Things (IoT) interventions for each. Finally, recognizing that adoption ultimately depends on human capacity, we propose a tiered, project-based framework that uses the national network of more than ten thousand Atal Tinkering Laboratories to cultivate agricultural-AI skills among school students aged 11–18, anchoring abstract computational concepts in the local agrarian economy. The article is intended as a conceptual and policy-oriented contribution rather than a report of primary empirical findings.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; machine learning; precision agriculture; post-harvest management; Atal Tinkering Labs; STEM education; digital agriculture; Bihar; makhana; smallholder farmers.

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Note: The paper is a revised version of Author's speech in a programme of NITI Ayog, New Delhi.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains the foundation of India's economy and society. The sector engages close to half of the national workforce and underpins the food security of more than 1.4 billion people, even as its share of gross value added has declined with structural change. The achievements of the past six decades are considerable: a country that imported food grains to survive recurrent shortages in the 1950s now produces a surplus and maintains buffer stocks. Yet the conditions under which this success was achieved have changed. Climate variability has made the timing of the monsoon less predictable; landholdings have fragmented to the point where the great majority of Indian farmers are small or marginal; groundwater tables have fallen and soil health has deteriorated in the very regions that led the Green Revolution; and the imperative now is to produce more from less land, less water and fewer chemical inputs.

Two earlier waves of agricultural modernization addressed parts of this challenge but not all of it. The Green Revolution supplied improved genetic material and the agronomic package needed to express its potential, while mechanization supplied power and speed. What neither supplied was decision intelligence – the ability to interpret heterogeneous, real-time information about weather, soil, pests, prices and storage conditions, and to convert it into timely, farm-specific recommendations. Artificial intelligence, and machine learning in particular, is distinctive precisely because it learns patterns from data and generalizes to unseen cases, making it well suited to the noisy, spatially variable and time-sensitive problems that characterize farming[1, 2].

This article has four aims. First, it offers a structured overview of where AI is being applied in agriculture, with an emphasis on applications relevant to smallholder systems. Second, it situates these applications within India's emerging public digital infrastructure for agriculture. Third – and as its principal original contribution – it adopts a regional perspective, asking how these general capabilities translate to the specific, high-value commodities of Bihar, a state whose makhana, litchi, mango and fisheries carry both economic weight and cultural identity. Fourth, it argues that the diffusion of agricultural AI is ultimately a human-capacity problem, and proposes a concrete, school-level framework – built on the Atal Tinkering Laboratory network – to grow that capacity from the ground up.

SCOPE AND APPROACH

This is a narrative review and conceptual synthesis rather than a systematic review or an empirical study. We draw on peer-reviewed literature on machine learning and deep learning in agriculture, on primary government and institutional sources for Indian policy and post-harvest statistics, and on documented deployments such as the ICRISAT–Microsoft sowing advisory. The regional analysis and the

educational framework are presented as informed proposals, grounded in the cited evidence base, and are intended to be tested and refined through subsequent field implementation. No primary experimental data are reported, and all quantitative claims are attributed to their original sources.

FROM THE GREEN REVOLUTION TO MECHANIZATION: THE BACKDROP

The Green Revolution was not a single innovation but an integrated package. Semi-dwarf, high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice – developed through international research and adapted to Indian conditions – were combined with chemical fertilizers, assured irrigation from canals and tube wells, and modern agronomic practice. The result transformed Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh into the nation's grain basket and moved the country to food-grain self-sufficiency within a few seasons. Mechanization advanced in parallel: tractors, powered pump sets, threshers and combine harvesters displaced animal and manual power, raising the speed and scale of operations and reducing drudgery.

These gains, however, came with externalities that frame today's agenda: over-extraction of groundwater, the environmental burden of intensive agrochemical use, and a narrowing of cropping patterns. Crucially for the present discussion, both the seed-fertilizer package and mechanization augmented the physical capability of the farm without augmenting its informational capability. A tractor executes whatever instruction it is given; it does not perceive a developing pest infestation, infer the optimal sowing window, or weigh the trade-off between irrigating today and waiting for forecast rain. Supplying that perceptual and inferential layer is the natural province of artificial intelligence.

Artificial Intelligence in Agriculture: Domains and Applications

A widely cited categorization organizes machine-learning applications in agriculture into crop management, livestock management, water management and soil management[1]. Within crop management, the most active areas are yield prediction, disease and pest detection, weed detection, crop-quality assessment and species recognition. The maturation of deep learning, and convolutional neural networks in particular, has been especially consequential for image-based tasks, frequently surpassing earlier image-processing techniques in accuracy[2]. The subsections below summarize the principal application clusters; Table 1 maps them to representative techniques and to Indian and Bihar-specific instances.

Crop Management: Yield, Disease, Pests and Quality

Yield prediction models integrate weather, soil and management data to anticipate output, supporting decisions from input planning to procurement. Disease and

pest detection has become one of the most accessible applications: trained on large labelled image sets, deep networks can identify crop diseases from a single photograph of an affected leaf. A landmark demonstration trained a deep model to recognize 26 diseases across 14 crop species with high accuracy, illustrating the feasibility of smartphone-based plant diagnostics in the field[3]. In commercial practice in India, image-based advisory applications now allow a farmer to photograph a symptom and receive a probable diagnosis and management suggestion in a regional language. Weed detection enables site-specific control, and quality grading by machine vision can sort produce by size, colour and defect far faster than manual inspection.

Soil, Water and Precision Inputs

Soil management applications use spectral and sensor data to estimate properties such as moisture, organic carbon and nutrient status, informing variable-rate fertilization. Water management is especially salient in a country facing acute irrigation stress: soil-moisture sensors, coupled with weather forecasts and simple control logic, can schedule irrigation so that water is applied only when and where the crop requires it. These precision approaches embody the core promise of agricultural AI – obtaining more output, or the same output with fewer inputs, by replacing uniform practice with spatially and temporally targeted action.

Advisory Systems, Drones and Robotics

Beyond analytics on a single farm, AI supports advisory systems that deliver personalized guidance at scale. Unmanned aerial vehicles equipped with multispectral cameras survey fields from above, and learning algorithms translate that imagery into maps of crop stress, water deficit or pest incidence that are invisible from the ground; some platforms then apply inputs only to the affected zones. Ground robots capable of distinguishing a crop plant from a weed and treating each individually point toward a future of plant-level management, in which decisions are made not per field but per plant.

Market Intelligence and the Post-Harvest Interface

Information asymmetry in markets is a persistent disadvantage for smallholders, who often sell at unfavourable prices for want of timely market intelligence. AI-based price forecasting can indicate when and where to sell, and demand-prediction supports more efficient supply chains. These capabilities connect directly to post-harvest management, considered in Section 7, where sensing and prediction can substantially reduce the loss of produce that has already been grown.

Table 1. Principal domains of AI application in agriculture, representative techniques, and Indian/Bihar-relevant examples.

Domain	*Representative Techniques*	*Indian/Bihar-Relevant Examples*
Crop management	Supervised learning and CNNs for yield prediction, disease/pest classification, weed detection, quality grading	Smartphone leaf-disease diagnosis; machine-vision grading of makhana, mango and litchi; mango fruit detection and load estimation
Soil & water	Sensor analytics, regression and time-series models, control logic for irrigation	Soil-moisture-driven smart irrigation; soil profile and fertility mapping under the Digital Agriculture Mission
Advisory & aerial	Forecasting models, remote sensing, UAV imagery analytics	ICRISAT–Microsoft sowing advisory; Kisan drones for monitoring and spraying
Market & post-harvest	Price/demand forecasting, anomaly detection, environmental monitoring	Commodity price forecasting; sensor-based storage monitoring; cold-chain shelf-life prediction
Livestock & fisheries	Behaviour analytics, water-quality sensing, computer vision	Smart-pond water-quality monitoring for inland aquaculture; early disease detection in fish

INDIA'S DIGITAL-AGRICULTURE ECOSYSTEM

India has moved rapidly from isolated pilots to public digital infrastructure for agriculture. An early and influential demonstration was the AI sowing application developed by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) with Microsoft. Drawing on roughly thirty years of climate data together with real-time weather, the system computed an optimal sowing date and delivered it to farmers as a simple text message, requiring neither a smartphone nor in-field sensors. The 2016 pilot with 175 groundnut farmers in Devanakonda, Kurnool district, recorded an average yield increase of about thirty per cent; in 2017 the programme expanded to more than three thousand farmers across Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and a range of crops, with reported yield gains of ten to thirty per cent[4]. The case is instructive because the benefit derived not from new land, water or machinery but from better information delivered at the right moment through the most basic of devices.

At the level of national policy, the Government of India approved the Digital Agriculture Mission in September 2024 with an outlay of ₹2,817 crore. The Mission is built on three foundational components: AgriStack, a farmer-centric digital

public infrastructure comprising a farmers' registry, geo-referenced village maps and a crop-sown registry; a Krishi Decision Support System that integrates remote-sensing data on crops, soil, weather and water into a geospatial platform; and comprehensive soil-profile maps. Under AgriStack, farmers receive a unique digital identity linked to land records and entitlements, with a stated target of issuing identities to eleven crore farmers by 2026–27; the Mission explicitly anticipates the use of data analytics, artificial intelligence and remote sensing to make service delivery more efficient and transparent [7]. Complementary public tools include AI-assisted, multilingual farmer-advisory chatbots and image-based national pest-surveillance systems that identify pests from a photograph; these extend expert guidance to remote users in their own languages.

A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE: AI FOR BIHAR'S SIGNATURE COMMODITIES

General capabilities acquire meaning when applied to particular crops, places and communities. Bihar offers an especially rich setting, because several of its commodities are both economically important and culturally emblematic, and a number carry Geographical Indication (GI) status that protects their regional identity. In the Mithila tradition, pan (betel), makhan (makhana) and machh (fish) are regarded as three markers of cultural identity – two of which feature directly below. We consider four commodities and identify presently feasible AI and IoT interventions for each.

Makhana (fox nut)

Bihar, and the Mithila region in particular, produces the overwhelming majority of India's makhana (Euryale ferox), and "Mithila Makhana" received a Geographical Indication in 2022, registered to a regional producers' association [8]. Cultivation and processing remain labour-intensive: seeds are gathered by hand from pond beds and are subsequently dried, roasted and popped. Two AI-enabled interventions are immediately relevant. First, machine-vision grading can classify popped makhana by size and quality in real time, a task performed slowly and inconsistently by hand today; because price is strongly size-dependent, accurate automated grading translates directly into higher and fairer farm-gate returns. Second, IoT sensing of pond water conditions can support cultivation management. Both build on mature image-classification and sensing techniques and are well suited to local fabrication.

Litchi

Muzaffarpur's Shahi Litchi is GI-protected, and Bihar is the country's leading litchi producer. Litchi is, however, highly perishable and sensitive to pre-harvest heat

and moisture stress, which can cause fruit cracking. AI weather advisories can warn growers of conditions conducive to cracking and help schedule harvest; post-harvest, predictive models of shelf life based on storage temperature and humidity can guide cold-chain decisions so that consignments reach distant markets before deterioration. For a commodity whose value is destroyed within days, timely prediction is among the highest-return applications available.

Mango

Bihar's mango varieties – most notably the GI-tagged Jardalu of Bhagalpur, alongside Dudhiya Malda and Gulabkhas – are prized for quality. Computer vision supports several interventions across the mango value chain: detection of diseases and pests, such as the mango hopper, from photographs; grading and sorting of fruit by ripeness and defect; and orchard-level yield estimation. Deep-learning systems for real-time mango detection and orchard fruit-load estimation have been demonstrated and benchmarked, indicating that drone- or camera-based harvest forecasting is technically within reach for organized orchards[10].

Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture

Fish is central to Bihar's diet and culture, and the state has prioritized expanding domestic production. Smart aquaculture applies IoT sensing within ponds to track the parameters on which fish health depends – dissolved oxygen, temperature and general water quality – and to alert the farmer when intervention is required. Learning algorithms can additionally detect abnormal fish behaviour indicative of disease and optimize feeding, reducing waste while improving growth. Because water management and behaviour analytics are established machine-learning territory[1], pond-side monitoring is a particularly tractable entry point for local innovation.

POST-HARVEST MANAGEMENT AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Producing food is only half of the food-security equation; retaining what has been produced is the other half. The Food and Agriculture Organization has long emphasized that a substantial fraction of global food output is lost or wasted between field and fork[12]. In India, successive assessments quantify the scale of the problem. The ICAR–Central Institute of Post-Harvest Engineering and Technology estimated economic losses of the order of ₹92,651 crore in its 2015 study of major crops and commodities[5], while the 2022 assessment commissioned by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries and conducted by NABARD Consultancy Services placed annual post-harvest losses at roughly ₹1.5 lakh crore[6]. Reported quantitative loss ranges from the latter study are summarized in Table 2; horticultural produce

and fish, being highly perishable, sit at the upper end, and inadequate cold-chain infrastructure is a recurring driver.

These losses define a clear opportunity for AI and IoT, because preventing the loss of grown produce is frequently more resource-efficient than producing more. Inexpensive temperature and humidity sensors placed in storage can warn of conditions conducive to mould and fungal growth before spoilage occurs; machine-vision systems can grade and sort produce, diverting damaged units before they contaminate a consignment; controlled drying systems can bring grain to a safe moisture level; and shelf-life prediction can prioritize the dispatch of consignments most at risk. For perishable, high-value Bihar commodities such as litchi, mango and fish, the post-harvest interface is arguably where data-driven intervention yields the greatest marginal benefit.

Table 2. Indicative post-harvest loss ranges in India by commodity group (NABCONS 2022), with principal drivers. Figures are quantitative losses as reported by the original source [6].

Commodity Group	*Loss Range (%)*	*Principal Drivers*
Cereals	3.89 – 5.92	Harvesting, threshing, storage moisture
Pulses	5.65 – 6.74	Storage pests, handling
Oilseeds	2.87–7.51	Shattering, handling, storage
Fruits	6.02–15.05	Perishability, weak cold chain, transport
Vegetables	4.87–11.61	Perishability, grading, transport
Marine fish (illustrative)	≈ 8.8	Cold-chain gaps, handling

FROM CLASSROOM TO FIELD: ATAL TINKERING LABS AS A GRASSROOTS INNOVATION PLATFORM

Technology diffuses only as fast as the human capacity to build, adapt and trust it. India possesses an unusual asset in this respect: a national network of school innovation spaces. Established under the Atal Innovation Mission of NITI Aayog, Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) equip schools with electronics, sensors, microcontrollers, robotics kits and 3D printers, with the stated ambition of cultivating a generation of young innovators. The network has grown to more than ten thousand laboratories spanning over seven hundred districts and engaging upward of 1.1 crore students, each laboratory typically supported by a grant of about ₹20 lakh; the mission's next phase extends this commitment further, with substantial additional expansion planned [9]. This infrastructure is well matched to agricultural AI, whose entry-level projects depend precisely on the sensors, microcontrollers and image-classification tools that ATLs already provide.

We propose a tiered, problem-first framework (Table 3) that maps school capability to local agricultural need. The organizing principle is to begin from a

genuine problem in the surrounding agrarian economy – the precise question that animated the ICRISAT sowing advisory, namely when to sow – rather than from a device in search of an application. At the introductory level, students build sensing and automation artefacts such as soil-moisture-triggered irrigation and micro-climate weather stations. At the intermediate level, they train image classifiers using accessible no-code tools to distinguish healthy from diseased leaves, or to grade produce. At the advanced level, students program models in general-purpose languages, construct IoT dashboards, and connect sensors to the internet. A distinctive Bihar-specific track links these capabilities to local commodities: a makhana or mango grader, a litchi cold-store monitor, and a smart fish-pond water-quality monitor. Such projects simultaneously teach computational thinking and address tangible local problems, and they position the Atal Incubation Centre ecosystem to carry the most promising student prototypes toward enterprise.

Table 3. Proposed tiered Atal Tinkering Lab project framework linking school capability, core tools, and local agricultural problems.

Project	*Level (Class)*	*Core Sensors/Tools*	*AI/Data Concept and Local Link*
Smart watering system	6–8	Soil-moisture sensor, microcontroller, pump	Rule-based automation; foundation for precision irrigation
Micro-climate weather station	6–8	Temperature/humidity and light sensors	Data logging; the raw material for forecasting
Leaf-disease classifier	8–10	Camera, no-code image-training tool	Supervised image classification; smartphone plant diagnostics
Smart greenhouse	8–10	Multiple sensors, fan, pump, grow-light	Closed-loop control; precision environment management
Crop-yield/disease model	11–12	Open datasets, general-purpose programming	Regression and CNN modelling; data science practice
IoT farm dashboard	11–12	Networked sensors, web dashboard	Internet of Things; real-time monitoring and alerts
Makhana/mango grader	8–12	Camera, image-training tool	Machine-vision grading; GI-crop value addition
Litchi cold-store monitor	8–12	Temperature/humidity sensors, alerting	Shelf-life monitoring; perishable-crop loss reduction
Smart fish-pond monitor	8–12	Water-quality and temperature sensors	Aquaculture sensing; inland-fisheries productivity

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Responsible deployment of agricultural AI faces interlocking constraints. The first is data: machine-learning systems require representative, well-labelled data, which are scarce for many Indian crops, agro-climatic zones and local pests, and

models trained elsewhere may transfer poorly to local conditions[2]. The second is the structure of farming itself: with most holdings small or marginal, technologies must be extremely low-cost, robust and simple, and benefits must accrue at very small scale to be meaningful. The third is digital access: reliable connectivity, electricity and device availability cannot be assumed in rural areas, which is exactly why the SMS-based delivery of the sowing advisory mattered. The fourth concerns data governance: as large farmer registries are assembled, questions of consent, privacy, ownership and the equitable distribution of benefits become central, and have attracted scrutiny in the context of national digital-agriculture infrastructure [11]. Finally, technology is not a substitute for agronomy or for trusted human extension; AI augments the farmer's judgement rather than replacing it, and over-claiming risks eroding the very trust on which adoption depends.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Several directions follow from this analysis. Priority should be given to building open, well-documented datasets for Indian and regional crops – including GI commodities such as makhana, litchi and mango – so that locally relevant models can be trained and validated. Lightweight models capable of running on inexpensive edge devices, and multilingual voice interfaces, will be essential for reach. The post-harvest interface deserves greater attention than it has received, given the magnitude of avoidable losses. Regionally, rigorous field pilots of the commodity-specific interventions proposed here – machine-vision grading for makhana, predictive cold-chain management for litchi, and pond-side monitoring for fisheries – would convert proposals into evidence. Educationally, the ATL framework should be evaluated empirically: tracking whether problem-first, locally grounded projects improve both computational competence and the pipeline of deployable agricultural innovations. Throughout, governance frameworks for farmer data should be developed in parallel with technical capability, not after it.

CONCLUSION

Indian agriculture has been transformed twice within living memory – first by improved seeds and inputs, then by machines. A third transformation is now under way, and its defining feature is intelligence rather than additional power. Artificial intelligence offers the farm something earlier waves did not: the capacity to perceive, to learn from data and to advise, applied to problems from sowing date to spoilage. This review has traced that capability across agricultural domains, located it within India's maturing digital-agriculture infrastructure, and argued that its promise is best demonstrated not in the abstract but on particular crops in particular places – here, the makhana, litchi, mango and fisheries of Bihar. It has further argued that

the binding constraint is human, and that the Atal Tinkering Laboratory network provides an unusually direct route to relax it, by teaching the next generation to build solutions for the fields and ponds around them. Technology will not replace the farmer's knowledge of the land. Used well, it will extend it.

DECLARATIONS

Funding. The author received no specific grant for this work from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflicts of interest. The author declares no competing interests.

Data availability. Based on secondary sources of data.

Acknowledgements. The author thanks colleagues at Bihar Vidyapith, the Atal Incubation Centre–BV Foundation and the Association for Promotion of Creative Learning for discussions that enriched this work.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

DECLINING STUNTING: EVIDENCE THAT BIHAR'S NUTRITION INVESTMENTS ARE DELIVERING MEASURABLE SUCCESS

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Abstract

The State Government's sustained investments have created a robust foundation for healthier child growth. Strengthened antenatal care, expanded iron-folic acid distribution, comprehensive nutrition counselling, and near-universal institutional delivery coverage have improved fetal growth and established optimal early breastfeeding practices. It makes an urgent imperative to assess the performance of the same. Based on the secondary sources of data, the present paper intends to highlight the achievements of the schemes. Paper depicts that Bihar has achieved a historic milestone in child nutrition, with stunting declining dramatically from 2019-21 to 2023-24 in just two to three years.

Keywords: Stunting, WASH, EAG Sates, Early and Complementary Breastfeeding, NFHS-5 & 6.

INTRODUCTION

The Executive summary of the research reflects that Bihar has achieved a historic milestone in child nutrition, with stunting declining dramatically from 42.9% in NFHS-5 (2019-21) to 35.6% in NFHS-6 (2023-24) in just two to three years. This remarkable reduction of 7.3 percentage points stands as a powerful testament to the State Government's unwavering commitment to child nutrition, maternal health, and the well-being of Bihar's future generations. These measurable gains reflect the effective convergence of multi-sectoral programmes spanning healthcare, food

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security, water-sanitation-hygiene (WASH), and dedicated frontline community outreach. The noteworthy rise in exclusive breastfeeding from 58.9% to 62.9% to underscore the outstanding success of the Mothers' Absolute Affection (MAA) programme. The efforts of ASHAs, ANMs, and ICDS frontline workers have brought nutritional counselling to every household, ensuring no mother is left behind.

IMPRESSIVE PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

- Stunting reduced by 7.3 percentage points – the largest gain among all Empowered Action Group (EAG) States.
- Severe wasting nearly halved from 8.8% to 4.7%, demonstrating effective intervention for the most vulnerable children.
- Complementary feeding improved dramatically from 39.0% to 53.0% for children aged 6-8 months.
- Urban areas led progress while rural areas showed strong, sustained improvements through community health worker outreach.

These outcomes validate Bihar's strategic multi-sectoral approach under POSHAN Abhiyaan, enhanced ICDS services, fortified take-home rations, and integrated WASH investments.

The decline in stunting represents durable gains in linear growth indicate that Bihar is moving decisively toward malnutrition reduction targets and Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger).

Bihar's nutrition trajectory demonstrates that sustained policy commitment, intersectoral convergence, and community engagement can rapidly transform child nutrition outcomes. The State has emerged as a model for neighbouring EAG States, setting a replicable benchmark for achieving optimal infant and child nutrition outcomes across India.

Bihar's nutrition investments are paying off notably and the results are transforming the future of Bihar's children, building stronger human capital for a prosperous and healthy state. Policy action should continue multi sectoral convergence across health, nutrition, WASH, agriculture, and social protection.

Bihar has achieved notable reductions in child stunting between NFHS5 (2019–21) and NFHS6 (2023–24), with urban areas showing the largest gains. These improvements reflect the state government's sustained investments in maternal and child health, food security programs, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, which together create the conditions for better longterm child growth (NFHS6; NFHS5). Strengthened antenatal care including improved coverage of iron folic acid, nutrition counselling and institutional deliveries has likely improved fetal growth and early breastfeeding practices, laying the foundation for healthier

height for age outcomes (Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, State reports). Concurrent expansion of food security measures and targeted supplementary nutrition programs has increased access to adequate diets for pregnant women and young children, while WASH investments have reduced exposure to infections that impair nutrient absorption (NFHS; Government of Bihar programme documents).

Data show complementary feeding and dietary adequacy have improved, particularly in urban localities, suggesting that behaviour change communication and frontline worker outreach are reaching caregivers more effectively (NFHS6). The decline in stunting signals durable gains in linear growth rather than short term weight fluctuations, indicating that the state's multi sectoral approach is producing sustained impact and moving Bihar closer to the Sustainable Development Goal targets for child nutrition (SDG 2) (UN SDG reports).

Continued focus on scaling high quality antenatal services, improving dietary diversity for children 6-23 months, and closing rural urban gaps in WASH and service delivery will be critical to sustain momentum. The evidence supports maintaining and strengthening integrated nutrition, health and sanitation investments as a cost effective pathway to secure long term human capital gains for Bihar's children (NFHS; state programme evaluations).

These gains are important but incomplete with one in three children still stunted; Bihar must scale up maternal nutrition, timely breastfeeding, and quality complementary feeding. Strengthening rural WASH and continuing multi sectoral investments will sustain progress and secure longterm child growth toward SDG targets

OBJECTIVES

(1) To quantify changes in child feeding practices and dietary adequacy in Bihar between NFHS-5 (2019–21) and NFHS-6 (2023–24).
(2) To measure changes in core anthropometric outcomes – stunting, wasting, severe wasting, underweight, and overweight – by urban, rural, and total populations.
(3) To assess whether improvements in IYCF indicators align with reductions in stunting and other malnutrition measures.
(4) To provide evidence for policymakers on the effectiveness of antenatal, food-security, and WASH investments in improving height-for-age outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the data available from the various secondary sources especially from NFHS-5 and NFHS-6. This brief uses NFHS6 (2023-24) and

NFHS5 (2019-21) indicator data for Bihar to compare child feeding practices and anthropometric outcomes. Urban, rural, and total estimates for key Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) indicators and anthropometric prevalence are reported, highlighting changes between rounds. Stunting is defined as height- for-age below -2 SD using WHO standards. Compare has been made among key feeding practices and child growth outcomes to understand where progress has occurred and where gaps remain. For feeding, indicators considered as early breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding, continued breastfeeding, and complementary feeding, showing results separately for urban, rural, and the state overall. For nutritional status, standard anthropometric measures are stunting, wasting, severe wasting, underweight, and overweight by urban, rural, and total populations. Changes between NFHS5 and NFHS6 are highlighted to show trends. Stunting is measured as height for age below-2 standard deviations based on WHO growth standards. All indicators follow NFHS definitions and samples, ensuring comparability across the two survey rounds.

RESULTS

Early breastfeeding and breastfeeding coverage (NFHS6, NFHS5)

Early initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour of birth is critical for reducing newborn mortality and providing essential protective antibodies through Colostrum. Breastfeeding coverage remains a cornerstone of child survival, with NFHS-6 showing sustained high rates of current breastfeeding among infants under 6 months. Bihar has demonstrated consistent improvement in exclusive breastfeeding, rising from 58.9% in NFHS-5 to 62.5% in NFHS-6. The State's rural areas show stronger breastfeeding adherence compared to urban pockets, reflecting effective community-level outreach. These positive trends position Bihar as an emerging model for infant nutrition among EAG States.

Table 1: Early breastfeeding and breastfeeding coverage in Bihar (NFHS6, NFHS5)

Indicators	*NFHS-6 (2023-24)*			*NFHS-5 (2019-21)*
	Urban	*Rural*	*Total*	*Total*
Children under age 3 years breastfed within one hour of birth (%)	56.8	51.4	51.9	31.1
Children under age 6 months exclusively breastfed (%)	62.9	62.4	62.5	58.9
Children under age 6 months currently breastfeeding (%)	93.2	97.3	96.9	94.9

Source: NFHS6 (2023–24) and NFHS5 (2019–21), National Family Health Survey.

Table 1 presents commendable progress in Bihar's breastfeeding indicators between NFHS-5 and NFHS-6, reflecting the State Government's sustained commitment under the Mothers' Absolute Affection (MAA) programme. Early breastfeeding initiation within one hour of birth has shown significant improvement, with rural areas achieving 51.4% and urban areas reaching 56.8% in NFHS-6, compared to 31.1% at the State level in NFHS-5- a notable upward trajectory demonstrating enhanced hospital-based breastfeeding promotion.

Exclusive breastfeeding among children under 6 months has strengthened commendably from 58.9% in NFHS-5 to 62.9% in NFHS-6 (urban: 62.4%, rural: 62.9%), marking Bihar as the only EAG State showing consistent improvement while other States witnessed declines. This 3.60% absolute increase reflects effective implementation of IYCF counselling and breastfeeding promotion activities.

Current breastfeeding coverage remains exceptionally high at 96.9% overall (urban: 93.2%, rural: 97.3%) in NFHS-6, compared to 94.9% in NFHS-5, indicating sustained maternal adherence to breastfeeding practices. Rural areas demonstrate stronger performance across all indicators, underscoring the success of community health worker interventions through ASHAs and ANMs. These achievements validate Bihar's strategic focus on neonatal health and position the State as a replicable model for neighbouring EAG States to follow in achieving optimal infant nutrition outcomes.

COMPLEMENTARY FEEDING AND ADEQUATE DIET (NFHS6, NFHS5)

Complementary feeding is the timely introduction of safe, nutrient dense solid or semi solid foods alongside continued breastfeeding and it is critical for child growth and neurodevelopment between 6–23 months. NFHS6 provides the latest evidence on coverage and quality of complementary feeding practices across urban and rural areas, enabling targeted policy action. Improvements in timely introduction and dietary adequacy signal progress in behaviour change communication, service delivery, and food security interventions. Monitoring adequate diet (diversity, frequency, and continued breastfeeding) helps assess programme effectiveness, including POSHAN Abhiyaan and ICDS enhancements. Continued focus on community counselling, fortified supplementary foods, and intersectional support can accelerate gains and reduce malnutrition.

Table 2 shows notable and encouraging gains in complementary feeding indicators between NFHS5 (2019–21) and NFHS6 (2023–24) in Bihar. The share of children 6-8 months receiving solid/semi solid foods and breast milk rose markedly from 39.0% to 53.0% overall, with urban areas at 64.6% and rural at 51.9%. This improvement reflects strengthened early initiation of complementary feeds which is likely driven by intensified counselling through frontline workers, improved

ICDS outreach, and focused behaviour change campaigns under national nutrition initiatives.

Table 2: Complementary feeding and adequate diet practices in Bihar (NFHS6, NFHS5)

Indicators	*NFHS-6 (2023-24)*			*NFHS-5 (2019-21)*
	Urban	*Rural*	*Total*	*Total*
Children age 6-8 months receiving solid/semi solid food and breast milk	64.6	51.9	53.0	39.0
Breastfeeding children 6-23 months receiving an adequate diet (%)	17.3	11.4	12.0	10.7
Non breastfeeding children 6-23 months receiving an adequate diet (%)	9.9	11.4	11.2	11.5
Total children age 6-23 months receiving an adequate diet (%)	16.5	11.4	11.9	10.8

Source: NFHS6 (2023–24) and NFHS5 (2019–21), National Family Health Survey.

Adequacy of diet for breastfeeding children (6-23 months) increased from 10.7% to 12.0% overall, with a stronger uptick in urban areas (17.3%) versus rural (11.4%). Though absolute levels remain modest, the upward trend indicates progress in dietary diversity and feeding frequency messaging, and expanding access to diverse foods. For non breastfeeding children, rates held steady (11.5% to 11.2%), suggesting sustained attention but also highlighting a programmatic gap i.e. non breastfed infants need targeted supplementation and counselling to achieve adequate diets.

Overall, the proportion of all children 6-23 months receiving an adequate diet rose from 10.8% to 11.9%. These gains validate ongoing government efforts-POSHAN Abhiyaan, strengthened ICDS services, fortified takehome rations, and convergence with agriculture and social protection. To build on this momentum, recommended priorities include scaling up locally appropriate complementary food interventions, enhancing supply chains for fortified products, intensifying frontline worker capacity building, and targeted rural outreach to narrow urban-rural disparities. Continued monitoring and state level adaptive strategies can accelerate progress toward universal adequate diets for infants and young children.

ANTHROPOMETRIC OUTCOMES (NFHS6, NFHS5)

Anthropometric indicators such as stunting, wasting, severe wasting, and underweight are critical measures of child growth, nutrition, and overall well-being under 5 years of age. NFHS6 (2023–24) provides the latest evidence on Bihar's

progress in reducing child malnutrition compared to NFHS5 (2019–21), enabling targeted policy interventions. Significant declines across all negative indicators reflect strengthened programme delivery under POSHAN Abhiyaan, ICDS, and integrated health-nutrition services. The data validates the government's multi-sectoral approach spanning healthcare, food security, women's empowerment, and Behaviour Change Communication. Continued focus on frontline counselling, fortified supplementary foods, and rural outreach will accelerate Bihar's journey toward optimal child growth outcomes.

Table 3 and Figure 1 demonstrate remarkable and sustained progress in Bihar's child anthropometric outcomes between NFHS5 and NFHS6, validating the effectiveness of the government's nutrition-focused interventions. Stunting among children under 5 year declined sharply from 42.9% to 35.6% (overall), with urban areas at 32.7% and rural at 35.8% which shows a reduction of 7.3 percentage points reflecting expanded early childhood development services and improved household nutrition.

Wasting shows equally encouraging improvement, dropping from 22.9% to 19.0% overall, with urban at 16.2% and rural at 19.3%. More significantly, severe wasting fell dramatically from 8.8% to 4.7%, nearly a 50% reduction; it is indicating that critical interventions for severely malnourished children, including National Nutrition Rehabilitation Programme centres and targeted supplementary feeding, are reaching the most vulnerable populations effectively.

Underweight prevalence decreased substantially from 41.0% to 35.7% overall (urban 27.3%, rural 36.5%), demonstrating progress in addressing chronic energy deficiency through ICDS take-home rations, fortified foods, and convergence with agriculture and social protection schemes. The consistent urban-rural improvements across all indicators reflect strengthened frontline worker capacity building and intensified behaviour change communication under POSHAN Abhiyaan.

Notably, overweight prevalence remains low (0.8% overall), with a slight urban increase (2.4%) suggesting emerging awareness of balanced diets while maintaining focus on preventing undernutrition. These gains validate the government's multi-sectoral strategy – integrating health services, women's empowerment, water-sanitation, and food security. To build on this momentum, priorities include scaling up local complementary food interventions, enhancing fortified product supply chains, intensifying rural outreach to narrow disparities, and state-level adaptive strategies. Bihar's trajectory demonstrates that sustained policy commitment, intersectoral convergence, and community engagement can rapidly transform child nutrition outcomes, moving the state closer to Vision 2025 malnutrition reduction targets.

Table 3: Anthropometric outcomes in Bihar (NFHS6, NFHS5)

Indicators	*NFHS-6 (2023-24)*			*NFHS-5 (2019-21)*
	Urban	*Rural*	*Total*	*Total*
Children under 5 years who are stunted (%)	32.7	35.8	35.6	42.9
Children under 5 years who are wasted (%)	16.2	19.3	19.0	22.9
Children under 5 years who are severely wasted (%)	2.7	5.0	4.7	8.8
Children under 5 years who are underweight (%)	27.3	36.5	35.7	41.0
Children under 5 years who are overweight (%)	2.4	0.7	0.8	2.4

Source: NFHS-6 (2023–24) and NFHS-5 (2019–21), National Family Health Survey, India. Anthropometric indicators defined using WHO growth standards: below −2 SD (stunting/wasting/underweight), below −3 SD (severe wasting), above +2 SD (overweight)

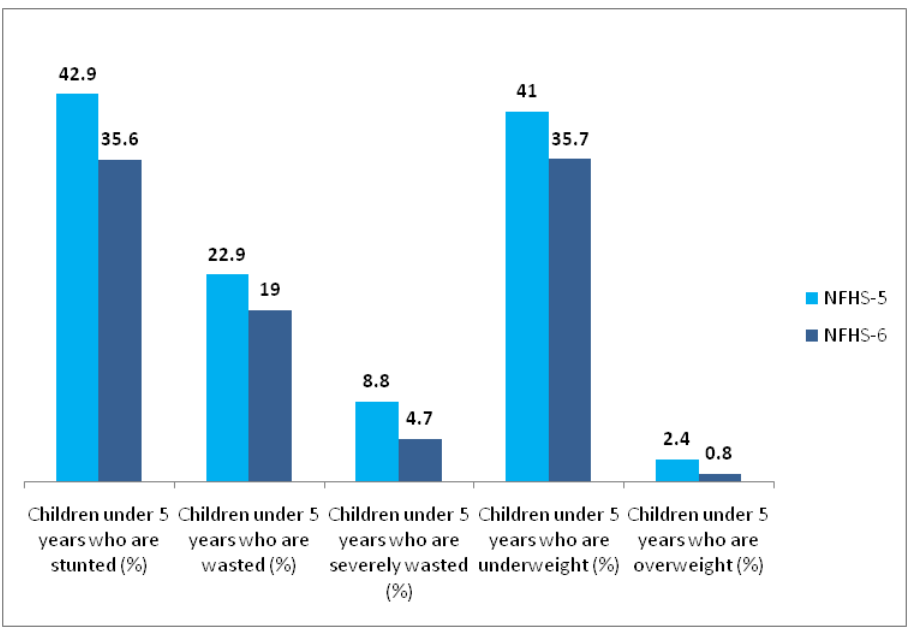


Figure 1: Anthropometric outcomes in Bihar (NFHS-6: 2023-24 and NFHS5: 2019-21)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Bihar has shown strong and encouraging progress in child nutrition. Stunting fell from 42.9% to 35.6%. Wasting and severe wasting also declined. Underweight rates went down meaningfully. Early initiation of breastfeeding rose sharply. Exclusive breastfeeding improved. Current breastfeeding rates remain very high. More children aged 6-8 months now receive solid or semi solid foods with breast milk. The share of children 6-23 months getting an adequate diet rose slightly. Urban areas led improvements in several indicators. Rural areas also improved due to strong frontline outreach. These gains reflect steady government action. The state expanded antenatal care and iron folic acid coverage. Institutional deliveries and newborn care improved. Nutrition counselling reached more caregivers. ICDS enhancements and fortified takehome rations increased nutritional support. POSHAN Abhiyaan helped align efforts across departments. WASH investments reduced infections and supported growth. Targeted programmes for severe wasting improved survival and recovery. The combined multi sectoral approach shows results. The data point to durable gains in linear growth. This is a positive sign for Bihar's future human capital. Progress moves the state closer to SDG 2 and Vision 2025 goals. The improvements are real but incomplete. One in three children remains stunted. Diet adequacy for young children is still low. Non breastfeeding children need more support. Urban-rural disparities persist for diets and WASH. Continued focus is needed on maternal nutrition and complementary feeding. Frontline worker capacity must be strengthened further. Fortified food supply chains need expansion. Behaviour change efforts should intensify in rural areas. Monitoring and state level adaptation will guide better targeting. Overall, the state's programmes are effective. They deliver measurable gains. Continued investment will secure longterm benefits for Bihar's children.

CONCLUSION

Bihar's nutrition trajectory is positive and scalable. Government programmes are producing measurable improvement. The multi sector approach is proving effective. Sustained political and programmatic commitment will deepen gains. Priority actions can close remaining gaps. These include scaling maternal nutrition, increasing early and exclusive breastfeeding, and improving complementary feeding. Strengthening rural WASH and supply chains will reduce exposure to infections and improve diets. Targeted outreach for non breastfed children is vital. Continued capacity building for ASHAs, ANMs, and ICDS workers will sustain behaviour change. With focused investments and coordination, Bihar can accelerate progress towards national and global nutrition targets. The state is on a clear path to better child health and stronger human capital.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The box below summarizes key findings and recommendations for policy actions impact

Key Findings	*Recommendations*
1. The number of children with stunting (low height for age) went down from 42.9% to 35.6% across Bihar.	Keep running and grow the combined nutrition and health programmes. Focus first on districts with the most stunting.
2. Severe wasting (very low weight for height) dropped by half, from 8.8% to 4.7%.	Open more nutrition rehabilitation centres. Train more staff to treat severe wasting. Make sure children can reach these centres quickly.
3. More mothers started breastfeeding within one hour of birth. Exclusive breastfeeding (only breast milk for 6 months) went up from 58.9% to 62.9%.	Continue and expand the Mothers' Absolute Affection (MAA) programme. Teach breastfeeding support in hospitals and during postnatal visits.
4. More children aged 6–8 months now get solid or semi-solid food along with breast milk, rising from 39.0% to 53.0%.	Train community workers to counsel mothers on timely complementary feeding. Support local nutritious food options and provide fortified take-home rations through ICDS.
5. The share of children aged 6-23 months getting an adequate diet rose slightly to about 12% overall.	Run campaigns to teach families about diverse foods. Support mothers with good nutrition. Help families access varied and affordable foods.
6. Urban areas improved more than rural areas in many feeding and nutrition measures.	Send more health workers to rural villages. Train ASHAs and ANMs better. Use simple messages that work in rural communities.
7. Investments in clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) helped children grow better by reducing infections.	Build more clean water and toilet facilities in rural areas. Link WASH work with nutrition programmes at the village level.
8. Children who are not breastfed get less adequate diets than those who are breastfed.	Give special counselling and extra nutritious food to mothers of non-breastfed infants. Make sure these children receive timely supplementation.

Key Findings	*Recommendations*
9. The number of underweight children dropped from 41.0% to 35.7%.	Improve ICDS take-home rations and fortified food supply. Work with agriculture and social welfare departments to ensure families get enough food.
10. Overweight children are few (0.8% overall), but urban areas saw a small increase.	Keep focusing on preventing undernutrition. In cities, also teach families about balanced diets and healthy living to avoid overweight.

The views expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position, policy, or view of the Department.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

FROM DALITS TO MAHADALITS: EXCAVATING SOCIAL CHANGE VS. SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN CONTEMPORARY BIHAR

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Abstract

This article is a focus on Mahadalits by excavating social change vs. social exclusion in contemporary Bihar. Mahadalits, known as the most disadvantaged groups among Dalits, has been constituted in 2007 through the State Mahadalit Commission by the Government of Bihar due to their socially and economically backwardness. After the formation, there are many programmes and policies launched for the development of Dalit communities. To what extent have these programmes and policies brought social change among them or still lagged behind. In this regard, the article will unveil whether they have actually improved their socio-economic position in comparison with other social categories or are even today untouched. In doing so, it analyses the factors of social exclusion which is explained as a denial of equal opportunities imposed by some sections of society on certain sections.

Keywords: Mahadalit, Social Hierarchy, Indology, Constitutional Acceptability, Exclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, Dalits have been socially separated, economically deprived, educationally restricted and politically denied communities in Indian society in general and in Bihar in particular. Dalits have also been the most excluded castes or communities of the society in India. They have been the most discriminated, exploited, subordinated and physically segregated communities in Indian society.

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They have also been the stigmatized people and suffering from numerous disabilities due to their low ascribed status that is caste status which has remained regulated through the religious beliefs and practices. By and large, majority of them have low socio-economic status, lack of political power, low literacy and educational level and social mobility including both untouchables and ex-untouchables in India (Ram 2018). The methodology of this article is primarily dependent on secondary literature. In this context, an attempt, in this article, has been made to touch upon three underlying phenomena. First, the article shall discuss about social hierarchy of Bihar which is still predominant in everyday life of Dalits even after 79 years of independence. Moreover, hierarchical system of the state has placed Mahadalits in the lowest scale of social development in comparison with other social categories. Second, it tries to understand subject matter of 'Mahadalits' (termed by the state of Bihar) which has emerged as a new social category within Dalits in 2007. Is the term 'Mahadalit' constitutionally accepted? Third, the article finds out whether division, by the state of Bihar, within Dalits has brough equitable social change or are still lagged behind due to social exclusion which is deeply structured in social structure and social institutions. The concept of social exclusion has been observed as a denial of equal opportunities imposed by some sections of society on certain sections and owing to it, they are denied to participate in the basic social, economic, political and educational spheres of society. In doing so, it is genuinely to have a precise sense of understanding in the context of social hierarchy in both- societies of India and Bihar regarding Dalits/Mahadalits.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY IN INDIAN SOCIETY

Indian society is referred as a hierarchical society in which numerous castes and sub-castes are placed one above the another and their rankings are determined by their privileges and social status accordingly. To comprehend it in a precise way, as we know that all societies in the world are stratified or hierarchised in nature and society of India is no exception to it. If we perceive a general meaning of hierarchy, according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000), hierarchy is explained as a system, especially in a society or an organisation in which people are organised into different levels of importance from highest to lowest. In sociological standpoint, Dumont (2009: 66) opines that hierarchy is a "principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole". According to him, the hierarchy of caste system among the Hindus is based on ideology of purity and pollution. This concentration on ritual status is what makes the caste hierarchy a true hierarchy. Furthermore, Dubois and Ordabayeva (2015) view that social hierarchy typically deals with the ordering of individuals or groups within a population regarding material or immaterial dimensions that are accepted as status markers within this population. It is in the sense that there are various traditional and classical

evidences that disclose about various terminologies used by the Hindu society in which Dalits/Mahadalits were spatially segregated and also given the lowest social position. In view of the above statement, it would be significant to figure out such sources of evidence through Indological perspective (See, Ghurye 1979, Dumont 2009). As we know that Indology, a branch of sociology, copes with Indian society based on such as ancient texts, ancient history, epic, religious manuscripts, sacred texts of Hindu. More interestingly, these texts include the classical ancient literatures of Indian society like *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Smriti*, *Geeta*, *Puranas*, *Manusmriti*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharatha* and others (See, Nagla, 2008). In this context, theory of *Chaturvarnya* (Hindu Social Order) discusses the division of Hindu society into four orders mentioned by various sociologists such as Olcott (1944), Ghurye (1979), Srinivas (1985), Dumont (2009), Ram (1995) by unveiling that how three varna or castes (Brahmin traditionally priest or scholar, *Kshatriya* that is ruler or soldier, *Vaishya* that is merchant known as 'twice-born') included in the society and forth one (*Shudra* includes peasant, labourer and servant) is excluded in society where fifth one (untouchables or ex-untouchables) are completely outside the varna scheme. This *varna* or caste also refers to how one *varna* or caste is originated from the creator such as *Brahmanas* from the mouth, *Kshatriyas* from arms and *Vaishya* from thighs and *Shudras* from feet. By perceiving the above explanations in the context of Bihar, it is fact that Bihar is one of those states where the upper castes numerically not large, have traditionally enjoyed ritual superiority and social prestige. As far as Dalits are concerned, they constitute around 16.6 percent of Bihar's population according to 2011 Census. Dalits who are remained at the bottom of the Indian caste hierarchy, have resisted social and economic inequalities in various ways throughout their history (Kunnath, 2013). As Roy (1970), rightly views that the numerical weakness of upper caste is more than compensated by the ritual status, social prestige and economical power. In the ritual matters, Brahmins enjoy the first position followed by the Bhumihar Brahmins and the Rajputs. It is also fact that rural Bihar is divided into *Uchcha jatikelog* (people of high castes) who do not have regular social interaction and relationship with the *Neech jatikelog* (people of the low castes) (Ram, 2023). Besides, in the case of Bihar, Lal (1997:19) explains:

> 'Dalits have been the worst suffers in the exploitative social order. No sphere of life is such where equality is accorded to them in interaction with superiors in the caste hierarchy. They work on land but cannot claim it, perform services essential to the maintenance of society but are ranked lowest in the traditional hierarchy, produce consumption materials and are rendered untouchables.Segregation and exploitative have been their fate'.

Such an explanation by Lal isprofoundly embedded in the system of social hierarchy in the state which may be regarded as one of the key factors of low scale of social development of Mahadalits incomparison with other social categories.

CONCEPTUALISING NOMENCLATURES OF DALITS

Dalits are known by various names such as *Mlechha*, *Chandal*, *Avarna*, Depressed Class, Out Castes, Untouchables, Ex-untouchables, *Achhut*, *Harijan*, *Dalits* and now *Mahadalits* in Indian society. The term 'Dalit' is derived from the root 'Dal' which means to crack, open, split and so on. When it is used as noun or adjective, it means burst, split, broken or torn, downtrodden, scattered and so on. (Massey 1995: 15). Dalits have been called by various names such as untouchables, 'Harijan' (a glorified term coined by Narasimha Mehta and adopted by Mahatma Gandhi), 'Exterior Caste' (used by J.H. Hutton), 'Depressed Classes' (by British Officials), 'Out Caste', 'Pariah'- undoubtedly derived from the Tamil generic word 'Para'or 'Parai' the 'Drum' (see, Deliege 1997). In ancient times, different nomenclatures or terminologies were used for them like 'Mlechha', 'Chandal' (used by Manu), Panchama known as fifth class, 'Avarna' that is outside the four varnas, 'Nishada', Paulkasa, 'Antyaja', 'Atishudra', (Michael 1999: 12). As per Webster (1999), Dalit was used in the 1930 as a Hindi and Marathi translations of Depressed Classes, the term British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes. In 1930, there was a Depressed Classes newspaper published in Pune known as *Dalit Bandu* (Friend of Dalits). The word was even used by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in his Marathi speeches. In addition, Dr. Ambedkar preferred to call 'broken men' which is widely used for Dalits. Most significantly, Michael (1999: 15) mentions two sets of arguments highlighted by scholars on the theoretical construct of the term 'Dalit'. Firstly, the noted historian Professor Romila Thapar believes that there is a notion of 'out of date history' that indicates that certain categories lose their significance by stating the example of the Arya-Anarya category. Thus, by the same logic, Shudra and Adi-dharma and so on became part of the 'out of date history'. Secondly, Satyanarayana views that Dalit as a construct will be achieved through recruiting and restoring the hidden culture and textual history of Dalits. In the context of sociological writings, the term Dalit has broadly been defined and conceptualised by Pradhan (1986), Oommen (1994), Omvedt (1994), Ram (1995), Zelliot (2001), Kumar (2005) and so on. On the other hand, the term 'Scheduled Caste', known as the Constitutional term, appeared for the first time in the Government of India Act, 1935. After then, the British Government issued the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936 identifying certain castes, races and tribes as Scheduled Castes. The term 'Dalit' which is known as a social category, originated from Panther movement in Maharashtra during the early 1970s and then became popularised in other parts of the country. Moreover, the definition of Dalit by Zelliot (2001) acknowledges that the clearest definition of dalit in its contemporary usage comes from a letter written to her by Gangadhar Pantawane, a Professor of Marathi at Milind College now at Marathwada University in Aurangabad and founder-editor of *Asmitadarsh* (mirror of identity), the chief organ of Dalit literature. Zelliot (2001: 268) writes:

'To me, Dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of the country. He does not believe in God, Rebirth, Soul, Holy Books teaching separatism, fate and Heaven because they have made him a slave. He does not believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution.'

FROM DALITS TO MAHADALITS IN BIHAR

After emphasizing the various meanings along with definition of Dalits above, it is equally relevant to highlight the creation of new nomenclature for Dalits, referred as *Mahadalits*, in contemporary Bihar. Initially, it was a new discourse among scholars, academicians, politicians and policy makers as far as the new creation/division among Dalits was concerned. Let us comprehend pros and cons of it in detail. Mahadalits, known as the most disadvantaged groups among Dalits, has been constituted in 2007 through the State Mahadalit Commission by the Government of Bihar. Usually, Dalits in Bihar referred as *Mahadalits* do not constitute a homogeneous category. The Mahadalits Commission was constituted under the chairmanship of Vishwanath Rishi who was a former minister by the Nitish Government. There are 23 Scheduled Castes in the state of Bihar in which 18 SCs were identified as the most disadvantaged groups within Dalits in its first report. According to 2001 Census, 18 constitutes of 37 per cent of the SCs population of Bihar. On the other hand, those SCs who were not included in the list of Mahadalits Category are: Dusadhs, Pasis, Dhobis and Chamars constituting 69 per cent of the SC population in the state. By the second recommendation of the Commission in 2009, Pasis and Dhobis were incorporated in the list of Mahadalits Category while Chamars were included in the category by the third recommendation of the Commission (Govt. of Bihar, 2009).On the contrary, as per 2011 Census, Scheduled Castes constitute 16.6 per cent of Bihar's population. This data represents around 16.5 million Dalits out of the 104 million population in the state (Govt. of Bihar, 2012). The 2011 Census argues that 21 out of 23 Dalits have been classified as Mahadalits including Bantar, Bauri, Bhogta, Bhuiya, Chaupal, Dabgar, Dom, Ghasi, Halalkhor, Hari (Mehtar, Bhangi), Kanjar, Kurariar, Lalbegi, Mushar, Nat, Pan (Swasi), Rajwar, Turi, Dhobi, Pasi, Chamar and Paswan. They are recognised as the most marginalised Dalit communities in the state of Bihar. In views of the above, it has been observed that Scheduled Castes have remained socially and economically backward in the state. Owing to it, the Commission highlighted four major objectives which are follows:

1. Identify the castes within Scheduled Castes who lagged behind in the development process;
2. Study the educational and social status of these castes and suggest measures for upliftment of these castes;

3. Recommend actions to initiate measures for their educational and social upliftment together ways for their employment;
4. Any other subject the state entrusts to it.

Accordingly, the Bihar Mahadalit Vikash Mission has been registered under the Societies Registration Act., 1860 for implementation of welfare schemes for the upliftment of Mahadalits based on the report of the State Mahadalit Commission. The Commission observed that out of the 22 Scheduled Castes in the state, 21 are precisely deprived in terms of social, economic, cultural and political status (Economic Survey, 2019-20). It was stated that people belonging to Dalits have not been benefited significantly from affirmative actions. Therefore, in views of the above explanation, Bihar Vikas Mission has highlighted action plans to be fulfilled the basic necessity of all Mahadalits through various schemes which include Land for housing Scheme, Mahadalit Awas Yojna, Mahadalit Toilet Communication Scheme, Mahadalit Basti Link Road Scheme, Mahadalit Anganwadi, Mahadalit Creche, Special School/Hostel for Mahadalit, Mukhyamantri Mahadalit Poshak Yojna, Dashrath Manjhi Shramik Training Institute, Mukhyamantri Nari Jyoti Programme, Dhanvantari Mobile Ayurvedic Chikitsha, Mobile Public Distribution System, Eradication of Scavenging System, Construction of Community Hall cum shade, Mukhyamantri Jeevan Drishti Programme, Establishment of District and Block Resource Centre for Training and Research, Vikas Mitra, Community Radio, etc. (See, Govt. of Bihar, 2009). It is mentioned that during 2007-08, State Government sanctioned a special project of Rs. 288.19 crores for a period of three years. The project includes schemes for the social, economic, infrastructure development. It is in the sense that one of the major decisions of the State Government was to appoint 'Vikas Mitra', a person at the *tola* level to act as a bridge between the Mahadalits and the government functionaries.

CONSTITUTIONAL ACCEPTABILITY

Keeping in mind the focus of Mahadalit as a new social category in this paper, one may raise different observations on the constitutional acceptability of the formation of Mahadalit in the state of Bihar. Thus, we may argue that Bihar is not the first state which has created a division within Dalits. There are some states of India which have created such a kind of bifurcation within Dalits to be understood in this context. For examples, as Kumar (2013) writes that in 1975 Giani Zail Singh, Chief Minister of Punjab, bifurcated SCs into two A and B categories. Then, in 1994, the Chief Minister of Haryana, Bhajan Lal did a similar formation among Dalits in the state. After then, Rajnath Singh in Utter Pradesh also created same division but initiative was lost after filing a legal case by an advocate against this quota. In addition, in Andhra Pradesh, Chandra Babu Naidu bifurcated the SCs into four categories-A, B, C and D. But it was challenged in the Andhra Pradesh

High Court which upheld the Naidu ministry's step. Owing to it, E.V. Chinnaiah filed a petition in the Supreme Court in 2004 by mentioning that there was no connotational basis for a state to provide a separate quota. Nevertheless, in the case of Bihar, if we adhere the constitutional acceptability of the term, '*Mahadalits*'. One may understand that it is not a constitutional term as far as the constitutional provisions and legalities are concerned. As per the Constitution of India, Scheduled Caste is a constitutional term which is widely used for Dalits. As Article 366(24) of the Constitution of Indian defines the Scheduled Castes as 'such castes, races or tribes or parts or groups within such castes, races or tribes as are deemed under Article 341 to be Scheduled Castes for the purpose of the Constitution'. In this regard, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes declared the formation of the Mahadalits Commission by the state of Bihar to be unconstitutional. It is in the sense that the Constitution did not permit a state to take any such step without consulting it. Not only the Commission raised such kind of concern but also the Supreme Court declared that such efforts by the states as unconstitutional (See, Kumar 2013). Furthermore, the division within Dalits through the Commission, the Nitish Kumar was criticized by political parties, especially Lok Jansakti Party (LJP) as an electoral stunt in order to marginalize Dusadh communities.

SOCIAL CHANGE VS. SOCIAL EXCLUSION

At the outset, let us focus on the conceptual orientation about social change and then social exclusion. As a definitional level, social change refers to a change in social structure including changes in the size of a society or in a particular social institution or in the relationships between institutions (Bottomore, 1962). Furthermore, social change moves in forward or backward direction and has both positive and negative attributes. Change or social change is both time and space specific i.e., both quality and quantitative of change is visible at distinctly at the two different times and spaces (Ram, 2024). On the other hand, the concept of social exclusion has originated in Western Europe in mid 1970s, especially in France and gradually spread in the rest of the world. The official French definition of the concept which defines social exclusion as a rupture of social bonds-which reflects a French emphasis on the organic and solidaristic nature of society. More broadly, Haan (1997: 10) defines it as "the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live" (See also, European Foundation 1995). Besides, there are many scholars and intellectuals such as Silver (1999), Hills (2002), Sen (2004), Levit as (2006), Byrne (2008), etc., who have defined and conceptualized social exclusion in their works. Alternatively, the concept of deep exclusion which was introduced into the conceptual field by David Milibandin 2006 by arguing that deep exclusion refers to exclusion across more than one domain or dimension of disadvantages resulting in

severe negative consequences for quality of life, well-being and future life chances. Multi-dimensionality is the key idea of deep exclusion (See, Levitas 2006).

If we observe social change among Dalits or Mahadalits based on the governmental data and published reports and articles, it demonstrates that Dalit development in contemporary Bihar has speedily improved in all domains. But the round reality displays that they are a few out of the majority of the Dalit population who have been benefited so far. Majority of them are still untouched. It is amply clear that there is a lack of empirical evidences which reveal the actual scenarios of Dalit development, if we examine socio-economic, educational, political and cultural status of 23 SCs in Bihar together. For example, one may view that people belonging to Mahadalits are, still in the vulnerable condition, facing various kinds of denial such as social, economic, political, educational, equitable justice, land rights, freedom of expression, dignity in their everyday life in one or another way. Since centuries, Dalits have been the most excluded castes or communities of the society in India. They have been the most discriminated, exploited, subordinated and physically segregated communities in Indian society. They have also been the stigmatized people and suffering from numerous disabilities due to their low ascribed status that is caste status which has remained regulated through the religious beliefs and practices. The majority of them have also low socio-economic status, lack of political power, low literacy and educational level and social mobility including both untouchables and ex-untouchables in India (Ram 2018). Likewise, Kunnath (2013) observes the perspective of ideological domination that deprives Dalits. According to him, Musahars and other Dalits groups are victims of the caste system. Their subordination is made possible not merely by brute force or through their deprivation of economic and political sources of power but also by the creation of values and ideologies. The notion of purity and pollution as well as the ideologies of karma and dharma have imposed various disabilities on the Dalits' way of life. In other words, Sahay (2019) unveils his field work experience by mentioning that the government flagship programmes in the areas of education, health and nutrition have hardly reached the disadvantaged groups in the villages such as the Musahars. Poverty, landless and caste-based discrimination continue to exclude Musahars from government schemes and services even today. Due to it, they have remained a poor, landless, marginalised and excluded caste group in the state of Bihar. In addition, Kumar and Somanathan (2016) presents a mixed picture of development based on their investigation of implementation of land transfer programmes regarding Mahadalit Awas Bhoomi Yojna in Bihar. They even argue that significant numbers of households were excluded from Mahadalit census due to their location and in the case of Chamars because their community was added later as Mahadalit. The report also suggests that transfers of land seem to far more slowly than the government progress report may suggest. It actually means that there is a significant delay in the process of transfers of land into actual possession of land

(Ibid. 2016). At this point, it would be ample to say that the substantial numbers of Mahadalits have still deprived of their access to various kinds of schemes, policies, plannings, programmes in the state. Needless to say, Mahadalits, in a nutshell, have remained deprived, segregated, stigmatized and excluded categories. In the 21st century of Bihar, Dalits/Mahadalits are not even today untouched of experiences of oppression, exploitation exclusion and socio-economic impoverishment across domains. Such phenomena are profoundly rooted in their social world. This leads to the various kinds of social inequality and deep exclusion of Mahadalits across domains causing negative repercussion of quality of life. This is what David Miliband (2006) views 'deep exclusion' which results negative consequences of 'quality of life, well-being and future life chances.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we may argue that social change among Mahadalits based on the governmental data and published reports and articles, it shows that Dalit development in contemporary Bihar has speedily improved in all domains. But as far as the round reality is concerned, it displays that the majority of the Dalit population are still untouched. They are remained socially separated, economically deprived, educationally restricted and politically denied communities. Only a sizeable number of them have benefited after the formation of Mahadalits, the most disadvantaged groups within Dalits, after 2007. It is fact that Bihar is one of those states where the upper castes numerically not large, have traditionally enjoyed ritual superiority and social prestige. As it also views that the numerical weakness of upper caste is more than compensated by the ritual status, social prestige and economical power. There is a lack of empirical evidences which reveal the actual scenarios of Dalits development, if we examine socio-economic, educational, political and cultural status of 23 SCs in Bihar together. Due to the social hierarchy being deeply rooted in the society, Mahadalits not only face various kinds of social inequality and deep exclusion in their everyday life in one or another way but also it restricts the process of socio-economic, educational, political and cultural development of Mahadalits in the state.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

PUNJAB GRAM PANCHAYATS' FINANCIAL RESOURCES: TASKS AHEAD

Mohinder Singh* and Ruchi Dhiman**

Abstract

India's Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have a significant historical background and have been granted constitutional status to serve as robust foundations for democratic decentralization in the country. Financial resources serve as the foundation for the Panchayats which include tax revenue, non-tax revenue, grant -in- aids, loans, shares from state and centre taxes, donations and contributions. Finances are also provided through the MP LAD and MLA LAD schemes. The Panchayat have limited own sources of income such as local taxes, user charges and income from Panchayat assets, shops and market fees. because they hesitate to levy of taxes, and the tax collections also remain poor. Not all the recommendations of the State Finance Commission are generally accepted by the state government, and it allocates/reallocates the funds after modifications. Further, it also true that panchayats are not so free to spend independently on the development of local communities. It is in this context that the present paper has been devoted to analyse the resources of finance, their problems, issues, challenges and prospects on the basis of secondary data. The analysis intends us to suggest to broaden local revenue sources, strengthening institutional capacities, leveraging technology for financial transparency and ensuring timely devolution of funds, launching special campaign to recover the arrears of taxes, stopping political interference, ensuring active participation and cooperation of local community, creating durable assets on permanent basis and so on.

Keywords: Panchayats Financial Resources, Political Interference, Tax Revenue, Transparency, Assets, Punjab

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INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of independence in 1947, the major challenge faced by India was the overall development of the country and to shape a nation in the most democratic, secular and socialist way. To expand democracy at the local level, the Panchayati Raj System was implemented in rural India. Panchayats are instrumental in bolstering the core and in successfully implementing rural development initiatives. They are recognised not just as political entities but also as a strong tool to empower the socio-economic structure of the villages. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India demonstrate a new way of democratic decentralisation that promotes local involvement in decision-making and participation in addressing issues at the grassroots level. Mahatma Gandhi believed that India should focus on rural living and that authority should originate from the lower levels. He consistently expressed regret over the omission of village councils from the original constitution. The views expressed led to the inclusion of Article 40 in the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution of India and the formalization of local self-government in 1992 through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. The efficacy of decentralised governance in achieving sustainable rural development is contingent upon the financial autonomy of local self-government institutions (LGIs) (Amarnath et al., 2025). Punjab's rural population and history of agricultural-driven economic growth underscore the importance of its PRIs. Punjab has maintained a three-tiered hierarchical framework of PRIs, consisting of Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zila Parishads. Samitis and Zila Parishads, established under the Punjab Panchayati Raj Act of 1994. The Gram Panchayat, at the village level, is the most important level because it functions as the principal agency for the management and distribution of essential services and community resources at the local level. Despite the well-established structure, Gram Panchayats continue to encounter a multitude of financial challenges. The majority, roughly 89% of overall revenues, is derived from the State and Central Governments, through government transfers. In comparison, roughly 4% comes from their own revenue sources, such as local taxes and fees, accompanied by the inadequate implementation of State Finance Commission recommendations, and the absence of the provision of effective technical assistance to Gram Panchayats.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The present study intends to a) evaluate the sources of finance of gram panchayats in Punjab; b) identify problems and challenges in the financing of gram panchayats in Punjab; and c) suggest suitable measures for strengthening the financial resource base of the gram panchayats.

Considering the goals of the research, the methods employed are analytical. The study draws on secondary information from a range of texts, including various

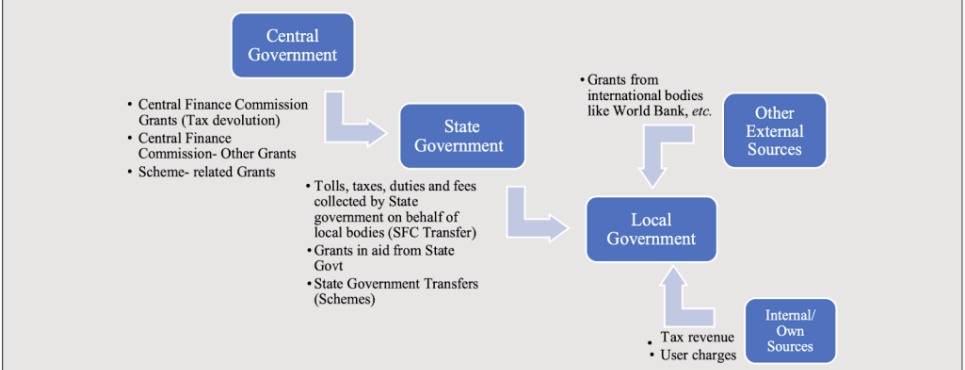
journal articles, records from both central and state government departments, RBI reports, the Punjab Gram Swaraj portal, and the Panchayati Raj websites.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The "Devolution Index 2024 Report", published by the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) in February 2025, serves as a crucial metric for evaluating fiscal decentralization across Indian states. The report provides a quantitative analysis of the actual transfer of funds, functions, and functionaries (the 3Fs) to local self-governments. "The persistent issue of incomplete fiscal transfers is quantified by the 2024 Devolution Index (IIPA, 2025)." For a state-specific review like Punjab, the index highlights ongoing "problems," such as a low implementation rate of State Finance Commission (SFC) recommendations and limited fiscal autonomy. The report's primary utility lies in identifying specific "prospects" for reform by offering a comparative framework to improve accountability and enhance the capacity of Gram Panchayats to manage untied grants efficiently. "According to the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA, 2025), the 'status of devolution' in several northern states requires substantial legislative and administrative reform." The core issue examined in this review is significant horizontal and vertical fiscal disparities in the way General Purpose (GP) financing is arranged in Punjab. Data consistently indicates that rural local authorities throughout India face difficulties with Own Source Revenue. Generation of (OSR) or On Station Requirements, a challenge particularly acute in northern states like Punjab, which rely heavily on Transfers between governments (Shrawan et al., 2025). This dependency is intensified by macroeconomic volatility, with recent fiscal analyses illustrating this point through 4 specific examples. Immediate external pressures on Punjab's GPs, including the termination of central revenue deficit subsidies and projected central fund flows, are expected to decrease during the 2025-26 fiscal year (PRS Legislative Research, 2025). The academic discourse also shows a clear relationship between these fiscal constraints and governance. The research carried out in Punjab has specifically illustrated the obstructive impact of inconsistent funding arrangements on the system. Achievement of fundamental human rights and the delivery of services in health and education, undermining the effectiveness of current devolution models, according to Kaur (2025). The 2024 Devolution Index Report confirms that Punjab displays stagnation in comparison with its high-performing counterparts. Progress in the comprehensive transfer of funds, functions, and personnel is expected by 2025 (IIPA). Despite entrenched problems, the literature points to substantial prospects for systemic reform. Emerging policy models are prioritizing innovative OSR strategies, shifting focus from conventional grants to maximise leverage. Revenues such as standardised user fees and property monetization (Amarnath et al., 2025). This review paper critically examines the Financing of Gram through a synthesis of recent literature published between 2022 and 2026. Examining

Panchayats in Punjab: Challenges and Opportunities at a pivotal moment in India's federal financial system. Panchayats in Punjab: Problems and Prospects, addressing this critical juncture in India's federal fiscal architecture.

Chart I.3: Local Government Sources of Revenue



Source: Budget Documents of Centre and States.

SOURCES OF REVENUE

The successful implementation of the functions of Gram Panchayats in Punjab is solely dependent upon the financial availability. The government cannot achieve any of its socio- economic objectives without the financial resources. Under Section 86 of Chapter 5 of the Punjab Panchayati Raj Act 1994, the 'Gram Panchayat Fund' is established. It mentions the constitution, sources, and application of funds for every Gram Panchayat in the state.

The resources of gram panchayats can be broadly discussed as under-

I. Own Resources
II. Other Sources

I. **Own Reources:** The own sources of PRIs in Punjab are classified as Tax revenue and non-tax revenue:

Tax Revenue	*Non-Tax Revenue*
House building tax/Property tax	Water fee
Profession tax	Sanitary fee for public washrooms
Vehicle tax	Fee for the use of panchayat shelter
Pilgrimage tax	Judicial fines
Toll (on new bridges)	Remunerative assets
Tax on fairs and other entertainments	User charges for hospitals and schools
Tax on advertisement	Fee on markets and weekly bazaars
Levy on factories in lieu of taxes	Birth and death registration fee

II. **Other Sources:** Other sources of revenue include Grants in aid, loans, share of state taxes, MPLAD, MLALAD, donations and contributions.

- **Grants-in-aid:** Grants in aid for Panchayats in Punjab are provided by the central government under Fifteenth Finance Commission (XV FC), which are divided into Tied and Untied grants. From 2021-22 to 2025-26, the share of funding of tied grants and untied grants are 60% and 40% respectively. There are also Discretionary Grants that are approved by the Punjab Finance Department and sanctioned by the Chief Minister and other Ministers for development purposes. State-Specific/Incentive Grants, such as awards and financial incentives for best-performing Panchayats that improve service delivery.
- **Loans:** Panchayats also raise loans to meet their local developmental needs. For the period 2020-21 to 2025-26, Punjab's Rural Local Bodies (RLBs) have been receiving 15th Finance Commission (XV FC) grants. In the 2024-25 financial year, the first instalment of untied grants amounting to over Rs. 225 crore was released for eligible Gram Panchayats, Block Panchayats, and District Panchayats.
- **MPLAD (Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme) or MLA LAD:** It allows MPs/MLAs to recommend development programmes with the funds through district authorities, often covering schemes like MGNREGA for grassroots level implementation. The Punjab government approved the "Rangla Punjab Vikas Fund," with the amount of Rs 5 crore per MLA per year.
- **Share of State Taxes:** The state government also share some specified taxes, such as land revenue, local cess, sales tax, etc., with the PRIs. As such, in Punjab, 40% of the total land revenue collected in the village is given to Gram Panchayats.
- Donations and Contributions: Apart from the above sources, Gram Panchayats also receive funds in the form of gifts, donations or contributions. However, the income from these sources is negligible now.

PROBLEMS OF THE FINANCING OF GRAM PANCHAYATS IN PUNJAB

Panchayats in Punjab have many financial problems, basically due to a heavy dependency on central and state government grants and a minimal ability to generate their own source revenue (OSR), which leads to a number of challenges, such as delayed funding and limited autonomy.

The problems of the financing of gram panchayats in Punjab are as follows:

- **Heavy Reliance on Grants:** Gram Panchayats in Punjab are largely dependent on state and central grants in the form of agricultural subsidies, disaster relief funds, with specific sectoral development funds such as health, education, industry or entrepreneurship.

- **Restricted Taxation Powers:** Panchayats in Punjab have limited taxation powers, which increase their dependence on the state budget transfers. Moreover, they need to take approval before levying various taxes. There is very limited or almost no provision for generating independent revenue resources.
- **Lack of Accountability and Transparency:** The Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Act, 2018, aims to promote open governance, but the implementation is inconsistent. At some places, Gram Sabha is not always held regularly or effectively, neglected social audits are not in accordance with the guidelines, and financial discrepancies exist, which hinder the workability of Panchayats.
- **Audit Observations:** Reports have highlighted irregularities in the auction of land, unpaid rentals for shops, and unauthorized use of Gram Panchayat land.
- **Administrative and Structural Issues:** There are many administrative and structural issues, like lack of proper infrastructure, bureaucratic domination, political interference by local MLAs and higher-level politicians, lack of proper coordination between the three levels of PRIs (Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zila Parishad), a shortage of technical and non- technical staff, weak gram sabhas and lack of expertise.
- **Delays in Funding:** Panchayats in Punjab face unnecessary delays in funds, which strain state-centre relations and hinder the path of development projects. There have been reported instances of a short collection of funds from the auction of Shamlat land.
- **Issues with State Finance Commission:** It is seen that there are delays in the composition of SFCs and in receiving their reports. It results in accounts often remaining in arrears. Discrepancies exist between digital (e-Gramswaraj) and manual records.
- **Limited Own Sources of Revenue:** Panchayati Raj Institutions face serious challenges because of limited taxation powers. They usually hesitate to impose new taxes due to the limited devolution of subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution. As of Nov 2025, 5,228 Gram Panchayats reported having no income of their own.

All of these problems collectively hinder the ability of Gram Panchayats in Punjab and create hurdles in making themselves self-reliant.

TASKS AHEAD

An analysis of data and information about the financial position of Gram Panchayats shows that some concrete efforts are required to ensure the sound financial base of Gram Panchayats-the lowest rung of decentralized local governments. In order to address the financial challenges faced by the Panchayats in Punjab, a multi-directional, synthetic approach focusing on strengthening financial autonomy

and digitalisation is required. According to the 15th Finance Commission and parliamentary reports, reliance on state or central grants must be reduced through better financial management at the local level.

Following action-oriented steps can be taken for the improvement of the financial position of the Gram Panchayats:

- **Role of the Central Government:** In view of the higher number of items to be administered, there is an urgent need for devolution of more financial powers to the Gram Panchayats. This task cannot be successful unless and until the political bosses and the administrators are fully committed and sincere in helping the Gram Panchayats. The union government can contribute to making more funds available to them by the way of enhancing the need- based funds to be released directly to the Gram Panchayats.
- **Improving Financial Autonomy:** There is an urgent need to improve financial autonomy and management by reducing dependency on grants from the state and central governments. Audits of the accounts of gram panchayats must be conducted regularly and are mandatory to ensure accountability and transparency.
- **Professionalisation:** There is a need to educate employees and offer assistance for improved data processing, financial management, and audit compliance. Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA, redesigned in 2022) provides officials and elected members with training in planning, finance, and governance.
- **Digitization and Adoption of Technology:** Use of digital platforms such as e- Gram Swaraj for the generation of tax demands will improve efficiency and reduce corruption.
- **Simplified Approval Procedures & Planning Guidelines:** Local development initiatives should require fewer levels of approval, and elected officials should be provided with more access to the development planning process.
- **Strengthening Institutions:** Regular constitution of State Finance Commission (SFCs) should be ensured to recommend fair resource sharing among state and local bodies. Gram Sabhas should also be empowered, and the shortage of trained staff to manage financial records should be addressed.
- **Enhancing Own Source Revenue (OSR):** Panchayats should try to boost their own revenue resources by effectively using local assets like renting property, increasing taxes or fees (water, property, etc.), diversifying income through e-services and local markets and leveraging state and central schemes for capacity building. OSR management is being streamlined and improved by innovations like the Ministry of Panchayati Raj's Samarth Panchayat Portal, which is being tested in Himachal Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.
- **Campaigning and Awareness:** Special campaigns should be launched to generate awareness among the local people to make them realise that, in case

user charges are increased, these will strengthen the financial position of the Gram Panchayats to provide more benefits to the local community by way of providing quality amenities and services.

- **Strict Regular Follow-Up:** Stern action is required against those villagers who have developed the habit of not regularly paying the taxes and fees.
- **Encouragement to Community-Contributions:** Villagers should be encouraged more for Shramdaan (labour) and cash or kind contributions for the village development.
- **Partnerships:** Public-Private Partnership (PPPs) can be attracted for local projects.
- **SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas) Scheme:** On April 24, 2021, National Panchayati Raj Day, a central sector initiative was introduced nationwide. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MOPR), State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments, and Survey of India, a Technology Implementation Agency, collaborated to create the SVAMITVA Scheme, which can aid panchayats in their fiscal development. Drone surveys and CORS (Continuously Operating Reference Stations) networks, which offer mapping precision of 5 cm, would be used to demarcate rural inhabited areas.
  - This would give village household owners who own homes in populated rural areas of villages the "record of rights."

  Its goals are to:
  - Provide rural Indian inhabitants with financial security by allowing them to use their property as a financial asset for loans and other financial benefits.
  - Accurate land records are created for rural planning.
  - Property tax determination.
  - The development of GIS (Geographic Information System) maps and survey infrastructure that any department can utilize.
  - To facilitate the use of GIS maps in the creation of an improved Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP).
  - To lessen legal cases and issues pertaining to property.
- **Property tax reforms:** Updating property tax assessment and collection procedures, which provide a substantial potential source of funding for Gram Panchayats.
- **User fees & Resource utilization:** Establishing fair costs for services, including waste disposal, water delivery, and community asset upkeep. Besides, creating sustainable revenue by making use of community lands, ponds, and marketplaces.

- **Financial Decentralization and Own Source Revenue (OSR):** Panchayats historically have limited economic autonomy due to their heavy reliance on state and federal grants.
  - Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu collectively contributed more than 60% of the ₹25,595 crore OSR earned by Gram Panchayats nationwide between 2017–18 and 2021–22, indicating that several states have seized the lead in local income mobilization.
- **Other measures:** Some other suggested measures are:
  - In certain circumstances, such as when there is a need for infrastructure and the community is prepared to pay for it, local communities might develop Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs).
  - For instance, Budhanoor village in Kerala's Alappuzha District has coordinated its efforts through initiatives like the creation of the Standing Committee on Finance, listing all the organizations, individuals, and merchants responsible for paying taxes, counselling tax defaulters, enlisting Kudumbashree volunteers and staff for door-to-door tax collection, setting up tax collection camps, etc.
  - Access to debt capital markets can be a good way to find funding and allow them to develop planned projects. To obtain debt, especially long-term loans, local governments must significantly enhance their entire administrative and technological capabilities.
  - Performance indicators: Creating quantifiable metrics for governance, financial management, and service delivery.
  - Incentive structures: Associating successful results with more resources or autonomy.
  - Recognition programs: Honouring and showcasing effective methods with prizes and opportunities for peer education.

CONCLUSION

After critically examining the financial situation of the Gram Panchayats, it can be stated that the overall position of gram panchayats is not so good. However, there have been improving prospects due to central schemes that focus on infrastructural development, capacity building and performance incentives. So, it is concluded that concrete efforts on the part of both the state and the central governments are required to financially strengthen the Gram Panchayats.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

RECONCILING GOVERNANCE: ANALYSING THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN THE PESA ACT, 1996 AND THE FOREST RIGHTS ACT, 2006

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Abstract

The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) represent landmark legislations in India's legal landscape, aimed at empowering tribal communities through self-governance and securing their forest rights, respectively. The primary purpose of this paper is to critically analyse the points of convergence and divergence between PESA and FRA. The analysis reveals that the key synergy lies in the Gram Sabha's role as a central authority for governance and rights-holding. However, significant conflicts arise from the ambiguity between PESA's mandatory "consultation" and FRA's community "consent," the dilemma of the "competent authority" for land and resource governance, and procedural overlaps exacerbated by bureaucratic resistance. The article concludes by proposing a framework for harmonious construction, advocating for integrated governance models, legal clarifications to resolve the consultation-consent dichotomy, and strategic investment in capacity building for Gram Sabhas. This work contributes to the fields of tribal law, environmental justice, and legal pluralism by providing a structured analysis of a pressing implementation challenge and offering actionable solutions for policymakers, legal practitioners, and academics.

Keywords: PESA, Forest Rights Act (FRA), Gram Sabha, Jurisdictional Conflict, Tribal Self-Governance.

THE TWIN PILLARS OF TRIBAL EMPOWERMENT

For centuries, India's Adivasi communities have maintained a profound, symbiotic relationship with their forests, which are not just a resource but the very bedrock

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of their cultural, spiritual, and economic existence (Guha: 2000). This relationship was systematically dismantled, first by colonial rule which, through legislations like the Indian Forest Act of 1878, declared vast swathes of ancestral lands as state property, criminalizing traditional practices and transforming forest-dwellers into trespassers in their own homes (Indian Forest Act 1878). This legacy of alienation didn't end with independence; it persisted through well-intentioned but often paternalistic post-colonial policies that prioritized commercial exploitation and top-down conservation, leading to widespread displacement and a profound disenfranchisement of tribal populations (Xaxa Committee: 2014). This protracted "historical injustice" created an urgent need for a legal architecture that would not only restore rights but also empower communities to govern their own destinies.

The Legislative Response: In a transformative shift, the Indian Parliament enacted two landmark laws aimed at rectifying this legacy. The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), was a radical departure from the standard panchayati raj model. Recognizing the unique cultural fabric of tribal areas, it mandated state governments to devolve significant autonomy to Gram Sabhas, making them the central authority for managing natural resources, controlling land alienation, and approving development projects in Scheduled Areas.[1] A decade later, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA), sought directly to undo the colonial grip on forests. It aimed to correct the historical injustice by formally recognizing the individual and community forest rights of these populations, including the critical right to protect and manage traditional forests.[2] Together, these acts were envisioned as twin pillars, with PESA establishing a framework of self-governance and the FRA furnishing the substantive rights to be governed.

Statement of the Research Problem: While PESA and the FRA share a common emancipatory philosophy, their practical intersection is far from seamless. On paper, they create a powerful, complementary system. Yet, in practice, their overlapping jurisdictions over land, forests, and the authority of the Gram Sabha have spawned significant confusion and conflict.[3] This begs the central question this article seeks to address: Do PESA and the FRA coalesce to form a cohesive and empowering system for tribal communities, or do their jurisdictional ambiguities create a legal labyrinth that ultimately frustrates their shared goals of autonomy and justice?

THE CONSTITUTIONAL BEDROCK

The legal validity and transformative potential of both PESA and the Forest Rights Act are deeply rooted in the Indian Constitution, which provides a specialized framework for tribal welfare. The cornerstone of this framework is *Article 244 read with the Fifth Schedule*, which establishes a distinct administrative system for "Scheduled Areas" – regions with a predominant tribal population. The Fifth

Schedule empowers the Governor of a state to make regulations for the peace and good government of these areas, specifically to protect tribal communities from exploitation and disenfranchisement (Art 244 Para 5). It's this special constitutional status that creates the necessity for tailored legislation like PESA, moving beyond the one-size-fits-all approach of the general panchayati raj system to accommodate unique tribal customs and community-based governance structures.

Beyond the specific provisions for Scheduled Areas, the spirit of PESA and FRA draws life from the Constitution's commitment to social justice and fundamental rights. The *Right to Life and Personal Liberty under Article 21* has been expansively interpreted by the Supreme Court to include the right to livelihood, dignity, and a clean environment.[4] For forest-dwelling communities, whose lives are inextricably linked to their land and forests, this right is meaningless without the security of tenure and access to resources, a gap both PESA and FRA aim to fill. Furthermore, the *Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs)*, though not legally enforceable, provide a crucial philosophical compass. *Article 39(b) and (c),* which mandate the state to direct its policy towards ensuring that the ownership and control of material resources are distributed to serve the common good, justify the community-centric resource governance model of both Acts. Similarly, *Article 48A*, which enjoins the state to protect and improve the environment, finds a practical expression in the conservation duties bestowed upon Gram Sabhas by the FRA.

DECONSTRUCTING THE PESA ACT, 1996

The core philosophy of PESA is a radical departure from top-down governance, championing *self-governance and community-led development* as the cornerstones of administration in Scheduled Areas. It flips the traditional power structure by positioning the Gram Sabha – the village assembly – not as a mere implementer of schemes, but as the competent authority for approving plans and managing resources.[5]

This philosophy is operationalized through the pivotal *Section 4* of the Act, which mandates state legislatures to endow Panchayats at the appropriate level and the Gram Sabha with specific powers. Key provisions that are central to its interface with the FRA include:

- **Section 4(d): Ownership of Minor Forest Produce (MFP):** This clause vests the ownership of MFP, a critical source of livelihood, directly in the Gram Sabha. It's a powerful economic and managerial right that seeks to break the control of state forest departments and private contractors.
- **Section 4(i): Power to prevent land alienation:** This is a protective shield for tribal communities, granting the Gram Sabha the authority to restore any

unlawfully alienated land of a scheduled tribe and, more importantly, the power to prohibit or restrict the transfer of land in the scheduled area.

- **Mandatory Consultation:** The Act requires that the Gram Sabha shall be *consulted* before making the acquisition of land for development projects and before resettling or rehabilitating those affected by such projects. While the term "consultation" has been a source of legal debate, it undeniably grants the community a formal voice in decisions that directly impact their lives and habitats.

DECONSTRUCTING THE FOREST RIGHTS ACT, 2006

The Forest Rights Act is fundamentally a corrective legislation, conceived with the core philosophy of *"correcting historical injustice"* inflicted upon forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers.[6] Its preamble explicitly acknowledges this injustice, framing the act not as a grant of state benevolence, but as a recognition of pre-existing, yet historically disregarded, rights. It seeks to transform these communities from mere "beneficiaries" of state programs to *right-holders and managers* of the forest ecosystem.

The Act's substantive power is housed in several key sections:

- **Section 3 – Recognition of Forest Rights:** This is the heart of the FRA, enumerating the bundle of rights it recognizes. Crucially, it goes beyond individual land titles (3(a)) to include *community rights (3(b))* such as nistar (access to forest produce), and most significantly, the *Community Forest Resource (CFR) right under Section 3(1)(i)*. This right provides for the community's right to "protect, regenerate, conserve, or manage any community forest resource which they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use."
- **Section 4 – Vesting of Forest Rights and Procedure:** This section outlines the procedure for recognizing and vesting these rights, importantly stipulating that these rights are *heritable but not alienable or transferable,* ensuring they remain with the community. It also places the Gram Sabha at the center of the process of initiating the claims.
- **Section 5 – Gram Sabha's Duties and Community Power:** Perhaps the most synergistic provision with PESA, **Section 5** empowers the Gram Sabha with the authority to protect wildlife, forest, and biodiversity; ensure that adjoining catchment areas are protected; and control unsustainable practices. This effectively makes the Gram Sabha, once its rights are recognized, a statutory body for sustainable forest governance.

THE SYNERGISTIC IMPERATIVE: PESA AND FRA AS COMPLEMENTARY FRAMEWORKS

The Gram Sabha as the Linchpin

At the heart of both PESA and the FRA lies a singular, revolutionary idea: the Gram Sabha must be the primary authority for governing local resources and determining the course of community development. This shared focus transforms the Gram Sabha from a nominal institution into a powerful, statutory body for grassroots democracy (Chowdhary: 2018). PESA establishes the Gram Sabha as the competent forum for self-governance in Scheduled Areas, while the FRA designates it as the authority to initiate the process for determining forest rights, manage community forest resources, and conserve biodiversity.[7] This isn't a mere overlap; it's a deliberate reinforcement. The two laws, when read together, provide the Gram Sabha with a comprehensive mandate – PESA provides the overarching governance structure, and the FRA furnishes the specific substantive rights and conservation duties within that structure. This creates a potent institutional linchpin, empowering communities to speak with one, legally recognized voice on matters critical to their survival and identity.

Fortifying Resource Rights

The synergy between the two Acts is perhaps most palpable in their treatment of Minor Forest Produce (MFP), a critical source of livelihood for tribal communities. PESA, in its Section 4(d), boldly vests the "ownership of minor forest produce" in the Gram Sabha (As in endnote 1). This is a profound transfer of economic power from state-controlled forest departments to the community. The FRA, in turn, strengthens this position through its Section 3(c), which recognizes the "right of ownership, access to collect, use, and dispose of minor forest produce." (see endnote 2). This creates a dual-layered, legally robust claim. PESA's "ownership" provides the community with the standing to manage and regulate, while the FRA's bundle of "rights" secures individual and community access and use. This complementary framework doesn't just grant a privilege; it constructs a formidable legal edifice that empowers communities to break free from historical exploitation by middlemen and state monopolies (Xaxa Committee: 2014).

A Unified Mandate for Conservation

A powerful, often overlooked, synergy exists in the shared conservation ethic of both legislations. While PESA's core focus is self-governance, its very design – by entrusting resources like land and MFP to the community – is predicated on the principle of sustainable, community-based management. The FRA makes

this implicit mandate explicit and actionable. Its Section 5 empowers the Gram Sabha to "protect wildlife, forest, and biodiversity" and to ensure that adjoining catchment areas and other ecologically sensitive zones are adequately protected.[8] This provision operationalizes the conservation ethos inherent in PESA. It legally arms the community, which has the deepest stake in the long-term health of the forest, with the authority to act as its guardian. This transforms the community from passive beneficiaries of state-led conservation into active, legally recognized stewards of their environment.

The Dual Barrier against Dispossession

Together, PESA and the FRA erect a formidable legal shield designed to halt the historical pattern of tribal displacement and land alienation. PESA acts as a procedural and preventive barrier. Its Section 4(i) grants the Gram Sabha the power to prevent the alienation of tribal land and to restore any unlawfully alienated land. Furthermore, it mandates that the Gram Sabha must be consulted before any land acquisition for development projects.[9] The FRA complements this by creating a substantive barrier. The forest land rights granted under the FRA are heritable but explicitly made **inalienable** and non-transferable under Section 4(4).[10] This means that even if the procedural consultation under PESA were to be diluted, the underlying right granted by the FRA cannot be legally taken away or sold. One law provides the community with a voice in the process, while the other secures the underlying title, creating a dual-barrier system that offers a much stronger defense against dispossession than either could provide alone.

THE CONTOURS OF CONFLICT: JURISDICTIONAL AMBIGUITIES AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

1. The "Competent Authority" Conundrum

The potential for synergy between PESA and the FRA is often undermined by a fundamental ambiguity: when both laws apply, which Gram Sabha is the ultimate "competent authority," and what exactly is the nature of its power?

- **Land Acquisition vs. Forest Diversion:** This conflict becomes starkly evident in projects like mining that require both the acquisition of land and the diversion of forest land. PESA mandates a process of *consultation* with the Gram Sabha before land acquisition (Chowdhary: 2018). This term, however, is not defined in the Act and has often been interpreted by state governments as a procedural formality rather than a substantive veto power. In contrast, the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in the *Niyamgiri* case interpreted the FRA as granting Gram Sabhas the authority to grant or refuse **consent** for the

diversion of forest land where forest rights are recognized.[11] This creates a legal quagmire: a project proponent could theoretically claim to have consulted the PESA Gram Sabha for land acquisition, while a separate FRA Gram Sabha might refuse consent for forest diversion, stalling the project and leading to protracted litigation. This ambiguity over which process takes precedence – consultation or consent – lies at the heart of the conflict, leaving both developers and communities in a state of uncertainty.

- **Ownership vs. Right over MFP:** Even in areas of seeming synergy, conflict lurks. While both Acts empower communities over Minor Forest Produce (MFP), they use different legal language. PESA vests "ownership" in the Gram Sabha, suggesting a broad managerial and proprietary control.[12] The FRA, conversely, recognizes a "right of ownership, access to collect, use, and dispose of" MFP in the forest-dwelling community.[13] In practice, this can lead to tensions. Could the PESA Gram Sabha, exercising its power of "ownership," impose regulations on the sale of MFP that conflict with the interests of the specific FRA rights-holding families? The lack of clarity on how these overlapping yet distinct rights interact can create internal community conflict and administrative deadlock, frustrating the very economic empowerment both laws seek to achieve.

2. Procedural Labyrinth and Bureaucratic Resistance

The promise of self-governance is often lost in a maze of parallel and disconnected administrative processes. The procedure for claiming and vesting rights under the FRA is a lengthy one, managed through a separate committee structure at various levels (Xaxa Committee: 2014). Simultaneously, the exercise of PESA's governance powers operates through the state's panchayati raj administration. This bureaucratic duality means that a Gram Sabha must navigate two different government departments with often conflicting priorities, leading to immense delays and implementation gaps.

Compounding this procedural labyrinth is the deep-seated resistance from the state forest bureaucracy. For decades, forest departments have operated with a "Forest Guard" mentality, viewing themselves as the sole custodians of forests and often perceiving local communities as threats.[14] Both PESA and the FRA directly challenge this hegemony by transferring significant authority to the Gram Sabha. This has led to what can only be described as an institutional cold war, where forest officials may delay or undermine the recognition of CFR rights under the FRA or resist handing over control of MFP as mandated by PESA.[15] This resistance from a powerful state actor remains one of the most significant practical barriers to the harmonious functioning of these laws.

3. The Dilemma of Differential Application

A unique legal dilemma arises from the[16] differing geographical scopes of the two Acts. PESA applies exclusively to the "Scheduled Areas" listed under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.[17] The FRA, however, applies to all forest areas across India, regardless of whether they are in a Scheduled Area or not.[18] This creates a stark disparity in the empowerment of Gram Sabhas. A tribal community living in a Scheduled Area may have the combined, potent force of PESA and the FRA backing its Gram Sabha. However, an equally forest-dependent tribal community living just outside a Scheduled Area can only invoke the FRA. Its Gram Sabha lacks the broader governance powers under PESA, such as the power to prevent land alienation or mandatory consultation on all development projects. This arbitrary legal boundary creates a two-tiered system of tribal rights, where the degree of a community's autonomy depends more on a historical notification than on its actual needs or dependence on forests.

JUDICIAL INTERPRETATION: NAVIGATING THE INTERFACE

1. The Foundational Philosophy: *Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh*

While predating PESA, the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in *Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh* laid the essential philosophical groundwork for both PESA and the FRA.[19] The case revolved around the permissibility of leasing tribal land in Scheduled Areas to private companies for mining. The Court's radical ruling – that such transfers were null and void – was rooted in a profound understanding of the state's role as a protector of tribal interests. It emphasized that the Fifth Schedule creates a "trust relationship" between the state and tribal communities, imposing a fiduciary duty to shield them from exploitation.[20] This principle of non-alienation of tribal land and resources to outsiders became the moral and legal compass for PESA's provisions on land and the FRA's core mission of correcting historical injustice. The Court essentially established that in Scheduled Areas, the presumption must favor community rights and autonomy over commercial exploitation, a principle that both legislations would later codify.

2. The Landmark Precedent: *Orissa Mining Corporation v. MoEF (Niyamgiri Case)*

The *Niyamgiri* case is the definitive judicial pronouncement directly confronting the interface between PESA and the FRA, and it decisively privileged the latter's community consent process. The dispute concerned a proposal for bauxite mining in the Niyamgiri hills, the sacred homeland of the Dongria Kondh tribe. While the project involved land in a Scheduled Area (triggering PESA's consultation

mandate), it also required the diversion of forest land where the community held rights (triggering the FRA). The Supreme Court resolved this jurisdictional tangle by placing the Gram Sabha's authority under the FRA at the forefront. It directed that the Gram Sabhas must determine whether the project affected their cultural, religious, and forest rights, and that their decision would be binding.[21] In doing so, the Court effectively established a hierarchy, treating the FRA's requirement for a determination of rights – interpreted as a right to *consent* – as paramount over the more general consultation process envisaged under PESA in this specific context of forest rights.

3. Contemporary Battlegrounds

The legal principles established in *Samatha* and *Niyamgiri* are continually being tested in new arenas, revealing the ongoing struggle to implement this complex legal interface. The *Hasdeo Aranya forests* in Chhattisgarh present a quintessential contemporary battleground. Here, communities and environmentalists are challenging proposed coal mining blocks in a dense, biodiverse forest. The litigation and protests heavily rely on both legal frameworks: the area is a Scheduled Area, invoking PESA, and the communities are asserting their CFR rights under the FRA (Ariel: 2022). Similarly, the proposed *Dichpally Railway Line* in Telangana threatens to displace tribal villages and divert forest land. The legal challenge here questions the validity of the land acquisition and forest clearance processes for failing to adequately secure the free, prior, and informed consent of the Gram Sabhas as required by the spirit of both PESA and the FRA (Kumar: 2024). These cases illustrate that the judicial interpretation of the PESA-FRA interface is not a settled matter but a live, evolving jurisprudence where the rights of tribal communities are being defended in real-time against powerful state and corporate interests.

INTERNATIONAL LAW NORMS AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

1. Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

The ongoing tension in India between PESA's "consultation" and the FRA's de facto "consent" finds a powerful normative frame in the evolving international standard of *Free, Prior and Informed Consent (Ananya: (2009) FPIC)* While India has not ratified the *ILO Convention No. 169 (C169)*, its Article 6 obligates governments to consult indigenous peoples through appropriate procedures with the objective of achieving agreement or consent (ILO Convention June 1989). This principle was further crystallized in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*, which explicitly calls for states to obtain FPIC before adopting measures that may affect indigenous communities, particularly in connection

with their lands and resources (GA Res: 2007). When viewed through this lens, the Supreme Court's interpretation in the *Niyamgiri* case, privileging community consent under the FRA, aligns India's judicial approach with this global consensus. It suggests a progressive interpretation where mere consultation is insufficient; for projects fundamentally impacting tribal life and forest resources, the community's affirmative consent is the benchmark to strive for, pushing the Indian legal framework closer to international best practices.

2. Conservation and Indigenous Rights

The community conservation mandate embedded in *Section 5 of the FRA* resonates powerfully with a significant shift in global environmental governance. The *Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*, to which India is a party, has long recognized the vital role of indigenous and local communities. Its *Article 8(j)* specifically calls on contracting parties to respect and maintain the knowledge and practices of these communities and promote their wider application with the approval of knowledge-holders. More recently, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework has further emphasized the role of indigenous stewardship in achieving conservation targets.[22] By legally empowering Gram Sabhas to protect wildlife, forest, and biodiversity, the FRA effectively domesticates this international principle. It moves beyond a model of exclusionary conservation, which often displaced local populations, towards a participatory one that recognizes tribal and forest-dwelling communities not as threats, but as essential partners and primary agents in the protection of India's natural heritage.

TOWARDS A HARMONIOUS CONSTRUCTION: A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

1. Legal and Procedural Clarity

To resolve the core conflict between "consultation" and "consent," a clear legal sequence must be established. The most effective solution would be a *clarificatory amendment* to PESA, or a definitive Supreme Court ruling, that formally establishes a two-stage process.[23] This framework would mandate that the recognition and vesting of forest rights under the FRA must be completed *before* any project affecting those rights or the community's land can be considered. Following this, the PESA Gram Sabha's approval would be required, and this approval must be construed as a mandatory *right to grant or refuse consent*, not a mere procedural consultation.[24] This would align India's domestic law with the international FPIC standard and provide much-needed certainty, ensuring that the substantive rights granted by the FRA are not circumvented by a diluted interpretation of PESA.

2. An Integrated Governance Model

The current parallel systems for FRA claims and PESA governance create unnecessary bureaucracy and confusion. Instead, we need to move towards an *integrated governance model* that designates the PESA Gram Sabha as the single-window, statutory authority for community approvals (Haque: 2013). The processes for recognizing FRA rights – from initiating claims to managing Community Forest Resources (CFR) – should be administratively nested within the PESA Gram Sabha's functions. This would streamline decision-making, reduce delays, and present a unified, empowered community front to project proponents and government agencies. It acknowledges the reality that the same community, residing in the same geography, should engage through one robust institution rather than being split into separate legal personas.

3. Empowering the Institution

Laws on paper are meaningless without the capacity to implement them. The potential of both PESA and FRA is currently hamstrung by a lack of awareness and technical expertise at the Gram Sabha level. A transformative, sustained investment in *capacity building and legal literacy* is non-negotiable (Xaxa: 2014). This must be coupled with providing *technical support*, such as using GIS technology for participatory mapping of CFR boundaries, which would provide irrefutable evidence of community jurisdiction (Govt of India: 2023). Empowering the Gram Sabha with knowledge, tools, and continuous hand-holding is the final, crucial step in transforming it from a statutory concept into a truly competent institution of self-governance, capable of wielding its powers effectively and justly.

CONCLUSION

The analysis reveals a complex legal landscape. On one hand, we find powerful synergies: the Gram Sabha emerges as a linchpin institution, rights over minor forest produce are fortified by dual legal backing, and a unified mandate for community-led conservation takes shape. On the other hand, the lack of clarity between PESA's "consultation" and the FRA's "consent," coupled with bureaucratic resistance and the dilemma of differential application, creates a legal labyrinth that often leaves communities navigating a system working at cross-purposes with itself. Judicial interventions, particularly the landmark *Niyamgiri* judgment, have provided crucial guidance but haven't fully resolved the underlying procedural conflicts.

Ultimately, the future of tribal empowerment and forest conservation in India doesn't hinge on choosing between PESA and the FRA. Instead, it demands a conscious, judicious, and harmonious reading of these two laws together. The

transformative potential of this legislative framework will only be realized when we move from viewing them as separate, sometimes conflicting statutes, to implementing them as an integrated, robust system of community sovereignty. The choice isn't between the two, but in their joint, effective implementation, transforming their latent potential for conflict into an undeniable and powerful synergy for justice.

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ENDNOTES

1. The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, No. 40, Acts of Parliament, 1996, § 4 (India).
2. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, No. 2, Acts of Parliament, 2007, pmbl. (India).
3. See Orissa Mining Corp. Ltd. v. Ministry of Environment & Forests, (2013) 6 SCC 476 (India) (exemplifying the conflict in the context of mining and forest rights).

4. *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corp.*, AIR 1986 SC 180 (India) (establishing right to livelihood as part of Article 21); Subhash Kumar v. State of Bihar, AIR 1991 SC 420 (India) (recognizing right to a clean environment).
5. The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, No. 40, Acts of Parliament, 1996, § 4(d) (India)
6. As in reference no. 2 above.
7. Ibid.
8. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, § 5.
9. The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, § 4(i).
10. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, § 4(4).
11. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, No. 2, Acts of Parliament, 2007, § 5 (India).
12. The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, No. 40, Acts of Parliament, 1996, § 4(d) (India).
13. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, § 3(c).
14. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, § 5.
15. The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, § 4(i).
16. Ibid.
17.
18. As in reference no 10 above.
19. *Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh*, (1997) 8 SCC 191 (India).
20. *Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh*, (1997) 8 SCC 191 (India).
21. As in reference no 3 above.
22. Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, CBD/COP/DEC/15/4, Goal A (Dec. 19, 2022).
23. This proposition is supported by the logical sequence implied in *Orissa Mining Corp. Ltd. v. Ministry of Environment & Forests*, (2013) 6 SCC 476, where the recognition of rights was a precondition.
24. Such an interpretation would bring Indian law into closer alignment with the standard of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, G.A. Res. 61/295, art. 19 (Sept. 13, 2007).

BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

BRICS PLUS AND INTERNATIONAL PEACE & SECURITY: CONDITIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

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Abstract

Evidently, BRICS has emerged in the wake of structural transformation in the international system, particularly at a time when unilateral, monopolistic policies of the lone superpower, the United States of America, began to challenge the very foundations of international organisations, norms, and principles that were instrumental in maintaining international peace and security. Primarily, after the end of the Cold War, U.S. unilateral actions to resolve the regional and international crises have undermined the very existence of the multilateral international governing system. At the same time, emergence of transnational organized crimes, international terrorism, climate change, and digital warfare have posed global challenges to international peace and security which needs to be curtailed collectively with common efforts and collaborations thereby, need of strong and sustainable global governing bodies is necessary for maintaining peace and security. BRICS, as an ever-enlarging and empowering organisation, has greater opportunities to resolve issues that threaten peace and security and to create a conducive environment for peace, prosperity, and development. The paper uses qualitative methods and explores the role of BRICS in preserving and enhancing peace and security in the transforming world order.

Keywords: Peace, Security, BRICS, International System, Emerging Economies

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of BRICS (initially, Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa expanded in 2024 to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE)

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marks one of the most significant developments in the shifting global order, challenging the long-standing Western-dominated security alliances (Luckhurst, 2013 and Wso, 2025). As the post–Cold War unipolar moment recedes and global power diffuses, BRICS' growing economic weight and geopolitical assertiveness raises critical questions about its capacity to shape global peace and security (Khorbaladze, 2021). This transformation is not merely about institutional expansion. In fact, it reflects a more profound systemic change in the distribution of power, in which emerging and middle powers aspire to redefine the norms of global governance (Acharya, 2014). Against this backdrop, the BRICS grouping is increasingly positioned as a counterweight to Western hegemonic institutions, particularly the UN Security Council (UNSC), NATO, and Bretton Woods financial regimes (Chakraborty, 2018).

The argument that BRICS holds the potential to influence global security rests on its combined demographic, territorial, military, and economic resources. BRICS countries collectively account for over 40% of the world's population, nearly one-third of global GDP, and possess critical military capabilities, including two nuclear-armed states and influential regional powers (BRICS Joint Statistical Publication 2023 and BRICS Statistical Services (2025). Scholars argue that such structural power provides BRICS with "the material foundation for strategic autonomy" in world politics (Stuenkel, 2016). However, material weight alone does not guarantee transformative influence; the capacity to translate aggregate power into coherent security governance remains an ongoing challenge (Kennan Institute, 2021). BRICS, as an ever-enlarging and empowering organisation, has greater opportunities to resolve issues that threaten peace and security and to create a conducive environment for peace, prosperity, and development. The paper uses qualitative methods and explores the role of BRICS in preserving and enhancing peace and security in the transforming world order.

INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF BRICS: AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

The institutional architecture of BRICS has evolved from an informal dialogue platform into a semi-institutionalised framework with growing relevance for non-traditional and developmental dimensions of security. While BRICS lacks a formal military alliance or collective defence mechanism, its institutional instruments, such as the New Development Bank (NDB), the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), and sectoral working groups, address structural sources of insecurity linked to development, financial instability, and infrastructure deficits. Scholars argue that this "development-security nexus" reflects a post-Western understanding of peace, wherein economic resilience and sovereign development capacity are prerequisites for long-term stability (Chin, 2014). The NDB's emphasis

on infrastructure, green finance, and crisis-responsive lending thus indirectly contributes to conflict prevention by reducing vulnerability to global financial shocks (New Development Bank, 2023).

One of the most critical contributions of BRICS to global peace and security lies in its institutional architecture, notably the NDB and CRA (Chin, 2014). These institutions bolster financial resilience among member-states, thereby enhancing political stability and reducing vulnerability to external economic pressures, which are essential determinants of security. The NDB funds infrastructure, climate, and digital connectivity projects that mitigate socio-economic inequalities, which are often the root causes of conflict (Humphrey, 2015). By offering development financing without intrusive political conditionalities, NDB positions itself as an alternative to the IMF and World Bank, which many Global South states view as instruments of Western leverage (Chin, 2014).

At the normative level, BRICS' institutional design is underpinned by principles of sovereignty, non-interference, and consensus-based decision-making, which shape its security relevance in global governance debates. Unlike NATO or Western-led security institutions, BRICS avoids coercive enforcement mechanisms and instead promotes institutional pluralism within the international system (Niu, 2020). This approach resonates with Acharya's (2014) argument that emerging powers are not overthrowing global order but reconstituting it through parallel institutions that dilute Western dominance (Acharya, 2014). Consequently, BRICS institutions function as instruments of "soft balancing," enabling member states to contest Western security norms without confrontation (Glosny, 2010 and He, 2014). The CRA similarly provides liquidity support to help members withstand currency pressures and financial shocks, indirectly supporting domestic stability. Beyond economics, BRICS has institutionalised sectoral cooperation through working groups on counterterrorism, cyber governance, and maritime security (O'Neill, 2015). This institutional gap limits BRICS' capacity to respond operationally to crises. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, BRICS institutions play a crucial role in shaping a developmental peace paradigm, emphasising stability through economic sustainability, financial sovereignty, and multilateral cooperation. The institutional architecture thus contributes indirectly but meaningfully to global security governance (Gouvea, et.al, 2023 and Desogus, M., & Casu, E. 2024). The NDB's financing of sustainable infrastructure, renewable energy, and digital connectivity demonstrates BRICS' commitment to addressing non-traditional security threats, such as climate change, pandemics, and developmental vulnerabilities Khar calls for enhanced cooperation between Europe, Asia-Pacific - Daily Times. https://dailytimes.com.pk/1093277/khar-calls-for-enhanced-cooperation-between-europe-asia-pacific/. along with NDB'S de-dollarization initiatives (Kamath, 2020). Still, BRICS lacks a formalised collective security institution, unlike NATO

or even the SCO, thereby limiting its ability to operationalise security cooperation (Stuenkel, 2015).

However, the institutional limitations of BRICS also constrain its direct security impact. The absence of a permanent secretariat, binding dispute-resolution mechanisms, or an integrated security council restricts coordination on complex security issues such as armed conflict, terrorism, or military escalation. Analysts note that BRICS' institutional flexibility, often celebrated as a strength, also results in ambiguity and uneven implementation of collective initiatives (Chakraborty, 2018). As a result, BRICS' security relevance remains primarily indirect and developmental, reinforcing peace through economic cooperation rather than through explicit security governance (Khorbaladze, 2021).

COLLECTIVE VISION OF BRICS: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE MULTILATERALISM

At the normative level, BRICS articulates a vision of multipolarity, sovereign equality, and non-interference, often contrasting Western interventionist practices. This position was strongly advanced during the Libyan crisis (2011), the Syria conflict, and debates over the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), where BRICS members criticised unilateral militarised solutions and argued for political dialogue (Kenkel, K., & Cunha, 2018). Such stances highlight an alternative framework for international peace and security, grounded in the "primacy of state sovereignty and negotiated settlements (Niu, 2020). Additionally, critics point out that normative convergence within BRICS is incomplete, as members prioritise different interpretations of sovereignty, development, and intervention. China's assertive regional posture in the South China Sea, Russia's interventions in Ukraine and Syria, and India's Indo-Pacific strategy reveal divergences that challenge collective security alignment (Glosny, 2010).

The global order after 2008 experienced accelerated structural shifts driven by the global financial crisis, declining Western economic dominance, and rising Asian influence. The 2020s further intensified these shifts through the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia–Ukraine war, and the U.S.–China rivalry (Kim, U. and et.al 2023). These developments led to growing scepticism toward Western institutions and governance models (Jeong-Min, L., Kim, Y. S., Chang-Hee, L., & Chang-Hee, L. 2024). Analysts such as Oliver Stuenkel argue that BRICS challenges the Western ability to "set the rules of the game," creating space for alternative norms and institutional arrangements (Stuenkel, 2015; Mata, F., Mata, F., Dos-Santos, M., & Cocksedge, J. (2023). BRICS' emergence symbolises the growing political confidence of emerging powers who no longer accept the asymmetries of the Bretton Woods system (Stuenkel, 2016 and Wang, 2021).

The expansion of BRICS in 2024 intensifies debates about its evolving global role. The inclusion of major West Asian powers Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, and Egypt introduces new geopolitical complexities but also expands BRICS' influence over the energy-security nexus, maritime chokepoints, and West Asian conflict zones (Kohar, H.Y.; & H.N.Z. Tungkagi 2024). The enlarged BRICS+ not only controls a significant portion of global oil supply but also extends strategic influence from the Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific (Siddiqui, 2016). Such expansion could enable BRICS to act as a platform for conflict mediation, particularly in regions where Western influence is contested (Wso, A.A. & Mahmood, R.M. 2025). However, these new entrants also harbour deep-seated rivalries, such as Saudi–Iran tensions, which may complicate institutional coherence and collective decision-making (Khorbaladze, E. 2021).

One of the central opportunities for BRICS lies in agenda-setting power within multilateral institutions. By advocating UNSC reform, democratisation of global governance, and promotion of "inclusive multilateralism, BRICS aims to restructure the normative foundations of the international order (BRICS Leaders' Declaration, 2022). India, Brazil, and South Africa seek reforms that would increase representation from the Global South. While BRICS' collective diplomacy strengthens these demands, the challenge lies in balancing competing ambitions among member-states. China's reluctance to support India's UNSC bid exemplifies these internal tensions (He, K. 2014).

BRICS also presents avenues for cooperation in counterterrorism, cybersecurity, maritime security, and energy transition. The Annual BRICS Security Advisors' Meetings and Working Groups on Counterterrorism have developed shared frameworks to combat extremism, though actionable coordination remains limited. In the maritime domain, the navies of India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA), and BRICS have explored cooperative patrolling and information-sharing in the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, deep-seated mistrust between China and India constrains the development of an integrated maritime security framework (Panda, 2021).

Furthermore, the geopolitical context surrounding BRICS, especially the US–China rivalry, Western sanctions on Russia, and ongoing global economic fragmentation, creates both opportunities and constraints. On the one hand, strategic pressures incentivise BRICS members to coordinate policies and resist Western dominance; on the other hand, great-power competition risks polarising the grouping and aligning it too closely with China's geopolitical agenda. Analysts warn that for BRICS to sustain legitimacy, it must avoid becoming a "China-centric bloc" and instead nurture a genuinely pluralist institutional identity (Roberts, C. 2023).

Despite its limitations, BRICS represents a critical experiment in post-Western global security governance, offering an emerging platform for South–South cooperation and normative pluralism (Siddiqui, K. 2016). While it may not replace existing Western-led institutions, it can complement them by providing alternative pathways to stability, development, and conflict resolution. The ultimate challenge for BRICS is whether it can transform its shared dissatisfaction with the status quo into actionable, cohesive strategies that genuinely contribute to global peace and security (Khorbaladze, E. 2021).

BRICS PLUS: BROADENING FRAMEWORK FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

The 2024 expansion of BRICS to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE marks a pivotal transformation with significant implications for global peace and security (Wso, A.A. & Mahmood, R.M. 2025). The inclusion of these states, especially major energy producers such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and strategic regional powers like Iran, extends BRICS' influence across the West Asia, Horn of Africa, and North Africa (Alhajji, A.F. 2014). This expanded footprint grants BRICS leverage over global energy markets, maritime chokepoints, and conflict-prone regions (Larionova, M. & Kirton, J. 2018). It positions the bloc as a potential mediator in West Asian tensions, including Saudi–Iran rapprochement.

The expansion of BRICS into BRICS+ represents a significant shift in the geopolitics of global security, extending the grouping's influence into strategically volatile regions such as the West Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Analysts argue that BRICS+ reflects a growing demand among middle and regional powers for alternatives to Western-centric security and economic arrangements (Antony, S. 2023). The inclusion of energy-rich and geopolitically pivotal states enhances BRICS' relevance in global supply chains, energy security, and regional conflict dynamics (Malik, Y.I., Kohar, H.Y., & H.N.Z. Tungkagi, 2024) and Moch, E. 2024).

From a security perspective, BRICS+ contributes to regional stabilisation by integrating economic cooperation with geopolitical balancing. The participation of West Asian Countries, for instance, enables BRICS to play a mediating role in energy markets and regional diplomacy, particularly in contexts shaped by declining US engagement and fragmented regional orders (Laadam, J.A.I.T. 2019 and Alhajji, A.F. 2014). Rather than replacing existing security alliances, BRICS+ introduces a multi-layered security environment in which economic interdependence reduces incentives to escalate conflict (Nach, M. & R. Ncwadi 2024).

Nevertheless, the expansion also introduces new challenges for cohesion and effectiveness. Critics caution that increasing membership diversity may dilute BRICS' strategic clarity and exacerbate internal asymmetries, particularly given China's disproportionate economic and political influence (Kamin, K.

& Langhammer, R.J. 2024), and Lee, B.T.F. & J.P. Sims, 2024). As Rubina (2024) notes, BRICS+ risks transforming into a symbolic coalition unless institutional mechanisms evolve to manage competing security interests. Thus, while BRICS+ enhances representational legitimacy, its long-term security impact depends on balancing inclusivity with strategic coherence (Rubina, V., 2024).

This expansion also introduces deep-seated rivalries into the bloc, raising concerns about internal coherence. The Saudi–Iran rivalry, Ethiopia–Egypt tensions over the Nile, and competition among Gulf states could impede BRICS' ability to take unified positions on regional crises (Wso, A.A. & Mahmood, R.M. 2025). Critics also warn that expansion risks diluting BRICS' identity, reducing its ability to function as a coordinated strategic grouping (Stuenkel, O. 2016). However, supporters argue that the inclusion of new members strengthens BRICS' multipolar vision and enhances its capacity to shape global governance. BRICS+ can influence energy security, trade flows, climate dialogue, and conflict mediation, thereby expanding the bloc's strategic relevance (Larionova, M. & Kirton, J. 2018, and Langhammer, R. J. 2024).

WAY AHEAD: BRICS TRAJECTORY FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

The future of BRICS in global peace and security depends on its ability to navigate internal divergences, institutionalise cooperation, and maintain strategic autonomy. Scholars propose three possible trajectories: (1) BRICS as a balancing coalition that moderates Western dominance; (2) BRICS as a revisionist actor that builds parallel institutions; or (3) BRICS as a complementary pillar of global governance that contributes to institutional pluralism (Acharya, A. 2014). Institutional reforms such as enhanced security dialogues, greater financial integration, and expanded cooperation mechanisms could strengthen BRICS' role (Nayyar, D. 2018). However, the grouping must avoid overdependence on China and manage internal rivalries. In a world marked by geopolitical fragmentation, BRICS could either emerge as a stabilising force promoting multipolarity or fracture under competing national interests. Its trajectory will significantly influence the future structure of global peace and security governance (Antony, S. 2023).

BRICS and BRICS+ represent one of the most significant geopolitical developments in the 21st century. As the international order becomes more fragmented and multipolar, the bloc provides a platform for emerging powers to articulate alternative visions of peace, security, and governance (Nach, M. & R. Ncwadi 2024). While BRICS does not function as a military alliance, its growing institutional infrastructure, normative coherence on sovereignty, and expanding diplomatic reach position it as a significant voice in global security debates (Li, X. & R. Carey 2014). However, the grouping's impact is limited by internal divergences and structural constraints. Whether BRICS+ will evolve into a transformative pillar

of international security will depend on its ability to manage internal contradictions, institutionalise cooperation, and translate diplomatic alignment into operational capacity (Kamin, K. & Langhammer, R.J. 2024).

The future role of BRICS in global peace and security will likely be shaped by its ability to consolidate its identity as a development-oriented security actor within an increasingly fragmented world order. Rather than evolving into a formal military alliance, BRICS is more plausibly positioned to advance a model of security governance rooted in economic resilience, South–South cooperation, and institutional pluralism (Acharya, A. 2014). This trajectory aligns with broader shifts toward post-Western multilateralism, where legitimacy derives from inclusivity rather than coercive power.

BRICS expansion into regions such as the West Asia and Africa offers new opportunities to influence regional stability through economic integration, energy cooperation, and diplomatic balancing. By engaging energy-producing and strategically located states, BRICS can help stabilise global supply chains and reduce systemic vulnerabilities, which are increasingly recognised as security risks However, realising this potential will require careful management of internal asymmetries and avoiding bloc-centric rivalry with Western institutions.

BRICS' future effectiveness in peace and security governance will depend on incremental institutionalisation, norm convergence, and credible leadership within a multipolar framework. If BRICS successfully balances diversity with strategic coordination, it can function as a stabilising force that complements rather than replaces existing global security architectures, contributing to a more plural, equitable, and resilient international order.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

EFFICACY OF PRADHAN MANTRI ANUSHUCHIT JAATI ABHYUDAYA YOJANA (ADHARSH GRAM COMPONENT): FINDINGS OF ALL INDIA SOCIAL AUDIT EXERCISE

Rajesh Kumar Sinha*

Abstract

Scheduled Caste (SC) population in India is underdeveloped and deprived as it faced social and economic discriminations for a long time. Integrated development of villages having substantially large proportion of SC population through effective convergence of schemes and funding for gap filling developmental projects under erstwhile Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAGY) and now Adarsh Gram component of Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jati Abhyudaya Yojana (PM-AJAY) is one of the interventions by Government of India to improve the living conditions of SC population and its habitat. It makes an imperative to address the question – are these schemes effective in achieving the desired goals? With this question in mind, the present paper intends to know to know whether structure and processes suggested in the guidelines of the scheme are there on the ground and whether the scheme is on its right path or not, on the basis of the findings of social audit of exercise undertaken in 2024 in 531 villages selected under Adarsh Gram component across India Findings suggest several deviations in the implementation of the scheme. Based on these findings and interactions with various stakeholders, the paper also makes certain policy and operational recommendation to strengthen implementation of 'Adharsh Gram' component of PM-AJAY scheme and to improve its efficacy in achieving its goal.

Keywords: Social Audit, Schedule Caste, Adarsh Gram, PMAGY, PM-AJAY

INTRODUCTION

Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAGY) which became Adarsh Gram component under the Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jaati Abhyuday Yojana (PM-AJAY)

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is an ambitious scheme aiming to comprehensively develop villages with substantial Scheduled Caste population so that quality of living of SC population improves. How is this scheme being implemented at the ground level? Are desired structures and processes in place to make this scheme effective? This article has tried to search answer to these questions on the basis of findings of social audit carried out in the year 2024 in 531 villages selected under this scheme in 58 districts of 17 states across India. This social audit exercise has been carried out by specially trained resource persons belonging to Social Audit Units (SAUs) established under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guaranti Act (MGNREGA) and involves processes starting from entry level meeting to verification exercise to sharing the findings at various public forums and follow up actions on the findings. Thus the present paper is based on the reports of social audit of 'Adarsh Gram component of the PM-AJAY undertaken in the year 2024.

ADARSH GRAM COMPONENTS OF PM-AJAY

This article is based on the social audit of Adarsh Gram component of this scheme. Villages having more than 40% SC population and a total population of 500 and above as per the latest available Census data are eligible for selection for funding under the Adarsh Gram component of PM-AJAY. Guidelines of the scheme envisions these selected 'Adarsh Gram' villages would have all such infrastructure facilities and its residents will have access to all such basic services that are necessary for a dignified living, creating thereby an environment in which everyone is enabled to utilize his/her potential to the fullest. All requisite infrastructures necessary for the socio-economic development are to be provided and the identified 50 socio-economic indicators under following 10 domains are saturated leading to eradicate disparity between SCs and non-SCs population: (i) Drinking water and Sanitation, (ii) Education, (iii) Health and Nutrition, (iv) Social Security, (v) Rural Roads and Housing, (vi) Electricity and Clean Fuel, (vii) Agricultural Practices etc., (viii) Financial Inclusion, (ix) Digitization, and (x) Livelihood and Skill Development (MoSJE, 2022). Total score is 100. Villages which are declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) and score 70 or above on these indicators are declared as 'Adarsh Gram' under PM-AJAY(MoSJE, 2022).

Integrated development of selected villages are to be achieved primarily through implementation of the existing schemes of the Central as well as State/UT Governments in a convergent manner, thereby ensuring access to quality services as well as infrastructure development. The gap-filling funding is be provided for carrying out infrastructure developmental requirements, which cannot be carried out through convergence.

The funds released for gap-filling component in these selected villages, is to be utilized within a period of 02 years from the date of release and the monitoring

of convergence implementation would be done for another 03 years to continue efforts for improving the socio-economic indicators(MoSJE, 2022). Further details of this component will be given as context of the findings of the social audit

ACHIEVEMENTS

Since the launch of this scheme in the year 2009-10 till the end of September 2024 total 29851 villages in 26,723 GPs of 529 districts from 24 States across India have been covered. Through convergence projects and gap-filling interventions, this scheme has touched the lives of approximately 2.63 crores of SC population and 4.88 crores of all categories of population. Out of these 29851 villages selected for interventions under the scheme, total 9960 villages have been declared as 'Adarsh Gram' scoring 70 and above out of 100 points on 50 socio-economic indicators. These declared Adarsh Gram have total 92.03 lakh SC population (source: PMAGY website as on 03.10.2024).

In last three years, total allocation and utilisation under PM-AJAY and physical achievements under Adarsh Gram components is given in table-1. Half of this allocation and expenditure is earmarked for Adarsh Gram gap filing interventions (MoSJE 2024 b).

Table 1: Allocation and Expenditure under PM-AJAY (all components) in last three FYs (Rs. in Cr.) and Physical Achievements

Financial Year (FY)	*Budget Estimate (BE)*	*Revised Estimate (RE)*	*Actual Expenditure*	*No. of Villages Declared as Adarsh Gram*
2021-22	1800.00	1800.00	1820.31	215
2022-23	1950.00	1000.00	164.01	3609
2023-24	2050.00	450.00	471.11	2530

(Source: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India)

PROCESS OF SOCIAL AUDIT OF ADARSH GRAM COMPONENT OF PM-AJAY

The process of social audit of Adarsh Gram component of PM-AJAY included following steps:

(a) Preparation of calendar as per the target assigned to States.

(b) Orientation or entry meeting at State/District level 15 days before the start of actual social audit process in the field. All the concerned department officials, institution heads and officials engaged in implementation of the scheme were called to apprise them of the objective and process of social audit.

(c) Three types of field verification namely (a) verification of records, (b) verification of worksites/infrastructure and (c) verification with beneficiaries through personal interactions and focussed group discussions were carried out.

(d) Draft report based on the findings of the field verification exercise was prepared. This report contained issues in the implementation of PM-AJAY (Adarsh Gram component) backed by evidences.

(e) Validation of the draft report was done in the meeting of Gram Sabha. Social audit team read out the report followed by the discussion and validation by the members of Gram Sabha which was not chaired by the Sarpanch/ GP President.

(f) Social Justice Assembly conducted at the district level in which representatives of all departments concerned with this scheme were present to respond to the issues mentioned in the validated report. A panel of officials and representative of CSO examined these issues and took appropriate decisions on actions to be taken and responsible person/s.

(g) Findings/issues and decisions taken in the district level social justice assembly were uploaded on to social audit MIS of the MoSJE by resource persons of Social Audit Unit (SAU).

(h) SAU prepared the proceedings of the decision taken during District Social Justice Assembly and shared with the concerned departments and institutions within seven days for taking actions. Action Taken Report (ATR) was supposed to be uploaded by concerned departments in the social audit MIS within 30 days from the date of District Social Justice Assembly.

(i) State-level Social Justice Assemblies were organised within 30 days of the completion of social audit in all the districts. These were chaired by Secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and reviewed the process, coverage, issues and action taken status on the findings of the social audit. Proceedings of this assembly was shared with the State Department of Social Welfare and with MoSJE.

Above process was followed in 17 States covered by the social audit exercise with minor context specific variations.

COVERAGE

The social audit was conducted to evaluate the convergence and impact of the Adarsh Gram component of the PM AJAY Scheme. This section of the report presents the findings of the audit for Adarsh Gram Yojana.

Table 2: Coverage of Social Audit of PM-AJAY (Adarsh Gram Component)

No. of States Covered	*Districts Covered*	*Villages Covered*
17	58	531

(Source: National Resource Cell on Social Audit, MoSJE, Govt. of India)

As per the decisions of the MoSJE, social audits were planned in 19 States. Social audits have been conducted in total 531 villages in 58 districts of 17 states. The districts were selected on random sampling basis from among highest SC population districts. State-wise list of villages covered are given below:

Table 3: State-Wise Number of Villages Covered

S. No.	*State Name*	*No. of Villages Covered*
1.	Maharashtra	12
2.	Andhra Pradesh	28
3.	Assam	17
4.	Chhattisgarh	34
5.	Gujarat	13
6.	Haryana	20
7.	Himachal Pradesh	14
8.	Jharkhand	26
9.	Karnataka	12
10.	Madhya Pradesh	10
11.	Meghalaya	2
12.	Odisha	7
13.	Punjab	59
14.	Rajasthan	37
15.	Tripura	19
16.	Uttar Pradesh	184
17.	Uttarakhand	37
	Grand Total	531

(***Source:*** National Resource Cell on Social Audit, MoSJE, Govt. of India)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Need Assessment Survey

The starting point for preparation of the Village Development Plan (VDP) is to carry out Needs Assessment of the important developmental needs for the village as a whole and for all the families/individuals and for whom household survey is to be carried out. The Needs Assessment will get reflected in Format I, II, III-A and III-B. While Format-I captures the Village level Data and Format-II captures the Village level Infrastructural needs, Format III-A captures the Family/Individual

needs. Format III-B is a consolidation of Format III-A and thus captures the Family/ Individual needs at the village level. Format-IV and V are a consolidation of the Action Plans already captured in Format II and III-B and hence reflect the VDP for Infrastructure and Family/Individual needs respectively. Format-IV and V also serve to monitor monthly progress of fulfilling the needs. Format-VI reflects the status of Monitorable Indicators (MoSJE, 2022).

Need assessment survey is foundation of the success of the PM-AJAY (Adarsh Gram component) as it ensures that the interventions are appropriate, resources are optimally utilized and the programme outcomes are aligned with the actual needs of the community. The survey provides a basis for data-driven planning and implementation of various development initiatives under Adarsh Gram component. This includes infrastructure development, social welfare programs, and other community services, which can be better planned with detailed insights from the survey.

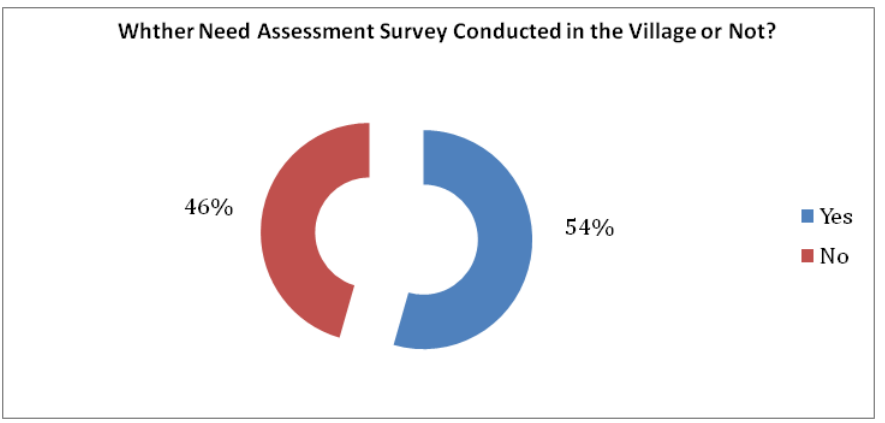


Figure 1: Percentage of Villages Where Need Assessment Survey Conducted

The above pie chart shows that in majority of villages, about 54.4% (289 out of 531), the need assessment survey has been conducted. However, nearly 45.6% (242 out of 531) did not conduct the survey, which could imply gaps in data collection and potential missed opportunities for tailored program planning.

The lack of a need assessment in a significant number of cases suggest that there may be areas where program planning is not fully informed by the specific needs of the community or area. This could affect the effectiveness and targeted nature of interventions. Lack of awareness and training to the officials at ground level leads this crucial issue. Allocating resources, training or enhancing awareness can increase need assessment survey condition.

Preparation of Village Development Plan

The purpose of the VDP is to prepare a comprehensive, realistic and practical blueprint for development of the selected Village into an 'Adarsh Gram' in a time-frame of about five years.

The preparation of Village Development Plan is pivotal component of the Adarsh Gram component of the PM-AJAY as this component is aimed at developing model villages that serve as exemplars of local development. VDP ensures a comprehensive approach to village development, covering various aspects like infrastructure, education, sanitation, health and economic development. It integrates the needs and priorities identified in the needs assessment survey, ensuring that all developmental activities are well coordinated and holistic. It also fosters community involvement by actively engaging local residents in the planning process. This participation enhances the relevance and acceptance of planned initiatives, ensuring that they genuinely address the needs and spirations of the community. Through systematic planning, the VDP helps in the efficient allocation and utilization of resources. It enables better financial planning and management. The whole exercise of the Need Assessment, data collection, gap analysis and preparation of VDP will be done by the Village PMAGY Convergence Committee in online mode. As per the official website of the PMAGY, between FY 2018-19 to 2021-22 total 15,908 VDPs have been generated.

Table 4: Financial Year-wise VDPs generated between FY 2018-19 to 2021-22

FY	*2018-2019*	*2019-2020*	*2020-2021*	*2021-2022*	*Total*
No. of VDPs Generated	3,560	4,625	2,574	3,096	15,908

(Source: PMAGY website as on 03.10.2024)

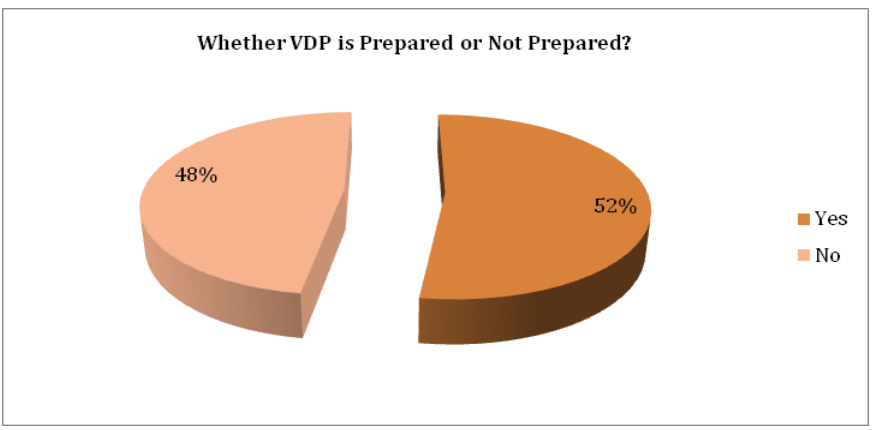


Figure 2: Percentage of Villages where VDP is Prepared

It was found that approximately 52% (278 out of 531) of the selected villages have prepared the VDP, while about 48% (253 out of 531) have not done so. The almost even distribution between entities with and without a prepared VDP suggests a varied level of readiness and execution in village-level planning and development activities. The absence of VDPs in nearly half of the cases might indicate challenges such as resource limitations, planning inefficiencies, or varying levels of local governance effectiveness. It's important to investigate why a significant number of entities have not prepared VDPs.

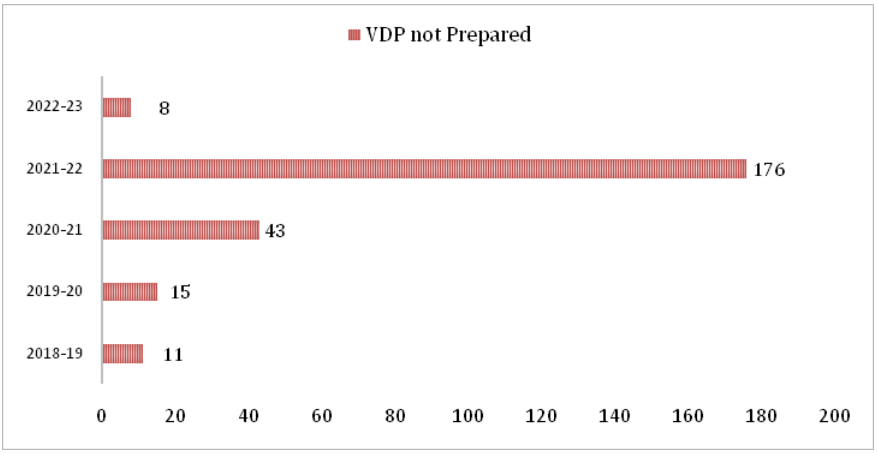


Figure 3: Financial Year-wise Villages without VDP

The data provided on the fiscal year wise distribution of cases where Village Development Plan were not prepared offers valuable insights into trends over time. The social audit findings show that in 176 villages the VDPs are not prepared in fiscal year 2021-22. Ongoing monitoring of VDP preparation status should be maintained to quickly identify and address emerging issues in future fiscal years.

Need Assessment Based Village Development Plan

Need assessment based VDP not only has the potential to address the real needs of the community but also inculcate sense of ownership and promotes community participation in implementation and monitoring of the VDP.

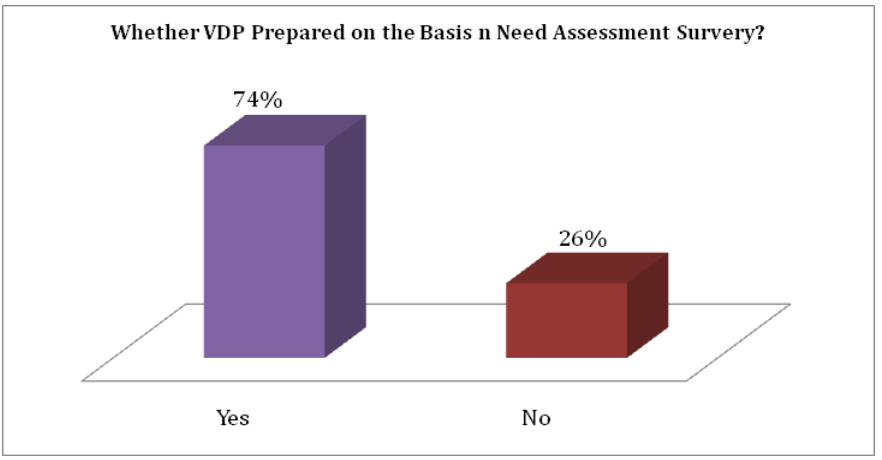


Figure 4: Percentage of VDP Based on Need Assessment Survey

Data gathered through the social audit exercise highlights that a substantial majority (approximately 74.1%) of VDPs were prepared after conducting need assessment surveys. This indicates a positive approach towards data-driven and needs based planning. The high percentage of VDPs prepared based on need assessment suggest effective utilization of data for planning, enhancing the likelihood that the interventions are well-targeted and relevant to the local context and requirements. However, 25.9% of the VDPs were prepared without such need assessment, which is an area of concern regarding the thoroughness and specificity of planning efforts. The VDPs which are prepared without a need assessment might not fully address the specific needs of the communities, which could lead to inefficiencies or suboptimal resource utilization. Need assessment surveys typically involves various stakeholders, including community members, local leaders and external experts. This process not only ensures that the assessment captures a broad range of perspectives but also fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among the residents towards the VDP. The VDPs prepared without need assessments needs to be revised by conducting need assessment exercise exclusively in particular villages.

Approval of Village Development Plan by Gram Sabhas

VDPs prepared by Village level Convergence Committee shall be presented in the meeting of the Gram Sabha and after due approval of the Gram Sabha it will be forwarded to the District Level Convergence Committee for further approval (MoSJE, 2022). Gram Sabha being the constitutional body with power of identification of public works to be taken up in its jurisdiction and to monitor its progress, it is necessary that VDPs are approved in the meetings of respective Gram

Sabhas. Discussion in the Gram Sabha provides an opportunity to revise the draft VDP and include interventions which may have got ignored inadvertently.

Table 5: No. and Percentage of VDPs Approved by Gram Sabha

Whether VDP Was Approved by Gram Sabhas?		*Percentage*
Yes	194	69.8
No	67	24.1
No Information	17	6.1
Total	278	100

Data collected during social audit exercise about the approval of Village Development Plan by Gram Sabha gives us valuable overview of the democratic nature of local governance and people's participation in development processes. The above table shows that a significant majority of VDPs about 69.8% have been approved by respective Gram Sabhas, indicating fairly democratic nature of the planning process in Adarsh Gram component of the PM-AJAY scheme. However, a notable proportion 24.1% of the VDPs were not approved, and for 6.1%, there is no information avaialbe about their approved status. The VDPs which are not approved by the Gram Sabhas may be termed as illegal. The social audit teams at many places found that VDPs are prepared by the block offices by filling up the data in given formats on MIS which is mockery of the process defined in the guidelines.

FORMATION OF VILLAGE LEVEL CONVERGENCE COMMITTEE (VLCC)

As per PM-AJAY guidelines, for overall guidance and monitoring of the implementation of the PM-AJAY Scheme including the 'Adarsh Gram' component, there will be different Committees at Central, State, District and Village level. Apart from State and District level committee, the Village level Committee would play crucial role in conducting need assessment, collecting the baseline data, preparation of the VDP as well as implementation and monitoring of the Scheme in the village. The Village level Convergence Committees (VLCC) will be headed by the Sarpanch/Pradhan of the village and will have all SC members of the Panchayat and concerned line officials viz. Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), ASHA workers etc. The Committee will be assisted preferably by one of the SC members of Panchayat from the village, who will also be the Member Secretary of the Committee (MoSJE 2022).

The timely and proper constitution of a VLCC plays a vital role in the successful implementation of the Adarsh Gram component of the PM-AJAY scheme. The VLCC comprises representatives from various segments of the village, including elected members, women, marginalized groups and representatives of local institutions. This committee is fundamental in ensuring effective governance,

integrated development, and efficient utilization of resources at the village level. The VLCC enables the integration of various sectoral programs and services. By coordinating different government and non-government initiatives, the VLCC ensures that development efforts are synergistic and comprehensive, covering all aspects of village life from education and health to infrastructure and economic development. The concept of having convergence committee at local level empower local leaders and community members by involving them in decision making process.

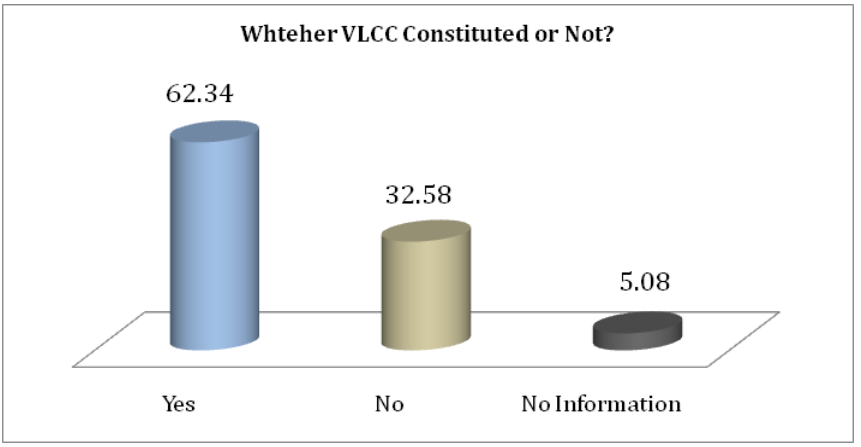


Figure 5: Percentage of Villages with VLCC Constituted

The social audit findings reflect that in 62.3% (331 out of 531) of villages selected under Adarsh Gram component of PM-AJAY, have constituted VLCCs demonstrating a commitment to utilise resources through right process. However, about 32.6% (173 out of 531) villages have not constituted VLCC. Social audit teams could not get information in 5.1% villages about constitution of VLCC.

Awareness amongst Members of the Village Level Committee

The awareness amongst the VLCC members of their role and responsibilities as well as about the scheme guidelines ensures that the committee functions effectively, fulfilling its mandate to foster integrated sustainable development of the selected village. When members are aware about their roles and responsibility, the coordination between different stakeholders and implementation of projects become smoother. This is essential for synchronizing various development activities under PM-AJAY.

Awareness of their roles equips members with the knowledge needed to make informed decision that align with the goals of PMAGY. It allows them to effectively

assess the needs of the village, plan suitable development activities and allocate resources wisely. It also enables VLCC members to effectively monitor the progress of development initiatives and evaluate their impact.

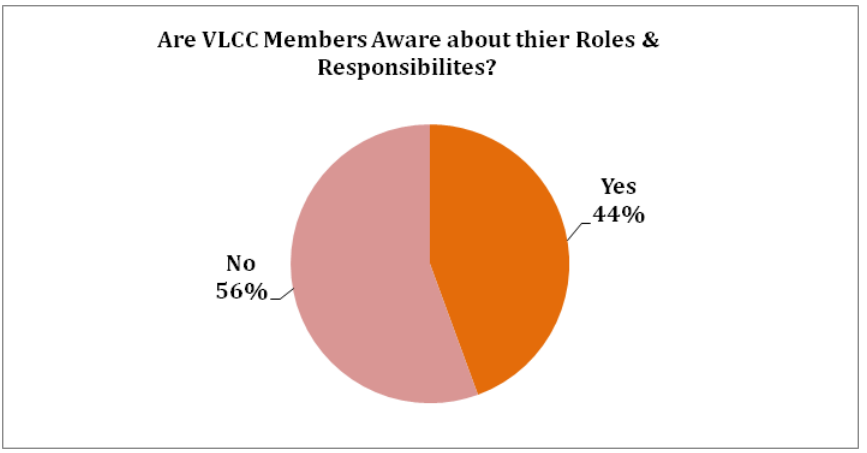


Figure 6: Percentage of VLCCs Aware of Role and Responsibilities

It was found during the social audit of PM-AJAY that majority 55.6% of VLCCs, (184 out of 331), are not aware of their roles and responsibilities. This indicates a major concern regarding the operational effectiveness and potential impact of these committees on development initiative. Only about 44.4% (147 out of 331) of the committees are reported to be aware of their duties which is less than half of the surveyed entities. It is critical to develop and implement comprehensive training program for VLCC members to educate them about their roles and responsibilities.

STATUS OF FUND DISBURSEMENT TO SELECTED VILLAGES

As per PM-AJAY guidelines, for Adarsh Gram component an amount of Rs. 21.00 lakh per village will be provided for new villages by the Central Government, out of which, Rs. 20.00 lakh would be for carrying out activities under the 'Gap-filling' component in selected villages. The balance amount of Rs. 1.00 lakh per village would be for administrative and other expenses. Further, for continuous development of the villages already covered under the earlier phases, there would a component of an additional round of funding of Rs. 10 lakh per village after the end of 5 years provided other conditions are fulfilled. Out of this, Rs. 9.50 lakh per village would be utilized for 'Gap-filling' component. The funds under this component of the Scheme will be released by the Central Government to the States/UTs in two installments. The first installment of Rs. 0.80 lakh or Rs. 0.40 lakh per village, as the case may be, will be released immediately on selection of the villages to enable State/UT Governments to carry out capacity building, awareness

generation, need assessment, preparation of Village Development Plans and meeting the expenses related to Project Implementation Units, etc. The balance admissible Central Assistance as 2nd and final installment of Rs. 20.00 lakh per village or Rs. 9.50 lakh, as the case may be, would be released in respect of villages whose VDPs have been finalized by the Gram Sabha to those States/UTs whose Annual Action Plans for the year have been approved by the Ministry. The State Government/UT Administration in turn will release the entire admissible funds under 'Administrative Expenses' to the District Administrations for carrying out capacity building, administrative expenses, awareness generation, initiating non cost based activities, etc.. Thereafter the entire admissible funds under the 'Gap-filling' component, i.e. Rs. 20.00 lakh or Rs. 9.50 lakh per village, as the case may be, will be released by the State Government to the District Administration, once the VDP of the selected villages is approved by their District level Committees so that the planned works can be executed without any delay (MoSJE, 2022).

Funding for gap filling activities under Adarsh Gram is most important for several reasons, particularly in ensuring that the development of model villages is comprehensive and leaves no significant needs unaddressed. Gap filling fund are specifically intended to address areas that are not covered by existing programmes or where additional resources are needed to complete initiative. This ensures that all aspects of village development receive attention, including infrastructure, education and sanitation, etc.

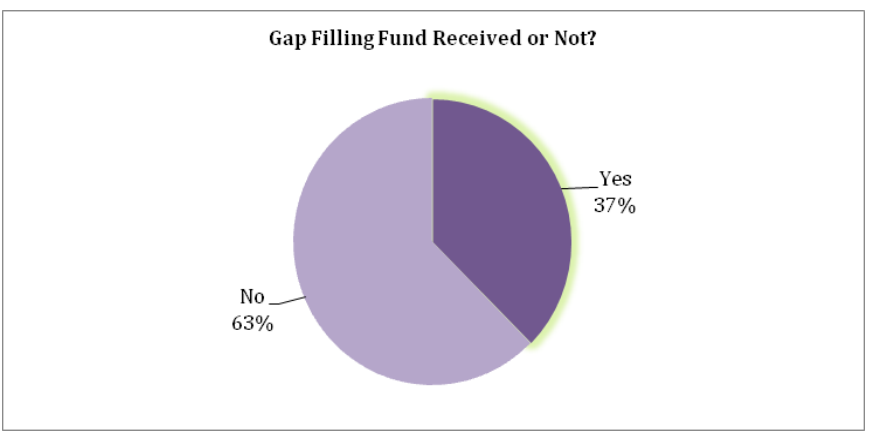


Figure 7: Percentage of Villages Received Gap Filling Fund

During the social audit it has been found that only about 37.5% (199 out of 531) of the villages have received funding for gap filling activities, which are crucial for addressing key developmental needs and disparities. Conversely a significant majority about 62.5% (332 out of 531) have not received gap filling fund. The

lack of funding in majority of the villages is leading to delays in executing vital development projects, identified under gap filling activity.

Table 5: Financial Year-wise No. and Percentage of Village Not Receiving Gap Filling Fund

Villages Not Received Gap Filling Fund		
Financial Year (FY)	***No. of Villages***	***Percentage***
2018-19	20	6.02
2019-20	35	10.54
2020-21	66	19.88
2021-22	203	61.14
2022-23	8	2.41
Total	332	100.00

Data with regard to year-wise number of villages not receiving gap-filling fund was also collected during the social audit exercise. The findings shows that maximum 203 villages selected under the scheme during financial year 2021-22 did not received the fund till the time of the social audit. 66 villages from FY 2020-21, 35 villages from FY 2019-20 and 20 villages from FY 2018-18 were waiting for gap filling fund till the time of social audit. Efforts should be made to streamline the disbursal of funding to the selected villages so that development projects are not disrupted.

IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECTS IN VDP AND THEIR EXECUTION

Timely identification of works under VDPs, their approval and execution are essential for effective implementation of Adarsh Gram component of PM-AJAY. For effective implementation and monitoring of this scheme, Project Implementation Units (PIU) would be set up at State as well as District level to assist the officials in every stages of implementation of the scheme (MoSJE 2022).

Table 6: No. of Works Identified and Executed

Works Identified in VDPs and Execution	
Total Works Identified in VDP	3129
Works in Gap Filling Activity	1760
Total works executed	1021

The above table shows a total 3129 works have been identified in 278 villages where VDPs were found to have been prepared. High proportion of works dedicated to gap filling activities demonstrates a concerted efforts to address critical gaps within community infrastructure or services through targeted interventions. But only 1021 works out of total 3129 identified works were executed in these 278 villages. Non-disbursal of critical gap fund to these villages as seen in earlier section of

the paper was the major reason for non-execution of identified works. Similarly, converging departments have also delayed execution of other identified works.

AWARENESS AMONGST VILLAGERS ABOUT THE SCHEME

Awareness among villagers is essential for the success of the Adarsh Gram component of the PM-AJAY scheme. When villagers understand scheme's goal and their roles in it, they are more likely to take ownership of the initiatives. Such ownership enhances community participation in planning, implementation and monitoring of the scheme and also empowers the community. This sense of empowerment is crucial for sustaining development efforts even after the programmes is completed. Awareness ensures that villagers know about the resources and services available under the Adarsh Gram component of PM-AJAY and also implementation structure and monitoring mechanisms. Many development challenges require not just infrastructural solutions but also behavioural changes, such as participating in development initiatives. Awareness is key to changing behaviours and attitude.

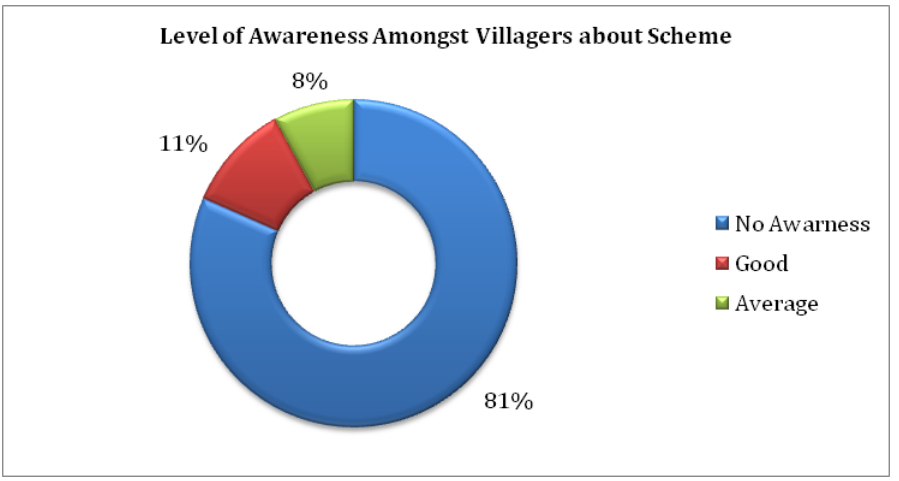


Figure 8: Level of Awareness amongst Villagers about the Scheme

The social audit findings reveal that in 81.5% villages, the villagers are not aware about the scheme and its provisions. Only in small fraction of total number of villages, good or average level of awareness amongst villagers about the scheme could be found. High level of unawareness is impacting the community involvement in making the village as 'Adarsh Gram'. Further, it also shows that wherever Gram Sabha were held for approval of the VDPs, members may not have participated actively and informed discussion would not have happened. Considering this situation, developing and implementing more effective communication strategies is crucial. This could include preparation and dissemination of local language information materials, regular community meeting and use of local media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the social audit exercise, interactions with various stakeholders and rural development experts, few recommendations are being made for improving the efficacy of Adarsh Gram component of PM-AJAY scheme. These recommendations have been categorised into policy recommendations and operational recommendations.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CENTRAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS

(i) The allotment of funds to the selected villages should not be uniform, it should be based on the norms recommended by the 15th Finance Commission for release of funds to Gram Panchayats i.e. 90% on population and 10% on geographical area of the village. Further, as in the case of Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Grameen (PMAY-G), for hilly, difficult areas and left-wing extremism affected Integrated Action Plan (IAP) areas additional 10 percent may be given due to higher input and transportation costs.

(ii) A separate Village Development Plan has not been effective. It should be aligned with the the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) prepared by the Gram Panchayats every year through the similar process. Selection of villages be communicated to well before the GPDP preparation process begins. Gram Panchayat Plan Facilitation Team (GPPFT) may be oriented on the guidelines of the Adarsh Gram component of PM-AJAY and be given the task of prepared a plan for Adarsh Gram too which will become a sub-plan of the GPDP. However, representation of Ward Member representing that village, SCs and Women of that village need to be ensured in the GPPFT of those Gram Panchayats.

(iii) Prior to approval of the Adarsh Gram sub plan (VDP) of the GPDP in the Gram Sabha, same may be discussed and got approved by the Ward Sabha of the Ward under which selected village falls. In case there are multiple Wards in that village, joint meeting of those Wards may be organised. Smaller number of participants in the Ward Sabha and the very fact that members are directly affected be the planning process will help make deliberations more participatory and democratic.

(iv) A separate Village Level Convergence Committee (VLCC) need not be formed to overlook this scheme instead this task needs to be given to village development committee which is standing committee of the Gram Panchayats. It can be extended with representation of SC community as invited member and their monthly meeting to be ensured and proper training to be held.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CENTRE, STATE, DISTRICT AND GPS

(i) Community members, particularly SCs of the selected members be made aware of the objectives and key provisions of the Adarsh Gram component of the scheme. Further, they may be oriented on their role in planning, implementation and monitoring of the scheme and motivated to actively participate in the village level processes. IEC campaigns on the lines of Swachha Bharat Mission-Grameen (SBM-G) may be carried out for behavioural and attitudinal changes.

(ii) Time-bound disbursal of fund after approval of the VDP (or Adarsh Gram sub Plan of GPDP) must be ensured so that projects can be initiated and completed in time. Flow of fund may be monitored and reviewed at the Central and State levels.

(iii) Training of VLCC (and GPPFT) on their role and responsibilities in the planning, implementation and monitoring of Adarsh Gram component of the PM-AJAY must be ensured. For this district level Master Trainers be identified and given intensive training at State/ National level through NISD or NIRD&PR.

(iv) Village Development Plan (or Adarsh Gram sub Plan of GPDP) with its current updated status must be in public domain for transparency and accountability.

(v) Findings of social audit exercise may be acted upon appropriately and timely. ATRs must be uploaded on the MIS within stipulated time-frame. MoSJE and State Department of Social Welfare should regularly review the social audit exercise and action taken on the findings. This will help make implementing officials and institutions accountable and responsive.

CONCLUSION

Social audit of Adarsh Gram component of the PM-AJAY has thrown revealing findings. Important among the negative findings are lack of awareness about this scheme amongst most of the villagers as nearly four-fifth of villagers had no information about the scheme, need assessment surveys were not conducted in nearly half of the villages, VDPs were prepared in only half of the villages, one-fourth of VDPs were not approved by meetings of Gram Sabha, in one-third villages Village Level Convergence Committee were not constituted, in the villages where VLCCs were constituted more than half of the members of VLCCs were not aware of their role and responsibilities, nearly two-third of villages had not received gap filling fund till the time of social audit, only one-third of works identified were executed till the time of social audit mainly due to delay in funding. There are some positive findings also. For example in nearly three-fourth of the villages where VDPs have been prepared it was found that VDPs were based on need assessment survey. Overall, it may be concluded that Adarsh Gram component of

the PM-AJAY scheme is not being implemented properly at the village level and much need to be done to make it more effective otherwise it will not achieve it's stated objectives. It is recommended that structure and processes for planning and implementation of projects under Adarsh Gram may be integrated and aligned with those of Gram Panchayats. Further, community need to be aware about the scheme, VLCC members need to be trained in planning and implementation, gap filling fund need to be released immediately after VDP gets approved at the district level, transparency and accountability measures including social audit need to be strengthened.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

PANCHAYAT FINANCES TO REALISE LOCALISED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: A STUDY OF SELECTED VILLAGE PANCHAYATS IN GOA

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Abstract

Finance is the key to success of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The 73rd CAA made provisions of generation of revenue by the PRIs added with share in state funds and grants-in-aid. But PRIs in have been heavily depended on devolution of funds from state and central governments. Goa is not an exception. This makes it an imperative to assess the judicious utilization of fundsthe goal of LSDGs (Localised Sustainable Development Goals). Thus the present paper intends to examinethe situation of panchayat finances (Own Source Revenue and Devolved Revenue), share of devolved funds for implementation of LSDGs and the status of expenditure made by PRIs for achieving the LSDGs, particularly in Goa. For this, seven panchayats of Ponda Taluk of Goa were selected for an in-depth survey with help of questionnaire served on secretaries of Panchayats and official records were consulted. It was observed that no special funds were devolved by the governments for LSDGs, despite government's desire to implement LSDGs. Though governments want these PRIs to be financially independent, the ground reality is different. Thus the paper goes to suggest that it is essential for the governments to devolve the finances along with functional responsibilities to the panchayats.

Keywords: LSDGs, Panchayat Finances, Finance Commissions, Governments.

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INTRODUCTION

The 73rd Amendment Act 1992 to the Constitution of India mandated the state governments to pass the conformity legislation, in pursuance of this provision, Goa Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 came into existence (Goa Panchayati Raj Act, 1994). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) that came into effect on 1st January, 2016 are blueprint to achieve a better and sustainable future for all by 2030. At the core of this 2030 agenda are the 17 global goals and their 169 targets driven by the principle of 'Living No One Behind' (NITI Aayog, 2024). Since India is a signatory to this UN SDGs, it wants to achieve these goals by local self-governments interventions. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India has taken a thematic approach and mapped 17 SDGs into nine themes,stated as Localised Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs), for better understanding and effective action by the local bodies, especially the panchayats (NITI Aayog, 2022). Panchayats play an effective role in the planning and implementation of functions related to 29 subjects enlisted in XI schedule of the Constitution and many SDG targets are within the purviewof these subjects (United Nations, n.d). Achieving effective development outcomes requires synergies between various government departments' schemes and initiatives, for a holistic inter-sectoral approach in terms of planning and implementation (Chakradhar & Pisupati, 2018).

Goa has 191 village panchayats across 12 talukas. According to the 2011 Census, Goa has a population of 14.59 lakhs, out of which 7,30,923 is rural population. The table below shows the total talukas comprising the total number of panchayats.

Table 1: Village Panchayats in Goa

Talukas	*No. of Panchayats*	*Talukas*	*No. of Panchayats*
Sattari	12	Mormugao	10
Bicholim	18	Salcete	30
Bardez	33	Quepem	11
Pernem	20	Sanguem	07
Tiswadi	19	Canacona	07
Ponda	19	Dharbandora	05

According to the Goa Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, thepanchayats are constituted on the basis of the population. For a panchayat with a population of 1500 or more but not more than 2000, number of elected representatives are 5 and the category is 'D', for more than 2000 but not more than 5000, number of elected representatives are 7 with 'C' category, for more than 5000 but not more than 8000 people, number of elected representatives are 9 and belongs to 'B' category, and for more than 8000 population, number of elected representatives are 11and it is categorised as 'A'.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the present research are to assess the state of finances of Panchayats in Ponda Taluka (Own Source Revenue and Devolved Revenue) and examine the success rate of the expenditure made by them on LSDGs

The was collected by examining Form X-income and expenditure of panchayats along with a structured questionnaire served on the secretaries of selected seven Village Panchayats (VP) from Ponda taluka, by using a random sampling method. This study was conducted for three financial years; 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23. The selected panchayats are V.P. Volvoi, V.P. Bandora, V.P. Betqui Khandola, V.P. Curti-Khandepar, V.P. Queula, V.P. Veling-Priol-Cuncolimand V.P. WadiTalaulim.

STATE OF INCOME SELECTED PANCHAYATS

The financial years 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 witnessed the devolution of finances from the XIV Finance Commission for the first financial year 2020-2021 and XV Finance Commission for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. The XIV Finance Commission allocated grants to panchayats amounting to 2,00,292.2 crores (XIV Finance Commission Report, 2014) and also identified many sources of income for them and provided the guidelines to union and state governments to empower them.The XV Finance Commission recommendations devolved a total of rupees 2.4 lakh crores for rural local bodies to all three tiers of panchayats (XV Finance Commission Report, 2020). This section analyses the finances of selected panchayats, basically their income with respect to Own Source Revenue (OSR) and devolved revenue which is identified as the first objective of the study.

Table 2: Income – V.P. Volvoi

Years	*Grants-in-aid (in Rs)*	*OSR (in Rs)*	*Total Receipts (in Rs)*
2020-2021	2193189.00	348804.00	2531993.00
2021-2022	6139257.00	313607.00	6452864.00
2022-2023	3929521.00	607521.00	45370142.00

Volvoi village panchayat has five wards and belongs to 'D' category in the classification of panchayats. It depends on grants from the central government to sustain itself. The OSR for the panchayat consists of fines collected from sand dumping, issuance of house taxes, market fees, auction fees and royalty fees. The panchayat belongs to the category of a weaker panchayat. The major sources of income from OSR during the year 2020-2021 are sand dumping fees, house tax, No Objection Certificates (NOC), trade licenses, etc. and it is Rs. 348804/-. The year 2021-2022 saw an increase in the grants received from the government mainly towards celebration of Goa Liberation Day, (It is celebrated on 19th December, since

Goa was liberated from the Portuguese rule on this day in 1961) and covid welfare grants. The OSR during the year 2021-2022 was collected from sand dumping fees, house taxes, issuance of provisional tax, NOC, etc. and amounted to Rs. 313607/-. During the year 2022-2023, a large amount of the income under OSR were from sand dumping fees, bank interests and from house taxes amounted to Rs. 607521/-. The income received from grants-in-aidis much higher than the income collected from OSR as can be seen from the Table 2.

Table 3: Income – V.P. of Bandora

Years	*Grants-in-aid (in Rs)*	*OSR (in Rs)*	*Total Receipts (in Rs)*
2020-2021	11751031.00	3294614.41	15045645.41
2021-2022	9844874.00	5119953.00	14964827.00
2022-2023	6796719.00	6229991.75	13026710.75

There are 11 wards in Bandora VP and falls under the category of 'A' in the classification of panchayats. The panchayat is one of the financially weaker panchayats in Ponda taluka and hence receives grant-in-aid from the central government under the weaker panchayat grants. The OSR is collected from the registration of births and deaths, construction license, enabling house number fees, construction number, Right to Information (RTI) issuance certificates, etc. The market auction fee is a major source of revenue for the panchayat in which they derive revenue by auctioning the market area close to the temple premises of Lord Naguesh (Shiva), the panchayat earns revenue by auctioning the market area to the highest bidder. The major source of income in the year 2020-2021 was from the issuance of weaker panchayat grants, along with security deposit fees. Panchayats OSR was Rs. 3294614.41. In the year 2021-2022, the major share of income was received from market auction fees, issuance of construction licenses and house taxes and it was Rs. 5119953.00. The grants-in-aid have been always greater as compared to OSR. During the year 2021-2022, panchayat also received Covid-19 grants. In the year 2022-2023, the income received from OSR,that is Rs. 6229991.75 increased due to the revenue collected from house transfer proceeds, occupancy certificates, enabling house numberfees, etc.

Table 4: Income – V.P. Betki-Khandola

Years	*Grants-in-aid (in Rs)*	*OSR (in Rs)*	*Total Receipts (in Rs)*
2020-2021	7795079.00	3336823.50	11131902.50
2021-2022	8255842.00	4032836.20	12288678.20
2022-2023	4278445.00	7366287.10	11644732.10

There are 09 wards in Betki-Khandola village panchayat and comes under the 'B' category in the classification of panchayats. The major sources of income for the panchayat are in the form of house tax, construction fees, market auction fees,

registration of births and deaths. The panchayat receives a large amount in the form of grants-in-aid since it belongs to the category of weaker panchayat. The income of this panchayat in the year 2020-2021 was Rs. 3336823.50 that was collected from house tax and popular contribution occupancy fee, construction license fees, NOC, etc. The major share of revenue is from grants provided by the XIV Finance commission; XV Finance commission and significant amount it received from the biodiversity grants was Rs. 7795079.00. The panchayat received grants for covid-19 as well as special grants and matching grants under the category of grants-in–aid in the year 2021-2022 which was Rs. 8255842.00. The OSR was from house tax, construction license fees, RTI fees, house transfer fees, etc amounting to Rs. 4032836.20. The year 2022-2023, saw an increase in revenue from own sources as compared to the previous years, was collected from house tax, construction fees, trade license fees, building rent, bank interests, etc. was Rs.7366287.10 as seen from the table above. The year also saw the income from grants Rs. 4278445.00, being far lesser as compared to the revenue generated from own sources.

Table 5: Income – V.P Curti Khandepar

Years	*Grants-in-aid (in Rs)*	*OSR (in Rs)*	*Total Receipts (in Rs)*
2020-2021	16206212.00	10747023.00	26953235.00
2021-2022	11730792.00	18954515.00	30685307.00
2022-2023	7191894.00	19635198.10	26827092.10

Curti-Khandepar village panchayat has 11 wards and belongs to category 'A'. Since the industries are located in this panchayat, it receives revenue from trade licences and trade tax on the industries. The panchayat receives a large share of its revenue through own-sources, in the form of renewal of construction licenses, certificate fees, popular contribution, garbage tax, sanitation fees, burial fees, earnest house number, market auction fees, bifurcation fees, etc. along with, market auction security deposits and through the floating of the tender forms and market auction forms. As can be seen from the table, the panchayat collects a more revenue from own-sources as compared to grants received from the government and its OSR has been increasing over the years. In the year 2020-2021, OSR collected were from construction license fees, labour cess, bifurcation fees, market auction, security deposit, garbage collection fees, etc. amounted to Rs. 10747023.00.The major revenue in the year 2020-2021 from grants-in-aid was towards members salary, matching grants and settlement of unreconciled amount which was Rs. 16206212.00. The OSR in the year 2021-2022 was collected from construction license fees, labour cess fees, sanitation fees, trade tax, etc. was Rs. 18954515.00 while the income in the form of grants- in-aid was towards celebration of 60 years of Goa's liberation, national day celebrations and towards disbursal of matching

grants which was Rs. 11730792.00. The year 2022-2023 saw an increase in revenue collected specifically from renewal of construction license and its fees, market auction fees, security deposit etc amounting to Rs. 19635198.10, higher than grants which was Rs. 7191894.00.

Table 6: Income – V.P. of Queula

Years	*Grants-in-aid (in Rs)*	*OSR (in Rs)*	*Total Receipts (in Rs)*
2020-2021	6190419.00	3106651.99	9297070.99
2021-2022	8034509.00	4879509.52	12914018.52
2022-2023	3311151.00	6070023.69	9381174.69

The village panchayat of Queula has 9 wards, belongs to 'B' category and receives a large share of its revenue from the government. OSR generated by this panchayat is less as compared to grants-in-aid. As can be seen from the table, with the exception of 2022-2023, there was an increase in revenue received from grants-in-aid as compared to OSR. The OSR for the panchayat in the year 2020-2021 was from housing grants, construction license fees, house transfer fees, etc. constituted Rs. 3106651.99 The grants for the village panchayat were from XIV finance commission amounted to Rs. 6190419.00. The panchayat received its OSR,Rs. 4879509.52 in the year 2021-2022 from collection of garbage tax, construction labour cess, house transfer fees, etc. while the major sources of income under grants was on celebration of 60 years of Goa's Liberation, XV finance commission and for members salary was Rs. 8034509.00. The OSR of Rs. 6070023.69 for the panchayat in the year 2022-2023 were from house tax, G.S.T., royalty fees, construction licenses, reconciliation expenses, etc. The major sources of revenue under grants-in-aid, that is, Rs. 3311151.00 was from matching grants, garbage grants and XV Finance Commission.

Table 7: Income–V.P. of Veling-Priol-Cuncolim

Years	*Grants-in-aid (in Rs)*	*OSR (in Rs)*	*Total Receipts (in Rs)*
2020-2021	10158270.00	3876806.00	14095136
2021-2022	10361393.00	9464063.00	20025456
2022-2023	4530384.00	6159336.00	10689720

This VP of Veling-Priol-Cuncolim belongs to category 'A' with 11 wards. The panchayat generates a large OSR from house tax, light tax, profit tax, various certificate fees, hall booking fees, NOC fees, etc. There has been an increase in the revenue generated from of OSR over the years. Another major source of revenue is the income generated from earnest monthly deposit fees. (Earnest Monthly Deposit is a security deposit that a bidder pays to show that they are serious in fulfilling the obligation about a particular tender application). The major sources of revenue for

the panchayat in the year 2020-2021 from own sources are from hall booking fees, construction license and shop rent amounted to Rs. 3876806.00 and grants-in-aid was Rs.10158270.00 The year 2021-2022 was marked by an increase in revenue collected from OSR was Rs. 9464063.00, through market auction fees, chicken shop auction fees, house tax receipts, etc. The income received in the form of grants was Rs. 10361393.00 towards Independence Day celebration and 60 years celebration of Goa's liberation, etc. The OSR in the year 2022-2023 was Rs. 6159336.00, collected from house tax, renewal of construction license, transfer fees, etc. The major part of the amount received towards grants- in aid was on members salary and matching grants was Rs. 4530384.00.

Table 8: Income–V.P. Wadi-Talaulim

Years	*Grants-in-aid (in Rs)*	*Income from Own Sources (in Rs)*	*Total (in Rs)*
2020-2021	4137510.00	775863.00	4913373.00
2021-2022	7563123.00	770126.90	8333249.90
2022-2023	3034391.00	1067505.00	4101896.50

Wadi-Talauli village panchayat has 7 wards and belongs to 'C' category. The major sources of income in the year 2020-2021 are from house tax, construction license fees, enabling house number fees, etc. The panchayat is mainly dependent on grants from the government. As seen from the above table, in the year 2020-2021, the income received from OSR Rs. 775863.00 is less while the share of revenue was Rs. 4137510.00 from the government grants. The major OSR for the panchayat is from house tax proceeds, construction license fee, royalties, house transfers, etc. The major grants received are towards popular contribution and disbursement of staff and members salary. There was increase in the grants-in-aid in 2021-2022, such as garbage grant, development grants, and disbursal towards staff salary amounted to Rs. 7563123.00. The OSR in the year 2021-2022 was Rs. 770126.90were from house tax, construction license fees, enabling house number, etc. The year 2022-2023 saw a decline in the grants-in-aid as compared to the previous two years which was Rs. 3034391.00. However, its OSR increased as compared to the previous two years and was amounted to Rs. 1067505.00.

EXPENDITURE ON LSDGS IN PANCHAYATS

Table 9: Expenditure- V.P Volvoi

Years	*Exp. On LSDG's (in Rs)*	*Other Expenditure (in Rs)*	*Total expenditure (in Rs)*
2020-2021	199336.00	1560217.74	1759553.74
2021-2022	149755.00	1827156.68	1976911.68
2022-2023	1816873.00	2150246.75	3967119.7

This panchayat spends less on LSDG as compared to other expenditure. Thepanchayat feels that they cannot undertake proper development activities in their locality due to the meagre income they receive as OSR. In the year 2020-2021, panchayat's expenditure was on desilting of gutters, maintenance of public toilets and cleaning of pavements, gutters, disposal of carcasses amounted to Rs. 199336.00. the expenditure in the sameyear on non-related to the themes identified under LSDGs was Rs. 1560217.74. The year 2021-2022 was marked by an increase in spending on other items like development of shigmo maand (local festival celebrated in Goa) and repairs of crematorium and it was Rs. 1827156.68 The table above clearly shows that there has been a marked increase in spending towards LSDGs during the year 2022-2023, the amount of Rs. 1816873.00 was spent especially on cutting of bushes, construction of garbage shed, clearing of roadside gutter and garbage and improvement in the existing pathways whereas Rs. 2150246.75 was spent on items non-related to LSDG.

Table 10: Expenditure–V.P. Bandora

Years	*Exp. on LSDG's (in Rs)*	*Other Expenditure (in Rs)*	*Total Expenditure (in Rs)*
2020-2021	2924330.00	4371491.00	7295821.00
2021-2022	3933565.00	7218506.00	11152071.00
2022-2023	5745343.00	13062532.00	18807875.00

The expenditure of the panchayat is mainly on advertisements, employees provident fund, Goa building cess, post natural calamities, repair of computers etc. The major expenditure towards LSDGs is with regard to cleaning of public places, gutters, nullah, cutting of bushes, clearing of garbage, etc. Moreover, a part of its expenditure is incurred on animal welfare and rescue operations, along with the disposal of carcasses. The amount spent on LSDGs is considerably meagre as compared to other expenditure. The year 2020-2021 was marked by an increase in spending on sanitation and public health which was Rs. 2924330.00. and the other expenditure amounted to Rs.4371491.00. During the year 2021-2022, Rs. 3933565.00 was spent on disposal of carcasses, cutting of bushes, and cleaning of gutter was towards LSDGs while expenditures on projectors, computer repairs,

advocate fees, payment of provident funds to employees were other expenditure which was Rs. 7218506.00. In the year 2022-2023, expenditure on the LSDGs increased considerably due to huge expenditure on garbage collection, cleaning of public toilets, as well as sanitation and public health measures were undertaken by the panchayat. It was Rs. 5745343.00.The other expenditure dealt with payment towards provident fund for employees, settlement of arrears, payment of labour cess and expenses incurred on security deposit amounting to Rs. 13062532.00.

Table 11: Expenditure–V.P. Betki Khandola

Years	*Exp. on LSDG's (in Rs)*	*Other Expenditure (in Rs)*	*Total Expenditure (in Rs)*
2020-2021	2569450.00	5437945.00	8007395.00
2021-2022	4153762.00	3795714.00	7949476.00
2022-2023	1264979.00	7872030.00	9137009.00

The expenditure of the village panchayat is incurred on other items like administrative and public works development programs. The panchayat has difficulty in financing its developmental activities. The expenditure on LSDGs in the year 2020-21 was Rs. 2569450.00.and other expenditure amounted to Rs. 5437945.00. The spending was on development works, water harvesting, carcasses disposaland on conduct of health camps for the people. The major share of expenditure was on advertisement, refund of labour cess and towards disbursal of staff salary. The year 2021-2022 was unique in the sense that the Panchayat spent a lot more on the LSDGs. The expenditure in 2021-2022 was Rs. 4153762.00 mainly on sanitation, public health, family welfare, drinking water and social welfare activities as well as garbage collection, carcasses disposaland pulse polio immunization programs. In the year 2021-2022, Rs. 3795714.00 was spent on retirement pension for staff, putting up of RCC slabs, celebration of 60 years of Goa's Liberation, etc. The year 2022-2023 was marked by a considerable decrease in the spending on the LSDGs which was Rs. 1264979.00 while there was a noticeable hike in the expenditure incurred on other items like payment of pension amount, staff salary, members salary and CCTV bills amounted to Rs. 7872030.00.

Table 12: Expenditure- V.P Curti Khandepar

Years	*Exp. on LSDG's (in Rs)*	*Other Expenditure (in Rs)*	*Total Expenditure (in Rs)*
2020-2021	9580256.00	9802390.83	19382646.83
2021-2022	12366434.00	12789620.44	25156054.44
2022-2023	11071444.00	19903172.00	30974616.00

Curti–Khandepar village panchayat is a self-sustaining panchayat. The major activities under LSDGs of the panchayat are waste collection, cleaning of gutter,

cleaning of black spots, repairs of toilets, repair of street lights, etc. Felicitation functions of meritorious students, education assistances, sports tournaments and national day celebrations programs are conducted for the holistic development of youth and children in the village. As can be seen from the above table, the expenditure undertaken on LSDGs Rs. 9580256.00 is almost equal to the other expenditures of Rs. 9802390.83 like children parks amenities, GST & SGST, JCB for burial, covid relief, house tax assessment, market auction security deposit release, etc. The years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 were marked by almost similar amounts of expenditures on LSDG amounted to Rs. 12366434.00 and on other items was Rs. 12789620.44. The expenditure under LSDG in the year 2020-2021 was on disposal of garbage, desilting of nullah, public works involving construction of gutters, construction of pathways, vaccination drive for animals, etc. The panchayat spent on purchase of dustbins, electricity tender bill, house tax assessment advance, conduct of sports tournaments, etc. The major expenditure in the year 2021-2022 on LSDG was on sanitation activities such as transportation of waste, cleaning of gutter, cleaning of black spots, cutting of bushes etc. while other expenditure was mainly on water bills, sweeper charges, purchase of CCTV, dustbin purchases, etc. In the year 2022-2023 the major part of expenditure under LSDG were on waste management, cleaning of gutter, cleaning of kabrasthan (Burial ground for Muslim Community) and bush cutting which was Rs. 11071444.00. The expenses on other things mainly on staff salary, sweeper charges, purchase of furniture, purchase of RCC slabs, Governor's visit, construction, etc was Rs. 19903172.00.

Table 13: Expenditure-V.P Queula

Years	*Exp. On LSDG's (in Rs)*	*Other Expenditure (in Rs)*	*Total Expenditure (in Rs)*
2020-2021	3082150.00	3407338.10	6489488.10
2021-2022	3898460.00	8616100.06	12514560.06
2022-2023	4257389.00	4773874.08	9031263.08

The expenditure on the LSDGs is less as compared to other expenditures like administrative, miscellaneous and library. The panchayat spent Rs. 3082150.00 on sanitation, public health and family welfare programs, cleaning of gutter, waste management, post natural calamities relief measures, etc. in 2020-21. The major expenditure of Rs. 3407338.10 was on salaries towards staff, advocate fees, advertisement bill, etc. The year 2021-2022 saw an increase in the expenditure on disposal of carcasses, construction labour cess and daily wages towards labourers, on garbage management, cleaning of gutter, purchase of wood for crematorium purposes, etc. Thus Rs. 3898460.00 was spent on LSDGs and Rs. 8616100.06 was other expenses. In the year 2022-2023 the expenditure of Rs. 4257389.00 was on fulfilment of LSDG such as door-to-door plastic collection, purchase of plastic

bags, black spot cleaning, etc. The panchayat spent Rs. 4773874.08 on electricity bill, contribution towards provident fund, construction cess, national day celebrations and reconciliation statement, etc.

Table 14: Expenditure-V. P Veling Priol

Years	*Exp. On LSDG's (in Rs)*	*Other Expenditure (in Rs)*	*Total Expenditure (in Rs)*
2020-2021	2048055.00	8011105.00	10059160.93
2021-2022	1912415.00	14320915.58	16233330.58.84
2022-2023	1740204.00	12798665.62	14538869.62

The panchayat incurs a large amount of expenditure every year but mainly for development works, cultural programs and administrative matters and not on the LSDGs. Some of the administrative expenses are the chartered accountant fees, maintenance of computers, advocate fees, electricity bill, village panchayat staff bonus, Wi- Fi fees, etc. Hence the panchayat is unable to spend much on LSDGs. The year 2020-2021 was marked by an increase in expenditure on salaries, provident fund, expenses of the administrative staff and for volunteers engaged in distribution of groceries that was Rs. 8011105.00. The major expenditure towards the LSDG was on clearing of black spots, door to door plastic collection drive and disbursal of funds towards post natural calamities relief operations amounted to Rs. 2048055.00. The year 2021-2022 saw a higher increase in the expenditures on purchase of rickshaw, signboards, refunding of the cess collected and celebration of 60years of Goa liberation which was Rs. 14320915.58. The expenditure on LSDGs were on black spots cleaning, door to door garbage collection, cleaning and desilting of gutter, MNREGA and bush cutting was Rs.1912415.00.The expenditure in the year 2022-2023 on LSDG was Rs. 1740204.00 and on other works was Rs. 12798665.62. The panchayat spent on disbursal of staff salary, contribution towards provident fund, expenses incurred towards conduct of gram sabha and celebration of national days. The major expenditure under LSDGs were on door-to-door plastic collection drives, purchasing of plastic bags, disposal of carcasses and bush cutting.

Table 15: Expenditure – V.P. Wadi-Talauli

Years	*Exp. On LSDG's (in Rs)*	*Other Expenditure (in Rs)*	*Total (in Rs)*
2020-2021	1075296.00	2782724.44	3858020.44
2021-2022	978740.00	2295162.84	3273902.84
2022-2023	1088093.00	5189490.70	6277583.70

As can be inferred from the Table 15, the panchayat utilised most its income for meeting its administrative and miscellaneous expenses and spends less amount

on LSDGs. The activities under LSDGs are related to sanitation, public health and family welfare like well cleaning, gutter clearing, cutting of trees, disposal of dead animals, garbage collection, etc. In the year 2020-2021, the major share of expenditure under LSDGs was on cleaning of gutters and on various programs related to public health. The major expenditure in the year 2021-2022 was towards payment of members salary and waste management under the category of LSDGs. The expenditure has increased in the year 2022-2023 on office works, painting of furniture, member salary, provident fund for employees, etc. The major amount spent on the LSDGs was for garbage collection, cleaning of gutter, development works, etc.

CONCLUSION

Out of the seven village panchayats studied, three belonged to the category 'A', two belonged to category 'B', one was in the category 'C' and only one from 'D'. It was noticed that three VPs (Quela, Curti-Khandepar and Veling-Priol- Cuncolim) are financially stronger as their OSR was higher and therefore financially independent. However, remaining four panchayats were dependent on the grants-in-aid as they were identified as financially weaker panchayats. It has been noticed that the panchayats in almost all states in India continue to be starved of finances causing major impediment in their growth and effective functioning (Alok, 2020).

With regard to the expenditure on LSDGs, all the selected VPs select theme 5 'Clean and Green Village' since the funds under XV Finance Commission were devolved as 60% tied (30% each for sanitation and drinking water) and 40% untied for other expenditure. The VPs of Curti-Khandepar (2021-2023), Queula (2022-23) (both financially stronger) and VP of Wadi-Talauli (2020-21) (financially weaker), spent more on LSDGs either from their OSR or untied funds. Thus, this study concludes that the devolved finances are insufficient to meet the expenses towards LSDGs.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

ASSESSING GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF SCHEDULED CASTES: WHY ARE THEY NOT WELL IN BIHAR?

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Abstract

Government has been making efforts to empower the Scheduled Castes for more than a half century continuously without desired results. Further, despite initiatives, politico-legal arrangements, development and welfare schemes in Bihar, the SC community still remains at the bottom in terms of socio-economic development as is evident from results of recently caste-based survey in Bihar. Here a question arises – why the socio-economic conditions SC community in Bihar have not improved at desired level? Nearly half of the SC population in urban and rural localities lack education, health, employment opportunities and adequate assets. In the light of the situation, the present paper attempts to trace the impending factors and suggest measures for improvement, by applying empirical enquiry at micro-level and analyzing secondary data. It takes education, health, livelihood conditions and resources/assets as indicators of poor level of empowerment among SCs in Bihar. The results of enquiry indicate that the government initiatives are hampered by factors like barriers in social structure, social stigma and inconsistency in implementation of schemes. It underscores the importance of policy reform, targeted interventions, and community participation to achieve meaningful empowerment. By situating government schemes within broader sociological frameworks of inequality and social justice, this research contributes to understanding the complex dynamics of caste-based marginalization and offers actionable recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

Keywords: Scheduled Castes, Government Schemes, Implementation, Affirmative Action, Social inequality, Bihar

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INTRODUCTION

Caste has long been recognized as a central axis of social stratification in India, profoundly influencing access to resources, education, employment, and social mobility (Deshpande, 2019). Among the various marginalized groups, **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** have historically faced systemic discrimination, social exclusion, and economic deprivation. This historic marginalization has had long-lasting effects, resulting in persistent gaps in literacy, employment, income, and political participation (Thorat & Newman, 2010). Recognizing the historical injustice, the Indian Constitution provides multiple safeguards to protect the rights and promote the social, educational, and economic empowerment of SC communities. These measures include reservation policies in public education and employment, financial support through scholarships, skill development programs, and economic development interventions via Scheduled Castes Development Corporations (SCDCs) (Government of India, 2019).

Despite these affirmative action programs, the translation of policy into tangible social and economic empowerment remains uneven. Access to benefits, awareness of programs, and socio-cultural barriers continue to limit their effectiveness, particularly in rural regions where caste hierarchies are entrenched and social mobility is constrained (Kumar & Singh, 2020). Urban areas, while offering better access to education and employment opportunities, are not free from discrimination, and subtle forms of exclusion persist, limiting the full empowerment of SC communities (Jeffrey, Jeffery, & Jeffery, 2008). Understanding the differential impact of government schemes in **urban and rural contexts** is therefore essential for a nuanced analysis of SC empowerment. In this regard, the state of **Bihar** provides an ideal case study, given its significant rural population, urban-rural disparities, and historical socio-economic inequalities (Singh, 2021).

KEY CONCEPTS

For clarity, it is necessary to define the central concepts of this study:

- **Empowerment** refers to the process through which marginalized individuals or communities acquire the capacity to make informed choices, exercise agency, and participate fully in social, political, and economic life (Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment is multidimensional, encompassing access to education, economic opportunities, political participation, and freedom from social discrimination (Kabeer: 1999).
- **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** are those social groups identified in the Indian Constitution as historically disadvantaged due to caste-based discrimination, traditionally relegated to lower socio-economic positions within the caste hierarchy (Government of India, 2015).

- **Government schemes** encompass policies and programs implemented at national and state levels designed to mitigate caste-based inequality, including education scholarships, reservation policies, financial aid, and support for self-employment and entrepreneurship through SCDCs (Social Justice & Empowerment Ministry, 2022).

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The marginalization of SCs is deeply rooted in the historical caste system, which institutionalized hierarchy and restricted social mobility. Traditionally, SCs were confined to occupations deemed "menial" or "polluting," excluded from land ownership, and denied access to formal education and political participation. This systemic exclusion created intergenerational cycles of poverty and social disadvantage, the effects of which are still evident today.

Post-independence, the Constitution of India sought to redress these historical injustices by guaranteeing equality, prohibiting caste-based discrimination, and instituting affirmative action policies aimed at promoting the socio-economic development of SCs (Jodhka, 2016). Reservation policies in education and government employment were implemented to increase representation, while welfare programs, scholarships, and economic development schemes were introduced to provide targeted support. The overarching goal has been to transform SCs from marginalized communities into socially and economically empowered participants in modern Indian society (Jodhka: 2016).

Despite these measures, the effectiveness of government schemes is uneven due to structural, administrative, and social barriers. Urban SC communities often have greater access to government programs and formal employment, whereas rural communities, particularly in Bihar, face infrastructural limitations, low literacy, and entrenched social norms that restrict participation (Kumar & Singh, 2020). Understanding these dynamics requires a detailed sociological analysis that integrates both quantitative outcomes and qualitative lived experiences.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES OVERVIEW

The Indian government has implemented several key schemes targeting SC empowerment:

1. **Reservation policies** in education and public employment aim to enhance representation of SCs and provide opportunities historically denied to them.
2. **Educational scholarships** address financial barriers, reduce dropout rates, and support enrollment in higher education institutions.

3. **Economic support and SCDCs** facilitate self-employment, entrepreneurship, and financial inclusion through loans, subsidies, and skill development programs (Govt of India: 2022).

While these interventions have improved access to education and employment, their effectiveness varies geographically and socially. Urban populations generally experience higher program penetration and access, whereas rural populations, particularly in regions like Bihar, face challenges including lack of awareness, administrative hurdles, and social stigma (Jeffrey et al: 2008).

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH GAPS

There is dearth of studies tracing the factors responsible for poor performance of governmental initiatives in actual socio-economic empowerment of the SC community, especially in Bihar. Despite decades of affirmative action and targeted initiatives, SC communities in Bihar continue to experience socio-economic inequalities. The existing literature on the subject inadequately address the issues in the context of rural-urban dichotomy and also examination of ground level reality. A study underlines the acute disparity among SCs vis-à-vis rest of the society and also within the community itself (Singh, 2021). This makes an urgent imperative to evaluate governmental efforts in the context (Singh: 2021)

Literature Review

The empowerment of Scheduled Castes (SCs) through government schemes has been widely discussed in sociological literature, both from theoretical and empirical perspectives. The literature indicates that, despite decades of affirmative action policies and welfare interventions, disparities persist due to structural inequalities, socio-cultural barriers, and uneven implementation of schemes (Thorat & Newman, 2010). This review synthesizes previous research on SC empowerment, examining both theoretical frameworks that underpin the study of social stratification and empirical evidence on the effectiveness of government schemes in India, with a particular emphasis on **urban-rural differences in Bihar**.

CASTE AND EMPOWERMENT

Social Stratification

Social stratification theory provides a foundational framework for understanding caste-based inequality in India. Stratification involves hierarchical arrangements of groups in society, determining access to resources, power, and prestige (Kerbo, 2017). The caste system represents a rigid form of social stratification that assigns individuals to occupational and social roles by birth, perpetuating inequality across

generations. Scholars such as *Dirks (2001) emphasize that caste is not merely a social identity but also an institutionalized structure that enforces social exclusion*. In this context, SC communities have historically occupied the lowest positions in the hierarchy, limiting access to education, employment, land, and political power.

Empowerment Theory

Empowerment theory complements stratification theory by focusing on mechanisms that allow marginalized groups to overcome social and economic constraints. Empowerment involves increasing the capacity of individuals and communities to make choices, exert agency, and participate fully in society (Kabeer, 1999). In the context of SCs, empowerment includes not only economic and educational advancement but also the ability to challenge caste-based discrimination, access political structures, and achieve social mobility. Sen's (1999) concept of development as freedom underscores that empowerment is multidimensional, encompassing both material and social dimensions.[1]

Intersection of Theory and Policy

The integration of social stratification and empowerment theories provides a lens to evaluate government schemes. While stratification theory explains why SCs remain marginalized despite policy interventions, empowerment theory guides the assessment of whether such interventions effectively enhance agency and inclusion (Kabeer, 2005). This dual theoretical framework is essential for understanding the **differential impact of government schemes in urban versus rural areas**, as social structures and access to resources vary significantly between these settings.

Government Schemes for SC Empowerment

India has implemented a variety of schemes targeting SCs, ranging from reservation policies to economic and educational interventions.

Reservation Policies

Reservation policies in education and government employment are the most prominent measures to promote SC inclusion. Thorat and Lee (2010) note that reservations in public sector employment and higher education have significantly increased representation of SCs, although challenges persist in quality of employment and socio-economic mobility. In Bihar, urban areas have shown higher utilization of these opportunities compared to rural regions, where access to higher education and government jobs remains limited (Singh, 2021).

Educational Scholarships and Incentives

Scholarships and financial aid schemes aim to reduce dropout rates and improve enrollment among SC students. Empirical studies suggest that scholarships have increased literacy rates among SC communities, particularly in urban centers with easier access to educational institutions (Jeffrey et al., 2008). However, rural SC students often face additional barriers, including inadequate school infrastructure, long travel distances, and family economic pressures, which reduce the effectiveness of such programs.

Economic Development Programs

SCDCs and other state-led initiatives provide financial support, training, and microcredit to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship among SC households (Social Justice & Empowerment Ministry, 2022). These programs aim to foster economic independence and reduce dependency on government support. Kumar and Singh (2020) highlight that urban beneficiaries often have better outcomes due to greater access to markets and financial literacy, whereas rural populations face challenges in implementation and monitoring.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON SC EMPOWERMENT

Urban Context

Studies in urban contexts indicate that government schemes have improved SC participation in education and formal employment, but social discrimination remains a challenge. Jeffrey et al. (2008) show that while urban SC youth achieve higher educational attainment, they still experience workplace prejudice and limited upward mobility. Singh (2021) reports that urban SC households in Bihar benefit more from economic development programs, due to proximity to administrative centers and better awareness of government initiatives.

Rural Context

In rural areas, SC communities face persistent structural and social barriers. Low literacy, limited awareness of government schemes, entrenched caste hierarchies, and poor infrastructure hinder the effectiveness of interventions (Kumar & Singh, 2020). Rural SC women are particularly disadvantaged, experiencing intersecting social and gender-based discrimination that limits their ability to benefit from government programs. Studies show that while schemes exist on paper, gaps in implementation reduce their tangible impact on empowerment.

Comparative Studies: Urban vs Rural

Comparative studies highlight stark differences in outcomes between urban and rural settings. Singh (2021) finds that urban SC communities in Bihar have greater access to education, higher utilization of scholarships, and better employment outcomes. Conversely, rural SC communities are less aware of schemes, and cultural resistance or caste-based exclusion persists. These findings underscore the importance of analyzing government programs in both contexts to understand disparities in empowerment outcomes.[2]

Research Gaps Identified in Literature

Despite extensive research on SC welfare and empowerment, several gaps remain:

1. **Limited Comparative Studies:** Most research focuses on either urban or rural populations in isolation. Few studies provide a systematic comparison of urban vs rural SC empowerment, particularly in Bihar.
2. **Mixed-Methods Analysis:** Many studies rely solely on quantitative or secondary data. There is a lack of mixed-methods research that integrates **statistical outcomes** with **qualitative insights** from beneficiaries lived experiences.
3. **Longitudinal Impact Assessment:** Few studies evaluate the long-term impact of government schemes on empowerment and social mobility, making it difficult to assess policy effectiveness over time.
4. **Intersectional Analysis:** Limited attention has been given to how gender, caste, and location interact to affect empowerment outcomes, particularly for SC women in rural Bihar.

Justification for Current Study

The present study addresses these research gaps by employing a **mixed-methods approach**, integrating quantitative indicators such as literacy, employment, and income with qualitative insights from interviews and surveys. By focusing on **urban and rural contexts in Bihar**, it provides nuanced analysis of the differential effectiveness of government schemes. The study contributes both to theory, by testing the applicability of social stratification and empowerment frameworks, and to practice, by offering evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and development agencies.

METHODOLOGY

In the present study, the focus is on examining the **effectiveness of government schemes in empowering Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Bihar**, comparing **urban and rural contexts**. A **mixed-methods approach** is adopted to integrate quantitative

data (statistical outcomes such as education, employment, income) with qualitative insights (perceptions, experiences, and barriers to empowerment). This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of both **policy impact** and **social realities** (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

A **convergent parallel mixed-methods design** is employed, where **quantitative and qualitative data** are collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and then merged for interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design enables triangulation of findings, increasing **validity** and **robustness**.

- **Quantitative component**: Measures tangible outcomes of government schemes (education enrollment, employment status, income levels).
- **Qualitative component**: Explores perceptions, social barriers, and experiences of SC beneficiaries, providing context and depth to numerical findings.

STUDIED AREA

The study is conducted in the state of **Bihar**, India, which has:

- A high proportion of SC population (approximately 16% of total population)
- Significant urban-rural disparities in literacy, employment, and social infrastructure (Government of India, 2019)
- A range of government schemes targeting SCs at both state and national levels

Two sites are selected:

1. **Urban area:** Patna (capital city, high access to education, government offices, and markets)
2. **Rural area:** Nalanda district (representative of typical rural challenges including low literacy, poor infrastructure, and strong traditional caste hierarchies)

This selection allows **comparative analysis** of scheme effectiveness in contrasting socio-economic settings.

POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The target population consists of **Scheduled Caste households** that are eligible beneficiaries of government schemes in Bihar.

A stratified **sampling approach** is employed:

1. **Stage 1 – Area selection:** Urban (Patna) and rural (Nalanda) areas are purposively selected.
2. **Stage 2 – Household selection:** Stratified random sampling is used to select SC households, ensuring representation across gender, age, and socio-economic status.

3. **Stage 3 – Respondent selection:** Within households, adult members (18 years and above) are chosen for interviews or surveys.

A **sample size was 400 households** (200 urban, 200 rural)

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Survey instrument: A structured schedule was designed to collect information on:

- Educational attainment of SC members
- Employment and income levels
- Awareness and utilization of government schemes
- Perceived social mobility and empowerment

Face-to-face interviews conducted by trained field researchers to ensure accuracy and overcome literacy barriers

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

- **Semi-structured schedules:** Conducted with 40 respondants (20 urban, 20 rural) to explore:
  - ❖ Personal experiences with government schemes
  - ❖ Social barriers and discrimination encountered
  - ❖ Perceptions of empowerment and agency
- **Focus group discussions (FGDs):** 4 groups (2 urban, 2 rural) with community leaders and beneficiaries to understand collective experiences and challenges

INTEGRATION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

Quantitative results are interpreted in light of qualitative insights to provide **holistic understanding** of empowerment outcomes. This approach ensures both **numerical rigor** and **contextual depth**.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Informed consent obtained from all participants
- Anonymity and confidentiality ensured
- Ethical clearance obtained from institutional review board
- Participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time

These measures ensure adherence to international ethical standards in social research (Israel & Hay, 2006).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- **Time and resource constraints** limited the study to two districts; generalization beyond Bihar may require caution
- **Self-reported data** may be affected by recall bias or social desirability bias
- Access to some rural areas was restricted due to infrastructure challenges

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and interprets the findings of the study on the **effectiveness of government schemes in empowering Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Bihar**, with a comparative focus on urban (Patna) and rural (Nalanda) populations. Using a **mixed-methods approach**, the quantitative data provide measurable outcomes on education, employment, income, and scheme utilization, while qualitative data offer insights into the lived experiences, perceptions, and social barriers influencing empowerment. The discussion integrates these findings with the theoretical frameworks of **social stratification** and **empowerment theory** (Kerbo, 2017; Kabeer, 1999).

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Demographic Profile

Among 400 surveyed households (200 urban, 200 rural):

- **Gender distribution:** 52% male, 48% female
- **Average household size:** Urban – 5.1 members; Rural – 5.7 members
- **Literacy rates:** Urban SC members – 81%; Rural SC members – 56%
- **Employment patterns:** Urban – 42% in formal employment; Rural – 18% in formal employment

These demographic trends indicate significant disparities between urban and rural SC populations in Bihar, particularly in literacy and formal employment.

Awareness and Utilization of Government Schemes

- **Educational scholarships:** Urban – 78% aware, 63% utilized; Rural – 52% aware, 37% utilized
- **Economic development programs (SCDCs, self-employment loans):** Urban – 68% awareness, 49% utilization; Rural – 41% awareness, 22% utilization
- **Reservation in government jobs:** Urban – 81% aware, 36% employed in reserved positions; Rural – 53% aware, 14% employed

Observation: Urban SC households benefit more from government schemes due to better access, administrative infrastructure, and information dissemination.[3]

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Urban Perspectives

Semi-structured interviews in Patna revealed:

- **Increased educational and employment opportunities** as a direct result of scholarships and reservations
- **Challenges in workplace inclusion:** Despite formal employment, participants reported subtle discrimination and social bias
- **Perceptions of empowerment:** Urban SC youth feel greater agency in pursuing education and careers but continue to face social constraints

Theme 1 – Opportunity vs Social Constraints: Government schemes improve tangible opportunities, yet social stigma persists.

Rural Perspectives

FGDs and interviews in Nalanda highlighted:

- **Limited awareness of schemes**, especially among older adults
- **Social and cultural barriers:** Traditional caste hierarchies restrict participation in local governance, education, and market access
- **Gendered challenges:** SC women face additional barriers in accessing scholarships and loans due to familial and societal restrictions

Theme 2 – Structural and Cultural Barriers: Even where schemes exist, entrenched social norms limit empowerment outcomes.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: URBAN VS RURAL

Indicator	*Urban SCs*	*Rural SCs*	*Key Observation*
Literacy Rate	81%	56%	Urban SCs have higher literacy, facilitating scheme utilization
Employment in Formal Sector	42%	18%	Urban SCs benefit more from reservation policies
Awareness of Scholarships	78%	52%	Information access is critical for empowerment
Utilization of Economic Schemes	49%	22%	Rural barriers include infrastructure, knowledge, and bureaucracy

KEY FINDINGS

The study examined the effectiveness of government schemes in empowering Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Bihar, comparing urban (Patna) and rural (Nalanda) populations. Major findings include:

Disparities in Literacy and Education

- Urban SCs: 81% literacy; Rural SCs: 56% literacy
- Scholarships and educational schemes are better utilized in urban areas, improving access to higher education and employment opportunities.
- Rural SC children face challenges including school distance, poor infrastructure, and familial economic pressure.

Employment and Economic Empowerment

- Urban SCs: 42% in formal employment; Rural SCs: 18% in formal employment
- Reservation policies have greater impact in urban areas due to proximity to administrative centers and better awareness.
- Rural SCs depend heavily on informal labor and face barriers in accessing self-employment programs, microloans, and entrepreneurship support.

Awareness and Utilization of Government Schemes

- Awareness levels: Urban SCs – 78–81%; Rural SCs – 41–53%
- Utilization: Urban SCs – 49–63%; Rural SCs – 22–37%
- Awareness is a key determinant of participation and empowerment.

Social and Cultural Barriers

- Urban SCs experience subtle workplace discrimination but benefit from infrastructure and social networks.
- Rural SCs face entrenched caste hierarchies, social exclusion, and gender-based barriers, particularly affecting SC women.

Agency and Perceptions of Empowerment

- Urban SCs perceive higher agency, confidence in pursuing education and employment, and greater participation in social decision-making.
- Rural SCs report limited agency due to structural, cultural, and informational barriers.[4]

Interpretation: Urban SCs generally experience better empowerment outcomes due to infrastructure, administrative access, and higher literacy, whereas rural

SCs remain disadvantaged due to structural, cultural, and informational barriers (Kumar & Singh, 2020; Singh, 2021). G**eographical access and social capital** play a critical role in scheme effectiveness.[5]

SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings highlight the persistent impact of social stratification on SC empowerment: **Urban Advantage** :Urban SC populations leverage literacy, awareness, and social capital to benefit more from government interventions. This situation is in congruence with empowerment theory, showing that access to resources and agency are necessary for meaningful empowerment (Kabeer, 1999). **Rural Disadvantage** : Structural barriers (infrastructure, limited access to institutions) and cultural barriers (caste hierarchy, patriarchal norms) reduce rural SCs' ability to utilize schemes effectively. Social stratification theory explains why rural SCs remain marginalized despite policy interventions (Kerbo, 2017). **Gendered Disparities**: SC women in rural areas face compounded disadvantages due to intersectionality of caste and gender, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive approaches in policy design.

LINKING FINDINGS WITH THEORY

Findings demonstrate that caste hierarchies continue to limit rural SC empowerment despite formal policies. Social stratification theory explains why structural inequality persists: rural SCs are excluded from social networks, markets, and political power, which impedes access to government schemes (Kerbo, 2017). Urban SCs exhibit comparatively a bit higher level in education and employment, consistent with emphasis on resources, agency, and achievements in empowerment theory(Kabeer, 1999). However, rural SCs, particularly women, face intersecting barriers that reduce the conversion of resources into empowerment. This supports Kabeer's assertion that empowerment is multidimensional and contingent on social and cultural contexts. These findings reinforce the need for evidence-based policy interventions r both social structures and empowerment outcomes.

SUMMARY

- Urban SCs in Bihar benefit more from government schemes due to higher literacy, access, and awareness.
- Rural SCs face persistent structural, cultural, and gender-based barriers, limiting empowerment.
- Mixed-methods findings underscore the importance of combining quantitative outcomes with qualitative insights to assess the real-world effectiveness of government interventions.

- The study supports theoretical frameworks linking social stratification and empowerment, confirming that resources alone are insufficient without agency and social inclusion.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that while government schemes have **contributed to SC empowerment**, significant disparities remain:

- Urban SCs show higher utilization, literacy, employment, and agency
- Rural SCs, particularly women, face structural, cultural, and informational barriers that limit scheme effectiveness

The research confirms that **resources alone do not ensure empowerment**. Meaningful empowerment requires:

- Awareness and access to schemes
- Social and institutional support
- Agency and the ability to make choices

Integrating **social stratification theory** with **empowerment theory** provides a robust framework for understanding these disparities and designing more effective interventions. **contextualized interventions**[6], sensitive to urban-rural differences and intersectional vulnerabilities, are essential for equitable empowerment outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation: Needs to strengthen rural infrastructure and service delivery and simplify application processes for schemes to reduce bureaucratic hurdles

Awareness and Education: using local languages and media for awareness campaigns and encourage digital literacy to facilitate beneficiaries to access online the government programs are required. Besides, there is need of ensuring scholarships and employment programs for SC girls and women effectively

Monitoring and Feedback: In view of lack of feedback mechanism, it is suggested to develop feedback mechanism for beneficiaries and to conduct regular audits of the mechanism.

Research and Data: In view of lack of consistent data base, it is suggestible to encourage researches to create database and MIS on the situation of SC girls and women.

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ENDNOTES

1 Empowerment, as conceptualized by Kabeer (1999) and Sen (1999), emphasizes both material access and agency, highlighting the multidimensional nature of developmen

2 Rural SC communities in Bihar often depend on informal credit networks and local caste councils, which affect their participation in government schemes (Kumar & Singh, 2020; Singh, 2021)

3 Awareness of government schemes is a critical predictor of utilization; studies show that households informed about scholarships and loans are more likely to access them (Thorat & Newman, 2010).

4 SC women in rural Bihar face compounded disadvantages due to intersectional barriers, including caste discrimination, limited mobility, and familial restrictions (Thorat & Newman, 2010).

5 Geographic access, including proximity to administrative offices, schools, and markets, significantly influences scheme effectiveness, particularly in rural SC communities (Kumar & Singh, 2020).

6 Contextualized interventions that account for local socio-cultural realities are more effective in ensuring equitable empowerment, especially in rural areas (Kumar & Singh, 2020; Singh, 2021)

BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL MECHANISM UNDER THE NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT, 2013: AN ASSESSMENT OF ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Savita*

Abstract

Though public distribution system (PDS) has a long history in India, but it became more significant with the introduction of the idea of food security as a citizen-centric food administration. The redressal of grievances of consumers, especially from weaker sections of our society, becomes more important for the goal of assured food security under the law. This makes an urgent imperative to assess the effectiveness of grievance redressal mechanism in this part of the country. With this view in mind the present paper intends to examine the opinion of the PDS consumers regarding effectiveness of the grievance redressal mechanism. For which a survey of consumers on the issue was conducted in Pachkula district of Haryana and sampled beneficiaries (60 rural and urban respondents) were surveyed with the help of questionnaire. The secondary sources of data collection were also used in order to enrich the study. Thus the major objective of the study is to assess the experiences of beneficiaries and the effectiveness of grievance redressal mechanisms and to identifying areas for improving service delivery and ensuring equitable access to essential commodities. Our study results indicate that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the PDS, low rate of grievance filing and lack of awareness among the beneficiaries. Thus, it suggests that this is high time to go for structural reforms in order to build a more accessible, responsive, and citizen-centric grievance redressal framework under NFSA, 2013.

Keywords: Grievance Redressal Mechanism, PDS, NFSA, Filing of Grievances, Consumers' Satisfaction, Panchkula, Haryana

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INTRODUCTION

One of the basic duties of the state is to ensure food security to its people. In India the matter of 'Food Security' has long been a subject of government attention and originated in during World War II in 1939. It has grown with policy improvements and technology over the years. The Target Public Distribution System (TPDS) began in 1997, targeting beneficiaries based on income *(Gupte & Doctor, 2021)*. The National Food Security Act (NFSA) was enacted on 2013, represents a fundamental shift in the approach of food security, moving away from a 'Welfare-Based Approach' to emphasize the 'Right to Food' security (*DFPD, Government of India, 2023)*. NFSA is a remarkable social protection initiative in the history of global welfare as it ensures food security to over 800 million individuals through the public distribution system *(Dreze, et.al, 2019)*. NFSA covers 67 percent of India's population, which includes 75 percent of the rural population, and 50 percent of the urban population, are eligible for foodgrains at highly subsidized rates of Rs.3, Rs.2, and Re.1 per kg of wheat, rice, and millets, respectively, via TPDS *(Bhattacharya, et. al., 2017)*. The Central Government has decided to continue providing free food grains to AAY households and PHH beneficiaries under the NFSA for five years from 1st January 2024. The scheme, fully funded by the Central Government, involves an estimated financial outlay of ₹11.80 lakh crore.As of October 2025, 78.90 crore beneficiaries are receiving free of cost foodgrains under the Act (www.pib.gov.in).

The implementation of PDS in Haryana has yielded significant improvements in both coverage area and size, thus contributing to the attainment of Food and Nutrition Security (FNS). Specifically, the system has successfully extended its reach to a total of 15 lakh ration card holders, with the valuable assistance of 1518 FPSs *(Devi & Siwach, 2023)*. Further, the State government implemented various reforms in PDS over the time. Thus, Haryana became the first state in India to implement NFSA, 2013 on 20th August, 2013 which aims to ensure people's food and nutrition security by assuring access to a sufficient quantity of high-quality food at reasonable prices *(Bhattacharya, et al., 2017)*. The state government implemented "End-to-End computerization" scheme to manage online ration cards, allocation, and supply chain management for ration distribution through AePDS. Currently, Haryana is providing food grain to 26,94,346 NFSA ration cards holders through 9,530 FPSs. The State government also provides online Grievance Redressal Mechanism (GRM) for smooth and effective execution of NFSA *(DFS, Government of Haryana, 2023)*. The state government is directed to establish a strong grievance redressal process by the National Food Security Act of 2013 and PDS control directives since 2001. It is crucial to have a functional grievance redress procedure in order to increase system accountability and openness. The establishment of state food commissions, district grievance redressal officers, nodal officers, and a helpline

number are all examples of how the Haryana State Food Security Rules of 2017 place a high priority on grievance redressal *(Sharma& Patro, 2019).*This research investigates beneficiary experiences and the effectiveness of grievance redressal mechanism in the public distribution system in Panchkula district of Haryana, emphasizing the role of monitoring bodies (vigilance committees at different levels) in enhancing service delivery. The objective of this study is to assess **the experiences of beneficiaries and the effectiveness of grievance redressal mechanism in the public distribution system within Panchkula district of Haryana, with the aim of identifying** areas for improving service delivery and ensuring equitable access to essential commodities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

i. To assess the problem faced by the beneficiaries regarding the distribution of food grains under NFSA, 2013.
ii. To assess the awareness of grievance redressal mechanism among beneficiaries in the **Panchkula district** of Haryana.
iii. To assess the effectiveness of functioning of the grievance redressal mechanism

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs both primary and secondary data to investigate beneficiary experiences and grievance redressal mechanism in public distribution system in Panchkula district of Haryana state. Primary data were collected from 60 respondents residing in rural and urban areas through a structured questionnaire, focusing on their public distribution experiences and awareness of grievance redressal mechanism. The structured questionnaire covers four thematic areas: (i) Socio-demographic profile, (ii) Problems under NFSA/PDS, (iii) Awareness of GRM, and (iv) Grievance filing experience and satisfaction. Secondary data were collected from government reports, research articles to provide contextual insights. Descriptive statistics including frequency distribution and percentages were used to assess quantitative data. The tables, charts and graphs (bar and pie charts) were employed for visual depiction. Google Sheets, Microsoft Excel and Google Doc were used for the analysis of the data.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The Panchkula district provides an indicative representation of both urban and semi-rural populations. A systematic analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of beneficiaries is essential for understanding the implementation and functioning of the grievance redressal mechanism under the National Food Security Act, 2013.

Parameters	Percentage
Rural-Urban Distribution	
Rural	60%
Urban	40%
Household Members	
0-2	3.3%
3-5	73.3%
6-8	20%
9-11	1.7%
More than 11	1.7%
Type of Household/Ration Card	
Primary Household/PHH	90%
Antyodaya Anna Yojana /AAY	10%
Education Qualification	
Literate	70%
Illiterate	30%
Primary Level	39%
Secondary Level	51%
Senior -Secondary Level	6%
Graduation Level	2%
Post Graduation Level	2%
Income (Per Month)	
Less than 5000	26.7%
5001-10000	45%
10001-20000	26.7%
Above 20000	1.6%
Availing Free Ration Under NFSA	
Yes	96.7%
Availed Earlier	2.3%

Figure 1: Socio-Demographic Profile

Source: Field Survey (2025).

Rural-Urban Distribution

Out of the 60 respondents, 60 percent were from urban areas and 40 percent from rural areas. This distribution is significant, as urban and rural beneficiaries differ in their assess to grievance redressal mechanism (GRM) channels, literacy levels, and digital literacy. These factors, in turn, influence their grievance filing behaviour.

Household Size and Income

A significant majority of households (73.3 percent) had 3–5 members, while 20 percent had 6–8 members. In terms of monthly income, 45 percent of households earned between Rs. 5,001 and Rs. 10,000, placing them in the economically vulnerable category. Another 26.7 percent earned below Rs. 5,000 per month, reinforcing their dependence on subsidized food grains under NFSA.

Literacy and Education

While 70 percent of respondents reported being literate, the educational attainment of household heads reflects a skewed distribution. A dominant 51 percent had completed senior secondary education, and 38.8 percent had graduated. The relatively high literacy rate did not necessarily translate into awareness of GRM channels, suggesting systemic information gaps that transcend education levels.

Ration Card Type and Availing Ration under NFSA, 2013

An overwhelming 90 percent of surveyed households possessed Priority Household (PHH) ration cards, while 10 percent held AAY cards. Majority of households (96.7 Percent) reported currently availing benefits under NFSA, 2013, confirming the relevance of the sample for assessing PDS-related grievances.

Assessment of Problem Faced by Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries reported a range of problems in accessing their entitled food grains. The survey assessed four key dimensions: quality of food grains, weighment accuracy, delivery delays, and Aadhaar authentication issues.

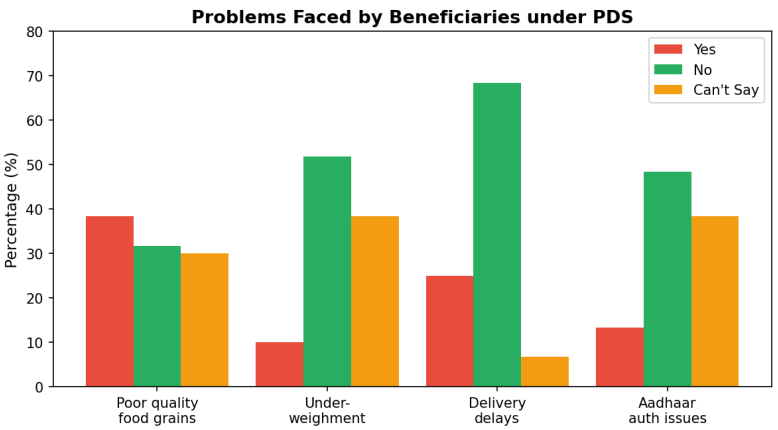


Figure 2: Assessment of Problems faced by Beneficiaries under PDS

Source: Field Survey (2025).

KEY FINDINGS IN THIS SECTION ARE AS FOLLOWS

- Poor quality or adulterated food grains: While 30 percent of respondents were unsure, 38.3 percent of respondents said they have encountered this issue, suggesting that underreporting may have resulted from ignorance.
- Under-weighment of commodities: Only 10 percent said they had encountered this problem in the previous year, but 38.3 percent selected 'Can't Say', indicating a poor ability to determine precise weights.
- Delays in receiving food grains: A comparatively favourable conclusion was that 25 percent of respondents said they experienced delivery delays from the Fair Price Shop (FPS), whilst 68.3 percent did not.
- Aadhaar authentication problems: Although the amount is small, 13.3 percent of respondents said they had authentication-related issues, which might pose serious access challenges for impacted households.
- Changes in quantity/quality over time: Notably, 61.7 percent of respondents said that food grain amount or quality was the same, compared to 21.7 percent who said it decreased and 8.3 percent who said it significantly decreased.
- Overall PDS-related problems: The systemic nature of implementation inadequacies is highlighted by the fact that 56.7 percent of respondents said they have encountered issues with food grain distribution or PDS services.

AWARENESS OF GRM UNDER NFSA, 2013

The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013's Grievance Redressal Mechanism is examined in this part to see how well-informed beneficiaries are. In order to assess respondents' self-reported awareness in various types of domains, from basic understanding of the Act's provisions to practical understanding of institutional actors and complaint filing processes, a main survey was conducted.

Awareness Topic	Very Aware	Aware	Neutral	Unaware	Very Unaware	To-tal
1. Awareness of NFSA, 2013 and its provisions	6	3	23	19	9	60
2. Awareness of Grievance Redressal Mechanism	2	17	9	22	10	60
3. Awareness of different channels to file griev-ances	3	4	13	25	15	60
4. Awareness of the FPS level vigilance com-mittee	3	6	5	25	21	60
5. Awareness of member of Vigilance committee	4	0	8	27	21	60
6. Awareness of functions of Vigilance Com-mittee	2	4	7	26	21	60
7. Awareness of District Grievance Officer	3	5	6	28	18	60
8. Awareness of the Process to file grievances	2	5	8	26	19	60
Column Total	25	44	79	198	134	480

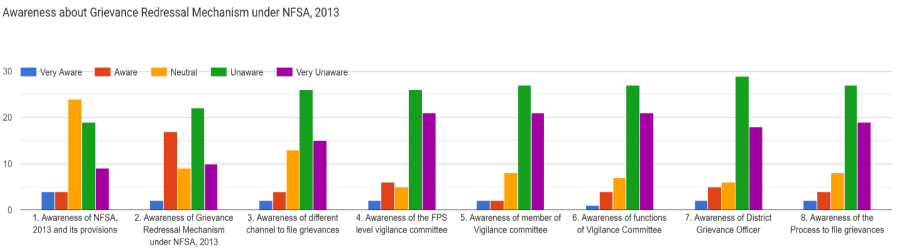


Figure 3: Awareness level about Grievance Redressal Mechanism under NFSA 2013

Source: Field survey (2025)

The distribution of respondents' awareness scores for each of the eight dimensions is shown in Figure No. 3. The data consistently shows that the "Unaware" and "Very Unaware" categories predominate across all awareness aspects. While the combined "Aware" and "Very Aware" categories account for less than 10 responses on average, the combined number of respondents falling into these two categories is roughly 44 per dimension. This striking disparity draws attention to the substantial and systematic knowledge gap that exists among beneficiaries. The pattern indicates that the lack of knowledge is systemic and widespread throughout all facets of the grievance redressal mechanism rather than being limited to particular elements.

GRIEVANCE FILING PROCESS AND TIMELINESS

Grievance Filing Rates: Significantly, 88.3 percnt of respondents said they have never complained about NFSA or PDS services. A shocking 93.1 percent of the small percentage (11.7 percent) who had filed complaints had only done so once. Despite the fact that 56.7 percent of respondents admitted to having problems with PDS services, there is a noticeably low percentage of complaints filing. The discrepancy between the high frequency of issues and the low utilisation of official grievance redressal procedures reveals a serious lack of knowledge, accessibility, or confidence in the system.

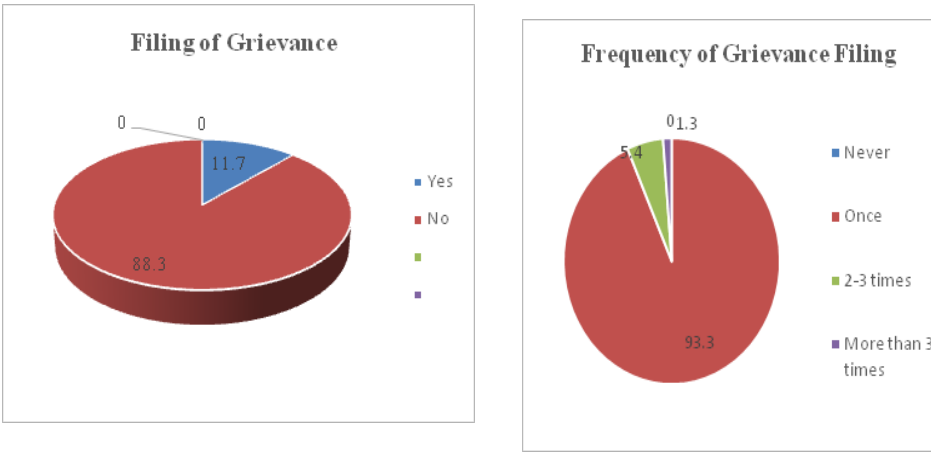


Figure 4: Filing of Grievances and number of grievances filed

Source: Field Survey (2025).

Channels Used for Grievance Filing: In-person visits to the Fair Price Shop accounted for 66.7 percent of the grievance-filing small subset, with helpline or toll-free lines coming in second at 25 percent and online portals at 8.3 percent. Low digital adoption for GRM is indicated by the fact that none of the respondents used a mobile application.This channel distribution reflects beneficiaries' low internet access and digital literacy, which are obstacles that must be removed for any technology-driven GRM to be successful, as well as their trust in in-person interactions.

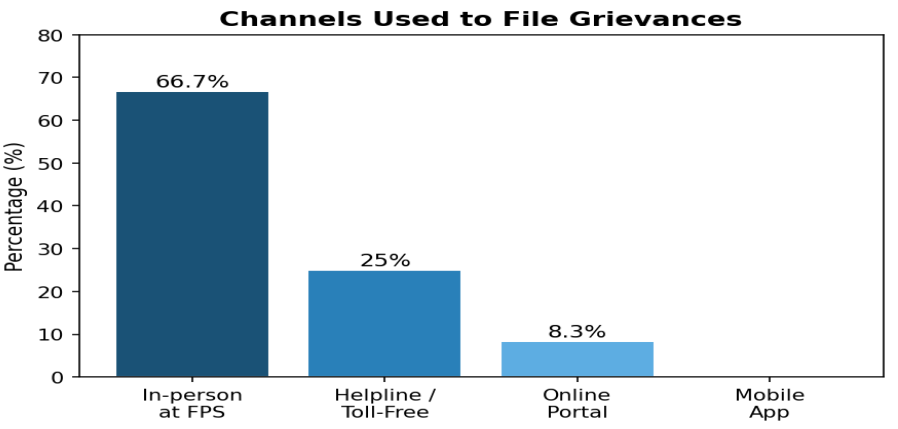


Figure 5: Channels used to file Grievances

Source: Field Survey (2025).

Response and Resolution Time: Only 9.1 percent of respondents who had submitted grievances said they had been waiting more than two weeks, compared to an overwhelming 90.9 percent who said they had received no response. Seventy-five percent of the respondents said that their problems were still unresolved. Just 8.3 percent of respondents said their complaints were successfully resolved in one to two weeks, and 16.7 percent said they were fixed in less than a week. These results show a very high percentage of outstanding complaints and indicate major inefficiencies in the grievance redressal process.

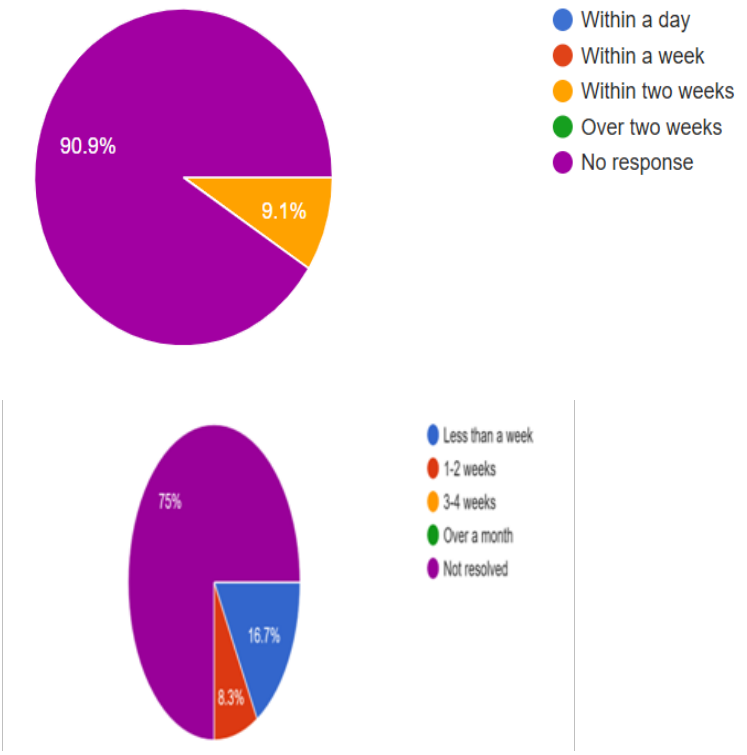


Figure 6: Receiving First Response and timeline for resolution of Complaints

Source: Field Survey (2025).

SATISFACTION AND PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF GRM

Access to GRM: The Grievance Redressal Mechanism (GRM) was assessed as "Neutral" by the majority of survey participants (64.3 perc) who had some experience with it. By comparison, only 7.1 percent of respondents said it was "Very Easy," while only 14.3 percent said it was "Very Difficult." These results demonstrate

the existence of important structural obstacles that prevent beneficiaries from efficiently interacting with the grievance redressal system and impede accessibility.

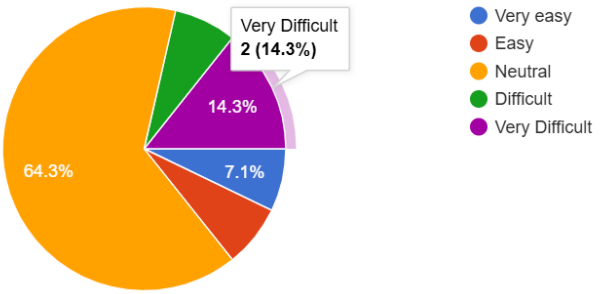


Figure 7: Accessibility of Grievance Redressal Mechanism (GRM)

Source: Field survey (2025).

Common Challenges faced while accessing Grievance Redressal Mechanism: The purpose of the survey was to find out what obstacles respondents had to overcome in order to use the Grievance Redressal Mechanism (GRM). Respondents could choose more than one obstacle. Lack of awareness was the most often mentioned obstacle, according to a resounding 96.3 percent of respondents. Low levels of digital literacy (11.1 percent), complicated and drawn-out procedures (13 percent), and a lack of internet facilities (13 percent) came next. Furthermore, 9.3 percent of respondents expressed worries about things like fear of reprisals and response delays. These results highlight the various obstacles that prevent people from effectively using the grievance redressal mechanism. Since most recipients are still uninformed that the grievance redressal system exists, this data reveals a basic deficit in government outreach and communication.

Challenge	*Responses*	*% of Respondents*
Lack of awareness of GRM	52	96.3%
Lack of Internet Facilities	7	13%
Complex and lengthy grievance procedures	6	11.1%
Delays in receiving a response	5	9.3%
Fear of retaliation for filing	5	9.3%
Language barriers	3	5.6%
Poor digital literacy for online filing	3	5.6%
Limited physical access to offices	1	1.9%
Non-functioning of Government portals	1	1.9%

Figure 8: Common Challenges faced while accessing GRM

Source: Field survey (2025)

Effectiveness of Grievance Redressal Mechanism: Respondents were asked to evaluate the Grievance Redressal Mechanism's (GRM) overall performance under the NFSA, 2013 in the final question. The method was scored as "Neutral" by a resounding majority (66.7 percent), indicating little engagement and a general lack of interest among respondents. The remaining responses were split equally, with 11.1 percent giving the GRM ratings of "Ineffective," "Effective," and "Very Effective." The results show that the GRM has produced at least some results.

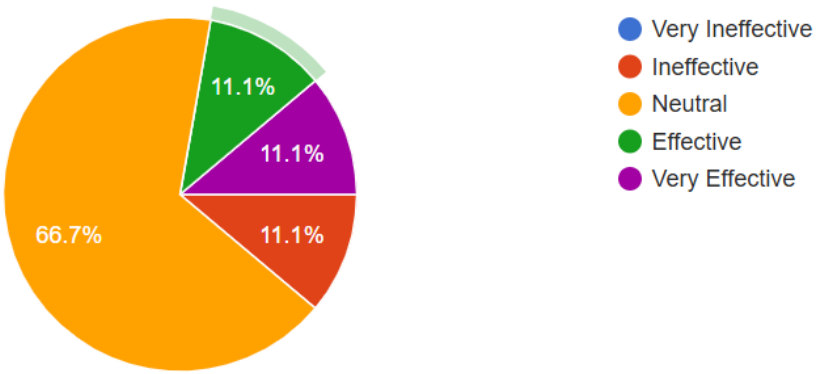


Figure 9: Effectiveness of Grievance Redressal Mechanism

Source: Field survey (2025).

POLICY SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION AND POLICY

The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 can be implemented using a number of strategic approaches to enhance the grievance redressal system and beneficiary experience. First, beneficiaries need to be made aware of their rights under the NFSA, how to file a complaint, and how designated redressal agencies operate. These advertisements must to be tailored to the local context and use language and media that are simple to comprehend. Second, in order to guarantee inclusion, particularly among rural communities, the grievance filing procedure should be made simpler. To lessen access barriers, this includes offering both online and offline complaint options, as well as forms and assistance in regional languages. Third, it's imperative to address complaints promptly.

Moreover, boosting public confidence in the redressal procedure is essential. This can be achieved by making the process more transparent; providing regular updates to complainants regarding the status of their complaints promotes trust in institutional mechanisms. Lastly, putting in place community-based monitoring systems can significantly increase beneficiary participation and openness. A more

inclusive system can be established by including local stakeholders in grievance redressal and Public Distribution System (PDS) monitoring, conducting third-party audits, and making complaint data publicly available. When combined, these actions can improve the effectiveness, responsiveness, and equity of the NFSA's implementation.

Without an efficient grievance redressal procedure, the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 cannot be implemented successfully. Redressal methods are less effective overall since many people are still unaware of their rights and how to file a complaint. The data indicates that there is little engagement with Vigilance Committees (VCs), indicating serious deficiencies in instruction, knowledge, and functional authority. The committees find it more challenging to fulfil their intended monitoring role as a result of these flaws. As a result, their limited impact diminishes attempts to settle complaints and draws attention to a structural disconnect between local policy execution and its requirements.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM ON CLIMATE CHANGE: A STUDY OF ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION

Ajitha S.*

Abstract

Climate change is the uttermost exigent matter forming a global agenda in recent decades. Consequently, we must find effective ways to both adapt to and mitigate its myriad negative impacts. Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) have long been recognized as valuable sources of information, skills, and wisdom, particularly when it comes to a comprehensive understanding of the importance of maintaining a pristine natural world for effective biodiversity conservation. Perennially drought-prone regions in the world like South Asia, the Sahel in Africa and Central Chile Megadrought in South America have survived drought traced back several decades ago. by relying onestablished indigenous strategies to withstand drought. Ideally, to a great extent, they have held on to Agroecology which is a traditional farming practice embedded in IKS. Agroecology exhibits the capability to reduce vulnerability reinforce Climate Change mitigation and adaptability and above all overcome food challenges in a society characterized by diminishing arable land base. The study draws upon a systematic literature review of 119 peer-reviewed articles published over the last 16 years to analyze the trend and correlation of the variables. The study recommends recognition and utilization of IKS to conserve biodiversity and subdue food scarcity by way of agroecology. Further, it suggests the integration of IKS and Western Science for enhanced mitigation and adaptation.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS), Climate Change, Mitigation, Adaptation, Agroecology.

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change impact is increasingly a complex issue globally, despite international efforts to address it, leading to greater vulnerability compounded by reduced adaptive capacity for developing countries (Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2019). It is characterized by a proliferation of re-emitted heat emanating from the Green House Gas (GHG) emissions causing carbon pool in the atmosphere. Continued inertia of the earth systems prompts anticipation of rising sea levels and perennial global warming (Nyong et al., 2007). Perceptions from Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) offer valuable contributions to climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. IKS refers to a complex set of knowledge, information, expertise, skills, practices, values, and representations that guide human interactions with the natural world (Ford et al., 2020). This includes rain-fed agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, and foraging. Indigenous knowledge can help people adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change (Derbile, 2013). For example, Indigenous practices like organic mulching, land fallowing and zero tillage can strengthen soil fertility hence higher yields (Awais, 2012; Ebhuoma & Simatele, 2019). Forest management and controlled burning can help reduce the severity of wildfires and promote ecosystem resilience (Altieri et al., 2012; Charles et al., 2013).

Global warming is such a huge extraordinary environmental catastrophe on the international scene (Makondo & Thomas, 2018). Its conspicuous myriad negative effects are not only detrimental to the ecosystem but also to the economy and the communities at large. The developing world is more vulnerable to climate change impacts due to its dependence on rain-fed agriculture and other climate-sensitive sectors (Mbah et al., 2021). Agriculture is largely the backbone of third-world countries' economies with small-scale farming as the primary economic activity (Fitchett & Ebhuoma, 2018).

Third world represents countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and is characterized by prolonged drought, floods and cyclones respectively occasioned by climate change concerns prompting adjustments accordingly (Altieri et al., 2012; Nyong et al., 2007; David-Chavez & Gavin, 2018; Derbile, 2013; Wu et al., 2015; and Mbah et al., 2021). Studies reveal that in recent times, there has been shrinkage in precipitation in these regions with Africa having experienced extreme drought that exceeded the meteorological predictions. In the third world, incorporating mitigation and adaptation strategies into matters of climate change is not entirely a novel concept as they have experienced frequent disasters dating back to over 1000 years ago (Nyong et al., 2007). Based on the World Development Report (2022) rubric the foundation of sustainable development is knowledge which implies that intellectual capital is critical before financial capital. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that the local knowledge mostly utilized by the indigenous people largely domiciled in third-world countries needs to be acknowledged. It is this kind of

priceless knowledge (Charles et al., 2013; Maldonado et al., 2016) that has enabled them to maneuver the harsh climatic conditions besides other environmental setbacks over the years a daunting situation that monetary capacity alone could not have salvaged.

From the Darwinian, sociologists, and anthropologists' perspectives, over the years communities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have survived adverse climate change effects, a surge in demography notwithstanding (Nyong et al., 2007; Ndlovu & Mjimba, 2021). The Continued existence of people in these regions gives evidence that they exhibit indigenous processes and tactics to deal with severe catastrophe. Clearly, they have devised an indigenous master plan to enable them to endure adversity. Such Indigenous Knowledge that has aided in the survival of people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America for decades meets the threshold of being a valuable insight that can be drawn for dealing with current and future climate disasters and thus be replicated in other regions.

This article explores IKS strategies, such as agroecology, that indigenous people in the third world have integrated to reduce their vulnerability to climate change challenges. A capricious climate necessitates certain essential information with which people affected by its effects can make prudent and logical decisions and hence devise pragmatic coping mechanisms.

METHODOLOGY

This article employed a systematic literature review of 119 articles that were retrieved from Scopus database. 16 articles derived from Web of Science were compared with the 119 articles to avoid redundancy. Scopus was chosen because it has a wide spectrum of disciplines that can reinforce the comprehension ofIKS and Agroecologyphenomena. The focus was mainly peer-reviewed articles over the span of 16 years from 2007 to 2023. Data set criteria was basically filtered to the English language to avoid translation which could lead to distortion of pertinent indigenous perspectives. Of the 119 articles reviewed 91 were from Africa, Asia, and South America which justifies the increase in utilization of IKS in third world countries. Research in relation to IKS and climate change between 2007 and 2015 was intermittent. From 2016 onwards there was an exponential rise in publication with over 80 articles being published in between. More than 20 articles were published within the year 2023 alone. The description insinuates that previously the role of IKS in climate change issues was reluctantly acknowledged. With publications recently mushrooming is adequate evidence that global problems are exacerbated by climate change hence the need to revert to indigenous ways to address the menace since the situation is getting steadily worse.

OVERVIEW OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

IKSs have long played a crucial role in understanding and adapting to environmental changes (Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2019; Adaawen, 2021; David-Chavez & Gavin, 2018). Throughout history, Indigenous people have developed subtle and intricate knowledge systems that have helped them adapt to changing weather patterns, ecosystems, and natural disasters (Mugambiwa, 2018). They exhibit phenological cues that enable them promptly to trigger a response when need be (Fitchett & Ebhuoma, 2018). This knowledge has been used to inform their agricultural practices, resource management, and community resilience.

Indigenous knowledge of climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies holds valuable insights that have been honed and passed down through generations (Nyong et al., 2007). The impact of indigenous knowledge on climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies has never been more significant considering the current climate change crisis (Charles et al., 2013). Indigenous communities have demonstrated the effectiveness of their traditional practices in mitigating the impacts of climate change (David-Chavez & Gavin, 2018). They exhibit unique perspectives and approaches that can aid in addressing the complex challenges posed by a changing climate (Ndlovu & Mjimba, 2021). This includes sustainable land management techniques, traditional seed selection, and the use of indigenous plants for medicinal and agricultural purposes. Indigenous people draw their expertise from nature-centered beliefs which align humankind to nature for reciprocal benefits (Wildcat, 2009). Wildcat, (2009) encapsulates the notion that a solution to global environmental degradation is pegged on embracing indigenous realism which discredits the fallacy that humans can be at odds with nature. Merely long-held misconceptions emanating from civilization led to economic development to the detriment of the environment (Carter, 2018). Acknowledging and integrating this knowledge creates more resilient and sustainable strategies for adapting to the unprecedented changing climate.

NEGATIVE RAMIFICATIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON AGRICULTURE

Climate change is a global concern, and it is the most arduous and perennial threat to humanity in current times. Of all the sectors and industries internationally, rain-fed agriculture is the most affected (Makondo et al., 2018). They are the most affected because indigenous people are closely and inextricably connected to nature and wholly rely on agricultural livelihoods (Sheffiel et al., 2014). Given the incumbent global problems entailing economic recession, the spike in oil prices, poverty, displacement, food shortage, exorbitant food prices, floods, drought and biodiversity loss, the situation is exacerbated by global warming (Altieri et al.,

2012; Klein, 2021). Climate Change Adaptation in Africa, Asia, South America, and Oceania, which constitutes the developing world is said to be more vulnerable to climate change impacts with over 75% of people's livelihood being contingent on rain-fed agriculture and other climate-sensitive sectors (Derbile, 2013; Charles et al., 2013; File & Derbile, 2020).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that South America is experiencing increased temperatures, changes in rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events such as droughts and floods (IPCC, 2014). These changes have resulted in reduced crop yields, decreased water availability, and increased risks of pest and disease outbreaks, which in turn affect the livelihoods of millions of farmers in the region. For example, smallholder farmers in South America are struggling with reduced water availability for irrigation, while small-scale farmers in Oceania are facing challenges in managing the impacts of sea-level rise on their agricultural lands.

Climate change's influence on water supplies, which are critical for agricultural output, has reached a point where the shrinkage is alarming, and yet water is life (Medeiros et al., 2017). Many parts of Asia rely heavily on monsoon rains to water their crops, and any disruption to these patterns can have devastating consequences. In recent years, several countries in Asia, such as India and China, have experienced erratic monsoons, resulting in droughts and water shortages. This not only affects crop yields but also leads to conflicts over water resources, as farmers and communities compete for dwindling supplies (Medeiros et al., 2017; Ebhuoma & Simatele, 2019; Ford et al., 2020). As explained by a study conducted by the International Water Management Institute, "Climate change is expected to lead to reduced water availability and increased competition for water resources, which could have profound impacts on agriculture in Asia" (IWMI, 2016).

Ramifications of climate change in Africa are dire as agriculture is the backbone of a significant portion of most of the Sub-Saharan African countries' economies (Nkomwa et al., 2013). Precisely climate change has adversely impacted agriculture, the main source of livelihood in Zimbabwe's rural communities, and has aggravated poverty levels. Rural communities in Zimbabwe have high exposure to climate change risks and limited adaptive capacity (Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2019; Ndlovu & Mjimba, 2021). Correspondingly, in South Africa, Nigeria, Malawi, Ghana, and Togo climate change is conspicuous and is a major issue affecting agriculture thus negative ripple effect of scarcity of food. (Vilakazi et al., 2019; Fitchett & Ebhuoma, 2018; Adaawen, 2021; File & Derbile, 2020; Ebhuoma & Simatele, 2019; Charles et al., 2013; Nyong et al., 2007). The impacts of climate change and variability on agriculture includes a negative effect on agriculture production not only in these countries but also across the continent. Small-scale farmers are particularly susceptible because of limited access to technical information about seemingly a

new variant of climate change leading to widespread poverty and food insecurity (File & Derbile, 2020).

REINFORCING FOOD SECURITY THROUGH AGROECOLOGY

In Africa, Green House Gases mainly stem from agriculture and land use (Vilakazi et al., 2019). These two main sources are important factors of production for Africa's economy and most of thethird-world countries (Nyong et al., 2007). If these two sectors are compromised by climate variations, then billions of people's livelihoods would be doomed (File & Derbile, 2020; Fitchett & Ebhuoma, 2018). Emerging research propounds agroecology as a principal panacea to food scarcity in the prevailing environmental setbacks in agriculture (Derbile, 2013). Agroecological systems are grounded in sustainable farming that aligns with the environment and upholds high levels of biodiversity and traditional knowledge systems. Altieri, et al 2011 perceives agroecology as a relevant approach in addressing the increasing food shortage caused by climate change effects. He holds the view that efficient farming systems like agroecology will feed the anticipated world population of approximately 9 billion people by 2050. Agroecology fosters sustainable agriculture thus reinforcing food security and nutritional value that protects human beings from diseases.

Characterized by ingenious management techniques, resilience, and high biodiversity, agroecology is considered a robust mechanism of farming geared towards equitable and sustainable development undeterred by climate change, economic crisis, and energy scarcity. What makes agroecology subtle and relevant in the contemporary world is the guarantee of household food security with the consciousness of safeguarding the environment and its natural resource endowment. It provides the scientific, methodological, and technological basis for a new perspective in mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change (Altieri et al., 2012).

In recent times, there has been a global proliferation of peasant agriculture and agroecologically based production systems for their continued huge contribution to food security. Agroecological systems strive to revamp industrial agriculture by reinforcing food security through the integration of indigenous innovation and resources (Adaawen, 2021). Small-scale agroecological farming albeit being mainly for subsistence purposes contributes immensely to adequate food production. However, the beneficence of indigenous innovations in agroecologically based production has been underestimated. Shrinking arable land base, limited water, and nitrogen supplies, and changing climate significantly affect sustainable food production (Altieri et al., 2012). Burgeoning research indicates that better forest management, sustainable food security, enhanced rural livelihoods and improved

aggregate national economies are attributed immensely to the indigenous people who account at least 370 Million out of 1.5 billion people living in rural areas globally (ETC Group, 2009) In the era of grappling climate change issues coupled with adverse effects of GMO foods, outrageous food prices occasioned by energy crisis and rampant increase in oil prices, agroecology appears to be the solution. Undoubtedly, this approach will augment the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal No. 2.

COMPARING AND CONTRASTING MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

Adaptation refers to the ability and capacity of a system or community to cope with the harsh impacts of climate change. Smit &Wandel, (2006) describes adaption as adjustments in response to change in stimuli. The concept of adaptation can be traced from Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection which postulates that the well adapted species will survive a change in the ecosystem(Mugambiwa, 2018). Indigenous peoples have deep social, cultural, and spiritual ties to their lands and nature. They possess profound ecological knowledge and phenological cues (Fitchett & Ebhuoma, 2018) that make them adaptable and resilient to any threat or vulnerability in the form of change in weather patterns. The flipside of vulnerability is resilience of which the indigenous people exhibit both because of the increased economic activities built on the edifice of capitalism which adversely affects them (Carter, 2018). Adaptation and resilience to environmental changesare influenced by factors such as place, agency, institutions, collective action, Indigenous knowledge, and learning. The concept of vulnerability is not always the opposite of resilience, and both can coexist within a population (Ford et al., 2020).

Community-based adaptation refers to strategies and actions taken by communities to reduce their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. It involves local communities identifying their vulnerabilities, drawing on their knowledge and resources, and implementing measures to increase their resilience and adapt to changing climatic conditions (File & Derbile, 2020). While community-based adaptation recognizes the importance of local knowledge, social networks, and community participation in addressing climate change, basic adaptation implies familiarizing and habituating with the adverse effects. Therefore, adaptation to climate change connotes reducing the adverse effects of climate change on health and well-being and taking advantage of the opportunities that the climatic environment provides.

Mitigation plans, on the other hand, focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions to minimize the causes of climate change. These plans are anchored on legal frameworks such as Kyoto Protocol, a binding treaty ratified in Japan to lessen the emission of greenhouse gases (Kyoto Protocol, 2018). Another classical

example of mitigation plans is the COP 21 Paris Agreement. The accord ratified on the 12th of December 2015 is a critical step towards recognizing the role of IKS in climate change adaptation (UNFCCC, 2015). The international treaty outlines indigenous people's rights and participation in efforts to combat global warming effects. It provides a legally binding framework that compels the international community to support and uphold the rights of indigenous peoples in the face of climate change. The current dominance of market-based instruments (MBIs) in environmental management and governance, particularly payments for ecosystem services (PES) like REDD+ highlights the global awakening of the climate change effects getting steadily worse thus a need for a course of action (UN, 2020). The role of Indigenous peoples and marginalized communities as implementers of these policies is phenomenal in the sustainable management of the ecosystem and the conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks (Mistry et al., 2016). Although critics have mentioned the potential for MBIs to crowd out pre-existing intrinsic environmental motivations and ethics, the role that they play in mitigating climate change is immense.

Akin to mitigation plan is the Seasonal Climate Forecasts (SCF) which is based on scientific weather models. SCF is vital in reinforcing agroecology since it can help farmers improve their agricultural practices and adapt to extreme climate variability. Rural communities in Africa and Asia rely on indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), such as moon appearances and animal behaviors, to predict weather events. Climate variability and change pose challenges to small-scale farmers in developing countries that rely solely on IKS (Ford et al., 2020). If adopted and utilized effectively by farmers, SCF could facilitate the adoption of planned and efficient adaptation strategies, leading to more effective food production. However, factors that hinder the uptake and utilization of SCF by small-scale farmers include a lack of trust in scientific forecasts and the inability to comprehend the role of human activities in the current induced climate change (Fitchett & Ebhuoma, 2018).

ROLE OF IKS IN CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

Invaluable role of indigenous peoples in the fight against climate change is imminently conspicuous in their stewardship of the environment for centuries, possessing traditional knowledge and land management practices that are integral to the preservation and conservation of pristine natural resources (Mbah et al., 2021).

While South America has contributed significantly to carbon emissions, particularly in the Brazilian Amazon (Carter, 2018), the indigenous people in this

region with the use of their knowledge systems have relatively put the situation under control using traditional farming methods. By cultivating a wide variety of crops and rotating their fields, indigenous farmers ensure that their lands remain resilient and productive over the long term. Moreover, indigenous peoples exhibit a profound comprehension of forest management. Lumber techniques for sustainable timber harvesting within their habitat are implemented to avoid deforestation (UN, 2020). These environmental practices are crucial for maintaining the health of the Amazon rainforest, which plays a vital role in regulating the Earth's climate and maintaining biodiversity equilibrium. Similarly, research in Australia indicates that Indigenous people's habitat have minimal instances of forest fires because of their unique methods of controlling wildfires (Mbah et al., 2021); Altieri et al., 2012).

In the same breadth of environmental conservation by utilizing indigenous knowledge and traditional practices, local herders in the pastoral society of Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau in China have effectively managed their livestock grazing activities, taking advantage of the seasonal dynamics of forage production, and avoiding overgrazing (Wu et al., 2015). The land management practice is in response to the continued complex climate variance. The pastoralists adjust livestock numbers according to forage supply on the rangelands in different seasons to maintain sustainable grazing just as herders do in central and southern provinces of rural Zambia (Makondo et al., 2018).

BLENDING IKS AND SCIENCE IN CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES

Dealing with adversity and uncertainty of environmental mishaps urgently requires a Multiple Evidence Base (MEB) approach, a framework that subtly connects Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Western Science to ignitenew ideas, concepts, and solutions towards mitigating myriad negative effects of climate change (Makondo & Thomas, 2018). Indigenous knowledge is as old as the universe itself therefore congenital and hereditary which implies that the knowledge is enriched and authentic having been scrutinized by numerous people who have lived in different times. Therefore indigenous knowledge is just as legitimate as scientific knowledge since inference is based on experience, verifiability and logic. When indigenous knowledge is incorporated into the process of developing sustainable strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation, it can add value to the process. These strategies should be rich in local content and should be designed in partnership with local people.

Integrating indigenous knowledge into climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies encompasses the process of combining the traditional knowledge and practices of local communities into policies and actions that are aimed at reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and responding towards the effects of climate change. (Nyong et al., 2007; Ndlovu & Mjimba, 2021) This

method acknowledges the significance of indigenous knowledge in the process of formulating strategies that are efficient, financially feasible, participatory, and environmentally benign. In order to construct an agroecology that is more efficient and sustainable, it is essential to combine indigenous knowledge with scientific knowledge in the process of adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change.

IKS is gaining popularity and is becoming a science, even if it is still deemed substandard and disrupts Western study. It may soon be mainstream research since IKS-based agroecology improves food security and nutrition, achieving SDG 2. In the Sahel, where harsh dry seasons occur, agroecology coupled with a wide spectrum of indigenous and community-based climate change methods have improved resilience and catastrophe preparedness.

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More than 75 million rice farmers in China still practice traditional agricultural practices embedded in indigenous knowledge similar to those used several decades earlier. These traditional practices are confined to agroecosystems that exhibit resilience and adaptation to climate change (Altieri et al., 2012; Mbah et al., 2021). Correspondingly, Cheruvayal K. Raman an Indian tribal farmer from Wayanad district, Kerala famously known as the guardian of rare seeds, engages in agroecological systems which has enabled him to produce bountiful yields in rice farming. Having no prior knowledge of conventional sciences like agriculture science or botany, he has often engaged indiversified agricultural practices using indigenous systems, and traditional technology of landscape and conserved over 55 rice varieties on his small farm. His style of traditional farming enhances resilience and robustness to cope with whatever disturbance of environmental change hence minimizing risk in agriculture. By way of agroecology, his peasant-bred seeds have managed to feed thousands of Indians over the years (Awais, 2012; Altieri et al., 2012).

Given the above sentiments borne out of agroecology and traditional practices traced back to more than 10,000 years ago, IKS approaches and techniques can be considered an embodiment of best practices of climate change mitigation and adaption especially in agriculture taking into account that it is the most affected sector globally. Therefore, the wide array of coping strategies can be replicated in other regions experiencing extreme weather variability as a way of building resilience and entrenching disaster preparedness mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

Indigenous knowledge holds significant value in climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. However, the preservation and transmission of this knowledge

encounter obstacles due to historical marginalization and disruption caused by Western knowledge systems in the colonial era. Ensuring the preservation of indigenous people's traditional knowledge and territories plays a crucial role in promoting climate change education. Developing nations often have a significant concentration of indigenous communities and are characterized by both widespread poverty and limited capacity for resource refinement. Before colonization, the political, social, and economic systems were influenced by the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) that were deeply rooted in their traditions and culture. Indigenous communities have a deep understanding of the local environment, agroecological practices, and natural resources due to centuries of observation and experimentation. They have successfully endured challenging weather conditions, demonstrating their natural resilience and ability to adapt over many centuries. Indigenous communities in many third-world countries have long been familiar with climate change. However, the specific impacts of induced climate change are relatively new to them, making them particularly vulnerable to the effects of global warming. Indigenous communities have relied on agricultural techniques passed down for generations. However, with the impact of climate change, some of these methods may no longer be sustainable. These communities must integrate traditional knowledge with Western scientific approaches to enhance their effectiveness in combating induced climate change.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

THE DECLINE OF BIHAR'S SUGAR INDUSTRY: UNDERSTANDING REGIONAL IMBALANCE AND THE NEED FOR POLICY REFORMS

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Abstract

This paper examines the trend and pattern of de-industrialisation in the sugar industry of Bihar and its implications for regional imbalance. Historically, Bihar was one of the leading sugar-producing regions in India, contributing nearly 20 percent of the country's sugar production during the early post-independence period. However, the sector has experienced a continuous decline, particularly after the economic reforms of the 1990s. Using secondary data from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Cooperative Sugar reports, and the Department of Sugarcane Industries, Bihar (1950–2023), the study analyses the structural decline of the industry and its socio-economic consequences. The findings reveal that more than nineteen sugar factories have been closed in the state, leading to significant employment loss and weakening of agro-industrial linkages. The decline of this labour-intensive sector has adversely affected rural livelihoods, increased out-migration, and contributed to regional economic disparities within Bihar. Despite this decline, the state still possesses significant comparative advantage in sugarcane cultivation due to favourable agro-climatic conditions. The paper argues that revival of the sugar industry through industrial modernization, diversification into ethanol and bio-energy production, and stronger institutional support for farmers is essential for addressing regional imbalance and promoting inclusive economic development in Bihar.

Keywords: De-Industrialisation, Regional imbalance, Sugar Industry, Bihar, Policy
JEL Classification: R11, Q19

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern period, industrialization has come to mean economic development. It is seen as the most promising way to raise the nation's GDP and guarantee that everyone has a decent standard of life. Both Rostow (1960) and Gunnar Myrdal (1971) regarded industrialization as a significant catalyst for promoting innovation and dynamism in productive endeavours. But the term de-industrialization is the opposite of industrialisation was used by Kaldor in 1966.

Daniel Thorner became one expert who looked into the complex mechanisms of India's deindustrialization. The phenomenon of de-industrialization has emerged as a significant concern in contemporary emerging countries. Typically, this phenomenon entails a decrease in the significance of the industrial sector within a nation's economy, as quantified by its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or overall employment outcome. De-industrialization refers to the phenomenon characterised by insufficient investment in essential manufacturing, closures of mills, workforce reductions, and a significant adverse balance in goods trade or de-industrialization as the reduction in the proportion of the labour force engaged in a secondary industry or a decline in the proportion of the population dependent on a secondary industry (Bagchi, 2007).

Agro-based industries in India possess the capacity to effectively contribute towards the mitigation of poverty, unemployment, and inequality. Moreover, these industries have the capacity to make a substantial impact on the overall economic growth through the effective utilisation of indigenous resources. The potential outcome of this phenomenon is the potential enhancement of job prospects for those from low-income backgrounds, including those who are landless, marginalised, and engaged in small-scale farming (Pasupathi et al., 2016 & Aditi, 2023). The industrial sector in Bihar may be categorized into two main classifications: agro-based and non-agro-based. The state of Bihar is home to two notable agro-based industries that have substantial importance, namely the Sugar and Dairy industries. Among the sectors that do not depend on agriculture, the most notable ones are food processing, cement manufacturing, and ethanol production. The industrial sector assumes a crucial role in facilitating economic expansion, as stated in the Economic Survey of 2021-2022. The sugar industry holds significant importance in Bihar as a key agro-based sector, exerting a substantial influence on the rural livelihoods of numerous farmers and a considerable workforce engaged in sugar mills and related activities, including transportation, trade, machinery servicing, and agricultural input supply (Aditi, 2023).

The state offers a significant workforce of industrious individuals who are cost-effective, making it an attractive destination for a wide range of industries. Bihar had the highest growth rate among the 17 non-special category states. In spite of this, the government's endeavors to mitigate the increasing imbalance between

states with lower affluence and those with higher affluence have demonstrated ineffectiveness since they have failed to attain sustained and substantial economic expansion. States with higher levels of economic development, such as Gujarat, have successfully attained consistent economic growth while exacerbating the existing inequality between themselves and other states (Economic Survey 2022-2023).

The sugar Industry is labour intensive with multiple linkages from Cane growth to Sugar production. The sugar industry plays a vital role in absorbing the maximum number of laborer's both as farmers and industry workers. However, deindustrialization of the Sugar industries in Bihar has increased unemployment in the state. Historically, due to low industrial development and the existence of a few skill-based service sectors, a large share of this working-age population has also been migrating to other states and foreign countries in search of remunerative employment opportunities (Economic Survey 2019-20). Industrial condition in Bihar is unfavourable, encompassing mineral-based, agro-based, and other manufacturing sectors. The agricultural industry in Bihar encompasses a significant proportion, over 70%, of the whole population's involvement. This signifies the condition of industries within the region. The state's limited industrial growth has resulted in significant levels of unemployment, migration, and low urbanisation. The circumstances are anticipated to result in the manifestation of poverty, illiteracy, and subsequently, a diminished socio-economic quality of life among the populace residing inside the state. Hence the major objective of this paper is to understand the process of the deindustrialization of the sugar industry this led to Bihar becoming the victim of regional imbalance in the country but the same is now found within the state as well.

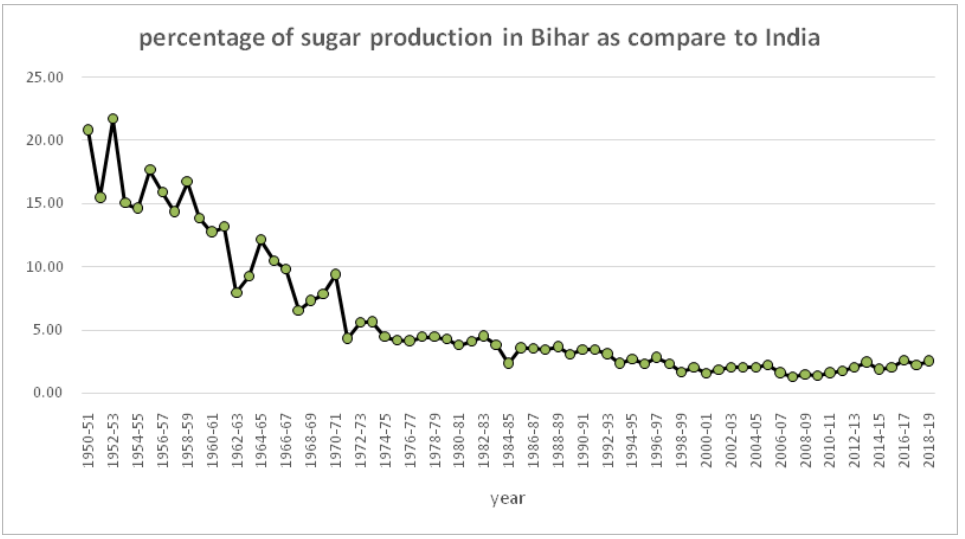
OBJECTIVE

To examine the regional imbalance by the trend and pattern of de-industrialisation of the sugar Industry in Bihar and Policy Suggestions.

SCENARIO OF SUGAR PRODUCTION (OUTPUT) IN BIHAR

The state of Bihar has significant potential for the development of sugar and related sectors, with a special emphasis on ethanol production and captive power generation. In Bihar Sugar, the industry is sugar complex due to its vast use of sugarcane waste like (Bagasse, molasses, press mud, etc.) (Solomon, 2016). During the 2022-23 sugar year, crushing days were an average of 104 days and the fluctuating recovery rate indicates a wide range of issues (Sugarcane Department of Bihar, 2022-23). Bihar contributed around 35 billion Indian rupees to the Indian economy through the cultivation of sugarcane crops during the fiscal year 2020. The production of

sugar depends on various factors like crushing capacity, recovery, and quality of sugarcane production.



Graph 1: Trend of Sugar Production/Output in Bihar as Compared India Since 1950

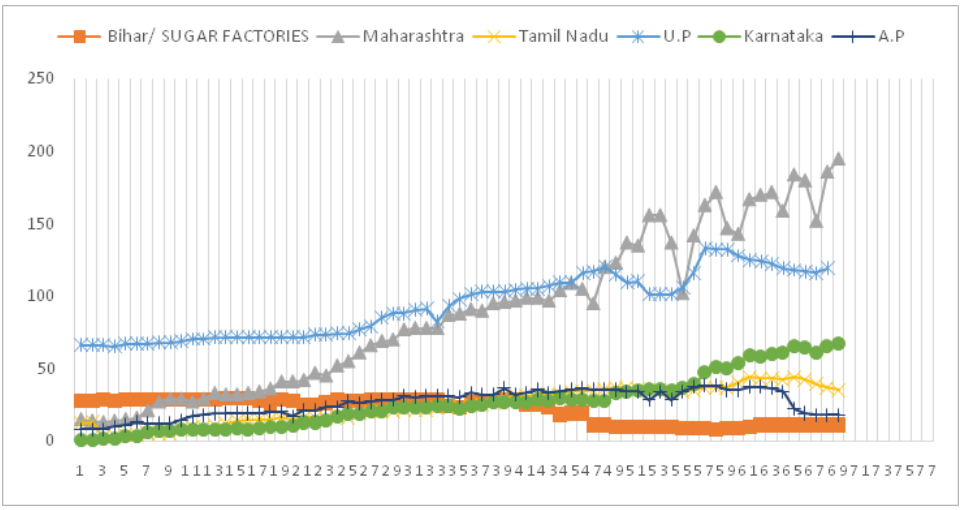
Source: Calculated by the author, Co-operative Sugar vol.53, August 2022, ISMA

According to the graph 5. It is evident that there have been varying patterns in sugar production from the year 1950. In the year 1950, the sugar-producing sector accounted for 20% of the overall contribution, in comparison to India. However, in the present day, its contribution has significantly declined to a mere 2%. However, the state government's emphasis on the use of high-yielding sugarcane seeds by farmers is facilitated by the provision of subsidies and incentives to increase sugar production.

Bihar has encountered various obstacles in relation to the de-industrialisation of its sugar factories. However, when considering the state-wise area of sugarcane from 2015-2016 to 2021-22, Bihar is positioned as the fourth-ranked state. Similarly, in terms of production, Bihar holds the fifth rank, while in terms of productivity, it holds the twelfth rank (Directorate of Sugarcane Development, 2022). Due to the increase in the crushing capacity of the current existing sugar factories in Bihar or the introduction of the various government initiatives taken for the profit of sugarcane farmers like FRP, PM- Kisan direct benefit transfer, etc. Hence, it's proven that Bihar has a comparative advantage in sugarcane production.

The sugar industry holds significant importance in Bihar. It has a profound impact on the rural livelihoods of numerous farmers, as well as a substantial number of workers who are employed either directly or indirectly in sugar factories.

Additionally, these workers are involved in various ancillary activities such as transportation, trade, machinery servicing, and the supply of agricultural inputs.



Graph 2: Trend of Sugar factories in top sugarcane producing States since 1950

Sources: Author complied, Co-operative Sugar vol.53, August 2022, ISMA

Based on the data presented in Graph 2, it can be observed that Bihar held second place in terms of the number of sugar factories during 1950. The state in question experienced a fall in its ranking, moving from second place to last among the major sugarcane-producing states in India, which include Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. The sugar-making factories in Bihar have demonstrated commendable performance for around 70 years. Nevertheless, subsequent to the aforementioned incident, a portion of the units were rendered inoperative, while the remaining units exhibited symptoms indicative of ailment. The graph illustrates that following Independence; there were both closures and new establishments of sugar factories in the leading sugar-producing states. The relative proportion of Bihar sugar factories in comparison to the overall number of sugar factories in India. During 1950-51, the Bihar sugar factories in India accounted for around 20% of the total contribution. However, in the present day, this proportion has seen a reduction of 2%. Hence it is noteworthy that Bihar did not see the development of any new factories in this sector. According to Gulati and Mohan, 2018 the states like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka have high land productivity but low irrigation water productivity suggesting that sugarcane cultivation need to shift from tropical to a sub-tropical state like Bihar and U.P. due to sugarcane crop being water guzzler crops. And this is proven by Graph 3. Bihar has been one of the ignored states of India which led to a regional imbalance within the state.

DEVELOPMENT OF SUGARCANE AS A COMMERCIAL CROP IN BIHAR

The historical context of the British era is paramount for a comprehensive understanding of the significance of the sugar industry in Bihar. One of the main reasons for the rise of colonial power in India has been the vigorous encouragement of cash crop growth. North Bihar's sugar industry, was more wealthy than South Bihar's. And it was a source of pride for the agricultural economy. European developed several factories and industries in the northern region of Bihar, as well as a limited number in the southern region. According to Lieutenant J. Paterson, it has been observed that the cultivation of sugarcane in Bihar exhibits a higher percentage of success and cost-effectiveness compared to the West Indies. The British have shown a preference for cultivating it as their essential commercial crop. Consequently, several sugar factories1 were established in Bihar (Kumar, 2020).

Establishment Of Modern Sugar Factories

The "modern Vacuum Pan" technique of producing sugar began in 1904 when the first modern sugar factories were constructed in Bihar's Marhawrah. According to Prasad (2004), the establishment of factories occurred in several locations throughout certain years. Specifically, factories were established in Lauriah in 1905, Barachakia in 1906, Lohat and Rayam in 1914, New Siwan in 1918, Samastipur in 1920, and Pachrukhi in 1922. During a certain period, Bihar witnessed the establishment of several sugar factories, whereas other regions of the country did not have any such factories. The sugar industry in Bihar had a dominant position for a period of around two to three decades (Kumar 1994). During the 1930s, Bihar made a significant contribution of almost 30% to the overall sugar output in the country. When the nation had a total of 32 sugar factories, Bihar accounted for 12 of them. Due to the region's ideal climate and ease of export to other nations, the British government placed a significant emphasis on the growth of the country's sugar factories (Singh, 1998 & Sinha, 2018).

Pre- and Post-Independence Scenario of the Development of the Sugar Industry in Bihar

The Indian Sugar Industries Protection Act, 1932 provided government protection, which allowed the sugar factories to grow quickly. During the first post-protection period, the primary expansion was observed in the subtropical area of North India, specifically in the states of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) and Bihar. Around 24% of India's sugarcane production comes from Bihar alone, where there are 35 sugar factories overall and 135 in the state of Bihar. In 1934, the government implemented price controls as a means of incentivizing the cultivation of cane. During the years

1. In this Article factories and mills are used simultaneously.

1935-1936, there was an unexpectedly high excess of crops on the market. The excessive production of cane has a detrimental effect on its pricing, resulting in an inability to sufficiently offset the increasing costs associated with its cultivation. The establishment of the Sugar Factories Control Act was a direct response to this particular situation (Chandra, 1993).

Post-Independence

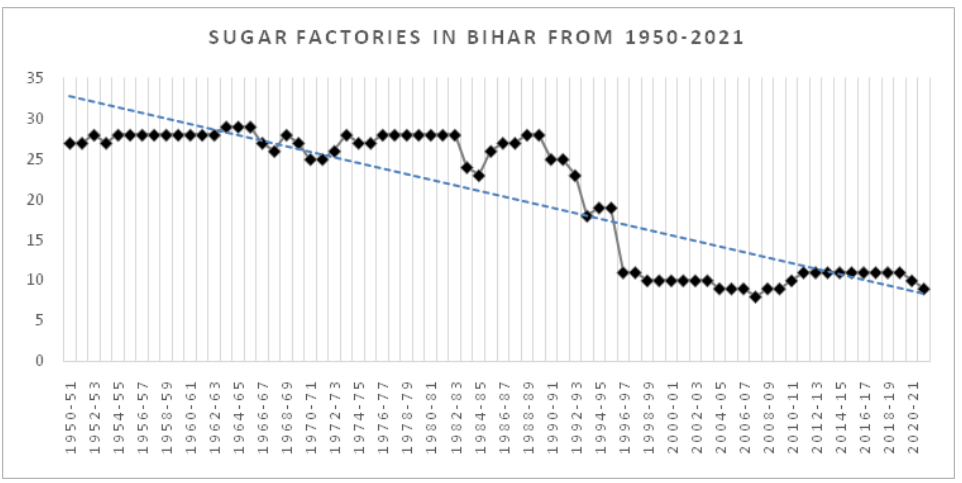
After Independence, the Industry Development and Regulation Act of 1951 marked the start of the subsequent stage of development. Before 1952, where the sugar industry was predominantly concentrated (in U.P and Bihar) imposed regulatory measures through respective legislative frameworks. According to this legislation, it became compulsory for every industrialist to get a license from the Government of India to construct new factories or expand existing sugar factories. The sub-tropical state (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, and Haryana) saw the growth of sugar factories during its early years. But from 1950–1951, a significant number of industries were established under the five-year plans in the tropical area, which includes the States of (Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu).

The licensing capacity in different areas and particular units is regulated by the Industrial Development and Regulation Act of 1951. During the regulated times, the government determines sugar prices, relying on cost schedules that were previously formulated by the Tariff Commission and, starting from 1965, by the Sugar Inquiry Commission. During periods of decontrol, the government implements a system of monthly sugar releases to regulate and control prices. Except for the periods 1961-62 and 1962-63, sugar limits were implemented between 1958-59 and 1966-67. From 1967 to 1968, the government undertook a policy of partial decontrol of the sugar industry. Since March 1st, 1970, the sugar industry, along with other industries, has been granted permission to extend its operations without the requirement of a license. A cumulative count of 97 sugar factories was developed after 1951-52, with 78 in the tropical zone and 19 in the sub-tropical region.

In the northern states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, a significant number of sugar factories were also privately owned. The cooperative sugar factories in Maharashtra have a dominant position, primarily because all the licensed sugar factories that have been created operate within the cooperative sector. Within the tropical region, there existed a substantial expenditure associated with agricultural activities. The Gangetic Plain's fertile alluvial soil provides a natural benefit to the sugar-producing regions of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which exceeds the advantages of other tropical regions (Tupe, 1980). From this point, Bihar was overtaken by other states in the production of sugar, and the government failed to recognise the state's role in the sugar industry, resulting in the deindustrialization of the industry.

DE-INDUSTRIALISATION OF THE SUGAR INDUSTRY IN BIHAR

The phase of de-industrialisation of sugar factories started in Bihar after the establishment of the Bihar State Sugar Corporation (BSSC). It was established in 1974 to save the small sugarcane farmers from the exploitation of private rich industrialists of U.P and Bihar. The state government formed Bihar State Corporation (BSC) Ltd. for the effective management of ill industries and the rehabilitation of those that had been liquidated (Sinha, 2018). All private factories were acquired by BSSC to upgrade and manage sugar mill losses. Among the 15 factories seized by the government. However, the BSSC failed to meet its objective, and all of the factories were closed down one by one. In 1997, all 15 factories were closed, with an estimated shortfall of Rs. 8.84 crores to farmers and Rs. 300 crores of workers (Department of Sugarcane Industries, 2022-23).



Graph 3: De-industrialisation of Sugar Industries in Bihar since 1950

Sources: Co-operative Sugar vol.53, August 2022, ISMA

The above graph 3. indicates that in 1950 there were a total of 28 sugar factories located across various districts of Bihar. Currently, in the year 2023, the number of operational sugar factories involved in the production of sugarcane is limited to just nine. A total of 19 sugar factories in the state of Bihar has been shut down. Currently, in 11 districts of Bihar, there are no operational sugar factories.Because of its strong agricultural heritage and devotion to agriculture, the state of Bihar has an inherent advantage in the agro-based industry (Chakrabarti, 2013). For a long while, Bihar was the leading state in India in terms of sugarcane production, making up more than 25% of the total. This pattern happened before the states of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra established their dominating influence. This might be because Bihar has a natural climatic advantage and abundant water resources (Saha, 2020).

Employment Loss/Workers Impact

There are two types of workers working in the Sugar industry one permanent and the other seasonal worker. Permanent Workers are employed full-time throughout the year and classified as permanent employees under the Industrial Labor Act are included in this category. Seasonal Laborers are the employees who are only employed during the harvesting season. The employees have been classified into the following categories, Operative, Clerical, Supervisory, Technical/Professional, administrative, executive, and other workers (Sinha, 2018).

According to the data presented in Table 2. In 2023, a total of 19 factories has been shuttered including 2 distilleries. The most recent closures were Riga Sugar Mill in 2020 and Sasamusa Sugar Mill in 2021. The closing of these factories not only had a detrimental impact on the plant shareholders but also had far-reaching consequences for a total of 16,773 workers from various districts. The shutdown of the mill might have a devastating impact on a significant number of individuals who were employed by the firm and relied on their earnings for their sustenance. According to the Bihar Sugarcane Industries Department, factories that ceased operations in 1997 were provided with their due salaries or compensation a decade after closure, along with an additional ten years of payment. It is worth noting that certain delayed payments are still being distributed among the workers of the sugar factories. Among the 15481 workers that received payment, the total amount was Rs.294,7461,840. However, 5383 workers were unable to get payment.

Hence the de-industrialisation of the sugar industry declined the employment opportunities for skilled or semi-skilled workers in Bihar. This unfortunate situation might have exacerbated the state's poverty levels and has also contributed to a reduction in per capita income, leading to increased outmigration. The closure of such industry not only hampered the worker's and farmers' livelihoods but it's also physically damaged the heavy machinery in which factories invest lots of money. It is a matter of grave concern as various billions of rupees are locked up in many closed sugar industries.

Table 2: List of the total no. of workers in closed sugar factories in Bihar

S. No.	*Sugar Mill*	*District*	*Year of Closure*	*Workers Who Lost Jobs*
1.	Lauriya	East Champaran	1997–1998	1290
2.	Sugauli	West Champaran	1997–1998	1299
3.	Motipur	Muzaffarpur	1997–1998	2099
4.	Siwan	Siwan	1991–1992	878
5.	New Siwan	Siwan	1991–1992	522
6.	Hathua	Gopalganj	1997–1998	1679
7.	Samastipur	Samastipur	1997–1998	930

S. No.	Sugar Mill	District	Year of Closure	Workers Who Lost Jobs
8.	Goraul	Vaishali	1994–1995	820
9.	Ryam	Darbhanga	1994–1995	779
10.	Sakri	Madhubani	1994–1995	957
11.	Lohat	Madhubani	1997–1998	1250
12.	Banmankhi	Purnia	1997–1998	776
13.	Bihta	Patna	1991–1992	933
14.	Guraru	Gaya	1991–1992	543
15.	Warisaliganj	Nawada	1993–1994	618
16.	Riga	Sitamarhi	2020–2021	700
17.	Sasamusa	Gopalganj	2021–2022	700
			Total	16,773

Source: Sugarcane Industries Department of Bihar.

The table shows that the majority of sugar mill closures occurred during the 1990s, particularly between 1991 and 1998, leading to the loss of employment for over 16,700 workers. These closures were largely concentrated in the sugarcane-producing districts of North Bihar, which historically formed the core of the state's agro-industrial economy. The decline of these mills significantly reduced rural employment opportunities and contributed to regional economic imbalance and increased out-migration.

REGIONAL IMBALANCE OF SUGARCANE PRODUCTION WITHIN BIHAR

In the sub-tropical region, Bihar is the second largest sugarcane-producing state next to U.P.

In 2022-23, sugarcane production in the state amounts to around 126,000 metric tonnes. Out of this total, 100,000 metric tonnes are being transported to neighbouring states. In the fiscal year 2018-19, there was an observed growth of 8.3% in sugarcane output compared to the preceding financial year of 2017-18. The productivity of cane in Bihar is around 40 tonnes per hectare, whereas it is 60 tonnes per hectare in comparison to India (Sugarcane Department of Bihar, 2022-23). Production of sugarcane depends on the area sown under the crop but is also adopted by technology adopted therein entrepreneurship and economics of production (Kumar and Singh, 2014).

The tabulated data presented in tables 3 and 4 reveals that the cultivation of sugarcane is in almost all districts within the geographical boundaries of the state of Bihar. The 12 districts, namely Araria, Kemur, Lahisarai, Nalanda, Katihar, Kisanganj, Khagaria, Saran, Buxor, Janahabad, Vaishali, and Supaul, exhibit

indications of a low spread index. In areas characterised by sugarcane production that is notably lower than the average crop yield of the state. However, it is important to acknowledge that these regions represent just 1.18% of the total land dedicated to cane cultivation and an insufficient 0.84% of the entire cane production. On the other hand, an additional seven districts, specifically East Champaran, Sitamarhi, Siwan, West Champaran, Gopalganj, Samastipur, and Bhagalpur, have a high spread index, suggesting a substantial predominance of sugarcane farming. The previously mentioned districts exhibit significantly higher average cane yields in comparison to districts characterized by a low spread index. The identified district comprises around 75.54% of the overall cane acreage and 76.53% of the cane production, thereby establishing it as the most advantageous area within the state for the cultivation of sugarcane. Notwithstanding this, the shutdown of operations at the singular sugar mill in the Sitamarhi district in 2020 led to a decrease in the scale of sugarcane cultivation inside said district. Based on an analysis of sugarcane yield in eighteen districts of Bihar, namely Madhubani, Gaya, Patna, Saharsa, Purina, Rohtash, Aurangabad, Bhojpur, Shekhpura, Begusarai, Jamui, Banka, Madhepura, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Munger, Nawada, and Sheohar it can be observed that these districts exhibit a medium spread index. The sugarcane production in each of these districts is comparatively lower, with an average measurement of 67.72 t/ha, in contrast to the total average output of Bihar. The combined cane acreage and cane output of the majority of the 18 districts being examined constitute 22.28% and 22.63% respectively of the total acreage and overall production. The majority of these 18 entities are situated in the southern region of Bihar. The production of sugarcane in the region is marked by poor irrigation techniques, mostly attributed to the occurrence of drought-resistant conditions in areas such as Rohtas, Aurangabad, Nawada, Gaya, and Bhojpur (Singh et al., 2021).

Table 3: Distribution of Sugarcane Area, Production, and Yield in Different Class Intervals of Sugarcane Spread Index in Bihar

Spread index (%)	*Number of districts*	*Area(ha)*	*Cane production (tonnes)*	*Cane yield (t/ha)*
<0.25%(low)	13	3003	149100	49.65
0.25-5.1%(medium)	18	59300	4015900	67.72
>5.00(high)	7	192400	13581500	70.59
Total	38	254703	17746500	69.68

Source: Group meeting of AICRP on sugarcane, 2015

Table 4: Distribution of Sugarcane Growing Districts in Bihar Based on Sugarcane Spread Index

Spread index (%)	*District represen*
< 0.25% (low)	Supaul, Kisangunj, Saran, Araria, Lakhisari, Katihar, Nalanda, Jahanabad, Kemur, khagaria, Vaishali
0.25-5.1%(medium)	Darbhanga, Patna, Nawada, Saharsa, Purnia, Rohtash, Sheohar, Aurangabad, Begusarai, Madhubani, Gaya, Jamui, Banka, Muzaffarpur, , Munger, Bhojpur, Shekpura,
>5.00% (high)	Gopalganj, East Champaran, Sitamarhi, Samastipur, Siwan, Bahgalpur, West Champaran,

Source: Singh et al.,2021

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

In view of the large-scale closure of sugar factories in Bihar, it is suggested to go for a comprehensive policy framework

First, the revival and modernization of closed sugar mills should be prioritized through public–private partnerships (PPP). Many closed factories still possess valuable infrastructure and land resources. The state government can invite private investors to rehabilitate these mills by providing financial incentives, tax concessions, and easier access to credit. Modernizing existing infrastructure with advanced machinery can improve productivity and reduce operational costs.

Second, the government should promote the development of integrated sugar complexes. Instead of focusing only on sugar production, mills should diversify into related activities such as ethanol production, cogeneration of electricity from bagasse, and production of by-products like molasses and bio-fertilizers. Such diversification can enhance profitability and reduce dependence on sugar prices.

Third, there is a need to strengthen institutional and financial support for sugarcane farmers. Timely payment of cane dues, expansion of irrigation facilities, and promotion of high-yielding sugarcane varieties can improve productivity and ensure a stable supply of raw material for sugar factories. Strengthening farmer–mill linkages through cooperative models can also improve efficiency in the sector.

Fourth, the government should develop industrial clusters around sugarcane-producing regions, particularly in North Bihar districts such as East Champaran, West Champaran, Gopalganj, and Samastipur. Establishing agro-processing zones and rural industrial clusters can generate employment opportunities and reduce migration from rural areas.

Fifth, improving transportation, storage, and logistics infrastructure is crucial for the development of the sugar industry. Better road connectivity, cold storage

facilities, and efficient supply chains will help reduce transportation costs and improve market access for farmers and industries.

CONCLUSION

The de-industrialisation of the sugar industry in Bihar has resulted in a decline in the manufacturing sector of the economy. Additionally, it has had a significant impact on the livelihoods of numerous farmers and workers who rely directly or indirectly on the mill for their income. This unfortunate situation has exacerbated the state's poverty levels and has also contributed to a reduction in per capita income, leading to increased outmigration. Therefore, the government must adopt a proactive approach in addressing the issue of de-industrialization within the Sugar Industry in Bihar which reduces the regional disparity. Despite all these challenges or the de-industrialisation of sugar factories of Bihar according to the Directorate of Sugarcane Development, in terms of state-wise area of sugarcane from 2015 to 2022, Bihar lies in 4th rank, in terms of production it lies 5th rank, and in terms of productivity its lies 12th rank. It shows that Bihar has the potential for sugarcane cultivation. Hence, the problem of de-industrialisation of the Sugar Industry needs to be addressed to cure regional imbalance in Bihar.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT, NEW PUBLIC GOVERNANCE, AND THE PUBLIC VALUE FRAMEWORK: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Md. Reyaz Ahmad*

Abstract

Public administration is a field that deals with the implementation of government policies andthe management of public programs. Over the years, the study of public administration hasdeveloped through various paradigms and theories. This paper examines contemporaryparadigms and theories that have influenced public administration, including New PublicManagement (NPM), New Public Governance (NPG), and the Public Value framework (PVF). Byanalysing these models, the paper highlights the shift from the traditional bureaucraticapproach to more flexible, citizen-centred, and market-based models. It also explores thechallenges and opportunities that these contemporary frameworks provide in the context ofglobal governance, political accountability, and service delivery.

Keywords: Public Administration, New Public Management, New Public Governance, Public Value Framework, Bureaucracy, Governance.

INTRODUCTION

Public administration is a fundamental component of modern governance. Implementing policies, providing services, and managing public resources are all part of public administration, which is a crucial part of contemporary governance. As societal, political, and economic contexts have changed, public administration theories have evolved to reflect broader changes in governance structures, processes, and values. More dynamic and adaptable frameworks eventually replaced traditional bureaucratic models of public administration, which emphasised efficiency through standardised procedures and hierarchical decision-making. These paradigms

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address the growing call for increased responsiveness, accountability, and people's participation in governance.

The Public Value Framework (PVF), New Public Management (NPM), and New Public Governance (NPG) are three modern paradigms that signify substantial changes in the theoretical and practical approaches to public administration. NPM, which promoted the use of private-sector management techniques in the public sector, first appeared in the late 20th century in response to the bureaucratic model's alleged rigidities and inefficiencies (Hood, 1991). In contrast, NPG emphasises citizen engagement, networked governance, and collaboration more, which reflects the complexity and interconnectedness of today's policy challenges (Osborne, 2010). The Public Value Framework, first presented by Mark Moore (Moore, 1995), advocates for a focus on long-term societal outcomes that benefit the public and emphasises the creation of public value as a primary goal of public administration.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate and contrast these three paradigms in terms of their theoretical underpinnings, real-world applications, advantages, and disadvantages. This study aims to provide insights into how these frameworks influence public administration and support governance and public service delivery in the twenty-first century by offering a thorough analysis of NPM, NPG, and PVF. It is essential to comprehend the subtleties of each paradigm in order to modify public administration procedures to meet the changing needs of contemporary governance.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY PARADIGMS: NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT (NPM)

Overview and Theoretical Foundations

The term '*New Public Management*' was first coined by *Christopher Hood* as an approach to address the inefficiencies in the conventional models of public administration. The term '*New Public Management*' was initially used to refer to the incorporation of private sector management practices in the public sector (Hood, 1991). The basic premise behind '*New Public Management*' was that market-based management approaches, such as competition and decentralisation, could be effectively employed in managing public service organisations.

The basic principles of NPM are heavily influenced by the principles of neoliberal economics, which focus on the importance of efficiency, cost-cutting, and accountability in the delivery of services (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). The role of the state is no longer considered as a deliverer of services but as a facilitator or enabler of the delivery of public welfare services. The process is termed as the 'marketization' of the public sector, in which the delivery of services is outsourced or privatised.

KEY FEATURES OF NPM

1. **Managerialism and Performance Orientation**: In managing public sector organisations, managerialism is based on a results-oriented approach, focusing on outputs and outcomes. Performance indicators and audits are essential in measuring efficiency.
2. **Decentralisation and Autonomy:** Decentralisation is a key aspect of NPM, which grants autonomy to managers to act in a manner that is in the best interest of efficiency.
3. **Customer-Centric Approach:** The citizen is treated as a customer of public sector organisations. Thus, customer satisfaction is a key aspect of NPM.
4. **Privatisation and Contracting Out:** Privatisation is a key aspect of NPM. It is based on the assumption that the involvement of the private sector in managing public sector organisations will enhance efficiency.

CRITIQUES OF NPM

1. **Increased Bureaucracy and Fragmentation:** Ironically, whereas NPM advocates for a reduction in bureaucracy, some research findings suggest that decentralisation and performance measurement result in increased bureaucracy (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). The rise in performance measurement and auditing leads to fragmentation in public services. This also leads to an increase in managers and administrative costs (Bureaucratic inefficiencies are not always reduced, and in some cases, they are exacerbated).
2. **Overemphasis on Market Principles:** It has been argued that the application of the management techniques of the private business sector to the public sector often results in the overemphasis on the principles of efficiency to the detriment of equity and justice. Public services like health and education cannot be treated as mere commodities, as they are subject to a number of complex social and ethical issues (Dunleavy, et al., 2006). The emphasis on cost-cutting and profit-making may jeopardize the very values of public services, which are supposed to provide equal access to all citizens irrespective of their socio-economic background.
3. **Short-Term Focus on Output:** The performance-based approach can also result in a short-term focus on output, rather than outcome. This can be a problem in sectors such as education and health, where a long-term approach and holistic approach is necessary. A short-term focus on output can negatively impact the quality of service (Christensen & Laegreid, 2001). This can lead to a "tick-box" culture, where agencies focus on meeting set targets, irrespective of their validity.

4. **Privatisation and Reduced Public Control:** NPM practices, such as privatisation, outsourcing, and contracting out, have been criticised for reducing public control and accountability. Although private agencies bring efficiency, there is a possibility that they may compromise public welfare for profit, thus leading to under-supplied services or a reduction in the quality of services. In addition, there is a concern about the loss of public sector knowledge and experience with the outsourcing of services (Suleiman, 2003).
5. **Equity Concerns:** NPM, which emphasises competition and customer choice, might actually worsen inequality. The market system might serve the interests of the more affluent segment of the population more adequately, while the less affluent might be left with inferior service. To give an example, in the education sector, the more affluent might be able to buy better service, whereas the less affluent might be left with inferior or less well-funded service (Laffin & Alford, 2002).

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND GLOBAL EXPERIENCES

The application of NPM principles can be seen in many countries, and some of the examples include the UK, US, New Zealand, and Australia. However, the effectiveness of the application of NPM principles differs. For example, in the UK, the application of performance targets and the use of the market mechanism in the National Health Service (NHS) has resulted in the improvement of efficiency and the lowering of the quality of care (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). In New Zealand, the application of NPM principles resulted in a more efficient government, but the emphasis on cost reduction led to the deterioration of some services (Haque, 2001). In the case of the application of NPM principles in the context of developing countries, the application of NPM principles faces a number of challenges, such as institutional frameworks, corruption and limited capacity to implement reforms.

NEW PUBLIC GOVERNANCE (NPG)

Overview and Theoretical Foundations: Alternatives to NPM

In light of the weaknesses of NPM, new approaches have been put forward, including New Public Governance (NPG) and Collaborative Governance. NPG highlights the importance of networks, collaboration, and the participation of stakeholders in the administration of public affairs. NPG relies less on the market approach than NPM does, focusing more on the interactions between the public, private, and third sectors. In the collaborative governance approach, there has been a focus on the integration of all the actors involved, including the public, private, and non-profit sectors, in the decision-making process, with the aim of co-production of public value (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Contrary to the managerial and market-based orientation of the NPM model, the New Public Governance (NPG) model was developed as a response to the complexity of governance in the 21st century. The key feature of this model is its focus on collaboration and network governance (Osborne, 2010). The NPG model advocates for a paradigm shift in governance models from hierarchical governance to decentralized governance. The rationale for this model is that the complex problems of contemporary society, such as climate change, poverty, and public health issues, can only be addressed through collective action among different actors in society.

NPG is based on the principle that the role of the state in governance is not the sole responsibility, but rather a partnership between various stakeholders in governance. It is based on the principle of governance that is participatory, transparent, and accountable to the people (Osborne, 2010).

KEY FEATURES OF NPG

1. **Collaborative Networks:** NPG highlights the value of collaboration among different organisations, such as public, private, and non-profit, to resolve complex problems (Rhodes, 2007). The networks are established to promote cooperation, not competition.
2. **Multi-Level Governance:** There is decentralisation in decision-making, and governance happens at different levels, from local to international, with governance systems being flexible and adaptive in nature (Osborne, 2010).
3. **Public Participation and Accountability:** NPG emphasises the involvement of people in decision-making processes, ensuring that governance is transparent and addresses the needs of people.
4. **Co-production of Public Services:** NPG encourages people to actively participate in the production of public services, as they are co-producers of public value (Osborne, 2010).

CRITIQUES OF NEW PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

1. **Implementation Challenges:** The theoretical foundation of NPG, which encourages collaboration, has been criticised for being difficult to implement in practice. For instance, governments have been criticised for facing various challenges in creating participatory networks due to lack of trust among various stakeholders, as well as bureaucratic resistance to change.
2. **Power Imbalance in Networks:** NPG has been criticised for being too ideal, as power imbalance in networks has been argued to create problems in achieving this ideal form of governance. For instance, powerful actors in networks, such

as large corporations and political leaders, have been argued to dominate decision-making processes, thus marginalising weaker actors, such as small community groups and disadvantaged members of society (Klijn&Teisman, 2003).This could result in perpetuating inequalities rather than building more equitable public services.

3. **Accountability Issues:** The accountability issues, which have been a major criticism of NPG, relate to the challenges associated with ensuring accountability in a decentralized structure. In a traditional hierarchical structure of governance, there is no ambiguity in ensuring accountability, as there is a direct chain of command. However, in NPG, there is ambiguity in ensuring accountability, as there are multiple actors responsible for decision-making. This ambiguity in ensuring accountability results in a lack of accountability, which may lead to a lack of responsibility for ensuring public services (Osborne et al., 2013).
4. **Over-Emphasis on Collaboration:** NPG lays great emphasis on collaboration and consensus-building, which, in some cases, may result in inefficiency and a lack of speed in the decision-making process. The complex nature of NPG, which involves ensuring the interests of all actors, may result in inefficiency and a lack of speed in the decision-making process, as it is always difficult to ensure consensus among all actors, especially if there is a wide array of actors involved in the decision-making process (Ansell & Gash, 2008).
5. **Risk of Fragmentation and Lack of Coherence:** Although decentralisation and network governance have their benefits, they may also bring about fragmentation in the delivery of policies and services. Different actors, with their own agendas and priorities, may formulate policies and practices that are incoherent and lack uniformity in their delivery and application in the regions and sectors they serve. This may bring about differences in the quality of services being delivered, thus undermining the principle of equitable delivery of public services (Osborne, 2006).
6. **Resource Intensity:** Network and collaborative governance may be resource-intensive due to the need for a great deal of coordination, dialogue, and even conflict management among a wide array of actors and stakeholders. This may add a great deal of cost in the delivery of governance, and this may be beyond the capacity of smaller public organisations and governments (Rhodes, 1997).

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND GLOBAL APPLICATIONS

Although NPG has been widely used in various nations, the effectiveness of NPG has also been inconsistent. In other words, although collaborative governance has been used in the UK, the effectiveness of NPG has also faced certain difficulties. In the UK, collaborative governance has been used in urban regeneration, community health, and environmental policies. In certain cases, collaborative governance has

also led to more creative approaches, as well as more citizen engagement (Osborne et al, 2013). However, challenges associated with issues of accountability, issues of power, and issues of coordination have hindered the actualisation of NPG's full potential in these areas.

In the Scandinavian countries, the principles of NPG have been incorporated into their welfare governance models. In this model, it is believed that networks between public agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as citizens themselves, are key to the provision of public services. The Scandinavian countries have recorded some successes in their governance models, especially in the provision of social care services. This is because of the high level of trust and cooperation that exists in these societies (Bovaird, 2007). However, it is believed that even in such environments, the use of networks can cause the fragmentation of services if governance is poor.

PUBLIC VALUE FRAMEWORK (PVF)

Overview and Theoretical Foundations: Alternatives to NPG

However, despite the criticism of NPG, some researchers suggest the need for hybrid governance structures, which blend aspects of NPG and traditional public administration. For example, New Public Management and Governance (NPMG) attempts to bring together the aspects of NPM's performance and accountability with the collaborative and inclusive features of NPG, as suggested by (K.J. & O'Toole 2006). This is a more balanced approach, which attempts to bring together the best features of both systems.

The Public Value Framework, introduced by Mark Moore, provides a shift in perspective from outputs and efficiency to the creation of public value. According to Moore's theory, public administrators should not only focus on the efficiency of services provided, but also on the value added to society. The value added to society is defined as the value provided by government services to society, as perceived by society. The framework highlights the importance of society's welfare, justice, and the alignment of public services with society's expectations.

KEY FEATURES OF THE PUBLIC VALUE FRAMEWORK

1. **Focus on Citizen Needs and Values:** The public value framework emphasises citizen needs and values, which go beyond service delivery (Moore, 1995).
2. **Strategic Management in Public Administration:** Public managers are required to take into account political, managerial, and public value factors in decision-making (Moore, 1995).

3. **Public Accountability:** Public managers are accountable to the public and are required to be transparent in their operations (Bryson, 2010).
4. **Long-Term Impact:** Public value is concerned with long-term societal impacts, including equity, justice, and sustainability (Moore, 1995).

CRITICISMS OF THE PUBLIC VALUE FRAMEWORK

1. **Ambiguity in Defining "Public Value":** One of the most significant criticisms levelled at the PVF is the ambiguity in the definition of public value. Although Moore's concept of public value is wide-ranging, it is also ambiguous and proves to be difficult to apply in practice. The subjective nature of what constitutes "value" differs substantially from one stakeholder to another. This makes it difficult to measure and assess public value outcomes (Benington, 2011). This lack of clarity may result in confusion or inconsistent application in real-world scenarios.
2. **Overemphasis on Stakeholder Satisfaction:** The PVF also overemphasises stakeholder satisfaction, especially in relation to public sector outputs and stakeholder demand. Although stakeholder satisfaction is critical in public sector management, it also leads to decisions being made in balancing conflicting demands. This results in decisions being made in favour of short-term political gain rather than long-term public value outcomes (Kelly et al 2002). This can lead to decisions driven by short-term political pressures rather than sustainable public outcomes.
3. **Lack of Clear Metrics:** Although the PVF emphasises the importance of public value creation, it does not provide any specific guidance on the metrics of public value. It has been noted that public value is intangible and cannot be quantified, which makes it difficult for public managers to evaluate their performance objectively. In contrast to the private sector, where the metrics of financial gain, or profit, provide a clear measure of public value, the public sector does not have any universally accepted metrics of measuring success or failure (Bozeman, 2007). In such cases, the PVF may seem more theoretical than practical.
4. **Potential for Political Manipulation:** It has also been noted that the PVF, which emphasises the role of public managers as they respond to political stakeholders, has the potential of being manipulated. In other words, public managers may give more importance to political or electoral concerns than the creation of public value. Such a situation has the potential of compromising the integrity of the public administration (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). In addition, the emphasis on meeting political demands may lead to the formulation of policies that are more politically expedient than the welfare of the public.

5. **Lack of Focus on Equity:** Although the PVF highlights the significance of generating public value, it fails to focus on the issue of equity in the delivery of services. The equitable distribution of the benefits of public services among various sections of the population is a basic feature of public administration. However, the PVF's general focus on the well-being of the people does not automatically translate into the development of strategies in this regard (Frederickson, 2005).

Table 1: Comparative Study of NPM, NPG and PVF

Criteria	*New Public Management (NPM)*	*New Public Governance (NPG)*	*Public Value Framework (PVF)*
Core Focus	Efficiency, cost-cutting, and performance-based management.	Collaboration, networks, and multi-stakeholder engagement in governance.	Creation of public value, focusing on societal benefits and long-term outcomes.
Role of the State	Reduced role of the state, with an emphasis on privatisation, outsourcing, and market mechanisms.	The state is a key player in collaborative governance, but governance is decentralised and involves various stakeholders.	The state plays a central role in creating public value, balancing political, managerial, and societal goals.
Governance Model	Hierarchical, results-oriented, performance-driven, market-based.	Decentralised, networked, collaborative, and multi-level.	Strategic, collaborative, citizen-centric governance with an emphasis on long-term public impact.
Public Sector Management	Managerialism uses private sector practices such as performance metrics, competition, and service outsourcing.	Emphasises co-production, transparency, and public participation in decision-making.	Public administrators must manage to create value for society, focusing on outcomes that reflect public preferences.
Main Focus of Accountability	Focus on accountability to political leaders and measurable outputs.	Focus on accountability to citizens, stakeholders, and society at large through inclusive decision-making and responsiveness.	Focus on accountability to both political leaders and citizens, ensuring the outcomes are aligned with public interests.
Citizen Engagement	Citizens are seen as customers, with an emphasis on service efficiency and satisfaction.	Citizens are active participants, co-creators of public services, and stakeholders in decision-making processes.	Citizens are central to the value creation process, and their preferences shape the service delivery model.

Criteria	*New Public Management (NPM)*	*New Public Governance (NPG)*	*Public Value Framework (PVF)*
Public Service Delivery	Often, through market mechanisms, privatisation, and outsourcing to private contractors for greater efficiency.	Public services are co-produced with citizens, non-profits, and other stakeholders, focusing on collaborative solutions.	Public services are designed to meet the values and needs of citizens, providing services that deliver societal benefits.
Implementation of Reforms	Focuses on restructuring organisations to be more efficient, with decentralisation of authority and performance-based systems.	Reforms encourage flexibility, decentralisation, and the building of cross-sector partnerships to address complex societal issues.	Emphasises strategic management and adaptation, ensuring that public services contribute to long-term public value.
Performance Indicators	Quantitative metrics, outputs, cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and performance reviews.	Qualitative outcomes, stakeholder satisfaction, collaborative success, and public participation.	Public value outcomes are assessed by societal impacts, equity, fairness, and long-term benefits to the public.
Strengths	Focuses on efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability, particularly in improving the operational performance of the public sector.	Emphasises inclusive decision-making, public participation, and the effectiveness of networks in solving complex problems.	Encourages the creation of long-term value, aligning public administration with the broader societal good and public needs.
Weaknesses	Can lead to a reduction in service quality, inequalities, and a loss of public sector values; can undermine democratic accountability.	Can lead to coordination challenges, decision paralysis, and difficulties in managing diverse stakeholders with competing interests.	Measurement of public value can be subjective and difficult to quantify, making practical application challenging.
Example	Introduction of performance management systems in public agencies, privatisation of public services (e.g., public transportation).	Collaboration between the government and private organisations in complex issues like climate change or healthcare reform.	Development of policies and services aimed at enhancing social equity, such as public health programs targeting vulnerable populations.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSISOF COMTEMPORARY PARADIGMS

Each of these three paradigms, NPM, NPG, and Public Value Framework (PVF), reflects a unique way in which public administration is run and managed, depending on changing societal values and expectations.

1. **Focus on Efficiency vs. Citizen-Centricity:** NPM is more focused on efficiency and results, while NPG and Public Value Framework are more focused on citizens and society.
2. **Role of Government:** NPM argues that the role of government should be minimised and that governments should let markets and private companies deliver services, while NPG and Public Value Framework believe in the importance of public sector delivery.
3. **Governance Model:** NPM is more hierarchical and control-oriented, while NPG and Public Value Framework are more decentralised and inclusive.
4. **Accountability:** NPM is more accountable to politicians and results, while NPG and Public Value Framework are more accountable to society and citizens.

CONCLUSION

However, despite the fact that NPM has introduced significant reforms to improve the efficiency and responsiveness of public administration, it has been criticised for various reasons, such as overemphasising market principles, increasing fragmentation and bureaucracy, and favouring short-term results over long-term social goals, among others. In addition, privatisation and competition may undermine equity in service delivery. Although NPM has shown some significant improvements in public services, it has been criticised for several reasons, one of which is the lack of democratic accountability in public services, as they are more focused on meeting market goals than serving public interests (Hughes, 2003). For instance, privatisation and competition in public services may result in low-quality services and create greater inequality in society (Lapsley, 2009). In addition, efficiency in public services may undermine long-term policy goals for equity and public value.

In this sense, the focus on efficiency and marketisation of NPM has resulted in a narrowing of the field of public administration, with issues of justice, fairness, and society being relegated to the background. In this sense, although NPM's influence on public sector reforms is undeniable, its limitations point to the need to strike a balance between NPM and other alternatives, such as New Public Governance.

Modern paradigms of public administration have shown a move from the traditional bureaucratic approach towards more flexible, collaborative, and citizen-oriented approaches. The emergence of the New Public Management, New Public Governance, and the Public Value Framework has demonstrated the increasing complexity of public administration in a highly interconnected world.

These paradigms have provided unique insights into the ways in which public administration can serve the interests of the citizenry. However, there have been a number of challenges, including the issue of power, political influence, and the

difficulty of measuring public value. These have, however, presented themselves as the public administration field continues to evolve. Future research must, therefore, be geared towards improving these models to ensure that public administration remains effective, accountable, and responsive to the interests of the citizenry (Ansell & Gash, 2008). New Public Governance is a promising concept for public administration, emphasising collaboration and co-production in public value creation. NPG is a significant departure from New Public Management, which was dominated by marketisation, recognising the complex nature of public governance and the need for collective action in public problem-solving. However, NPG also inherits considerable criticisms, especially in relation to challenges in implementation, issues in balancing power and accountability, and issues in relation to inefficiency and fragmentation. As public governance takes on more networked and decentralised forms, it is necessary to examine how these challenges and issues are balanced with the ideal of inclusiveness and public value creation. NPG is a promising concept for public administration, and it is necessary for its application to be refined in order to address these issues.

The NPG approach is commended for fostering inclusiveness, transparency, and collaborative decision-making. However, there are challenges associated with balancing the powers of the relevant actors, as inclusiveness in decision-making can lead to decision-making paralysis or inefficiencies, especially in situations of conflicting interests (Peters, 2005). In addition, the realisation of NPG can be limited by institutional challenges and the inability to cope with complex networks, as suggested by Rhodes (2007). Despite the challenges, NPG marks a significant shift in governance, as it acknowledges the value of collaborative and inclusive decision-making in addressing public policy issues.

It is beyond doubt that the Public Value Framework has contributed positively to public management by fostering a more integrated approach to measuring public sector performance. However, its conceptual ambiguity, emphasis on satisfying stakeholders, and absence of precise and equitable metrics are challenges to its successful application in public administration. Henceforth, it is possible that the Public Value Framework could be refined and more precise guidelines provided for its application in public administration.

Though there is no standard measure of public value, attempts have been made to establish techniques to achieve this. This has led to different frameworks that seek to cover public value measurement. They include Moore's and Meynhardt's public value scorecards. Moore's scorecard recognizes the need to lower costs to produce public value and also offers public sector organisations the ability to monitor the outcomes, both desired and undesired, that come up as a result of their daily work commitment (Moore, 1995). However, both scorecards have been found to have limitations. Moore's public value scorecard has been found to be

simply a repetition of his strategic triangle despite its focus being solely on public sector and non-profit organisations that are mainly connected to the United States perspective (Meynhardt et al., 2017). According to Bryson, Crosby, and Bloomberg, Meynhardt's model fails to take into account the systems of the organisation that have a contribution to make to the production of public value (Bryson et al., 2014).

Although the Public Value Framework provides a holistic approach towards governance, the greatest challenge associated with the framework lies in the subjective nature of public value. It is difficult to measure public value, as it involves the comprehension of the varied and conflicting interests of the public. Moreover, the framework has also been viewed as ambiguous, especially when there are no metrics to evaluate the generation of public value. However, the framework promotes a more holistic approach towards governance, as it encourages policymakers to consider the interests of the public.

Though each of these three paradigms is unique and distinct in its own way, they are united in their common goal of serving society better and more efficiently. The debate between these three paradigms is part of a wider debate about the role of government in society, the effect of globalisation, and how we should govern ourselves in the 21st century.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

PRIVACY: THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

In the contemporary digital era, scholarly discourse places significant emphasis on the individual's private domain. The rapid technological progress has brought forth well-known privacy threats, including surveillance of phone calls, online tracking, unauthorized changes to privacy settings, security breaches, and so on. To address these issues, national and international legislations are being implemented to govern the flow of data, affirming the principle that individuals should retain control over what they create. These regulations align with the principle articulated by Thomas Edison: "What one creates with his hand, he should control with his head." This innovative approach presupposes the intrinsic value of privacy, the availability of remedies, and the uncertainty of the future. Incompetent comprehensive protection mechanisms and knowledge entail potential irreversible repercussions, spanning from compromised personal data security to financial losses and erosion of confidence. Consequently, this paper delves into the concept of privacy within an Indian setting.

Keywords: Privacy, Security, Technology, Information, Data, Right

INTRODUCTION

In a democratic society, individual actions can generally be categorised as public or private. Public actions have a direct bearing on the general public, whereas

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private actions do not have any bearing on the public arena. The government in democratic states has the authority to regulate and meddle in public affairs for the welfare of its citizens. However, the intervention and surveillance of an individual's private sphere is being increasingly questioned and detested, leading to extensive discussions in the academic discourse on the issue of privacy and boundary management in the international arena. These expanded discussions concerning monitoring or interfering with private activities that don't affect the public have posed difficult questions about privacy protection on a global scale.

Therefore, the privacy discourse aims to find a balance between the needs of operations, societal security, and individual privacy. On one hand, stringent privacy regulations are being advocated by activists worldwide to preserve individual liberties and stop unauthorized access by organizations. Conversely, proponents of less restrictive boundary management place more emphasis on flexibility to enhance service delivery, safeguard national security, and foster technological innovation. Boundary management in international relations refers to the policies and practices countries use to regulate information flow, data protection, and cyber operations across borders. This involves negotiating international agreements, setting standards for data transmission, and managing the tension between open digital borders and national security

In contemporary discourse, the rapid advancement of technology has led to a significant increase in the digitization of almost all spheres of life. This has made it easier to intervene and surveil an individual's private life, resulting not only in an increase in privacy invasion and breach cases but also raising concerns about other dimensions, including data protection. In response, there is a growing demand for the government to regulate such technology to protect individuals' privacy and security. Developed nations and international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union have recognized privacy as a fundamental right. Thus, it is noteworthy to examine issues concerning privacy in India, the world's second most populous country, and how these international debates unfold in the Indian context. Additionally, this paper will also discuss the factors contributing to the current state of privacy in the country.

UNDERSTANDING PRIVACY

Privacy or the sanctity of an individual's life, including their act, image, and honour, has been a subject of discussion and debate for decades. It is widely recognized that the private space is a safe haven where individuals can retreat and seek refuge from the outside world, where no one may enter without his/her consent except by a court order or for *Flagrante Delicto*. However, concerns have been raised regarding the degree of intrusion that can be made into an individual's private life, given the advancements in technology that enable the recording and monitoring

of daily actions. Even continuous watch or surveillance has been a recurring theme in literature. The notion of Big Brother (Orwell 1949) and Panopticism (Foucault 1975) emerged in the context of surveillance and continuous watch by the state. While surveillance has been a part of human life for a long time, opposition to its excesses has also been a constant feature.

The notion of privacy often has multiple interpretations with no universal definition. As such, it is frequently conflated with other concepts such as "intimacy" and "secrecy" (Gerstein 1978). Privacy, intimacy, and secrecy are interconnected concepts, but they differ in significant ways, which affect our legal, social, and ethical understanding of privacy. Privacy encompasses both of these ideas, but it also includes the notion of having control over personal information and spaces. In the context of India, privacy is understood as the protection of an individual's private sphere from external interference. This notion has gained further importance with the emergence of data protection laws in India, which seek to safeguard individual data from theft and misuse. This includes the right to choose what information to share with whom, until it concerns the public at large. Collectively, these developments highlight the importance of privacy in the Indian context, both in terms of protecting individual autonomy and data security.

WHAT IS THE PRIVATE SPHERE?

Since the state is empowered by social consent to guarantee security and protection for all citizens, it is the state's exclusive duty in a democratic society to draw the line between private and public. But it does not imply that the state has unrestrained authority. John Locke believed that the authority of the government resulted from a commission from the people to defend and maintain their rights. Therefore, the government is neither absolute nor arbitrary, and freedom supersedes authority as people are naturally free and equal (Simmons 1989).

The term "private" is often used to describe matters that are personal or confidential to an individual, differing from those that are intended for public consumption. The issue of privacy came to the limelight in India as cases of intrusion into an individual's private space surged. In the past few years, video/photo leak cases have surged in India, resulting in suicides. For example, a 21-year-old University girl hanged herself after her boyfriend threatened her to leak their private videos in 2017 (Yadav 2017). Also, the Chandigarh University video leakage case of 2022 (Sharma 2022) is amongst several such cases where the invasion of an individual's private sphere resulted in the loss of dignity, honour, and even suicide. These incidents in India raised concerns for an effective privacy framework for the aegis of the private space of an individual, not only from the state but also from others. For this, it is important to set boundaries for the private realm where the

state, organizations, or private entities are prohibited from intervening. This raised a difficult question of who and where to draw the line to safeguard the private lives of individuals. In a democratic country like India, it is an essential obligation of the state to define or set boundaries for the private realm. Therefore, the state must exercise its authority for the protection of the private realm of individuals while also resisting the temptation to cause intervention.

That is why the issue of privacy in the face of intervention and surveillance has been a matter of intense debate in the modern world. However, with the rapid progression of technology in recent times, this issue has gained renewed attention and has sparked new discussions because, with the proliferation of smartphones and IOTs, we do not even know how many organizations, governments, or private entities have access to our gallery, documents, call records, and what not. These discussions are essential in shaping the future of privacy laws and regulations to ensure that individuals' rights are protected in the face of these paradigm shifts.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Privacy has a universal appeal that adapts to various cultural contexts. The right to privacy is widely recognized as a fundamental human right in the democratic world, though limited in practice. Most nations guarantee privacy as a right to their citizens, though in varying degrees. However, the sensible expectation of privacy in public places is still a difficult question facing the world (Moreham 2006). The advancement of privacy as a fundamental human right has been furthered by the emergence of international Human Rights documents that have been embraced by many nations as part of their legal systems. These documents have played a significant role in shaping the legal structures of the respective countries and in establishing privacy as an essential facet of human rights (Tarafder 2015).

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) is among the foremost documents that have contributed to the advancement of privacy as an indispensable human right. Article 17 of this document explicitly prohibits arbitrary intrusion into an individual's privacy, family, house, or correspondence, as attacks on their honour and reputation (Das and Boruah 2020). Additionally, it guarantees every individual the right to protection under the law against such interventions or attacks. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948, which India is a party to, also enshrines the right to privacy in similar language in Article 12. Similarly, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) 1950, along with other international documents, seeks to protect individuals from arbitrary interference with their private and family lives (Duraiswami 2017). While the definition of privacy may be debatable, ensuring its protection is universally acknowledged.

With the advent of the rapid technological proliferation of privacy, privacy-related concerns gained renewed international attention in politics, primarily following the well-known Snowden Case in 2013. A fresh and valid worry about privacy invasion in the name of national security was brought up by former CIA agent and NSA contractor Edward J. Snowden. He revealed classified material indicating that the United States government was covertly running a mass surveillance network throughout the world, a practice that went against its declared policies and international and human rights norms (Weinstein 2014, Greenwald, MacAskill and Poitras 2013). The U.S. government and its defenders argued that the surveillance programs were legal under U.S. law and necessary for national security. Another example that added to sparked privacy concerns across the globe was Cambridge Analytica, the political consulting firm that worked for the Trump campaign and obtained raw data from up to 87 million Facebook profiles in 2018 (Confessore 2018, Schneier 2018). The scandal raised fundamental questions about the power of private companies to influence elections and public opinion, the adequacy of social media platforms' data protection measures, and the need for ample transparency and accountability in digital advertising. Privacy is a basic human right that is respected by every individual and organization. It is a freedom that allows individuals to be free from unwanted observation or intrusion. Therefore, as per Martha Nussbaum, privacy should be understood as an all-encompassing concept.

PRIVACY IN INDIA: CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES

Different parts of the world experienced different stages of privacy evolution. In India, the concept of privacy is in its early stages of evolution. Indian legislation regarding privacy is changing in response to mainly two different kinds of claims: those pertaining to the safeguarding of the personal sphere of individual decision autonomy, and personal data. The Indian judiciary has borrowed contending privacy norms for guidance, primarily from America (Acharya 2015). It has also been careful to adapt these norms to the Indian context. The ongoing conflict between state surveillance and individual freedom has hampered the advancement of privacy laws in India.

The issue of privacy rights in India is predominantly a judicial construct, given that the constitution does not explicitly articulate privacy as a separate right or an expression of freedom of speech and expression. Instead, Art. 19(2) outlines reasonable restrictions imposed upon them. Nonetheless, such constitutional limitations have not deterred the Government of India from creating a framework for privacy protection within the constitutional scheme. The judiciary has interpreted the meaning of Article 21, which stresses the fundamental right to life and personal liberty, and found privacy to be implied therein, albeit to a limited extent. (Singh 2011).

JUDICIAL INTERVENTION

At the time of the drafting of the Indian Constitution, the right to privacy did not receive significant attention. The limited examples of codification of the right to privacy that existed at that time were considered insufficient to warrant inclusion as a fundamental right (Arun 2014). Although privacy is not explicitly mentioned in the Indian Constitution, the Supreme Court of India ultimately recognized the right to privacy as a fundamental right and has been outlining its parameters through numerous cases that implicate this right.

In M.P. Sharma v. Satish Chandra in 1954, the apex court declined to recognize privacy as an intrinsic right in the Indian Constitution. The court, in its ruling, specified that the Indian Constitution's framers had not explicitly acknowledged the right to privacy, and since the right was specific to the United States of America under its Fourth Amendment, it could not be imported into a different legal context. This judgment is indicative of the early positivist reading of law by the apex court. It is crucial to understand that this ruling has far-reaching implications for Indian citizens, as the absence of an inherent right to privacy raises concerns about the government's ability to carry out surveillance without any legal restrictions (Bhatia 2014). One of the earliest cases involving state monitoring in India was Kharak Singh v. State of UP of 1962 (GOI 2012). It dealt with the constitutionality of police regulations that allowed them to execute 'domiciliary visits' to known offenders or 'history-sheeters.' The bench in Kharak Singh refused to acknowledge the right to privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Instead, it based its ruling on the common law right to privacy while also deeming the provisions illegitimate (Revathi 2018). However, it was in the case of Govind v. State of Madhya Pradesh in 1975 that the concept of right to privacy as a fundamental right was first established. The court acknowledged that this right exists in part III of the constitution, but it is not infinite and must be balanced contrary to the "compelling state interests". Since then, privacy rights have been weighed against other rights, and the court of law has generally sustained the idea that it is a guaranteed right under the Constitution (Arun 2014, SAHRDC 2014).

On August 24, 2017, in the case of Justice K. S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) and Anr. In Vs Union of India And Ors., a nine-judge Supreme Court bench made a historic judgment. The court unanimously ruled that privacy is a basic human right, protected as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution. Since then, the apex court has explored and expanded the ambit of the right to privacy (Giridhar and Singh 2023). The judgment also outlined the limits to the state's intervention in the lives of its citizens (G. C. Gupta 2017). However, the court recognized the challenges posed by technology and the necessity to balance privacy rights with the imposition of certain restrictions by the

state for ambitions such as national security, crime control and investigation, and distribution of welfare resources, etc., within the legal framework (Dembi 2021).

Although the Indian legal system has a rich jurisprudence on different aspects of the right to privacy, this right often conflicts with other rights, i.e., national security. Privacy cannot exist without due regard for security, and liberty cannot exist without respect for privacy. Security necessitates certain liberties and privacy. Therefore, it is contesting to frame debates about privacy and security as a matter of choice or a balancing act between these two rights. It is even more misguided to view them as a trade-off between rights (Jawaid 2020). Privacy is an inalienable right and a legitimate expectation that is crucial for an inclusive society like India that guarantees human dignity to every individual.

INSTITUTIONAL CONCERNS OF PRIVACY

India has witnessed an unparalleled extension of Information Technology (IT) in governance structures over the past few decades. Such IT-enabled systems have brought about a new era of digital transformation, revolutionizing conventional citizen service delivery methods in the country. This digital change has bestowed governance with a new meaning, making public services more accessible, efficient, and transparent (Nanda 2022). In 2006, the National E-Governance Plan (NeGP) was initiated with the objective of providing government services that are accessible, efficient, transparent, and affordable to all citizens. Under NeGP, a variety of initiatives have been launched, such as Digital India, DigiLocker, Mobile Seva, and myGov, among others, to promote e-governance throughout India.

The government has acknowledged the potential for online service delivery to achieve strategic objectives such as financial inclusion and the delivery of cash transfers, with the implementation of Aadhaar playing a significant role. Despite its benefits, Aadhaar has been the subject of sustained criticism from various quarters due to its growing ubiquity. One of the primary criticisms relates to the repository of Aadhaar-related customer information, including metadata about the place of authentication, which is considered by some to be a serious breach of privacy. With the proliferation of smartphones, we exchange data with family and friends and take a casual approach to privacy and data security, not realizing how many applications have our consent to access our call logs, documents, photos, and other personal information also the ability to give consent rest on whether a person is knowledgeable about what he/she is consenting to. In addition, numerous apps like Facebook, Truecaller, WhatsApp, etc, are difficult to use without providing them access to our mobile data. Furthermore, if private information of a person, such as private images or videos, is leaked, he/she is held responsible and suffer severe consequences to their honour and dignity. Until very recently, the laws that address

the idea of sensitive private data or information and offer the legal framework for it are those found in the IT Act, 2011, and its associated guidelines.

Furthermore, the control that users have over their personal data in India can be seen in the light of section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, 2005, which offers an exception for the divulgence of personal information that does not pertain to public activity or interest. When the information relates to corporations, societies, organizations, or institutions, it cannot be utilized. This demonstrates that maintaining one's privacy could be a personal responsibility that no other entity could accept (Gandhi 2023).

The importance of data for development in this digital age has been progressively recognized by lawmakers and regulators. In terms of legislation, the Indian Parliament passed the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023. This cross-sectoral law on personal data protection is the first of its kind in India and follows more than half a decade of deliberations. The DPDP Act grants significant rights to individuals and provides them with better visibility, awareness, decision-making autonomy, and control over their personal data. It also obligates organizations to comply with individuals' rights and provides effective mechanisms for redressal, linked with substantial penalties (Shreyashi 2023). India has made some advances in formulating laws and policies to protect privacy. Although certain measures have been taken in India, such as the banning of Chinese apps and fostering domestic Information Technology and digital innovations through campaigns such as" Make in India", a more comprehensive and proactive approach is required. However, there is a necessity to further strengthen implementation, enforcement, and awareness in this area.

LACK OF DIGITAL LITERACY

Throughout history, countries have engaged in wars using conventional weapons like bombs and missiles. However, in this digital era, the battleground has shifted to controlling economies and leveraging technological authority. The risk of data and privacy wars is a serious threat that must be considered by all nations worldwide. In today's information age, privacy is a pressing concern that carries diverse connotations across different cultures. It is, therefore, essential to understand the dimensions of privacy in a country like India, which has the second-largest number of internet users. India generally perceives privacy in terms of individual autonomy and, recently, as data protection. At the individual level, privacy is continually being invaded to such an extent that it has become commonplace, and individuals are often unaware of such invasions. Most of the population in India falls prey to such junk messages and fraudulent emails (Suraiya and Vikas Singh 2005). This can be attributed to the lack of awareness amongst the masses of the country. The lack of digital literacy in India is a major concern in identifying, avoiding, and reporting such cases of privacy breaches.

In rural areas, the literacy rate is 67.77 per cent, with a lower rate of 57.93 per cent for rural females (MoSPI 2011) . Furthermore, the functional literacy rate is even lower. Consequently, individuals in these areas may sign documents or provide thumb impressions without comprehending their contents. They place their trust in the information provided to them, disregarding the potential consequences of their illiteracy and lack of knowledge. Unfortunately, instances of exploitation due to such ignorance are common.

Scholars have revealed that India follows the American model of privacy, despite the fact that the cultural backgrounds of the two nations are vastly dissimilar. The American approach emphasizes privacy from an early age through digital literacy; India, on the other hand, lacks digital literacy. The concept of digital awareness is still missing in India, and the country is slow to adopt training and development programs due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of privacy. The purpose of digital literacy is to serve as the cornerstone for informed debates and judgments on critical digital concerns such as privacy and security. India needs a change in the thought process surrounding privacy, and this can only be achieved by advancing digital literacy, which is sorely lacking in the country. With its vast population, most of whom are ill-equipped and unaware of data protection laws and digital literacy, India finds itself in a hotspot for privacy invasion and data breach cases.

LACK OF DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The concept of privacy is not yet an all-encompassing one in India. The lack of digital literacy has resulted in limited public discussion about privacy concerns. Even data protection, which is a subpart of privacy, has only recently started gaining attention and has become a topic for discussion in India. Furthermore, the poor and loosely developed digital infrastructure in the country is another reason why the topic of privacy doesn't get the needed attention.

In addition, the issue of data localisation has become a highly contested matter in India, in light of recent incidents, such as the Puttaswamy ruling and the Cambridge Analytica-Facebook saga. These occurrences have given rise to calls for the localisation of personal data, particularly in light of the diverse range of data shared online and the potential harm that can arise from unwarranted disclosures. There is no denying that better safeguards are needed to protect sensitive Indian data. While the localisation debate has gained considerable traction in recent times, it is not a new issue and is not unique to India. In fact, as early as 2014, the National Security Council was ostensibly reviewing a proposal that would require all data generated within India to be hosted on India-based servers and hence be subject to Indian laws. However, such a sweeping provision has not yet been enforced, resulting in an increase in cases of data theft and misuse. Privacy

invasions and data breaches are frequent phenomena in India, primarily due to inadequate digital infrastructure and institutional constraints in the departments that handle personal data. Institutional barriers arise mainly from officials who are responsible for designing, managing, and safeguarding systems but fail to enforce ethical technology practices (Mali 2021). In addition to this, data breach incidents are also caused by the insufficient data encryption in India. This suggests that the Indian government is almost silent on privacy legislation, as the government is not considering any law on data encryption or reviving the abandoned National Encryption Policy (Gaur 2022).

Daniel J. Solove's categorization of privacy problems into information gathering, information processing, information distribution, and information invasion is worth considering while addressing problems of data privacy and protection (A. Gupta 2010, Solove 2002). However, it's essential to note that enacting privacy regulations is not enough to ensure privacy protection. A lack of awareness and understanding about data privacy in society poses a significant challenge. Therefore, it's crucial to promote awareness and education on data privacy to ensure that individuals and organizations understand the importance of data privacy and comply with the regulations.

CONCLUSION

A fundamental human right, privacy upholds and defends other rights, including the freedoms of association, speech, and information. Surveillance and censorship are examples of activities that violate an individual's right to privacy. These types of actions are only legal when they are required by law, essential to accomplish a legitimate goal, and appropriate for the goal being pursued. Since information technology advancements have made it possible to gather, store, and share personal data in previously unthinkable ways, the right to privacy has expanded to include State obligations pertaining to data protection. The UN and the EU have acknowledged privacy as a critical concern due to the swift progress of technology. But in India, privacy as a right is not protected by the Indian Constitution as a basic right; rather, it is the result of court action and common law challenges. Also, the Indian government's efforts to protect privacy have been slow, due to a combination of factors. Chief among these is a lack of digital awareness among the populace, which has resulted in minimal public debate about privacy. The government's silence on the legislation of data encryption and lack of regulatory data protection policies, in turn, has stalled the enactment of privacy protection laws in the country. Moreover, the legal framework that exists to address privacy concerns is poorly structured and has proven ineffective, resulting in an increase in privacy breaches and invasions. Despite these challenges, India has demonstrated significant progress in Privacy and data protection in recent years which is advent

with the passage of the DPDP act and the fostering of domestic IT. To secure data privacy, India should strengthen its privacy protection laws, expedite procedures for handling privacy violations, and make significant infrastructure investments. India has the potential to establish a more secure digital ecosystem that protects the privacy and security of its people with a comprehensive plan and coordinated actions.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

CONSTITUTIONALITY OF PUBLIC FINANCE: AMBEDKAR'S VISION AND ACTION IN A WELFARE DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

India is witnessing significant changes and fluctuations in public finance and policy across all levels of government – national, state, and local. More specifically, the fiscal operations and public finances of the country are experiencing notable variations, making their evaluation and assessment increasingly vital at this time. To be more precise, the fiscal operations and public finances of India are undergoing noticeable changes and vacillations, highlighting the urgent need for their thorough assessment. On the other hand, Dr Ambedkar who has significant contributions in different fields of economics including public finance and fiscal policy. Further, he was a key person in framing of Indian Constitution. This makes an urgent imperative to assess the exercises in public finance and fiscal policy in India in present time, especially in the context Dr Ambedkar's ideas. Thus the present article explores Indian public finances through a practical lens inspired by the perspectives of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, particularly about the contemporary period through the constitutional validity. A comprehensive analysis of India's public finances from the standpoint of Dr. Ambedkar's views on public finance brings to light several significant insights regarding the fiscal operations of the Indian economy and incorporated in the Indian constitution to make it more just and viable in all spheres of social calls. Further, our objective is to examine the state of fiscal operations in India, and to identify the relevance of Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts on Public Finance in the present context.

Keywords: Public Finance, Constitution, social exclusion, policy, gender, discrimination.

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INTRODUCTION

Dr**. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956)** has made significant contributions to the field of economics and its several areas and branches and had a significant impact on the formulation of India's economic policy. He has made a very noteworthy contribution in the field of monetary policy, fiscal policy, Industrial and labour economics, agricultural economics, development economics, economics of social exclusion and discrimination, gender economics, poverty, and public economics and policy, etc. Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts have substantially contributed from both theoretical and applied perspectives.

Dr. Ambedkar, the Chief Architect of the Indian Constitution, was a scholar par excellence, a philosopher, a visionary, an emancipator, a writer, an economist, and a true nationalist. He led several social movements to secure human rights for the oppressed and depressed sections of society. He stands as a symbol of struggle for social justice. He was more than an individual – he epitomised the spirit of justice. His ideas, vision, and actions continue to illuminate the present and are a guiding light for the future. Dr. Ambedkar's legal expertise and knowledge of the constitutions of different countries proved to be very helpful in the making of the constitution.

He had a lot of influence on the contemplation of political thoughts, so he considered the state an essential institution. He thought that a just system can only be established through the state institution for socio-economic development. He has considered the democratic governance system as the best governance system. In this system, every section of society would get equal representation and opportunity to have its say. His vast writings also contain a wide range of economic issues, especially concerning the Indian economy.

Dr. Ambedkar's contribution to the monetary/fiscal policy was an important one, reflected in his doctoral work "*The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution*". His ideas resonated with the famous economist John Maynard Keynes, who argued for the gold exchange standard for India. Dr. Ambedkar had argued that the government under the gold exchange standard had an unregulated scope to manipulate the currency. Therefore, he argued for minting coins that could stabilise currency rates and prices.

In his doctoral thesis on Public Finance at Columbia University, "The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India," he analysed the colonial financial system and the Centre-State financial relations. He emphasised the centralization of government finance and unproductive expenditure by the government. This exposition is also on the diarchy of centre state financial roles and duties. He opined that 'public expenditure' should be based on the principles of faithfulness, wisdom, and economy.

AMBEDKAR AND THE CONSTITUTION

> "The Constitution is not a mere lawyer document, it is a vehicle of life, and its spirits are always the spirit of the age". Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had a vision to have a just society. Dr. Ambedkar's contributions [writings] such as Castes in India, Annihilation of Caste, Maharashtra as a Linguistic Province, need for checks and balances, Thoughts on Linguistic States, Federation Vs. Freedom, States and Minorities; Small Holdings in India, etc. gave the idea to the constitution in its development as social engineering. In all these diverse areas, it is not difficult to differentiate the silver strands of fundamental reflections on the value of equality as the cornerstone of the constitutional polity in democracy. To Dr. Ambedkar, "If you ask me, my ideal would be a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity.... an ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts." He incorporated these values of liberty, equality, and fraternity in the Constitution of free India. He was a supreme social architect who looked upon law as the instrument of creating a well-balanced social order in which the development of the individual would be in harmony with the growth of society.

He advocated for a religion founded on universal moral principles that may be applied to all times, places, and races. It must follow reason and be founded on the fundamental principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity incorporated in the constitution to ensure these for all residents. It also includes many measures that ensure preferential treatment for the oppressed in a variety of industries. Article 17 of the Indian Constitution declares untouchability eradicated.

In his speech to the Constituent Assembly on the Constitution, to quote: "I have completed my work; I wish there should be a sunrise even tomorrow. The new Bharat has got political freedom, but it is yet to raise the sun of social and economic liberty".

Constitutionalism/Constitutionality is closely connected with liberalism. The rule of law is central to the idea of constitutionalism. It aspires to create a social and political order that seeks to provide justice to all sections of society. The State system is particularly required to work for the promotion of justice. Dr. Ambedkar observed: "*I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved*". In democratic countries, like India, as adopted parliamentary Democracy, sovereignty lies with the people. However, the concept of constitutionalism demands that elected representatives and government officials act in terms of the limitations on power and the procedures that are set out in the Constitution, call it constitutional morality. In India, a nascent democratic nation-state and a widely diverse country, the need was to demonstrate that unity could be

built by respecting its differences in terms of religion, language, and ethnicity and that democracy itself would become a uniting factor.

On the other hand, it is true that Indian society had long neglected the tribal people, and was indeed oppressive towards the Dalits or marginalised sections. Dr B.R. Ambedkar realised that the members of the community could not secure justice in a society where untouchability and inequality had been institutionalised, purportedly based on Hindu scriptures. He, like other Dalit leaders before him, encouraged religious conversion for securing social justice and equality, and also institutionalised to protect them through the constitutional incorporation, like reservation policy, social security, etc.

Justice is best implied as fairness and equity, which can only be achieved through fair laws and institutions. It is the just laws and institutions that ensure people's act in accordance with legal norms. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar observed justice from a wider perspective within Indian democracy, connecting it to the social, political, and economic order. He emphasised the importance of social justice, political justice, and economic justice in building a just society.

He also emphasised the importance of constitutional morality, recognising its vital role in shaping fair laws, guiding judicial interpretation, and ensuring effective implementation by the executive. Constitutional morality also encourages citizens to hold governing institutions accountable and demand their proper functioning.

AMBEDKAR'S VIEWS ON PUBLIC FINANCE

There is a vast study made by him that can be seen in his doctoral writings, speeches, and articles. He widely discussed public finance or economics from a social and operational perspective for the development of a just society. Dr. Ambedkar's pioneering contribution to the origin and development of "provincial finance during the British period". He has discussed his opinion regarding different levels of decentralisation [centre, provincial, and local] and compares it with that of M.G. Ranade, one of the earliest writers on the subject. Ambedkar's opinion led to the enactment of the Reform Act of 1919, which marked the start of modern public finance in India. Dr. Ambedkar's view also sheds light on the financial dynamics between the central government and the provinces. He emphasised on internal stability of the governance, and he was convinced that only an automatic system based on the gold standard with currency could achieve this desirable end.

To him, governments should spend the resources garnered from the public not only as per rules, laws, and regulations, but also to see that "faithfulness, wisdom and economy". In the Bombay Legislative Council on October 10, 1927, he argued that the solution to the agrarian concerns "lies not in increasing the size of farms,

but in having intensive cultivation that is employing more capital and more labour on the farms such as we have." Further on, he added: "The better method is to introduce cooperative agriculture and to compel owners of small strips to join in cultivation."

The contributions of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar relating to 'State Socialism' in India is a strenuous step. As an economist, he propagated that the "state is the owner of the land". To him, the basic industries should be state-regulated. He thought that state socialism could only be achieved by state control over land, industries, religions, caste and through an elaborate scheme of constitutional method. He proposed the nationalisation of life insurance and supported state ownership and management of industries to uplift the poor and marginalised sections of society. His idea of state socialism was rooted in the core values of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity.

According to him, every individual differs from one another due to factors like birth, mental capacity, hereditary traits, and social environment. However, everyone should have the right to equal opportunities through constitutional means. The public sector or state-owned industries aim to accelerate economic development by building and expanding infrastructure, ensuring a fair distribution of income and wealth [redistribution], generating employment opportunities, mobilizing financial resources, and supporting the growth of small-scale industries.

In his Ph D thesis titled "Evolution of Provincial Finance in India" submitted to Columbia University, USA in 1917, Views on Taxation in Manifesto of Independent Labour Party in 1936, Development Policy for Independent India in his book "States and Minorities: What are Their Rights and How to Secure Them in the Constitution of Free India" in 1947, is a memorandum of an organisation Scheduled Castes Federation submitted to Constituent Assembly. One of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's significant contributions to public finance is found in his MA dissertation titled *"Administration and Finance of East India"*, submitted to Columbia University in 1915. This work evaluates the financial administration of the East India Company during pre-independence India. Dr. Ambedkar identified the Company's administrative structure as comprising the Court of Proprietors, the Court of Directors, and the Board of Commissioners. He criticised the Company's taxation policies, stating that they hindered both agricultural and industrial progress, ultimately obstructing the overall economic development.

At the time, the government was collecting land revenue in a highly exploitative manner, making up to 60% of the total revenue. In contrast, the growth of India's industrial sector was stifled due to minimal customs duties (only 6%) and a liberal import policy. Additionally, essential commodities like salt were heavily taxed, with the salt tax alone accounting for about 10% of revenue, making it more expensive (Ambedkar, B.R., 1915, pp. 22–24). Similarly, other forms of taxation – such as

those on tobacco, the sale of spirits and liquors, and professional and judicial fees—were largely ineffective and contributed little to the government's treasury.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that the taxation and revenue policies of the government at the time were unfavourable for the growth of productive sectors and hindered the overall economic progress of India. He also analysed the expenditure patterns of the East India Company's administration, concluding that their spending neither supported nor promoted India's development. In his manifesto for the Independent Labour Party (1936), Dr. B.R. Ambedkar outlined his views on public finance and taxation. He emphasised that taxation should be aligned with an individual's capacity to pay, meaning taxes should be based on income levels. He saw taxation not only as a tool for revenue generation but also as a means to reduce economic inequality. Importantly, he stressed that tax policies should not negatively impact people's standard of living.

The key principles on taxation included:

(a) Taxes should be levied according to an individual's income or capacity to pay.
(b) The system should be progressive – higher taxes for the wealthy and lower for the poor.
(c) Individuals earning below a certain threshold should be exempt from paying taxes.
(d) Land revenue should be flexible and adjustable, not fixed and rigid.
(e) The tax system must be fair and equitable.
(f) It should not be designed in a way that diminishes people's quality of life.
(g) Taxation should be efficient and effectively administered (Khairmode, 1992, p. 48).

Agriculture should be treated as a state-run industry and funded exclusively by the government. Both the Union and State governments must take on the financial responsibility for higher education, allocating adequate resources through the education budget, especially to support marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and other disadvantaged communities. The funding for secondary and college education, in particular, should be provided by the state governments.

Dr. Ambedkar had given principles of taxation, in which he was expecting taxes for equity and social justice. As framer of the Indian Constitution, he has incorporated many provisions engrained in the fundamental rights, directive principles of state policies, industrial policy, labour law/policy, wage system, and Reservation Policy. Public Finance/Annual Financial Statement (Article 112) deals with the detailed financial structure of the government in terms of the collection and distribution of revenue and taxes. Dr. Ambedkar thought that the contribution of direct taxes helps in controlling socio-economic inequity and injustice.

In his view, for the development of Independent India, he strongly advocated for the government's active involvement in addressing socio-economic inequality, discrimination, injustice, and poverty. He also emphasised the need for industrial development to absorb the surplus labour from the agricultural sector. A significant characteristic of India's employment landscape is the high proportion of informal employment, including its rise within the organised sector. From 2004-05 to 2011-12, informal employment consistently accounted for over 90% of total employment (Government of India, 2015-16, p. 27). According to 2015-16 data, the poverty rate fell from 36.2% in 2004-05 to 21.9%, with a more pronounced reduction among the rural poor (Government of India, 2018-19). Despite this decline, the ongoing issues of inequality, poverty, and informal employment reflect a reality that runs counter to Dr. Ambedkar's ideals.

CONCLUSION

A comprehensive examination of public finances through the lens of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's views highlights several key conclusions regarding the country's fiscal operations. It becomes evident that India's fiscal policies do not align with Dr. Ambedkar's vision. The current taxation system lacks a focus on promoting economic equality and social justice, due to the uneven revenue generation process. While government spending does support social development to some extent, it falls short in driving economic development. Even within the realm of social development, sectors like education and healthcare have not received the attention and priority they deserve. Moreover, the government's involvement in overall economic progress, particularly in the growth of agriculture and industry – remains limited and insufficient.

Since 1991, the government's role in the development of the industrial sector has significantly declined and weakened. The state's monopoly in areas like insurance is becoming outdated due to the increasing presence and influence of private sector players. Contrary to Dr. Ambedkar's expectations, the public sector has not been effective in advancing public infrastructure and development projects. The financial health of local governments in India is also poor, raising serious concerns. Moreover, the budget has not given sufficient attention or priority to the development of marginalised groups, particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). This reflects the government's shortcomings in addressing critical issues such as inequality, poverty, and unemployment. Moving forward, these challenges must become central to the fiscal strategy and development policies of the Indian government.

The policy should be focused on promoting job creation, along with a strong commitment to poverty alleviation, which is urgently required. Taxation should go

beyond merely serving as a tool for generating revenue—it must also function as a mechanism to uphold and strengthen equity and social justice in India.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

COMPARING INDIAN WISDOM ON GOVERNANCE WITH WESTERN CLASSIC: A STUDY OF *ARTHASHASTRA* AND THE PRINCE

Ruchi Rawat* and Vinayak Sharma**

Abstract

Generally, the credit to shift the study of statecraft from normativism to realpolitik is often associated with the Italian philosopher Machiavelli (15th-16th century), who is also known as founder of modern political thought. However, long before Machiavelli, in ancient Indian times (in the late fourth century BCE), Kautilya's discourse on statecraft *Arthahastra* establishes the realist tradition of statecraft and polity. Western scholars like Max Weber, in his famous lecture of "Politics as a Vocation," recognized Kautilya's *Arthashastra* as "Truly radical Machiavellianism". Here lies the irony that western thinkers in domain of social science undermine the Indian traditional wisdom with Eurocentric biases and call him Indian Machiavelli. Kautilya;s Arthashastra more comprehensively dealt with the realpolitik and aspects of administration which are still relevant. Thus, the present paper intends to analyse and compare the two political discourses Machiavelli's The Prince and Kautilya's *Arthahastra* and finds out that how the detailed administrative knowledge in The Arthashastra, provides a perfect amalgamation of pragmatism and morality that was far ahead of modern Western literature.

Keywords: *Arthashastra*, The Prince, Statecraft; Realpolitik; Diplomacy; Administration Governance, Politics

INTRODUCTION

It is believed that it was possible to establish Mauryan Empire (322-185 BCE) only by the guidance of Kautilya, a pragmatic political strategist, philosopher,

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statesman and Prime Minister of the great king Chandragupta Maurya (reigned c. 321-c.297 BCE), who ruled the united the Indian subcontinent under one empire for the first time in Indian history. Kautilya treatise treatise on polity and Statecraft '*Arthashastra*' (or The Science of Material Gain), a comprehensive treatise on administration and governance that systematically integrates *Arthaniti* (material wealth), *Dandaniti* (Administration of law and justice) and *Videsh Niti* (foreign policy). *Arthashastra' written* in the late 4th century BCE, is considered a timeless classic of the ancient arts of governance and political realism. Though the discourse was left unnoticed. it was first published by R. Samashastry in 1909, followed by an English translation in 1915. Later it was translated into German, Russian, and other languages (Boesche, 2002). The two English translations by Professor R. P. Kangle and the other by Shri L.N. Rangarajan is widely accepted as the most authentic translation. As R.P Kangle defines *Arthashastra* as a treatise to assist a king in *'the acquisition and protection of the earth*' and translated the word *Arthashastra* as the "science of politics". (Kangley, 1960) According to A.L. Basham, it is a "treatise on polity". (Basham, 2004). Kosambi, by highlighting the word's significance in economics, referred to it as "science of material gain", (Kosambi, 1964) while G.P. Singh labels it as a "science of polity". (Singh, 1993) Kautilya devoted this treatise to *'Artha'*, one of the four *Purushartha*: *Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksa.* He placed *Artha* above all other three *purushartha* since it is fundamental to pursuing all three others. The objective of the text better understood in as Kangley has translated:

मनुष्याणांवृत्तिरर्थः ।।१।।
मनुष्यवतीभूमिरित्यर्थः ।।२।।
तस्याःपृथिव्यालाभपालनोपायःशास्त्रमर्थशास्त्रमिति ।।३।। (Arthashastra 15/1)

The earth which reinforces mankind is referred to as "Artha", or wealth and the science which is the means to obtain and preserve the earth is known as "Arthashastra" or "the science of politics."(Kangley, 1972)

With a vision of a wealthy, prosperous and secure nation, he discussed everything in depth relevant to the wellbeing of people. His Arthashastra is comprehensive, coherent, and consistent. From the first translation in English by Shamasastry was published in 1915, immediately a comparison of it with Machiavelli's "The Prince" started in earnest. Without even fully understanding or reading the Arthashastra (or without having any knowledge of the Sanskrit), several political thinkers inappropriately have been comparing Kautilya to Machiavelli. (Rangarajan, 1992)

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527 Florence, Italy), who arguably referred to as the first modern political thinker and founder of modern political science with due regard to the fact that he never spoke of "political science", (Mansfield, 1981) was an Italian Renaissance political philosopher and statesman, who served the Republic of Florence in Italy. He wrote a monograph "The Prince" (*Il Principe*)

in 1513, a short treatise based on the lessons of history and his own experience as a foreign secretary in Florence, in the form of a realistic instruction guide for new prince, in the hope of pleasing and enlightening the ruling Medici family. It was offered sincerely to Lorenzo de' Medici as a kind of job application, in order to regain his position but the book was not published and distributed until after Machiavelli's death. His name still lies in the shadow of moralistic condemnation to the public at large. (Voegelin, 1951) "The Prince" was referred to as a "handbook for gangsters", by Bertrand Russell. (Russell, 1946) Similarly Leo Strauss also criticized Machiavelli as "a teacher of evil". (Strauss, 1958) The book was intended to guide a Prince on how to consolidate power and, therefore, it is inappropriate to evaluate it from the standards of the general public.

Max Weber in his famous lecture of "Politics as a Vocation," recognized Kautilya's Arthashastra as "Truly radical Machiavellianism", noting that comparing it with Machiavelli's The Prince is harmless. (Weber, 1978) It is not reasonable to compare Kautilya and Machiavelli. In terms of intellectual acuity and comprehensive outlook of world view, Kautilya surpasses his Italian rival by a wide margin. Furthermore, the Florentine diplomat's expertise was limited to a few years in a lower state department but Kautilya, the Indian statesman, was so much well versed in policy making and diplomacy that his guidance led to the establishment of Mauryan Empire. Five times as large as 'The Prince', Arthashastra is an incredibly thorough manual on how to run a kingdom with a "functioning state" and a working military. It is argued that Mavhiavelli could not convert his vision into reality whereas Kautilya could realize his dream in his lifetime.

Through the comparative study of both the text, this paper aims to study how, in sociocultural dynamics, time period, styles of writing, length, details and motive, both the texts stand considerably different from each other, where, Kautilya built and ran an empire while Machiavelli's work was limited to a city state of Italy, hence within this framework, drawing parallels between Kautilya and Machiavelli or any other historical political philosophers is often an opportunistic but futile exercise.

STATECRAFT AND GOVERNANCE

Kautilya's theory of statecraft is based on normative and ethical foundation drawing from the prior literature on statecraft (*Anvikshaki* (School of philosophy), *Trayi* (Triple Vedas), *Varta* (Agriculture, Cattle-breeding and Trade), and *Dandaniti* (Law of punishment or Science of government) in ancient India, rather than mere on historical-description, unlike Machiavelli. Kautilya formulated his *Saptanga Theory* of state in first Chapter of Book Sixth, defining the seven elements of sovereignty as:

स्वाम्यमात्यजनपददुर्गकोशदण्डमित्राणिप्रकृतयः ।।१।।

तत्रस्वामिसंपत् ।।२।। *(Arthashastra 6/1)*

The state is like an organic unit wherein the king serves as the head, while the minister, the territory, the fortifications, the treasury, the army and the allies act as its essential limbs of sovereignty. (Kangley, 1972)

Where all the seven *prakriti* are interwoven in a rational manner, with their order showing their respective weight and importance in statecraft. Kautilya's state was dynamic which shifts between- *stagnation, decline and rise,* determined by how well policies are formulated. (Liebig, 2013) Though *Kautilya* was the supporter of Monarchy, it was clear to him that kingship and state is based upon the goodwill of the people. King was the head of government and the popular leader of the masses. His states describe a system of governance where the king rules for the welfare of the subject. Kautilya defines the relationship of King to their subjects as:

प्रजासुखेसुखंराज्ञःप्रजानां च हितेहितम्।
नात्मप्रियंहितंराज्ञःप्रजानांतुप्रियंहितम् ।। (Arthashastra 1/19)

The happiness of the king lies on his subjects. Their welfare is his welfare. Whatever pleases his subjects should be treated as beneficial to himself rather than considering a good which only pleases him. (Kangley, 1972)

Moreover, the king is like a Constitutionalist who cannot rule by being arbitrary; he has to take the Council of Ministers into consideration. The king should take decisions based on the suggestions of ministers.

सहायसाध्यराजत्वंचक्रमेकं न वर्तते।
कुर्वीतसचिवांस्तस्मात्तेषां च शृणुयान्मतम्।।१५।। (Arthashastra 1/7)

As a single wheel of the chariot cannot move it, in the same way, in a state, Sovereignty (rájatva) is only possible with the assistance of ministers to the king. Hence a king shall appoint ministers and take their opinion. (Kangley, 1972)

The state should be governed by rule of law, with the people's welfare and happiness at the core of its ethical values. The moral duty of a king is to protect his subjects like *a father to his children.* The authority of the state rests on the foundation of *Dharma* (righteousness or moral duty). The proper performance of duties by rulers was considered crucial for maintaining social stability, ensuring the orderly progress of society, and promoting the well-being of individuals. As a result, *Rajadharma* (duties and obligations of the king) is often regarded as the root of or essence of all forms of *Dharma*. *Dharma,* which it focuses on, refers to the ethical and moral duties and responsibilities that individuals must uphold in society. When a ruler himself deviates from *Rajadharma,* he loses his legitimacy to govern, opening the door to social unrest. Even any of his state policies that go against the principle of *Rajadharma* is seen as unjust and immoral. Policies that disrupt traditional values and customs, punishing the innocent, and rewarding falsehood, devaluing good work, and promoting dishonesty and favoritism, leads to poverty,

greed, and dissatisfaction among the people. That is why *Kautilya* guided his ruler not only on sustainability and good governance but also on the ethical conduct expected of those in power, thereby ensuring a system of checks and balances to protect individual rights in society. Kautilya's ruler was supreme in his state; while serving justice, he functioned as the supreme judge of his realm, but he was not regarded as the original source of law. Nor was the ruler autocratic; rather, he was expected to be a prudent and morally upright ruler who upheld *Rajadharma.*

In contrast, Machiavelli placed exclusive importance on the self-interest of the king (his personal benefits) when it came to maintaining control and retaining his power. The Machiavellian state is the autonomous, supreme and highest association in human society which focuses only on capturing and maintaining political power by ignoring the religion, moral and ethical principles. He considered Cesare Borgia an Italian politician as his ideal ruler, who gained power through murder and manipulation of the masses. He treats his absolute state as an end in itself, for which power is the only means. On the Statecraft, Machiavelli highlights the prince to capture political power by any means. He advised his prince to always be ready to *'act against faith, against charity, against humanity, against religion*'. (Bondanella, 2005).

Whatever brings power and wealth to a ruler even the fraudulent, murder, shrewdness and cunningness is justified to be virtuous. For him observing traditional values of being good brings ruin to the prince. Kautilya puts limitations on the power of the ruler also as he should always act according to *Dharma* (righteousness); though his state was not a theocratic one rather a secular one where the king should come out with the best when he acts righteously. *Dharma* guides him and in return he should preserve *Dharma*, while the Machiavellian prince held a higher position over everything; absolute, supreme and harmless. He consciously separates politics from religion and ethics; State as a political entity above any morality. Kautilya advised his ruler not to instigate hatred and must have a flexible and prudential approach and be incredibly harsh when necessary only. Kautilya provides us a complete definition of the state that was possible in ancient times, with all its constituent elements, (Sharma, 1991) where no one in Greek philosophy has hardly discussed or even mentioned. As Somendra Lal Roy also suggests that Kautilya was perhaps the first thinker to put forth *'almost all the elements required to constitute a modern state.'* (Roy, 1992)

Machiavelli favoured despotism by emphasizing that absolute and supreme power of the government is essential to stop excessive desires and control of the people by exploiting their emotions, to bring order in society. 'The Prince' should have both the qualities of *a lion and a fox*. He must possess the combination of the bravery of a lion and cunningness of a fox.

'Since a prince is necessitated to play the animal well, he chooses among the beasts the fox and the lion, because the lion does not protect himself from traps; the fox does not protect himself from the wolves. The prince must be a fox, therefore, to recognise the traps and a lion to frighten the wolves.' (The Prince, XVIII, page 65)

He advocates a well-organized militarily strong state. In today's western political science, Kautilya doesn't fit in any category of- whether an individualist or a fascist, or a socialist or a writer of the historical and philosophical school. On clearly analyzing his work we can conclude him as the champion of the centralized, strong and benevolent monarch, with the ruler pursuing the welfare of the subject inside the state and of expansion of its territory outside of its own boundaries. (Ray, 1947) Kautilya considered *protection, maintaining the law, preserving social order and promoting the welfare of the people-* as four main functions of the state. These functions are not performed by the King alone, but rather by all the seven elements *(Saptanga)* of the state.

आत्मवांस्त्वल्पदेशोऽपियुक्तःप्रकृतिसंपदा ।
नयज्ञःपृथिवींकृत्स्त्रांजयत्येत्र न हीयते ।।१८।। (Arthashastra 6/1)

A king, wisely trained in politics will conquer the whole earth even if he possesses a small territory, with the support of the well-functioning elements of his sovereignty and will never be defeated. (Kangley, 1972)

Kautilya was not a theorist at all. His theory on *Statecraft* is based on his approach of practical knowledge and problems which he faces while administering the Mauryan administration. His realistic approach to dealt with the affair of the state might shocked the modern conscience but in today's time that can also be justified on the grounds of raison d'etat.

LAW, MORALITY AND JUSTICE

On the question of involvement of ethics and morality in politics, both Kautilya and Machiavelli have held different positions due to their different cultural and historical context in which they live. Kautilya, aligned with the traditional Indian approach rooted in the principle of *Dharma, emphasizes* the role of ethics and morality in guiding the ruler to ensure righteousness and balanced governance. Kautilya, with the ideal of shared prosperity as his goal, develops a theoretical framework and provides an ethical but pragmatic guidelines (implemantable) for governing the state. (Drekmeier, 1962) While on the other hand Machiavelli's amoral and practical approach reflected the turbulent political upheaval of Renaissance Italy, focusing on acquisition and maintenance of power only, denying the morality and ethics for rulership; as his ruler is absolute and supreme in itself.

Dharma, rooted in the ethical principles, and *Danda* (Punishment) are the two foundations for the ethical and practical governance of the Kautilya's state. He considered his king as *Dharma Pravartaka* (the fountain of justice). While practicing virtues such as *ahimsa* (non violence), tolerance, compassion, truthfulness and honesty, a ruler shall always give highest priority to the protection and preservation of *Dharma*. Book three of the text (*Arthashastra)* on *'concerning law'* presented a detailed account on use of *Dharma* and *Danda* while formulating laws and serving justice. Kautilya's king was not a law-giver than what actually a law stands for? Kautilya answered to define it as:

धर्मश्चव्यवहारश्चचरित्रंराजशासनम् ।
विवादार्थश्चतुष्पादःपश्चिमःपूर्ववाधकः ।५१। (Arthashastra 3/1)

By defining Law, Kauṭilya mentioned Dharma (Sacred law - eternal truth), Vyavahara (Evidence - is in witness), Charitra (History - found in traditions), and Rajasasana (Edicts of king - sasana) *as the four legs of Law. They are in order such that later is superior to the previous one.* (Kangley, 1972)

Dharma is rooted in truth. *Vayvahara* (legal procedure) is grounded in witness testimony. *Charitra* refers to the customary practices traditionally followed by society. *Rajajna* denotes the king's authoritative command. In Kautilya's hierarchy of legal authority, *Vayvahara* takes precedence over *Dharma, Charitra* supersedes *Vayvahara,* and *Rajajna* holds the highest position, surpassing *Charitra*. In case of disputes, resolution should ideally be achieved with the help of both traditions and the *Dharmashastra.* However, in cases of disagreement, the *Dharmashastra* should be considered the ultimate authority. Notably, *Kautilya* also asserted that if the provisions of the *Dharmashastra,* even when aligned with *Dharma,* contradict state interest or law, then *Rajajna* (the king's decree) should serve as the final basis for judgment-clearly indicating that, in Kautilya's legal philosophy, state authority is prioritized over *Dharma* or scriptural law, similar to modern governance.

Kautilya placed a strong emphasis on the *Susasana* (moral dimension of governance), with *Dharma* as a guiding force to ensure the preservation of social order. For the long term prosperity of the state, moral conduct by the ruler is essential. *Dharma* is instrumental in governance. Kautilya's State was not theocratic, however, it was secular. (Bandyopadhyaya, 1980) Despite his dependency on morality and ethics, he doesn't set out rigid and dogmatic rules but his political thought rather presented a realistic and flexible approach to administration. From one of the verse of the Book third we can take the practicability of his teachings as he clearly mentioned that:

शास्त्रंविप्रतिपद्येतधर्मन्यायेनकेनचित् ।
न्यायस्तत्रप्रमाणंस्यात्तत्रपाठोहिनश्यति ।।५७।। (Arthashastra 3/1)

In case, when there is disagreement between the Dharma (the sacred law) and rational law (Dharmanyaya-kings' law), then Reason shall be preferred as authoritative over the previous one. (Kangley, 1972)

Kautilya described an ethical ruler as *Rajarishi,* who could enact law as well as develop the cardinal principles of Justice by imposing punishment in proportion to the crime with the help of *Danda* (the rod of chastisement). He approves of deception only 'towards reasonable and unrighteous persons, not towards others' in his book fifth. On the question of how to use the instrument of *Danda,* Kautilya defined in book fourth as:

तीक्ष्णदण्डोहिभूतानामुद्वेजनीयः ।।११।।

मृदुदण्डःपरिभूयते ।।१२।। (Arthashastra 1/4)

The one who imposes severe punishment on his subjects is hated by them, while the one who is lenient is not taken seriously. But the one who delivers punishment as deserved becomes respectable. (Kangley, 1972)

Arthashastra has mentioned different punishments in proportion to the levels of crime and not for the subjects only but also for the ruler. When a ruler deviates from the path of *Dharma,* he should also be punished with the rod of chastisement.

राज्ञःस्वधर्मःस्वर्गायप्रजाधर्मेणरक्षितुः।

अरक्षितुर्वाक्षेप्तुर्वामिथ्यादण्डमतोऽन्यथा ।।५३।। (Arthashastra 3/1)

Duty of the king is the protection of his subjects while serving justice, leading him to heaven. A king fails to protect his subjects or uphold societal order wields his Danda in vain. (Kangley, 1972)

The Arthashastra of Kautilya elaborated a detailed discussion on judicial administration, including laws on contracts, property, and civil wrongs (torts). (Sihag, 2014) According to him the role of *Dharma* is also instrumental in promoting the *Artha* (prosperity) i.e.; *Dharma* paved the way to prosperity. *Arthashastra* has mentioned that *Dharma* (righteousness) is protected by *Artha* (wealth) and *Dharma* shall always prevail over *Artha. Kautilya* believed that economic growth, education, government institutions, accumulation of knowledge, practice of ethical conduct and good governance, all are interdependent. Another important role of government is to maintain law and order in the society, to remove obstacles that hurdles the societal and economic growth. *Dharma* (rule of law) and *Nyaya* (justice) should be treated as the two main pillars of good governance. For the proper functioning of society and a welfare state, *Dharma* should be followed and *Nyaya* should be served equally. (Sihag, 2007)

Machiavelli doesn't assign any values to ethics and morality in his guiding principles of governance. He formulates only a single approach to deal with his own subjects and other's which is- ruler (*the Prince)* centric, and pragmatic. A

key reason for condemning *'The Prince'* is that Machiavelli sidelines morality and defends the ruler's exercise of unchecked authority.

He rejected morality on the ground that Morality has nothing to do with power, and political power derives from political realism, hence if necessary a prince can be harsh, brutal, and cruel to maintain his power and authority. He argued that a prince can only prosper if he must be skilled in the art of power, since the manner in which he uses it determines the course of his political behavior. (Nederman, 2009).

In contrast to Kautilya's ethical guiding principles, Machiavelli's approach was focused on acquiring and preserving the power of the state only. For the greater good of the state, a ruler can set aside conventional morality. For effective leadership a Prince needs to take tough decisions and sometimes resort to morally questionable tactics for the sake of political expediency. He shows less interest in the ideal end of the state rather emphasized on the practical question of the means, and this instrumentalism and positivism give a strong momentum to the subsequent tendency of him to separate politics from morality. However, this description of the problem is not the result of any theory of methodology, but apparently was only an expression of his own lack of ethical and moral interest. (Wilde, 1928)

One of the reminded criticism of Machiavelli by Leo Strauss, contends that Machiavelli's separation of higher goods and virtues from politics effectively reduced the political standards often resulting in possibly leading the political regimes open to outrageous and abusive tactics. Machiavelli suggested that a prince may present himself as ethical but is not bound to moral conduct and can employ dishonesty whenever needed. In Section VII, he has discussed that the ruler should take care of his subject but the text lacks any discussion on programs and policies to enrich them. Apparently, Machiavelli understood the importance of law and order as he himself was a political diplomat, yet he did not, as Kautilya did, elaborate on the formulation or execution of legal and administrative policies. Since his strategy was centered on evoking fear in the minds of the people, not dispensing justice, thereby weakening the potential for effective law and order. Machiavelli argues that *'since there cannot be good laws where there are not good armies, and since where there are good armies, there must be good laws'* is very strange. Chapter seven of '*The Prince*' listed out his suggestions for what new rulers needed to stay in power-

> "Whoever therefore decides that when he has newly come to power he must destroy his enemies, secure some allies, win wars, whether by force or by fraud, make himself loved and feared by his subjects, make his soldiers loyal and respectable, wipe out those who can or wish to injure him, adopt new methods, replace old institutions with new customs, be stern and merciful, generous and magnanimous, disband disloyal troops and form new armies, form alliances with other powers, so kings and princes must either win your favour or think twice before going against your wishes-no man who thinks in these terms can hope to find, in recent times, a better model to emulate than Cesare Borgia." (The Prince, VII)

Machiavelli suggested his prince for using *'force or fraud'* to acquire power, which implies no role for ethics. As in Russell's words: The Italian political scientist totally *'ignored the ultimate potency of moral forces'*. He considered moral laws as useless for it to be violated. Machiavelli has criticized the Church and blamed it for keeping his country divided. His ideas are about surviving and strengthening his position in an unforgiving and brutal power struggle, with a complete disregard for Christianity and the classical ideas that prevailed in the Renaissance. In 1559, the Catholic Church added all of Machiavelli's writings, including The Prince, to its "List of Forbidden Books", mainly due to his supposed violations of Christian moral teachings. He rejects or even negates the ethical foundation of governance upheld by Christian philosophers. More significantly, the attribute he prizes most, virtue, is not an ethical virtue in the Christian sense. He argues that *'religion should have a prominent place in the State, not on grounds of its truth but as a social cement'*. (Russell, 1946)

CONCLUSION

Though both thinkers have occupied distinct places in their political thought and adopted empirical, pragmatic approaches to politics, our paper was based on the need to highlight the importance of acknowledging the contribution of ancient knowledge traditions of India. If Kautilya had already introduced realpolitik in the late 4th century BCE, then why does he not receive due credit, and why does academia continue to exhibit biased against this Indian thinker? Yes, we agree that both had remarkable similarities in their realpolitik ideas, but what we have observed in our study is that Machiavelli's work is limited in scope and narrow in objective; hence, the range of his inquiry remains restricted. Kautilya not only discusses the *Dharma* of a ruler but also emphasizes how both the subjects and the ruler fall under the purview of *Dharma*. *Dharma* is placed above all; even King is subordinate to the *Dharma; Dharma* is the King of King. In contrast, for Machiavelli, the core purpose of establishing a state was simply to impose order on its subjects. For him, the source of obedience; whether fear or genuine respect, was irrelevant as long as social order persisted. Kautilya's polity, however, was rooted in the ethical foundation of *Dharma,* valuing ethical and sacred duties in everyday life while adopting a realistic approach to administration. Machiavellian polity, by contrast, has no relation with ethics, due to which a conflict emerged between the spiritual and temporal authorities. The intellectual awakening in Machiavelli's thought, which infused rational and scientific thinking into his political outlook, was largely due to the Renaissance in Italy at that time. Similarities in their ideas, especially in relation to the pragmatic approach to statecraft, make it quite possible that Machiavelli's ideas were not entirely original but had already been presented by Kautilya more than eighteen hundred years before the Florentine. It might also

be possible that Europeans had access to Indic literature. Since the early encounters between Greece and India, dating back over three centuries BCE; Indian literature had been transmitted into Greek and neighboring cultures. European philosophy absorbed considerable influence from Bharatiya traditions. Hence, Kautilya deserves credit for originality, while Machiavelli, for that reason, is largely indebted to him for all that he has written, excluding the indifference towards religion and morality.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

IMPACT OF COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT ON WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF SHGs IN RAMNAGAR BLOCK (JAUNPUR), UP

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Abstract

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as a powerful tool for community empowerment, particularly in developing countries. The present paper intends to underline the impact of SHGs on strengthening socio-economic status of women in India by micro-level examination of women associated with SHGs in Ramnagar Block of Jaunpur District (Uttar Pradesh). It also provides an account of the historical evolution, objectives, dynamics, and impacts of self-help groups (SHGs) on individuals and communities. It delves into the multifaceted realm of self-help groups (SHGs) and provide an understanding of the role and effectiveness of self-help groups in fostering sustainable development and the impact of SHGs on poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, access to finance, and social capital formation. The findings highlight the significant positive effects of SHGs on both social and economic indicators, enabling them to underscore their importance as catalysts for sustainable development at the grassroots level.

Keywords: Self-Help Groups, Status of Women, Social Capital, Community Empowerment, Micro Finance, Financial Inclusion, Ramnagar, UP

INTRODUCTION

Self-help groups (SHGs) have emerged as transformative grassroots initiatives, addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals and communities. This section provides a contextual overview of the origins and development of self-help groups. Empowering communities through collective action is a critical strategy for

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achieving sustainable social and economic development. One of the most effective models for such empowerment has been the Self-Help Group (SHG) approach. Self-Help Groups, which are voluntary associations of people who come together to address common issues, have proven to be potent catalysts for community-driven development. These groups primarily focus on improving the economic conditions of their members through savings and credit activities, but they also play a significant role in social empowerment by fostering mutual support, enhancing community participation, and promoting leadership among marginalized populations (NABARD, 2021). In the late 20th century and continuing into the 21st century, self-help groups became associated with economic empowerment through microfinance initiatives. Particularly in developing countries, groups – often comprised of women – pooled resources, provided loans, and engaged in entrepreneurship, contributing to local economic development.

With the advent of the internet, the landscape of self-help groups evolved. Online forums, discussion boards, and social media platforms became spaces for individuals worldwide to connect, share experiences, and provide support. The virtual realm facilitated a global exchange of information, fostering a sense of community beyond geographical boundaries. The history of self-help groups reflects a continuous evolution shaped by societal needs, cultural dynamics, and advancements in communication. From ancient communal living to modern virtual spaces, self-help groups have played a crucial role in fostering community, empowerment, and resilience among individuals facing diverse challenges.

Beyond economic benefits, SHGs have been instrumental in enhancing social capital within communities. By providing a platform for regular interaction, they foster trust, solidarity, and collective action among members. This has led to greater community cohesion and the empowerment of individuals to take on leadership roles and engage in local governance (Sanyal, 2009). Additionally, SHGs have become a conduit for the dissemination of information on health, education, and rights, thereby contributing to broader social development goals.

The National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), now known as the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), is a flagship program launched by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. It aims to reduce poverty by promoting diversified and gainful self-employment and wage employment opportunities for rural households, particularly women. Self-help Groups (SHG) became an excellent opportunity for Rural Women to become financially independent and resolve various socioeconomic problems like education, health, collective bargaining power, building awareness, basic livelihood requirements and addressing issues like family harassment torture (Sudha et.al 2019). Women are more independent and self-sufficient after joining SHGs and help them stand equivalent to men in every aspect. After joining the SHG, women

have more freedom to roam around and engage with the authorities and other women. Some difficulties pertaining to women's life can be managed on their own. This demonstrates that "Power within the dimension of empowerment" is actually a result of SHG membership (Galab et.al 2003). The evolution of SHGs from informal savings groups to a formal mechanism for economic and social empowerment highlights their significance in development strategies. Over the decades, SHGs have proven to be a resilient and adaptable model, capable of addressing the needs of marginalized populations in diverse contexts. As SHGs continue to evolve, they remain a crucial tool for promoting financial inclusion, gender equality, and community development.

Historical evolution of self-help groups in global context: The evolution of self-help groups globally reflects a dynamic interplay of grassroots initiatives, socio-economic needs, and institutional support. From ancient mutual aid societies to modern digitally integrated networks, SHGs have consistently demonstrated their potential to empower individuals and communities, particularly the marginalized and economically disadvantaged. The concept of self-help can be traced back to ancient civilizations where informal groups were formed for mutual aid. During the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe, friendly societies emerged. These were mutual aid organizations that provided financial and social support to members, particularly in times of sickness, unemployment, or death. The cooperative movement, which began in the 19th century and gained momentum in the early 20th century, emphasized collective self-help in economic activities. Credit unions, a form of financial cooperative, provided members with low-interest loans and financial services. In the United States, mutual aid societies, particularly among immigrant communities, provided a support network for new arrivals, offering financial aid, healthcare, and social integration. In Africa, for example, rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs) were common, where groups of individuals would pool their savings and take turns receiving the collective sum (Bouman, 1995).

After World War II, the concept of self-help groups (SHGs) began to be formalized. Governments and international organizations recognized the potential of SHGs in addressing socio-economic issues. The microfinance movement, which started in the 1970s, played a crucial role in promoting SHGs, especially in developing countries. Pioneers like Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh demonstrated how small loans to SHGs could empower the poor, particularly women, by enabling them to start small businesses. During the 1980s and 1990s, women's SHGs became particularly prominent. These groups not only focused on economic empowerment but also on social issues such as health, education, and domestic violence (Harper 2002). In India, for instance, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural

Development (NABARD) were instrumental in promoting SHGs. Organizations like the World Bank, UNDP, and numerous NGOs started promoting SHGs as a tool for community development and poverty alleviation. Programs like the World Bank's SHG-Bank Linkage Program in India became models for other countries.

Historical evolution of self-help groups in Indian context: The concept of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has a long and diverse history, evolving from informal savings groups in traditional societies to a structured tool for economic empowerment in modern times. The evolution of SHGs has been influenced by various social, economic, and political factors, particularly in developing countries like India, where SHGs have become a key component of rural development strategies. In India, the historical evolution of self-help groups (SHGs) can be traced back to the early 20th century, with the emergence of community-based organizations and cooperative societies. However, the modern SHG movement gained significant momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, propelled by government-led initiatives to alleviate poverty and empower marginalized communities. Ela Bhatt founded the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which created the self-help group model. She was in responsible of developing an organised market for women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who ran unorganised businesses making handmade toys, pottery, needlework, and other crafts. In 1992, NABARD launched the SHG Bank Linkage Project, which grew to be the world's biggest market effort. The Reserve Bank of India has supported NABARD since 1993 in its efforts to assist SHGS in opening bank savings accounts. Swarn Jayanti Gramme Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) was created by the Indian government in 1999 to promote the development of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in rural areas of the country by providing them with training and capacity building opportunities. To reduce poverty in rural India, the Government of India launched the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) later in 2011. NRLMs gave SHGs access to easy finance(loans) other banking facilities (insurance, savings, pension, etc.) and conducted various training & upskilling programs (John R. and Lal 2022). Throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century, SHGs expanded across various sectors, including agriculture, small-scale entrepreneurship, and social welfare, leveraging collective action and peer support to address socio-economic challenges at the grassroots level.

Today, SHGs continue to thrive as a key component of India's development landscape, fostering self-reliance, economic independence, and community solidarity. In recent years, the SHG model has continued to evolve, incorporating new technologies and expanding its scope to address issues beyond financial inclusion. Digital platforms have been introduced to facilitate savings, credit, and insurance services for SHGs, improving efficiency and accessibility. Moreover, SHGs have increasingly taken on roles in community development, health, and

education, reflecting their potential as a comprehensive tool for social change (Puhazhendhi & Satyasai, 2000).

Problem Statement: Examining the existing societal and economic challenges that necessitate the formation of self-help groups. This involves an exploration of issues such as poverty, gender inequality, and social isolation that propel communities towards self-help initiatives.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The major objective of the present paper is to examine the impact of Self-Help Groups on socio economic development of women and their status in society

The present study adopts a mixed-methods such as the integration of quantitative and qualitative data to offer a holistic understanding of SHGs' impact and depends on both primary and secondary sources of data collection.

The universe of the study is self-help groups operating across diverse geographical locations and socio-economic contexts. A purposive sampling technique has been employed to select SHGs representing various demographic characteristics, such as rural/urban settings, different sectors (e.g., agriculture, microenterprise), and age groups. A total of 5 SHGs (50 members in all taken). The sampled respondents were interviewed and focus group discussions had been conducted with SHG members. The for this purpose, Ramnagar block of Jaunpur district of the Uttar Pradesh was purposively selected on the basis of availability of SHG in village. A total of 5 SHGs (50 members in all taken) from 5 villages of Ramnagar block mainly Ahirauli, Aura, Balbhadrapur, Barigaw and Bashirpur are selected.

Additionally, secondary data sources, such as government reports and SHG performance data, reports, and policy documents had provided qualitative insights. The key indicators were economic empowerment, social capital formation, community development, and sustainability of SHGs. Measurement tools have been developed based on established frameworks and validated scales to assess these variables quantitatively and qualitatively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An array of studies can be found examining different aspects of SHGs and depict that most of women SHG members belonged to the Below Poverty Line (BPL). They face hurdles posed by the community as well as the family in improving their status. However, some studies have shown that up to 51 percent of the members are from poor families (BPL), mainly belonging to the Schedule Caste community. (EDA Rural system Pvt limited. 2006). Harper (2003) found 77 percent of women

in the SHGs he studied are from the SC community. Many studies have shown that income of the members have increased significantly, however, not able to bring them above the BPL state (Swain, Ranjula Bali and Fan Yang Wallentin Eda Rural system Pvt limited; 2006 Tankha, Ajay). Further it is widely accepted that SHGs have helped to reduce the dependence on the moneylender by making available credit during emergencies and for creation of productive assets. Harper in his study found an increase of 37.5 percent in the assets of families who were members for seven years over those who were members only for three years. He points out that one reason could be the loans obtained from the SHGs. NABARD's evaluation study of 560 members of 223 SHGs linked to banks in 11 states showed that SHG members realized major increases in assets, income and employment. ASSEFA 's study showed 95% of members covered by the study reported increases in annual income and 52% have reported an increase in net worth over Rs. 10,000. Nevertheless, these studies confirm that income and assets of families of SHG members have increased.

NABARD evaluation study showed that women members were found to have become more assertive in confronting social evils and problem situations. Nearly half the poor member households had crossed the poverty line. The social status of women has increased in the family and in the community. (Ajay Tankha 2012). Studies conducted so far have shown that the SHGs membership had a positive impact on the women and society. A major study of 72 SHGs undertaken earlier covering over 1,000 SHG members in Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka (Harper et al.1998) observed improvement in members' diet, assets and education. Similarly, the EDA study showed thirty percent of the SHGs were active members in community.

CONTRIBUTION OF SHGs IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Self-help groups (SHGs) significantly contribute to social development by creating avenues for community empowerment, fostering solidarity, and addressing social challenges at the grassroots level. Through collective action and mutual support, SHGs empower marginalized individuals, particularly women, by providing access to resources, skills training, and opportunities for leadership. By promoting inclusivity and participatory decision-making, SHGs strengthen social cohesion, bridging divides within communities and fostering a sense of belonging and ownership. Moreover, SHGs often initiate community projects aimed at improving education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability, thus enhancing overall social well-being and promoting sustainable development. In essence, SHGs serve as catalysts for positive social change, empowering individuals and communities to overcome adversity and build a more equitable and resilient society.

Self-help groups (SHGs) have a profound impact on economic development by fostering financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and poverty alleviation. Through collective savings and access to microcredit, SHGs enable members, particularly those from marginalized communities, to start small businesses, invest in income-generating activities, and build assets. By promoting financial literacy and management skills, SHGs empower individuals to make informed decisions about their finances and plan for the future. Moreover, the economic activities facilitated by SHGs contribute to job creation, income generation, and local economic growth, thereby lifting households out of poverty and promoting economic self-sufficiency. Overall, SHGs play a crucial role in unlocking the economic potential of communities, fostering resilience, and contributing to sustainable development.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The study employs the Likert scale which presents a statement or question and asks respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with that statement by selecting from a range of options. Table -1 depicts the opinion of the respondents on their perception of impact of SHGs on the life and community.

Table 1:

	Opinion of the responders	*No.*	*%*
(a)	Very strong	41	82.369
(b)	Strong	6	16.184
(c)	Not Much	2	0.086
(d)	Very poor	1	0.057
	Total	50	100

"How would you describe the impact of the SHG on your life and community?"	Answer

Column diagram created on the basis of the above table

The Table 2 reveals their opinion on increase in savings. The Graph reflects the range.

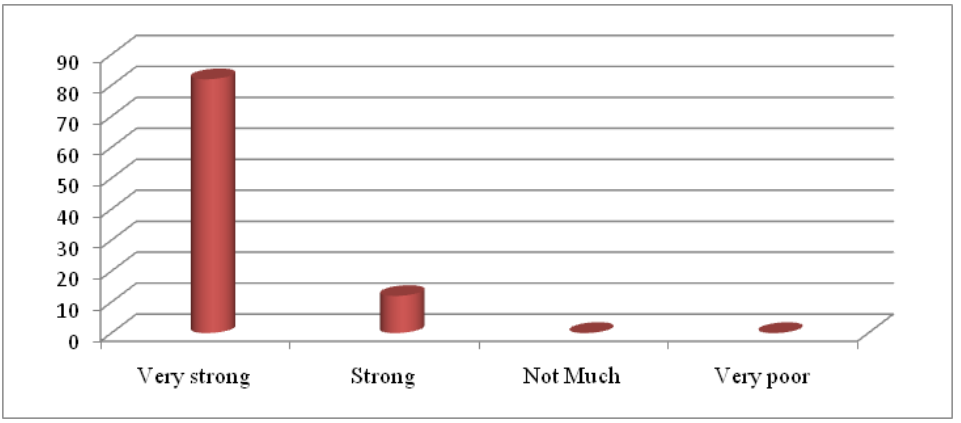
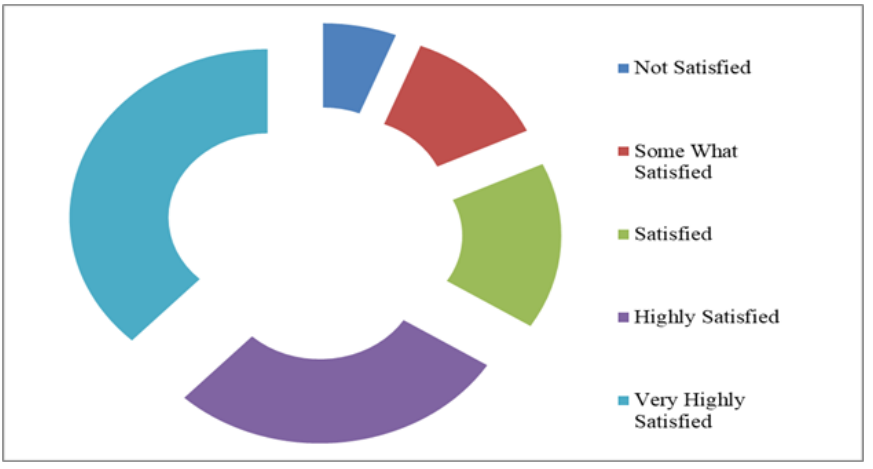


Table 2:

Question "How do you feel about the increase of your savings after joining SHG?"		*Answer*	
Opinion of the responders		***No.***	***%***
(a)	Not Satisfied	3	6
(b)	Some What Satisfied	6	12
(c)	Satisfied	8	16
(d)	Highly Satisfied	14	28
(e)	Very Highly Satisfied	19	38
	Total	50	100



Doughtnut Graph plotted on the bases of the above table

It will be evident from above data that on both the issues social and economic aspects there is positive trend of the impact of SHGs on women's socio-economic status, as almost all of them accept (98 percent) it and feel satisfied (82 percent). With that it also cleared that throughout its evolution, self-help groups have remained rooted in the principles of mutual support, empowerment, and personal responsibility. While the methods and mediums may have evolved, the fundamental goal of self-help groups – to provide individuals with the resources, guidance, and encouragement needed to overcome challenges and improve their lives – remains unchanged.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

A study conducted in Tamil Nadu reveals that women associated with SHGs are immensely benefited, not only by increased financial gains but also by the training and capacity-building activities provided by the SHGs (Puhazhendi & Badatya, 2002). In Bangladesh, the Grameen Bank model, which relies heavily on SHGs, has been instrumental in reducing poverty. A case study by Khandker (2005) showed that participation in SHGs contributed to a 50 percent increase in household income and a significant reduction in poverty levels. The social collateral provided by SHG membership played a crucial role in ensuring loan repayment and fostering trust within the community.

ENHANCING SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

SHGs not only contribute to economic empowerment but also to the strengthening of social capital. In Kerala, India, the Kudumbashree initiative is a prime example of how SHGs can enhance social cohesion and collective action. Kudumbashree, a poverty eradication and women empowerment programme, operates through a network of SHGs at the neighbourhood level. A study by John (2009) highlighted how Kudumbashree has fostered a sense of solidarity among women, leading to collective action on issues such as health, education, and domestic violence. Similarly, in Nepal, SHGs have been instrumental in improving the social status of women in rural areas. According to a case study by Mayoux (2001), SHG members reported increased confidence and a greater voice in household and community decision-making processes. This shift in social dynamics was attributed to the support networks and leadership opportunities provided by SHGs, which enabled women to challenge traditional gender barriers and assert their rights.

FOSTERING COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT

SHGs have also played a critical role in promoting community-led development. In Ethiopia, the SHG approach has been integrated into broader community

development programs. A case study by Jones et al. (2009) demonstrated that SHGs in Ethiopia have been successful in mobilizing communities to address issues such as water scarcity, sanitation, and education. By leveraging the collective power of SHGs, communities have been able to initiate and sustain development projects that address their specific needs.

In India, the role of SHGs in promoting community health initiatives has been particularly noteworthy. A study by Saha and others (2013) in the state of West Bengal showed how SHGs were involved in promoting maternal and child health by organizing awareness campaigns, facilitating access to healthcare services, and advocating for better health infrastructure. The involvement of SHGs in these initiatives not only improved health outcomes but also strengthened the capacity of communities to manage their development processes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this comprehensive review underscores the pivotal role of self-help groups (SHGs) as catalysts for social and economic development, highlighting their profound impact on empowering communities worldwide. Through a synthesis of empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks, this research paper has illuminated the multifaceted benefits of SHGs, ranging from economic empowerment and poverty alleviation to social inclusion and community solidarity. By providing platforms for collective action, mutual support, and capacity building, SHGs have emerged as effective grassroots mechanisms for addressing socio-economic challenges and fostering sustainable development outcomes. However, while SHGs have demonstrated considerable promise, their success hinges on factors such as leadership, participation, and external support, which warrant further attention and research. Moving forward, it is imperative for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders to recognize the potential of SHGs and to invest in their continued growth and sustainability as integral agents of positive change within communities. By harnessing the power of SHGs, we can aspire to create more resilient, equitable, and empowered societies, where every individual has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the collective well-being of their communities.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

THEORISING THE PHENOMENON OF 'FOOD SECURITY TO MIGRANTS': AN EXAMINATION OF INDUCTIVE AND DEDUCTIVE RESEARCH METHODS

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Abstract

A large number of workers migrate in search of jobs and other purposes. Food is the first and foremost pre-requisite for their survival. Ensuring food security to migrants is a major issue in India. They face immense difficulties in securing food commodities from public distribution system (PDS) in want of identity as beneficiary (ration card). To overcome this problem Government of India has launched 'One Nation One Ration Card' (ONORC). Now the serious concernis assessing migrants' status in regard to food security. This requires genuine enquiry and theorising the phenomenon of 'food security to migrants' for suggesting policy reforms. Further, it is also important to determine the appropriate research method. The issue of food security to migrants involves theoretical aspects like entitlement theory, social exclusion theory, multi-level governance theory, dietary acculturation theory (related to proper utilisation of food commodities) and so on.It requires appropriate research method which can be broadly classified into Inductive and Deductive methods. Since the food security to migrants through ONORC is an government's recent initiative which involves identification of the beneficiary in the strange location, effectiveness of food administration at grassroots level, state of migrant friendly PDS, their living conditions and capacity to avail the food commodities. As such the present paper examines the Inductive and Deductive methods of research, especially in the context of food security to migrant workers dwelling in slums or jhuggi-jhopdis or sites of industrial areas in metro cities.

Keywords: Inductive Method, Deductive Method, Food Security, Migrants, ONORC.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of food security, especially to the needy people, has been a global concern since long. The concern has gradually expanded the components of food security from mere availability to entitlement and conducive conditions. The Government of India took initiative to implement measures of food security in 2009 and finally enacted the National Food Security Act in 2013 which addresses the needy people like poor, women and children covering a large chunk of population. But the requirements of people who migrate from their native places to big cities, industrial areas and such other places for livelihood, faced identity crisis at the places of migration. Considering the needs of migrants, Government of India launched the scheme of One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) in 2018 which allowed portability of ration cards anywhere in India. The Scheme aimed at assured food security to migrants in any part of the country. It enables the migrant workers and their family members to avail the food commodities from PDS shops anywhere in the country. The ration card details and entitlement of the beneficiaries are made available on digitalised portal ePoS, making it potable under the Scheme. It allows beneficiaries to claim their food commodities from PDS shops anywhere in the country using their Aadhar Card linked. Further, the PMGKAY (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana) also facilitates the migrant workers. However, migrants face some challenges like lack of documents, dependence on market and storage problems (in informal settlements have lack of cooking and storage facilities). Here, we are not concerned with discussing the food security and the scheme rather to ponder upon theorising the phenomenon of 'food security to migrants'. Theorisation of the phenomenon can be approached through (a) the 'socio-ecological model' encompassing macro level policies and micro-level community based factors like social exclusion and inclusion, (b) entitlement theory (Amartya Sen), (c) macro and micro level governance, (d) dietary acculturation and (e) cultural capital (understanding how individuals adapt to unfamiliar food environment at place of migration) and such other theories may emerge after the research.

Social science research seeks to understand the complexities of human behaviour, social structures, and cultural change. For any study to withstand academic scrutiny and influence policy, its methodology must be carefully chosen and rigorously applied. Methodological decisions are not simply technical matters; they demand alignment with the research question and the lived realities of the subject under investigation. When the method is poorly matched, the credibility of the study suffers, often leading to rejection or extensive revision.

The present article explores the application of inductive and deductive approaches to two pressing and interconnected challenges: migration and food security. The intellectual foundations of these methods reach back centuries. Deductive reasoning, formalized by Aristotle, rests on the principle that

conclusions necessarily follow from established premises. Induction, though practiced informally in antiquity, gained prominence during the Enlightenment, when thinkers such as Francis Bacon argued that knowledge must be built from systematic observation and empirical evidence. Over time, both traditions have profoundly shaped the scientific method, influencing disciplines across the social sciences and beyond.

Conceptually, inductive and deductive methodologies move in opposite directions. Induction begins with specific, ground-level observations and gradually builds toward broader generalizations or theorisation. Deduction, in contrast, starts from an existing theory or hypothesis and tests its validity against empirical evidence. As Fardet et al. (2021) observe, these approaches represent two distinct epistemological pathways for advancing knowledge, each offering unique strengths and limitations when applied to complex social phenomena. Developing proficiency in both is essential for rigorous scholarship, particularly when examining the intertwined issues of migration and food security. For many vulnerable communities, these domains overlap significantly, with migration often serving as a critical livelihood strategy to secure household food needs (Choithani, 2017).

In today's rapidly shifting demographic patterns and volatile economic conditions, nuanced methodological approaches are more important than ever. This paper critically assesses the role of inductive and deductive reasoning in social science research, with a focus on how they illuminate the dynamic relationship between human mobility and food access. By engaging with the lived experiences of food insecurity, the structural dimensions of migration, and the policy responses that follow, this analysis demonstrates how methodological choices directly shape our understanding of vulnerability and the effectiveness of interventions.

THEORETICAL INSIGHTS OF METHODS

To understand the foundations of inductive and deductive reasoning, it is necessary to revisit the classic texts that shaped them. John Stuart Mill's A System of Logic is particularly influential. Mill argued that induction forms the bedrock of genuine knowledge. In Book III, he defined induction as the process of deriving general propositions from specific instances, a practice grounded in what he termed the uniformity of nature. His famous example all men are mortal illustrates this principle. We do not accept it through revelation; rather, we infer it from repeated observations of individual deaths. That leap from particular facts to universal rules lies at the heart of his inductive logic.

Deduction, or what Mill called ratiocination, occupies a different role. In Book II, he critiqued the traditional syllogism all men are mortal; Socrates is a man;

therefore, Socrates is mortal as circular. The major premise itself depends on prior inductive reasoning. For Mill, deduction was not a source of new truth but a way of interpreting and applying existing knowledge. He emphasized that real inference occurs only when past observations are connected to new cases. His four methods of experimental inquiry agreement, difference, residues, and concomitant variations provided systematic tools for strengthening induction. In Mill's view, deduction verifies knowledge, but induction constructs the very framework of science.

Francis Bacon, writing two centuries earlier in Novum Organum (1620), advanced a similar vision. He rejected the scholastic reliance on abstract deduction, which he saw as sterile and prone to circular reasoning. Instead, Bacon promoted careful observation and gradual ascent from data to theory. His study of heat exemplifies this approach. Rather than beginning with a rigid definition, he compiled tables of presence, absence, and variation, allowing patterns to emerge organically. For Bacon, forcing preconceived notions onto nature, what he called anticipations, was a fundamental error. True induction required humility before empirical reality.

Modern science continues to reflect this dual heritage. Research often falls into two modes empirico-inductive (EI) and hypothetico-deductive (HD) (Fardet et al., 2021). Inductive reasoning begins with raw data, often qualitative, and builds upward into theory. For example, exploring the lived experiences of food-insecure migrant families to identify recurring themes of vulnerability. Deductive reasoning, by contrast, starts with a hypothesis and tests it quantitatively. A study on whether remittances improve food security might survey households and apply statistical analysis to confirm or refute the claim (Choithani, 2017). While induction generates theory, deduction verifies it. These methodological choices also shape concept formation, influencing how individuals are categorized and how they perceive themselves within social groups (Postmes et al., 2005). In migration and food security research, early studies relied heavily on inductive, qualitative methods to understand survival strategies (Lemke et al., 2003). Later work incorporated deductive, quantitative models to test broader economic impacts (Choithani, 2017).

Contemporary scholarship often blends the two. Mixed-methods approaches allow researchers to capture both the lived realities of displaced populations and the measurable outcomes of policy interventions. For instance, one study might inductively explore coping strategies among migrants facing hunger, while another deductively evaluates the effectiveness of food aid programs across large samples. It is precisely this interplay between induction and deduction that produces the robust evidence base required for sound policy design.

INVESTIGATION OF FOOD SECURITY TO MIGRANTS: INDUCTIVE VS. DEDUCTIVE METHODS

Inductive methods are indispensable for uncovering the nuanced realities of migration and food security. Standardized surveys can be useful, but they often miss the localized complexities of migrant life. By prioritizing qualitative data and open-ended exploration, researchers generate theories grounded in lived experiences rather than abstract assumptions. A clear example is the multi-city study by Diehl et al. (2019). Instead of beginning with a rigid hypothesis, the team used semi-structured interviews to observe migrant urban farmers in Delhi, Jakarta, and Quito. This flexible approach revealed that urban agriculture was not only about food production but also a coping mechanism. In Delhi, informal crop exchanges became lifelines, while in Quito, home gardens provided psychological security. Such insights only emerge when participants are allowed to shape the narrative.

Khadar et al. (2025) further highlight the strength of induction in their Kerala study. By engaging directly with migrant workers in construction and textiles, they captured perspectives that structured surveys would have overlooked. Their thematic analysis revealed what they termed the migration–food security paradox. Migrants, though central to Kerala's food economy, were systematically excluded from state food security frameworks. This contradiction was not predicted by existing theories; it surfaced directly from the data. The study also documented specific vulnerabilities: over 80 percent of migrants cited language barriers as obstacles to accessing food, while nearly 27 percent reported health declines due to dietary changes after migration. By cantering migrant voices, the research moved beyond traditional push–pull models to show how climate change and systemic exclusion intersect.

Deductive methods, on the other hand, are essential for quantifying patterns, testing established theories, and producing findings that can be generalized across populations. This approach relies on structured surveys and measurable variables, making it the yardstick of social science.

Diehl et al. (2019) also applied a deductive lens to complement their inductive work. Drawing from sustainable development literature, they hypothesized that urban farming improves household food security. Using the USDA Household Food Security Survey Module, they converted abstract concepts into measurable indicators across three countries. Their results confirmed the theory, showing that migrant households engaged in farming consumed a greater variety and quantity of nutritious food.

Similarly, Khadar et al. (2025) employed a deductive framework in Kerala, guided by the Market Condition Theory of Migration. Using digital tools like KoBoToolbox and statistical analysis via SPSS, they tested whether structural

barriers predicted by theory were present. The findings were stark: 83 percent of interstate migrants lacked Aadhaar–ration card linkage, excluding them from the One Nation, One Ration Card scheme despite their economic contributions. Deductive analysis revealed that bureaucratic delays, caste-based networks, and administrative failures during COVID-19 were systemic issues rather than isolated incidents.

ASSESSING INDUCTIVE AND DEDUCTIVE METHODS

Inductive as well as deductive methods both are useful tools in social science, but they also have clear limits. John Stuart Mill's strong belief in the uniformity of nature assumes a level of stability that rarely exists in real life. In areas like migration and food security, where climate, culture, and politics mix, social patterns are often unpredictable. If the first observations are too narrow or biased, induction can easily lead to overgeneralization. Francis Bacon's method, while careful and scientific, also has problems. His call for full and detailed data collection can be too slow, especially in urgent situations where food security information is needed quickly to save lives. By rejecting deduction, Bacon also missed how useful it can be to apply existing knowledge to new and pressing problems. In practice, modern research does not follow only one extreme. Instead, it often moves in a cycle where ideas are formed deductively and then tested and refined through induction.

The main lesson for today's scholars is the need for balance. Relying only on induction can lead to quick but weak generalizations, while using only deduction risks falling into circular reasoning that ignores real-world evidence. As shown in recent studies on Kerala's migration and urban farming in Delhi and Quito, mixed methods are usually stronger. Using inductive fieldwork to uncover migrant struggles, and then applying deductive reasoning to place those findings into wider policy frameworks, makes research both sound and relevant.

Methodological choices also carry ethical responsibility. If an inductive study is based on biased or incomplete samples, it may reinforce harmful stereotypes or silence the very groups it aims to represent. On the other hand, if deductive reasoning begins from a flawed or unfair idea, it can be used to justify bad policies under the cover of logic. When studying vulnerable groups like migrants, ethics go beyond collecting data. Research must protect human dignity and promote fairness. This requires openness and self-awareness, including the researcher's ability to admit how their own position may shape the work.

RELEVANCE OF INDUCTIVE AND DEDUCTIVE METHODS

The lasting value of inductive and deductive methods is clear when we see how they work in modern field studies. John Stuart Mill's idea of moving from specific

facts to general rules is shown in the Kerala migration research. By surveying 1,554 people and finding that only 11 had valid ration cards, researchers could conclude that there is a systemic barrier stopping migrants from accessing food security programs. This move from raw data to a general truth is the core of induction. Deduction comes in when these findings are compared with national policies like the One Nation One Ration Card scheme. The policy claims full coverage as the general rule, but deductive analysis shows that migrants, the specific case, are excluded instead of included.

Francis Bacon's call for careful induction through observation is also relevant in the multi-city study of Delhi, Jakarta, and Quito. In the Yamuna floodplain of Delhi, household interviews showed that migrant farmers sold produce daily. This specific fact supports the wider inductive claim that urban farming is a reliable source of food security. In Quito, the AGRUPAR program created more than 2,500 gardens, which stands as inductive proof that local projects can reduce food insecurity.

Deduction plays a supporting role here too. Researchers often begin with the FAO's global definition of food security, which is access to enough safe and nutritious food, and use it to judge local practices. By comparing observed diets with this standard, they can deduce whether urban farming truly protects households. The results show that benefits are uneven, but the process itself shows how general rules can be used to test specific realities.

The real importance of these methods is in how they connect lived experiences with policy frameworks. This mix ensures that social science is not locked away in theory. By moving between the ground-level insights of induction and the structured testing of deduction, research can create fair and effective solutions to food insecurity among vulnerable migrant groups.

CONCLUSION

The growth of social science research from the early logic of Aristotle and Mill to the careful observation of Francis Bacon has given us strong tools to study today's complex problems. As shown in this paper, inductive and deductive methods are not just different styles of research. They work together. Induction helps us listen to real experiences, showing the struggles of food-insecure migrants that numbers alone might miss. Deduction gives the structure to test those insights against national policies and global standards. The studies of migration in Kerala and urban farming in Delhi and Quito remind us why this mix matters. Induction lets us move from small details, like language barriers or missing ration cards, to bigger ideas such as the migration and food security paradox. Deduction then proves these are not single cases but wider problems that need urgent policy change.

Looking ahead, research must stay flexible and self-aware. The choice of method shapes the reality we see. Using only induction risks weak generalizations, while relying only on deduction risks losing touch with lived experience. The strongest social science creates a dialogue between the two, using induction to humanize data and deduction to give it weight. With this balance, and with a clear ethical focus, research can move beyond simple observation and help build fair and practical solutions for global challenges like migration and food security.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

DYNAMICS OF INDIAN FEDERALISM: CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES

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Abstract

Indian Federalism has been characterized by a dynamic relationship between constitutional continuity and political transformation. The constitution of India provides for a federal system with a strong centralizing tendency. The federalism has evolved over a period of time with the changes in political dynamics, Judicial Pronouncements, Economic Reforms since 1990 and the changes made through the Constitutional Amendments. This study employs qualitative and interpretative methodology. By adopting these frameworks, it analyzes the political dynamics of the country, the judgements of the Supreme Court on federalism, and economic development since independence. The study also took into consideration the four-dimensional analytical framework ranging from changes in the party system and its implication on Centre-State relations, the judiciary's view on federalism, constitutional amendments made by the Parliament, and the advent of the New Economic Policy of 1991. The article highlights the continuities, such as the domination of the Centre, and the inclination of the legislative and financial power towards the Centre. At the same time, it underlines the influence of states at different phases of the party system. Its present nature and form are the outcome of many interconnected changes in politics, the judicial decision, the economic imperatives, and the constitutional changes.

Keywords: Indian Federalism, Coalition, Party System, Centre-State Relations, Judiciary, Political Economy, Constitutional Amendments.

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INTRODUCTION

A Federal government is a type of political arrangement in which powers are constitutionally distributed between the central government and the state governments by the constitution, and both tiers function in their jurisdiction independently. Such arrangement aims to balance unity with diversity allowing region to maintain autonomy. It promotes decentralization, protects the regional interest, celebrate diversity by accommodating cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences.The framers of the Indian constitution chose to establish a parliamentary system of government. This system was adopted because we were very much acquainted with the tradition of Westminster system. Moreover, this model guarantees a responsible government, and a responsible government was necessary to make it accountable to the people and to bring out the people from the poverty and illiteracy.

India's constitutional framework reflects a hybrid form of government. This hybrid form consists of two models – British tradition based on sovereignty of the parliament and American principle modelled on the supremacy of the constitution. This hybrid system can also be called as parliamentary-federalism. Granville Austin held that the constituent assembly has devised a new type of federalism which is suited to India's peculiar needs(Chakrabarty & KumarPandey, 2008).

Indian federalism has witnessed significant transformation over time, with the change in political dynamics, Judiciary's decision, economic transformation and amendments in the constitution. Accordingly, the paper has adopted four-dimensional analytical framework to examine the evolution and transition in Indian federalism. This particular framework provides a comprehensive understanding of how federalism operates and sustains itself with the changing dynamics. The paper is divided into six parts. First part deals with change in Party dynamics and its influence on relation between the union and the states. Second part highlights Judicial decisions in defining and recalibrating the constitutional balance of federalism, with special emphasis on the incidents of president's rule and the jurisdictional conflicts. Third part deals with the introduction of New Economic Policy in 1990s bringing structural changes in the dynamics of Centre-state relations. These changes brought a fundamental shift from the vertical competition to Horizontal competition among the states. The Fourth part envisages amendments caried by the Union government as instruments of structural restructuring with special focus on 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments which introduced third-tier of governance in India. Furthermore, the amendment in the Representation of People Act and the introduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST) by the Parliament was also included in this part to know better about the representational and fiscal issues. The Fifth part of the Paper comes with the finding about what has been continued and what has changed. The Final section of the paper is Conclusion where we find

that Indian federalism has evolved according to the times and circumstances and will continue to operate where elements of Continuities and Changes complement each other.

FROM CONGRESS DOMINANCE TO COALITION POLITICS: CHANGING DYNAMICS OF CENTRE–STATE RELATIONS

The Party system has been dynamic in India. It has changed and evolved over a period of time. The transformation in party system took place not only due to the weakening of Congress party domination but also due to the emergence of new and strong regional forces(Sharma & Swenden, 2017). Since 1989, Party system has changed significantly as the 1989 general election marked the decline of single-party dominance at the Centre and the rise of coalition politics. The National Front government led by V. P. Singh was supported by several regional parties such as the Telugu Desam Party and DravidaMunnetraKazhagam. This development strengthened federalism by giving regional parties a decisive role in national governance and policy-making. Thus, the arrival of Coalition politics at the national level changes the dynamics of Centre-state relations. The end of Congress domination and the arrival of the multi-party have increased the role of regional parties.

Several Scholars have explained federalization as the end of one-party dominance, the proliferation and expansion of political parties and remaking of the party system(Arora et al., 2013). Due to emergence of several parties in various states as a strong regional force and their dominance in the politics of Centre, and the inability of national parties to secure majority on its own compelled to constitute a coalition and form government with the help of other parties called as Federal coalition at the Centre(Chakrabarty, 2019). William Riker has emphasized the importance of party system for understanding federalism. When party is decentralized and centralized then federalism is also decentralized and centralized respectively(Sharma & Swenden, 2017). Indian Party system has been classified into four distinct phases.The "First party system" is characterized as congress system from 1947 to 1969. Second phase of the party system is known as "Congress-opposition system" from 1969 to 1989. The Third-party system ranges from 1989 to 2014 majorly dominated by coalition politics. Since, 2014, the BJP emerges as strong force and formed the government in 2014, 2019 and 2024 which is known as Fourth Party system (A. Kumar, 2024).

The Constitutional architects of Indian federalism designed centralized framework, where the dynamics of Centre-State relations has been shaped by changes in the party system. The Indian party system has transformed from single party dominance to multi-party system and then the Coalition system.

With the passage of time the coalition system again shifted to the single party dominance. These transformations have produced various degree of Centralization and Federalization. The federalizing factors highlighted are Judiciary's decision, economic changes, the transformation in party system and the Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendment Acts (Arora et al., 2013).

In the early decades after independence, Indian politics was dominated by Congress party which had significant presence at both the union and the state level. The control of single party at both levels enabled the government in the centralized decision-making processes. The decision of union was conveyed or transmitted to the states, and states have to accept and implement the programs and policies. The voice of dissents and issues of states were often managed within the party framework. As a result, federal system functioned on the direction of Centre, and states did not assert their functional autonomy. The dominance of Congress and its strong hold started declining from the late 1960s. This period is marked by the rise of the regional parties dominating the state politics as well as often played a crucial role in the formation of the government at the centre. The fragmentation of party system has compelled the Centre to have dialogue with states in the decision-making processes (Kumar Jha & Nayan Choubey, 2023). As regional parties strengthened and consolidated their influence and power in the states, the Centre-state relations started shaping by accommodation, bargaining rather than command.

The Coalition era at the Centre demonstrated the most significant case of federal balance. Although, the influence of regional parties was not uniform and it was depended on the strength of regional parties and their share in government formation at the Centre. In this phase, federalism was not transformed constitutionally but was shaped by political forces. The Centre-State relations have undergone certain transformation after 2014, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has formed the government at the Union level and gained majority of its own in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and establishment of the GST Council institutionalized cooperative federalism in India. The Council includes representatives from both the Union and state governments, and states collectively hold two-thirds of the voting power. The states continue to assert their autonomy and the government has ensured participation of states in the GST Council and has also accepted the recommendation of Fourteenth Finance commission which directed the Union government to increase the share of states in the divisible pool of taxes from 32 % to 42% (A. Kumar, 2024). These practices of accommodation and inclusion by the Centre is considered as the promotion of Co-operative federalism in India. From a comparative perspective, Indian federalism showcases a type of politically

and electorally dependent federalism which is distinct from classical federation of United States of America.

ROLE OF THE SUPREME COURT IN SHAPING INDIAN FEDERAL DEMOCRACY

Judiciary plays very important role in any federal democracy. Within India's Federal framework, the Judiciary functions as an impartial arbiter, resolving the disputes between the Union and the States as well as inter-state conflicts. The Supreme Court has protected India's federal system by limiting excessive central government power. In key cases, such as those involving Article 356 (President's Rule), it prevented the Centre from unfairly taking control of states, thereby safeguarding state autonomy. Through its interpretation of the Constitution, the Court maintains a balance of power between the Centre and the states.The frequent and unjust imposition of president's rule has been an issue of the conflict between the Centre and the states.

The Supreme Court in the famous *SR Bommai vs. Union of India*, 1994 invalidated the decision of the Union government for invoking Article 356 in Karnataka. The Court observed that the "Democracy and federalism are essential and part of basic structure of the constitution"(Chakrabarty & KumarPandey, 2008). The court further stated that the States exist independently and play important role in political, social, educational and cultural spheres of the people. They are neither inferior nor the agent of Centre. The Constitutional bench in this case also ruled that any proclamation under Article 356 comes within the purview of Judicial review (Chakrabarty & Kumar Pandey, 2008). After this Landmark judgement of the Supreme court, the frequency of the imposition of president's rule has reduced drastically in the states.

In recent times, two cases related to the president's rule came before the Supreme court. In Uttarakhand nine congress leaders left the party and joined the opposition party in March 2016. The governor has imposed president's rule in the states without providing the congress government an opportunity to prove its majority on the floor of the legislative assembly. The matter went to the high court and the Uttarakhand high court has revoked the president's rule. Later the Supreme court disqualified nine rebel leaders who came to opposition camp and ordered a floor test. The Congress party passed the floor test and as a result, the government was restored. In October 2016, the governor has imposed president's rule in Arunachal Pradesh. The Supreme court declared the decision of governor as unlawful. The Court has underlined that the governor has behaved in unconstitutional manner by advancing the state assembly session by one month and that too without the prior consultation of the state cabinet (Saxena & Swenden, 2017). This case also holds that the power of governor to summon or dissolve the session of the state

legislative assembly without taking the advice of the Chief minister and the cabinet is an unconstitutional act (Swenden & Saxena, 2022).

So, the stances of Supreme court on Article 356 can be summarized in three points. Initially, in the period soon after independence the Courts have maintained distance from Article 356 because they considered it a political question and kept itself aside and did not interfere in the matter. Secondly, the Judiciary started analyzing whether there has been the misuse of Article 356 and lastly Judiciary has started taking substantive approach when the article was misused extensively (Saxena, 2020). The Supreme court in the matters of amendment particularly in Kesavananda Bharti vs. state of Kerala (1973) held that parliament has the power to amend any part of the constitution including fundamental rights but this amendment cannot alter the basic features of the constitution (Saxena & Swenden, 2017).

The Parliament has amended Section 3 of the Representation of the People's Act, 1951 in the year 2003 and removed the domiciliary requirement for being elected in Rajya Sabha from the concerned state. This was challenged in the case namely *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India*, where the Supreme court has dismissed the plea filed by the Appellant (Mohanty, 2015). The courtstated that there is no requirement for a representative of the Upper House to have a mandatory domicile in that state from where he/she is elected.

There are several disagreements between union and states with respect to jurisdictional areas. As a result, multiple cases were filed in the Supreme court where the court has given its ruling both in favor of the Centre as well as in the states. The Union government has enacted Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development Act, 1957) which empowers the Centre to take away the lands from the states. The states contested the validity of this law before the Supreme court on the basis that the Union government has no authority to make laws and that the ownership of land lies with states. But,the Supreme court in State of West Bengal v. Union of India (1963), held that the Union government is authorized to undertake the acquisition of coal mines situated within the State of West Bengal (Malik, 2019). In a more recent case of the *Mineral Area Development Authority Etc. vs M/S Steel Authority of India* (2024), the Supreme court delivered its judgement by 8:1 majority and held that the Royalty imposed under Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 on mining leases is not considered as tax. The States are empowered under entries 49 and 50 of the seventh schedule to levy taxes on minerals and mineral bearing lands. So, this decision has overruled the earlier seven judge bench decision of India Cement in which it was held that royalty under this act is tax and states cannot impose taxes on mineral rights because this subject comes under the Union Government's MMDR Act (Landmark Judgment Summaries|Supreme Court of India|India, n.d.).

ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF INDIAN FEDERALISM

The Political economy dimension gives a new perspective to understand the transformation of Indian federalism especially after the advent of Economic Liberalization in 1991. The party system, constitutional framework, and Judicial pronouncements depict formal and political contours of Centre-State relations whereas adoption of the New Economic Policy reflects financial relations between the Centre and states. The shift from Centralized planning model to a market-oriented economy has reshaped fiscal relations, intergovernmental bargaining and autonomy of states (Rao & Singh, 2006). During the planning period, Indian federalism functioned on the direction of the Centre in a very centralized manner. The Union government exercised substantial control over the resource allocation through centralized planning institutions, centrally sponsored schemes and discretionary transfers. The states however depended on financial resources of Centre for the implementation of policies and programs.The New Economic reforms initiated in 1991 has transformed the political-economics of federalism in India. Liberalization, Globalization, Privatization and Deregulation has reconfigured the role of states in economic and financial matters. With these changes in economy different stakeholders emerged. As a result of this, government started consultingmarket forces in the process of planning policies and economic management. This deregulation also gave autonomy to states in the planning of their own economic policies. After this the Centre-State relation became competitive and the Centre alone could no longer decide the matter unilaterally.

Rudolph and Rudloph as cited in (Arora et al., 2013) maintained that the Indian economy has witnessed a shift from a 'command economy to a federal market economy'. Lawrence Saezdescribed this transformation from 'intergovernmental cooperation' to 'inter-jurisdictional competition' among states. The autonomy and freedom enjoyed by the states in economic and financial spheres led to the beginning of a new era of 'competitive federalism'. In this scenario, states compete with each other to bring Foreign Direct Investments, International investors and foreign capital to their respective states. Aseem Sinha as cited in (Arora et al., 2013) viewed the period after the New Economic policy as the period of changes and continuity in Centre-state relations. The competition existed even before the economic reform but that competition was more 'vertical competition' where states competed to take more resources from the Centre. In the post-reform period competition is more of the 'Horizontal competition' than the 'vertical competition'. In 2015, the Government of India dissolved the Planning Commission and established the National Institution for Transforming India popularly known as NITI Aayog, which became an important instrument to promote co-operative federalism in India. Another transformation in the Centre-state relation was caused by the

adoption of Goods and Services Tax (GST). The matters in the GST Council which was established as the central governing body, states now have two thirds votes to decide any matter against the Union which has only one third votes. This gives a significant power to the states vis v vis the planning Commission where states had no role to influence over policy making or taxation issues heralding a new era of cooperative federalism in India (Saxena, 2020).

The effects of liberalization get accompanied by new challenges. The Economically prosperous and advanced states were benefitted from these reform as they were better in position to capitalize market opportunities whereas the less developed states faced several structural and economic constraints. Moreover, it has further widened regional inequalities. The political economy of federalism is of extreme importance within the four-dimensional analytical framework. Economic liberalization in relation with party system, judiciary's decision and constitutional arrangement shape the character of Indian federalism. Therefore, the liberalization has expanded the autonomy of states to a significant extent and made them prosperous, but at the same time it has increased inequalities and dependency of some states.

FEDERALISM AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN INDIA: CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION

The Constitutional amendment is a process to bring change by addition, deletion or repealing in any provision of the constitution. The amendment enables to adapt the changing political, social, economic and cultural needs of the society. The Parliament of India is empowered to make amendment in the constitution. Originally, the constitutional framework established centralized federal structure. The subsequent amendments of the constitution have recalibrated union-state relationship. These amendments have neither completely changed centralizing tendency nor dismantled federal orientation.

In the initial period after independence, most of the amendments emphasized central orientation. The amendments related to parliament's authority to make laws, centralized planning, fiscal arrangements highlighted a kind of consensus which favors national integration and centralized planning and governance (Seervai, 1991). In the decade of 1970s particularly the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976 has increased the scope and area of the Centre in the matters of lawmaking by transferring some of the subjects of States list into the Concurrent list. The Judiciary came with the Basic Structure Doctrine in Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala and finally in SR Bommai of 1994 Supreme Court declared Federalism as an essential and basic structure of the constitution. Therefore, after the active involvement of Judiciary in the matters of federal interest, the amendments have been made in restricted manner in order to avoid Judicial scrutiny. The interaction

of constitutional amendments and the Judicial review provided an institutional check on unilateral federal restructuring (Jain, 2018).

The Amendments in 1990s showcased a multi-layered approach to federal governance. The Parliament has enacted Seventy-Third and Seventy-Fourth Constitutional Amendments in 1992, which granted Constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies. These constitutional recognition to Local bodies has expanded the federal framework to include third tier of governance. Another institutional development which affects federal representative framework was the Amendment to the Section 3 of the Representation of People's Act, 1951 removing the domiciliary condition for being elected to the Rajya Sabha. The Amendment was contested in the famous case of Kuldip Nayar vs Union of India, where the Supreme Court reject the plea and upheld the amendment (Mohanty, 2015). This reform allowed individual to be elected from the states without being the permanent residents of that state. The Judgement thus has reshaped federal logic of territorial representation in the Upper house. In the field of economic governance, the 101st Constitutional Amendment Act (2016) which introduced Goods and Services Tax (GST) was a major step in the way of restructuring of fiscal federalism. The GST has subsumed multiple indirect taxes and established GST Council as a Constitutional body under Article 279A as a federal institutional mechanism for joint decision making. The GST Council holds significant authority in shaping GST policy, particularly with respect to fixation of tax rates, the grant of exemptions, the determination of threshold limits, and administrative procedures. The decision in the council is generally arrived at through consensus. Any decision of the GST Council must get at least three-fourth of the total weighted votes of members present and voting. The Centre has one-third of the total voting power and all the States together have two-third of the total voting power. This system ensure that both the Centre and States must agree on the matter and therefore it shows the spirit of Cooperative federalism in India(Home Page|Goods & Services Tax Council, n.d.).

The Indian experiences reflect the tension between constitutional flexibility and federal autonomy. In a true and classical federation, the process of amendment is rigid and this rigidity prevents Centre to encroach in the sphere of states and by this means the authority of states remain free. In India, the process of amendment is relatively flexible and therefore the Union government can bring changes in federal dynamics through the initiative of the Parliament. Despite this, the role of state parties in influencing the politics of Centre and Judicial scrutiny have prevented centralization and allowed to maintain a healthy federal balance between the Centre and the States.

PATTERNS OF CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES IN INDIAN FEDERALISM

The above analysis demonstrates that the transition and evolution of Indian federalism cannot be understood from a single perspective rather it requires multiple lenses and perspectives. The elements of continuities are visible in Centre enjoying more legislative, administrative and financial powers. The Union government has bigger control on vertical distribution of finances and taxes. The elements of changes are evident in change in political dynamics, judicial decisions and economic transformations. The Party dynamics has remained a significant factor in maintaining union-states relationship. The era of single party dominance promotes centralized governance and reduced the functional autonomy of the states. While, the phase of Coalition Politics enabled the states to assert their freedom, autonomy and interest. Judiciary has important role in maintaining federal balance. Initially the Court has maintained distance in interfering the matter of political questions and from the misuse of Article 356 and has given many centralizing judgments. With the introduction of Basic structure Doctrine and change in political landscape the court tried to restrict the excessive centralization. The Supreme court's decision declaring Federalism as an essential and basic structure of the constitution and further the extension of the power of Judicial review to investigate the correctness of the imposition of president's rule under Article 356 have restricted the misuse of the provision. The Judiciary has neither decentralized nor centralized the federal system rather it has functioned as a balancing institution. It has renewed and reframed Centre-states relations in response to the changing political, social and institutional contexts. The Amendments in the constitution have consistently recalibrated institutional arrangements. The Economic Reforms have transformed fiscal relations and have provided opportunity for the states to bring investments. Indian federalism incorporates the elements of both continuities and changes. The relation between Centre and the states is an amalgamation of cooperative and competitive federalism where negotiation, compromises, coordination and bargaining took place. The Continuity and Change do not operate in opposition but complement each other to shape India's federal order.

CONCLUSION

The paper has examined the transition in Indian Federalism through multidimensional framework which incorporates Party system, Judicial pronouncements, New Economic Reforms and Constitutional Amendments. The Analysis reveals that federalism in India does not follow linear trajectory towards centralization or decentralization. It develops in gradual manner as a result of interaction between various political, institutional and economic forces. The Study highlights that Indian federalism is resilient because it has balanced stability

along with changes. The strong Centre, the existence of fiscal asymmetry and unifying role of National institutions have maintained structure of the system. At the same time, the political competition among political parties, role of Judiciary, economic liberalization and Constitutional changes have introduced significant transformation in the functioning of Centre-State relations. Indian federalism, therefore should be viewed as flexible and evolving system rather than a fixed constitutional arrangement. Therefore, by taking together these four dimensions reveal that Indian federalism emerged as a process of negotiation, cooperation and compromises where both continuities and changes coexist with each other. The present nature of the Indian Federalism is not the product of any single reform but the outcome of many interconnected dynamics and changes in politics, economy and Constitutional changes.

At the same time, the evolving federal system faces some challenges. The fiscal gap between Centre and states still exist. There has been increase in the regional disparities. The States demanding more freedom and autonomy continues to shape federal politics. The Southern States are demanding fair Delimitation process as these states have performed well in controlling the population in comparison to Northern States. In order to address these challenges, it is necessary to strengthen Cooperative federalism, improve better institutional coordination and ensuring balanced fiscal and developmental outcomes across the country. The transition in Indian federalism should be viewed in the contextual manner. Its future trajectory will depend on how well it reconciles and balances the needs of national integration with the goals of Democratic Decentralization.

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

A Research Note on PUBLIC POLICY AND SOCIAL MEDIA: THE CONTEXT OF POLICY PROCESS

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Abstract

The social media has its impact on every walk of human life, particularly in India, say on life style, social life, electoral process, government communications and so on. Social media has radically transformed socio-political life by providing a direct and cost-effective channel for political mobilization, civic participation, and discourse. However, this digital shift has also introduced complex challenges, notably severe political polarization, the spread of misinformation, and the creation of isolated ideological echo chambers. No doubt the social media attracts the attention of policy masters also. Thus, it makes an urgent imperative to explore the impact of social media on the policy process through its various stages, namely agenda setting, formulation/enactment, implementation/monitoring and evaluation. The present article intends to throw light on the areas of further research onimpact and challenges posed by social media on public policy process.

Keywords: Social Media, Policy Process, Problem Identification, Real Time Evaluation, Crowd Sources, Mobilisation.

INTRODUCTION

The social media platform allows unfiltered access to all categories of people say women, students, activists, politicians, bureaucrats, poor and rich etc. This mobilize people quickly.Further, social media algorithms are engineered to prioritize user engagement over accuracy. By continuously serving content that aligns with a user's past behavior, platforms often create echo chambers that deepen societal divides and promote tribalism.Social media can influence the agenda setting because

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government agencies use advanced technology in identifying the issues through monitoring hashtags, keywords, viral contents etc. on one hand and people access influencers, citizen campaigns, information, reactions of government etc. putting the issues on government radar on the other. At the stage of policy formulation, people's participation is facilitated by social media. Now in this age of digital India, policy makers instead of relying solely on closed-door committee meetings, use micro-broadcast policy drafts and seek citizen input directly. During the implementation stage, continuous feedback loops allow agencies to assess public reaction and make agile adjustments. In other words, social media serve as direct lines of communication between the state and the public, evident from the roles played by ASHA workers and Mobile Sakhi Chain (networking with women having mobile phones for dissemination of SoP of Covid-19) during Covid-19 pandemic in Bihar (Singh and Verma: 2020). Evaluation of a policy is also influenced by algorithm of social media. As such, it makes an urgent imperative for students of Political Science and Public Administration to explore the areas, nature and modes of impact of social media on the entire policy process, particularly in Indian context.

PUBLIC POLICY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Traditionally, public policy has been seen as being shaped by an interplay between institutional actors, i.e. those operating within the formal structure of Government, and others, i.e. those outside the formal structures, but who influence policy formulation and implementation through advocacy, expertise, litigation, persuasion or mobilisation. The primary channels for this interplay have been the traditional media - print and, later, visual, and, recently, digital media. These channels operate between Government and public for not only information dissemination and political mobilisation, but also for engagement.

The advent of social media, with its algorithmic focus on maximising1 the engagement time of users, has significantly altered the landscape of this interplay. This is because of the innate ability of social media to accelerate information dissemination, enable faster feedback and foster very high levels of public engagement through a dramatic rise in the numbers of non-state actors (Xiangping: 2026). In this article, we will take a brief look at the features of social media which can impact policy. Then we will attempt to critically examine how social media impacts policy formulation and implementation. The aspects of public policy that we would examine are problem identification; identification of solution; implementation; and evaluation.

Social media is essentially an online platform where users can share information in the form of text, photos, video etc. and connect with other users or user communities virtually (https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp). These can take the form of social or professional networks like Facebook,

LinkedIn etc.; blogging networks like X, Substack etc.; video and photo sharing like YouTube, Instagram etc.; or messaging apps like Whatsapp or Telegram. A particular platform may exhibit one or more of the above features.

The most critical feature of popular social media is that, in general, there is no cost to the user. The obvious corollary is that the value of a platform being dependent on the number of users, user acquisition would be designed to be as easy as possible. The revenues of these platforms are mostly dependent on targetted advertisements. Targetted advertising, in turn, requires, content personalization which would keep the user "hooked" and to enable the platform to "know" the user more thoroughly. This design element may lead to what internet scholars term "Algorithmic Bias" (Bratlett & DeSalle: 2024).

These design features, viz., participation requiring zero cost; personalised content targetted to maximise user engagement; and easy user onboarding are the most relevant when we analyse the impact of social media in any sphere, but they assume increased significance when it comes to public policy. These design features foster democratisation of information availability and information flow, but may also lead to content conforming to already held views being reinforced and even amplified (McCombs: 2004). This, combined with reduced attention spans due to sensory overloads with social media, may lead to quick mobilisation on both sides of a proposal without a nuanced appreciation of the situation. Democratisation of media tools availability assists information dissemination across languages and other divisions. But, there is also a risk of fake media being circulated and anonymous or fake users attempting to sway or manufacture public opinion.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND SOLUTION FRAMING IN PUBLIC POLICY

Traditional media had a definite role in agenda-setting by bringing issues to the fore and propose solutions. While media may not dictate what people think, it significantly shapes what people think about by giving attention to specific issues(Murphy & Love (2025). This was traditionally a one-way flow from media to the consuming public. Social media has significantly disrupted this space with users serving a dual role, that of creators as well as consumers of content. Content is no longer the sole prerogative of the traditional media. Social media deployment aids influence and amplification of issues, formation of coalitions and ensuring salience of issues (Gilardi, et al.: 2022), thus influencing and, increasingly, replacing traditional media.

With increasing number of people relying primarily on digital media and social media for their information fulfilment needs, actors in the policy space need to engage with this space to gauge opinion and also to attempt to shape it. For the institutional actors, it provides the opportunity to communicate directly, thus

bypassing traditional means (Web Link), and to mobilise support by customising the messaging across diverse groups and regions. This, in a way, enhances the power of institutional actors. It may be remembered, however, that the same tools are also available to non-institutional actors. Accordingly, issues may be brought up by individuals, amplified by newly formed coalitions and taken up by more organised actors. Thus, public policy agenda setting may be driven either top-down or ground-up.

The next question to be examined is whether there can be a downside to the democratisation of the agenda setting process as outlined in the above. Misinformation, proliferation of fake accounts, algorithmic bias (Bartlett and DeSalle: 2024) are some common risks that are ever-present. These can lead to a general erosion of trust between opposing groups and hardening of stances. While policy formulation is an exercise in continuous engagement and compromise, this may lead to policy formulation which may be one-sided leading to lower acceptance and implementation difficulties.

IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY

In case of implementation of social sector policies, the potential use of social media is much more apparent. It can be deployed to mobilise support for policies. In case of individual beneficiary-oriented policy, it may be harnessed to raise awareness and bring about transparency. It can also be used to communicate policy more effectively and to generate feedback in order to adapt implementation strategy, if required, and become more responsive to the voices from the ground. Use of social media, thus, reduces information asymmetry and improves implementation.

Reliance on social media also has the potential to expose actions of individual decision-makers in the loop, thus raising accountability and, thereby, improving outcomes. This could, however, also lead to a situation where the immediacy of response to social media sentiments may impact the primacy of policy objectives. This would be truer of more complex policy implementation involving multiple and disparate stakeholders, the immediate interest of whom may not coincide with the policy objectives. A ready example may be implementation of policy relating to phasing out of older vehicles in urban areas in India. Thus, policy implementation may be impacted adversely by the loudness of social media voices by interested pressure groups.

While social media can shorten implementation timelines and improve feedback loops, thereby improving responsiveness, indiscriminate reliance may lead to policy objectives getting compromised. Therefore, a judicious social media strategy must be deployed for policy implementation.

EVALUATION OF POLICY

The most significant use of social media in the space of policy evaluation is its ability to generate data. Where this data is in the form of objective metrics, it can then be utilized to supplement official statistics about outcomes of policy. The data can also be used to generate quick feedback from the ground and to cross-verify the official statistics. Social media can also be used to conduct quick surveys and to analyse sentiment of the target audience.

This is the area where social media is the most effective across the 3 areas that we have examined. But, due care has to be taken to ensure that this process is not hijacked by interested pressure groups and feedback gathered and analysed across the spectrum of the various stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

Social media has irrevocably transformed public policy formulation and implementation. It can be harnessed for more effective policy planning, but it can also be utilized to sow confusion and misinformation. Therefore, care should be taken that extreme views are catered to with patience and facts. Social media platforms, too, may need to work on their algorithms to eliminate "confirmation bias". As such, there is need of a comprehensive research on the topic. For policy implementation support and monitoring, social media offers instant feedback, thus enabling better implementation. Here, too, there is the need of research on identifying risks of misinformation being deliberately planted shall always remain. However, on balance, the benefits outweigh the risks.

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/ijsra.2026.18.3.0613

BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

A Research Note on
EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT: NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE STUDIES IN CHANGED SCENARIO

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Abstract

Educational Management is an applied branch of Management which requires changes with the change in time and conditions. A sea of changes in socio-economic and policy priorities have taken place in 21st Century in India, especially with the introduction of National Education Policy 2020. Unlike other branches of Management, Educational Management operates in educational organizations vis-à-vis socio-administrative milieu which applies the theories and principles of management in the field of education. In this context management of three resources namely physical (infrastructure), human resource (teachers, non-teaching staff, students and education bureaucracy) and curriculum design and implementation become significant. The present study throws light on the areas of research on educational management.

Keywords: Policy, Process, Goals, Multidisciplinary, Human Resource, Discipline, Curriculum, Budgeting.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction of National Education Policy, 2020, despite having many benefits, has posed challenges before managers of educational affairs, teachers, students and designing and implementing curriculum. Let us look into the issues. Educational Management is the process of managing these resources to achieve the desired goals of educational organisation. Scholars like G. Terry Page and J.B. Thomas posit that educational management is the theory and practice of the organisation and administration of existing educational establishments and systems. Educational Management can be considered as a continuous or dynamic process because the

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principles of management are changeable with changes in policy perspectives, demand of the society, political regimes, time and conditions, similarly as in the field of industry and trade which from time to time in respect of new policy, new action. So the process of management is dynamic. The nature of educational management indicates various aspects. Educational Management is a universal process. It is related to each and every country, society, organisation etc. The need of management can be arising in every field of Commercial, War, Religion, Human Relation, etc. It is an art as opined by Koontz who says that management has been accepted as an art as in management things are got done through others. Therefore, it requires to acquaint not only with the principles of management but also with the qualities of sympathy, patience, good manner, experience, behavioural skills etc. among the managers. Again it is a subject of social science research because it also collects data by using the methods observation, experimentation, explanation, etc., like Political Science, Economics, Sociology, etc. It can be taken as a profession because in each and every profession, to manage the activities effectively, manager should have some particular qualities like, preparation, behavioural skill, patience, etc. Educational management is a multidisciplinary subject that encompass the principles, concept andskill which are involves in management are also related to Economics, Mathematics, Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology etc.

Educational Management should also be Goal-Oriented: Effective management is guided by specific objectives. Similarly, it is a process of planning, organising, directing and providing instruction to achieve any goals. The chief objective of management is to achieve the predetermined goals. It is a Group Activity as it involves a group of individuals toachieve common goals. It helps the members of the organisation to know the aims & objectives of organisation and also directs them to achieve the goals. Thus it becomes a social processas it gives more importance on social benefit and responsibilities.

AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Providing Human Resources: One of the important aspects of the scope of educational management is to providing human resources in educational institution. The different types of human resources are teachers, students, and staff. Moreover, parents and other person who are related to the educational organisation are also come under human resources. Providing, co-ordinating and practicing these resources to educational organisation are the scope of educational management.

Providing Material Resources: The another important aspects of scope of educational management is to providing material resources i.e. land or site, building, classroom, equipments, teaching aids, library, laboratory, museum etc in educational institution.

Designing of Curriculum: In the light of the NEP 2020 makingcurriculum on the basis of the interest, needs and goals of NEP 2020 and capacity of existing manpower engaged in educational managementis another aspect of scope of educational management. Besides, it requireorganising co-curricular activities in order to achieve the major goal of education, i.e. all round development of personality and marketability of the products educational institutions. It further entails the preparation of proper time table suitable to the existing human resources. It will facilitate them to manage the co-curricular activities, determining the academic calendar for educational organisation is another important aspect of scope of educational management.

Maintaining Discipline: For effective management of an educational organisation maintaining discipline is another important aspect of scope of educational management. It will involve the proper arrangement of Hostel, staff quarter etc: Organisation of hostel and also staff quarter for the teachers is another important scope of educational management.

Budgeting, Evaluation and Coordination: To manage an educational institution preparing a budget for expenditure in the establishment of Building, Auditorium, Library, Laboratory, Equipments, etc., and also management of fund for these are also the important area of educational management. To achieve the goal of education, evaluation of the different planning of educational management are also important areas of educational management. Co-ordination among others the different resources of an educational organisation is another scope of educational management.

Thus, the present note suggests to take the implementation of NEP 2020 as a task of educational management and throws light on the areas of further research from the angle of Public Administration.

BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF FISCAL FEDERALISM AND REGIONAL INEQUALITY IN INDIA

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Abstract

This article examines India's fiscal federalism, a system that has allowed the country to demonstrate remarkable resilience against economic shocks. It delves into the foundational concepts and architectural design of this framework. The study traces the evolution of India's fiscal federalism over 75 years, from its pre-independence roots to its contemporary structure, analysing how it addresses the persistent issue of regional inequality. The article argues that despite its robust design, the system continues to face challenges in balancing central authority with state autonomy and ensuring equitable development across all regions.

Keywords: Constitution, Finance Commission, Fiscal Federalism, GST, Regional Disparity.

Journal of Economic Literature (JEL) Classification: E60, E62, H20

EVOLUTION OF FISCAL FEDERALISM IN INDIA

The Constitution of India adopted a path of Federal Fiscal System for conducive and holistic development of the country. The evolution of fiscal federalism in India can be broadly divided into five phases: (1) Conceptualizing decentralised finance: 1858 to 1871 (2) Informal decentralization of finances: 1871 to 1919 (3) Formal decentralization of finances: 1919 to 1935 (4) Decentralization to federal finances: 1935 to 1947; and (5) Starting of Constitutional fiscal federalism: 1947 to 1950. (K., Gopa, 2012).

The history of the formal inception of fiscal federalism in India began with the Montague Chelmsford Report on Constitutional Reforms, passed as the

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Government of India Act, 1919. This Act focused on the decentralisation of finances in the country. The 1919 Act created separate heads of revenue for the Centre as well as the provinces. The provinces got the power of taxation and debt, which was the foundation of federal finances. The 'Centre' and the 'Province' had their own subjects of legislations by this Act. It was assessed by the different Commission and Committee till 1934.

Thereafter, the Government of India Act, 1935 came into existence that also had the previous provision of distributing the powers among 'centre' and 'provinces' keeping Centre into main role. These power for resource distribution categorised into five broad heads – (i) Taxes levied, collected and retained by the Centre; (ii) Taxes levied, collected and retained by the province; (iii) Taxes levied and collected by the centre and assigned to provinces; (iv) Taxes levied and collected by the Centre and shared with the provinces; (v) Grants-in-aid. Apart from these provisions, the provinces could borrow, make their own budget, etc. This Act assigned major developmental responsibilities to the provinces with less revenue powers, which imbalances the fiscal situation among the centre and provinces.

The constitutional framework of fiscal federalism was discussed in many deliberations of the Constituent Assembly till 1947 and by and large based on the 1935 Act. Further, an Expert Committee was appointed. This Committee recommended – (i) Centre and provinces should share net proceeds of taxes (Income and Corporation) in 40:60; (ii) Sharing of the net proceeds of Jute Export Duty with the provinces should be dispensed with; (iii) For balancing the revenue structure of the provincial governments, some share of central excise duties should be given to them; and (iv) A constitutional institution 'Finance Commission' should be constituted to suggest distribution mechanism for revenue between the centre and the provinces and among the provinces. The fiscal federal relation recorded a significant impact of the Independence, especially on account of partition of the country evident from greater autonomy to the provinces.

India is the largest country in terms of population where different religions, cultures and languages are experienced. All states (provinces) are not on equal footing on account of available resources. Therefore, the Constitution framers adopted fiscal federalism to have one integrated national economy at the national level and greater fiscal autonomy and equitable development at the state level. The broad vision behind the power distribution among Union and States is national security and macroeconomic stability to the Union and the majority of development responsibility to the States.

However, the Constitution aims to address the inherent imbalances between the revenue-raising capacity of the Union and the expenditure responsibilities of the states, all while attempting to correct widening regional inequalities. However,

the system faces ongoing challenges, with debates centering on the fairness of resource distribution and the increasing centralization of fiscal power.

THE CONTEXT OF FISCAL FEDERALISM AND REGIONAL BALANCE

Fixing regional development gaps in a federal system means looking beyond simple market efficiency and addressing historical disadvantages. Less-developed states often struggle with deep-rooted bottlenecks, such as poor infrastructure, limited revenue sources, and lower levels of education and healthcare. Because private investment naturally flows to already prosperous industrial hubs, the market alone cannot bridge this divide. Instead, fair central tax devolution, targeted grants, and direct public spending are necessary tools to level the playing field for all states.

Investing in lagging states is not charity; it is a sound national economic strategy. These regions hold valuable untapped potential, including large working-age populations, fertile land, and vital natural resources. Building better transport links, schools, and hospitals in these areas brings strong long-term returns by connecting local workforces to the wider economy. Bringing growth to underdeveloped regions reduces distress migration, expands consumer markets across the country, and secures long-term economic stability for the entire nation.

THE DESIGN OF FISCAL FEDERALISM

The Constitution of India provides an extensive framework for the division of fiscal powers among the Centre and the states. It is listed under Articles 246, 268-281, and the Seventh Schedule. The Seventh Schedule demarcates the legislative and taxation powers into three lists: the Union List, State List, and Concurrent List. The constitution gives power to making law by the Union government and assigned taxes in the union list with a broader economic base. These taxes are Personal Income Tax, Corporate Tax, Service Tax (now merged in GST), Custom Duties, etc. While, the State List provides states with making law and collection of taxes on land revenue, sales tax (now subsumed under GST), and taxes on agricultural income, etc. Concurrent list does not have major taxes while GST is a classic example of cooperative federalism where state and centre are the partners in making law on GST and distributing equally among them. However, these distribution of tax powers impose vertical fiscal imbalances.

In order to address this fiscal imbalance, the Constitution framers made a provision of the Finance Commission for inter-governmental transfers established under Article 280. It is appointed every five years and provides broad recommendations on – (i) vertical devolution of taxes between the Union and the states; (ii) horizontal distribution of the states' share among the states; (iii) the principles governing grants-in-aid to states for specific needs.

Apart from the tax power, the Centre has monopoly to collect cesses and surcharges not sharing with the states. This arrangement makes states deprived of fiscal space, where the Centre collects the majority of the revenue, while the states bear the responsibility for essential public services like health, education, and law and order, which require significant expenditure.

FISCAL FEDERALISM AND WIDENING REGIONAL DIVIDE

The most important factor that contributed to the accretion of power to the centre was the adoption of planning led by the public sector as the strategy of development post-independence and emergence of the Planning Commission (PC) – a body not envisaged in the Constitution – playing a dominant role in economic policies and also as a dispenser of central funds on a large scale. (Bagchi, Amaresh, 2003).

The central government operated as a state planner by making five-year plans and approving annual plans of states, imposing the Union agenda through the state plans during plan periods (till 2016). Apart from this central fund transfer mechanism, Union also imposed the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) mostly on state subject matters like health, education, rural development, etc. to fulfilment of the Central plan. The majority of central transfers routed outside the Finance Commission mechanism, which is responsible for aggravating the regional economic disparity. The CSS also consumes state-owned revenue for matching share to achieve Union objectives. Despite the constitutional safeguards and the equalizing efforts of the Finance Commission, regional inequality in India remains a significant concern. The period following the 1991 economic liberalization has seen a widening of the development gap between the more prosperous states e.g., Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, etc. and the historically poorer states e.g., Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, etc.

Table 1: Income Inequality in India among Indian States

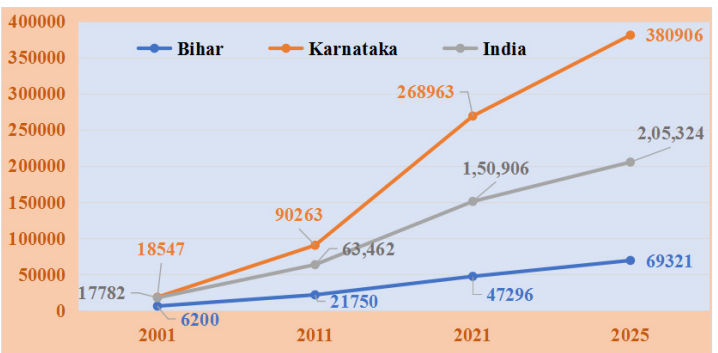
	2001	*2011*	*2021*	*2025*
		High-Income States		
Population Share	30.9	30.3	32.4	32.3
GSDP Share	42.0	50.1	50.8	51.3
		Middle-Income States		
Population Share	17.4	17.0	14.0	14.0
GSDP Share	19.5	15.3	14.8	14.7
		Low-Income States		
Population Share	49.2	50.0	50.8	50.8
GSDP Share	33.7	29.3	29.6	29.1

Source: National Statistics Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), GoI

RECENT TREND IN REGIONAL ECONOMIC DISPARITY IN INDIA

India faces stark regional economic disparity, and it is continuing to widen. Table 1 shows that the high-income states have ownership of nearly half of the national GDP for only one third of the national population. The middle-income states have nearly a share in GDP and population remained almost equal. However, less-income states bear with only 20 per cent national GDP for almost 45 per cent of the country's population. One may see the increasing trends of disparity in terms of per-capita income of high-income state, low-income state and national average. The data clearly indicates the diversion between low-income state (Bihar) and high-income state (Karnataka) and also from the national average per-capita income, over the years. Bihar recorded 33.4 percent of per-capita income of Karnataka in 2001, while it decreased to 24.1 per cent in 2011 and further decreased to 18.2 per cent in 2025. However, the trend of disparity with Bihar and national average per-capita income is mixed with fluctuating trends, where Bihar records one-third of national per-capita income.

Chart 1: Regional Per-Capita Disparity in India (in Rupees)



Source: National Statistics Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), GoI

After independence, a number of policy interventions were undertaken at the national level like freight equalisation, unequal central investment, economic reforms, and uneven FDI, but these policies are also skewed towards developed states, which is a disadvantage for low-income states. Low-income states have structural complexities like high poverty incidence, low HDI, and a narrow economic and revenue base. Even after these hardships, these states have evolved as better and prudent financial managers in the recent past. (Sinha and Ganguli, 2019)

TEMPRAMENT OF SIXTEENTH FINANCE COMMISSION

The 16th Finance Commission's framework risks exacerbating horizontal inequality by penalizing less-developed states for historical, structural disadvantages. Linking devolution and borrowing ceilings to productivity metrics, such as Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) contributions, overlooks the entrenched socio-economic realities of backward states. These regions face narrow tax bases, weak industrial ecosystems, and acute infrastructure deficits, leaving them ill-equipped to compete on performance-driven benchmarks without first achieving developmental parity.

Dismantling compensatory mechanisms compromises the core principle of horizontal fiscal equalization. Backward states bear high demographic burdens and substantial expenditure commitments in foundational sectors like primary education, public health, and basic connectivity. Curtailing need-based metrics and unconditional revenue cushions severely constrains their fiscal headroom, creating a cycle where under-resourced states cannot fund the baseline public goods necessary to attract private investment. Enforcing rigid fiscal discipline and penalizing social spending ignores that targeted welfare acts as vital economic support for vulnerable populations.

Treating sub-national entities with vastly different starting lines as equal competitors deepens regional divergence. True national productivity requires targeted public transfers to unlock the demographic dividend and natural resources of backward states, rather than conditioning essential fiscal support on outcomes they currently lack the structural capacity to achieve.

THE PATH FORWARD: RE-IMAGINING FISCAL FEDERALISM

To address the challenges of fiscal federalism and regional inequality, a number of reforms are needed. Among others, a key step is to enhance the fiscal autonomy of states. This could involve re-evaluating the current tax assignment to give states more revenue-raising powers or, more realistically, ensuring a larger and more predictable share of central taxes through the Finance Commission. Limiting the use of cesses and surcharges and incorporating them back into the divisible pool would be a crucial move towards this.

Furthermore, there is a need to rationalise and reform Centrally Sponsored Schemes, possibly by reducing their number and allowing states greater flexibility in their design and implementation. This would empower state governments to prioritise spending based on the unique needs of their populations.

In addition, the role of the Finance Commission needs to be continuously strengthened as a non-partisan institution that can mediate fiscal relations between the Centre and the states. The formula for horizontal devolution should be a subject

of continuous dialogue, balancing the need for equalisation with incentives for fiscal prudence and economic performance. While it is essential to support less-developed states, it is also important not to disincentivize high-performing states that are the engines of India's economic growth.

Other Factors: Apart from the skewed central transfers and fiscal federal functions, several other factors contribute to this persistent inequality. The major factors among others are – good governance, well-managed market functioning, adequate and better infrastructure, quality human capital, and a more favourable business environment. These states have been more successful in attracting private investment and leveraging the opportunities of a globalised economy.

Finally, India's constitutional framework for fiscal federalism provides a robust mechanism for resource distribution. However, its effectiveness in addressing regional inequality depends on how it is implemented and adapted to the country's changing economic and political landscape. The future of India's development hinges on a harmonious and cooperative fiscal relationship between the Union and its states, where the goal is not just growth and development, but inclusive growth and sustainable development that leaves no region behind.

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Hindi Section

BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

भारत में कर सुधार और आर्थिक विकास : वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (जीएसटी) तथा प्रत्यक्ष कर संरचना के पुनर्गठन का एक विश्लेषणात्मक अध्ययन

देवेंद्र मौर्य* एवं विजय शंकर चौधरी**

सार संक्षेप

भारत सरकार ने हाल के वर्षों में अपनी कर प्रणाली में कई महत्वपूर्ण बदलाव किए हैं। इन बदलावों का मुख्य उद्देश्य राजकोषीय दक्षता को मजबूत करना और देश के आर्थिक विकास को लम्बे समय तक बढ़ावा देना है। हाल के समय भारत में कर प्रणाली को बेहतर बनाने के लिए कई कदम उठाए गए हैं। इनमें से दो बड़े फैसले खासतौर पर ध्यान देने योग्य हैं। पहला, साल 2017 में जीएसटी लागू करना और दूसरा, साल 2019 में कॉरपोरेट टैक्स दरों में कटौती करना। इन बदलावों का मुख्य मकसद टैक्स प्रशासन को सरल बनाना, टैक्स आधार को बढ़ाना, आर्थिक विकृतियों को कम करना और भारत को विदेशी निवेश के लिए आकर्षक बनाना था। यह बदलाव अंतरराष्ट्रीय मुद्रा कोष की साल 2016 की सिफारिशों और भारत सरकार के साल 2025 के लक्ष्यों के अनुरूप हैं।

भारत में कर सुधार और आर्थिक विकास के बीच क्या संबंध है? यह लेख इसी सवाल पर केन्द्रित है, खासतौर पर जीएसटी और प्रत्यक्ष कर सुधारों के संदर्भ में। सरकारी रिपोर्टों, अंतरराष्ट्रीय वित्तीय विभिन्न संस्थानों और अकादमिक लेखों से प्राप्त आंकड़ों के आधार पर, यह शोध राजस्व संग्रह, आर्थिक विकास, निवेश और आर्थिक स्थिरता पर किए गए सुधारों के प्रभाव का विस्तार से विश्लेषण करता है। विश्व बैंक की वर्ष 2025 की रिपोर्ट के हवाले से, यह अध्ययन यह बताता है कि इन सुधारों का आर्थिक विकास पर क्या प्रभाव पड़ा है। इस अध्ययन के परिणामस्वरूप यह निष्कर्ष प्राप्त होता है कि कर सुधार भारत की आर्थिक प्रगति में बहुत मददगार साबित हुए हैं। हालाँकि, इस प्रक्रिया में कुछ चुनौतियाँ भी सामने आई हैं, जैसे कि संक्रमण काल के दौरान आने वाली मुश्किलें, विभिन्न क्षेत्रों में असमानता और नियमों का पालन करने से जुड़ी चिंताएँ। यह चिंताएँ राष्ट्रीय लोक वित्त एवं नीति संस्थान की वर्ष 2022 की रिपोर्ट में भी उल्लेखित है। अंततः यह शोध अध्ययन से निष्कर्ष निकालता है कि कर सुधारों ने भारत में आर्थिक विकास की आधारशिला को मजबूत किया है, लेकिन उनकी दीर्घकालिक प्रभावशीलता नीतियों में सुधार, प्रशासनिक क्षमता को मजबूत करने और समावेशी तरीके से लागू करने पर निर्भर करती है।

मुख्य शब्द : जीएसटी, कर प्रणाली, कराधान, राजस्व, कॉरपोरेट।

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प्रस्तावना

विकासशील अर्थव्यवस्थाओं में कराधान आर्थिक शासन का एक बहुत ही महत्वपूर्ण उपकरण है। यहाँ सार्वजनिक राजस्व की उपलब्धता सीधे तौर पर राज्य की आधारभूत अवसंरचना में निवेश करने, मानव विकास को बढ़ावा देने और सामाजिक संरक्षण सुनिश्चित करने की क्षमता को तय करती है (अंतरराष्ट्रीय मुद्रा कोष [IMF], 2016)।

भारत में कर प्रणाली का विकास व्यापक आर्थिक नीतिगत परिवर्तनों को दर्शाता है। यह एक जटिल और नियामक ढाँचे से होकर गुजरा है, जो समय-समय पर बदलते रहते हैं और देश के आर्थिक विकास को प्रभावित करते हैं। भारत में आर्थिक सुधारों के परिणामस्वरूप, हमें क्रमशः अधिक सरल और पारदर्शी कर प्रणाली की ओर बढ़ते हुए देखा गया है। यह परिवर्तन न केवल आर्थिक विकास को बढ़ावा देता है, बल्कि यह नागरिकों के लिए करों का भुगतान करना भी आसान बनाते हैं। भारत की अर्थव्यवस्था बाजार की ओर बढ़ रही है और राजकोषीय संरचना में विकास हो रहा है। कई सालों से, देश में कर व्यवस्था काफी जटिल रही है, खासकर केंद्र और राज्य दोनों स्तरों पर। अप्रत्यक्ष करों की जटिलता और प्रत्यक्ष कर दरों की अधिकता ने प्रशासनिक अक्षमताओं और लेन-देन लागत में वृद्धि की है (फेडरल रिजर्व बोर्ड, 2017)। यह समस्या आर्थिक विकास को प्रभावित कर रही है और इसके समाधान की जरूरत है।

जुलाई, 2017 में, हमारे देश में वस्तु एवं सेवा कर लागू किया गया। इसका मुख्य उद्देश्य पुरानी समस्याओं और जटिलताओं को समाप्त करना था। वस्तु एवं सेवा कर ने विभिन्न अप्रत्यक्ष करों को एक ही मूल्य-वर्धित कर प्रणाली में मिला दिया, जिससे एक समान राष्ट्रीय बाजार बनाने और संसाधनों के उपयोग को बेहतर बनाने में मदद मिली। विश्व बैंक ने 2025 में बताया है कि यह बदलाव हमारे देश के लिए बहुत फायदेमंद रहा है। इसके अलावा, 2019 में प्रत्यक्ष कराधान में भी सुधार किया गया, जिसमें कॉरपोरेट कर दरों में उल्लेखनीय कटौती शामिल थी। यह बदलाव प्रतिस्पर्धात्मकता को बढ़ाने और निवेश-आधारित आर्थिक वृद्धि को प्रोत्साहित करने के लिए किया गया था (प्रेस सूचना ब्यूरो, 2020, इन्वेस्ट इंडिया, 2025)।

यह शोध आलेख इस बात का विश्लेषण करता है कि इन प्रमुख कर सुधारों ने भारत की आर्थिक वृद्धि को किस प्रकार प्रभावित किया है। इसमें कराधान और विकास से संबंधित व्यापक सैद्धांतिक एवं अनुभवजन्य साहित्य के परिप्रेक्ष्य में चर्चा को स्थापित किया गया है, जीएसटी तथा प्रत्यक्ष कर पुनर्गठन के आर्थिक प्रभावों का आकलन किया गया है, और उन चुनौतियों की पहचान की गई है जो वर्तमान में भारत के राजकोषीय नीति परिदृश्य को निरंतर आकार दे रही हैं।

साहित्य समीक्षा

कराधान और आर्थिक विकास के बीच का रिश्ता एक जटिल मुद्दा है जिस पर आर्थिक सिद्धांतों और अनुभवजन्य अनुसंधानों में बहुत चर्चा होती है। क्लासिकल एवं नव-क्लासिकल आर्थिक विचारक मानते हैं कि ज्यादा और गलत तरीके से लगाए गए कर निवेश और उत्पादकता को

प्रोत्साहित नहीं करते हैं। लेकिन दूसरी ओर, अन्तर्जात विकास सिद्धांत यह प्रतिपादित करता हैं कि एक अच्छी तरह से बनाई गई कर प्रणाली सार्वजनिक खर्चों को फंड करने में मदद करती है, जो लम्बे समय में आर्थिक वृद्धि को बढ़ावा देती है (अंतरराष्ट्रीय मुद्रा कोष [IMF], 2016)। विश्व बैंक के अनुसार, एक सरल, स्पष्ट और व्यापक कर आधार वाली कर प्रणाली आर्थिक विकास को बढ़ावा देने में मदद करती है (विश्व बैंक, 2025)। यह दिखाता है कि कराधान और आर्थिक विकास के बीच का संबंध बहुत गहरा है और इस पर और अधिक अध्ययन की आवश्यकता है।

भारत में, जीएसटी के आर्थिक प्रभावों पर किए गए कई अध्ययनों से पता चलता है कि जीएसटी ने हमारे देश की अर्थव्यवस्था पर गहरा प्रभाव डाला है। यह कर प्रणाली हमारे देश में व्यापार और वाणिज्य को सरल बनाने में मदद कर रही है, जिससे आर्थिक विकास को बढ़ावा मिल रहा है। जीएसटी के कारण कई छोटे और मध्यम आकार के व्यवसायों को अपने उत्पादों और सेवाओं को बाजार में पेश करने में आसानी हो रही है, जो हमारी अर्थव्यवस्था के लिए बहुत फायदेमंद है। जीएसटी ने लॉजिस्टिक में आने वाली समस्याओं को कम कर दिया है और आपूर्ति श्रृंखला को बेहतर बनाया है, जिससे बाज़ार में एकता आई है (Avalara, 2018; Fi.Money, 2025)।

भारतीय आर्थिक संस्थानों द्वारा किए गए अध्ययनों से यह बात सामने आती है कि जीएसटी और राजस्व में वृद्धि के बीच एक गहरा संबंध है (गोखले राजनीति एवं अर्थशास्त्र संस्थान, तिथि अप्रकाशित; Taylor & Francis, 2024)। यह संबंध हमें बताता है कि बेहतर अनुपालन और राजस्व लोचशीलता की भूमिका कितनी महत्वपूर्ण है। हालाँकि, कई विद्वानों का मानना है कि अल्पकालिक समायोजन में कुछ चुनौतियाँ हो सकती हैं। आर्थिक विकास के साथ संबंधों को समझने के लिए और ज्यादा शोध की जरूरत है। हमें लागतों पर भी ध्यान देना चाहिए, खासतौर पर छोटे और मध्यम आकार के व्यवसायों के लिए। इन व्यवसायों को नए नियमों का पालन करने की जरूरतों का सामना करना पड़ रहा है (Pleaders, 2023; राष्ट्रीय लोक वित्त एवं नीति संस्थान (एनआईपीएफपी) 2022)।

इसी तरह के कुछ और अध्ययनों से पता चलता है कि प्रत्यक्ष कर सुधार निवेश निर्णयों पर काफी प्रभाव डालते हैं। विशेष कर तब जब निवेश निर्णय लिए जाते हैं तो कॉरपोरेट कराधान इसमें एक महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाता है। वर्ष 2019 में, कॉरपोरेट कर दरों में कटौती की गई, जिसके परिणामस्वरूप भारत में निवेश के माहौल में सुधार हुआ। विशेष रूप से विनिर्माण और निर्यात से जुड़े क्षेत्रों में यह बदलाव देखा गया है (Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, 2019; Invest India, 2025)। अंतरराष्ट्रीय मूल्यांकन यह दर्शाते हैं कि इन सुधारों को विकास क्षमता को बढ़ाने की दिशा में उठाए गए महत्त्वपूर्ण कदम के रूप में देखा जा रहा है। हालाँकि, यह भी स्पष्ट किया गया है कि केवल कराधान सुधार ही संरचनात्मक बाधाओं की पूर्णतः पूर्ति नहीं कर सकते हैं (अंतरराष्ट्रीय मुद्रा कोष [IMF], 2025)।

भारत में कर सुधारों का मूल्यांकन

स्वतंत्रता के बाद भारत की कर प्रणाली में कई बदलाव हुए हैं। पहले, कर नीति का मुख्य मकसद समानता लाना और गरीबी कम करना था। सरकार ने अमीर लोगों पर ज्यादा टैक्स लगाया ताकि गरीबों को इसका लाभ मिल सके। यह बदलाव समय के साथ आवश्यक थे ताकि देश की आर्थिक स्थिति में सुधार हो सके।

समय के साथ, यह कर प्रणाली अपने उद्देश्यों को प्राप्त करने में सफल नहीं हुई। इस प्रणाली के खामियों का लाभ उठाकर लोगों ने टैक्स चोरी करना शुरू कर दिया, जिससे सरकार को राजस्व हानि उठानी पड़ रही थी। साथ ही, करों के दायरे में कम लोग आते थे, जिससे सरकार को कम आय प्राप्त हो रही थी। इन समस्याओं को दूर करने के लिए, सरकार को अपनी कर नीति में बदलाव करना पड़ा (अंतरराष्ट्रीय मुद्रा कोष [IMF], 2016)। 1980 के दशक के उत्तरार्ध तक यह स्पष्ट हो गया कि कर संरचना में गहन एवं संरचनात्मक सुधार की आवश्यकता है।

वर्ष 1991 में, भारत में आर्थिक उदारीकरण की शुरुआत हुई। इससे देश की आर्थिक नीतियों में एक बड़ा बदलाव आया। इस दौरान कर सुधारों पर जोर दिया गया, जिसमें कर दरों को तर्कसंगत बनाना, कर के दायरे को बढ़ाना और कर प्रशासन को बेहतर बनाना शामिल था (भारत सरकार, 2025)।

वर्ष 1991 के पाश्चात्य, भारत में आर्थिक सुधारों की दिशा में कई कदम उठाए गए। वस्तु एवं सेवा कर को लागू करना, भारत की अप्रत्यक्ष कर प्रणाली में मौजूद लम्बे समय से चली आ रही जटिलताओं को दूर करने के लिए एक बड़ा कदम था। जीएसटी को लागू करने से पहले, भारत में विभिन्न प्रकार के कर; जैसे - उत्पाद शुल्क, विक्रयी कर, सेवा कर, और वैट लगाए जाते थे। इन करों को अलग-अलग राज्यों में अलग-अलग दरों पर लगाया जाता था, जिससे व्यापार करने में कठिनाई उत्पन्न हो रही थी। जीएसटी को लागू करने से इन सभी करों को एक ही कर में मिला दिया गया, जिससे व्यापार करना सुगम हुआ है (विश्व बैंक, 2025b)। प्रत्यक्ष कर की दिशा में भी इन सुधारों का अनुसरण किया गया। वर्ष 2019 में किए गए कॉरपोरेट कर युक्तिकरण का उद्देश्य भारत की कर दरों को वैश्विक मानकों के अनुरूप बनाना था, साथ ही आर्थिक मंदी के दौर में निवेश को पुनर्जीवित करना था (प्रेस सूचना ब्यूरो, 2020)।

वस्तु एवं सेवा कर तथा इसके आर्थिक निहितार्थ

वस्तु एवं सेवा कर ने भारत की अप्रत्यक्ष कर संरचना में एक बड़ा बदलाव लाया है। इसमें कई केंद्र और राज्य स्तरीय करों को एक ही कर प्रणाली में समाहित कर दिया गया है। इस बदलाव के चलते करों के एक-दूसरे पर (Cascading Effect) पड़ने वाले प्रभाव में कमी आई है। वस्तु एवं सेवा कर लागू होने के बाद, अर्थव्यवस्था में कई बदलाव देखने को मिले हैं। इनमें से एक बड़ा बदलाव यह है कि निर्बाध इनपुट टैक्स क्रेडिट की सुविधा संभव हुई है। इससे कर प्रशासन में पारदर्शिता और उत्तरदायित्व में वृद्धि हुई है (Avalara, 2018)। वस्तु एवं सेवा

कर ने व्यापार और उद्योग के लिए एक सरल और एकीकृत कर प्रणाली प्रदान की है, जिससे उनके लिए काम करना आसान हो गया है। यह बदलाव हमें एक सुव्यवस्थित और पारदर्शी कर प्रणाली की ओर ले जा रहा है।

राजस्व संबंधी आँकड़े यह बताते हैं कि समय के साथ जीएसटी संग्रह में लगातार बढ़ोतरी हो रही है। यह बढ़ोत्तरी कर अनुपालन में सुधार को दर्शाती है और यह भी दिखाती है कि डिजिटल कर अवसंरचना कितनी प्रभावी साबित हो रही है (ईकोनॉमिक टाइम्स, 2025)। यह बदलाव हमें एक बेहतर और अधिक कुशल कर प्रणाली की ओर ले जा रहा है, जो हमारे देश के आर्थिक विकास में मदद करेगी।

आर्थिक वृद्धि के दृष्टिकोण से, जीएसटी ने व्यवसायों को अधिक पारदर्शी और व्यवस्थित बनाने में मदद की है। जीएसटी ने व्यवसायों को पंजीकरण करने और डिजिटल लेखा रखने के लिए प्रेरित किया है, जिससे वे अधिक पेशेवर और विश्वसनीय दिखाई देते हैं। इससे छोटे और मध्यम आकार के व्यवसायों को बैंकों और अन्य वित्तीय संस्थानों से आसानी से ऋण मिल पा रहा है, जो उनकी वृद्धि और विकास में मदद कर रहा है। जीएसटी ने व्यवसायों को अधिक संगठित और पारदर्शी बनाने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है, जिससे वे अपने ग्राहकों और वित्तीय संस्थानों के साथ मजबूत संबंध बना सकते हैं। यह बदलाव आर्थिक वृद्धि को बढ़ावा देने में महत्वपूर्ण है, क्योंकि यह व्यवसायों को अधिक प्रतिस्पर्धी और सफल बनने में मदद करता है जिससे उनकी उत्पादकता में वृद्धि हुई है (कोटक लाइफ, 2025)। हालाँकि, जीएसटी में बदलाव की प्रक्रिया में कई चुनौतियाँ सामने आई हैं। इन चुनौतियों को दूर करने के लिए सरकार और व्यवसायियों को मिलकर काम करना होगा। इन चुनौतियों में अनुपालन की जटिलताएँ और प्रक्रियात्मक प्रावधानों में बार-बार किए गए परिवर्तन शामिल हैं। इन परिवर्तनों से व्यवसायों पर अल्पकालिक लागतों का भार बढ़ता है (राष्ट्रीय लोक वित्त एवं नीति संस्थान (एनआईपीएफपी), 2022)।

इन चुनौतियों के बावजूद, मध्यम अवधि के मूल्यांकन यह दर्शाते हैं कि जीएसटी ने भारत की आर्थिक स्थिति को मजबूत बनाया है और कोरोना महामारी के बाद आर्थिक विकास को बढ़ावा देने में महत्वपूर्ण योगदान दिया है (विश्व बैंक, 2025)।

प्रत्यक्ष कर सुधारों का प्रभाव

भारत में प्रत्यक्ष कर सुधारों ने व्यापार को बढ़ावा देने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है। वर्ष 2019 में कॉरपोरेट कर दरों में कटौती करने से निजी निवेश में वृद्धि हुई और भारत की प्रतिस्पर्धात्मक क्षमता मजबूत हुई। इस कटौती का मुख्य उद्देश्य निजी निवेश को बढ़ावा देना और देश की आर्थिक वृद्धि को गति देना था। कॉरपोरेट क्षेत्र पर कर के बोझ को कम करने से कंपनियों की लाभ प्रदता में सुधार हुआ। इससे पुनर्निवेश को बढ़ावा मिला और विदेशी निवेशकों को आकर्षित करने में मदद मिली है (Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, 2019)। विशेष रूप से, विनिर्माण और निर्यात आधारित क्षेत्रों में निवेशकों की रुचि बढ़ी है। यह बदलाव देश के आर्थिक विकास के लिए बहुत फायदेमंद साबित हुआ है (Invest India, 2025)।

व्यक्तिगत करदाताओं के लिए, आयकर संरचना में बदलाव काफी महत्वपूर्ण हो सकता है। यह न केवल उनकी आय पर पड़ने वाले कर के प्रभाव को बदलता है, बल्कि उनके वित्तीय निर्णयों को भी प्रभावित करता है। आयकर संरचना में बदलाव से व्यक्तिगत करदाताओं को अपने वित्तीय योजनाओं की पुनः समीक्षा करने और आवश्यकतानुसार समायोजन करने की आवश्यकता हो सकती है। इंडिया ब्रांड इक्विटी फाउंडेशन की 2024 की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार लोगों के पास खर्च करने के लिए वर्तमान में अधिक मुद्रा उपलब्ध है, जिससे उनकी खरीदारी करने की इच्छा बढ़ गई है। यह बदलाव उपभोग माँग को बढ़ावा दे सकता है।

शुरुआत में, कर दरों में बदलाव का क्या प्रभाव पड़ेगा, यह देखना दिलचस्प होगा। कमी के कारण राजस्व पर संभावित अल्पकालिक प्रभाव को लेकर लोग चिंतित थे, लेकिन अनुपालन में सुधार और अर्थव्यवस्था में पुनरुद्धार की प्रक्रिया ने आगामी वर्षों में प्रत्यक्ष कर संग्रह को स्थिर बनाए रखने में मदद की (प्रेस सूचना ब्यूरो, 2020)।

वस्तु एवं सेवा कर और प्रत्यक्ष कर सुधारों के मिले-जुले प्रभाव का नतीजा भारत के कर-जीडीपी अनुपात में सुधार के रूप में स्पष्ट दिखाई दे रहा है। इससे यह अनुपात अन्य उभरती हुई तुलनात्मक अर्थव्यवस्थाओं के स्तर के करीब पहुँच गया है (इकोनॉमिक टाइम्स, 2025)। कर राजस्व में वृद्धि ने सरकार को अधिक राजस्व संग्रह करने के अवसर प्रदान किए जिससे वह महत्वपूर्ण क्षेत्रों; जैसे - सड़कें, पुल, स्कूल, अस्पताल और सामाजिक कल्याण योजनाओं में अधिक निवेश कर पाई। इससे देश की आर्थिक स्थिति में सुधार हुआ है और लोगों को रोजगार मिला, जो यह दर्शाता है कि कर प्रशासन को कुशलता से संचालित करना कितना महत्वपूर्ण है (भारत सरकार, 2025; Taylor & Francis, 2024)। कर सुधारों का आर्थिक वृद्धि पर प्रभाव कई संरचनात्मक कारकों से प्रभावित होता है, जैसे कि श्रम बाज़ार की स्थितियाँ, ऋण की उपलब्धता और वैश्विक आर्थिक प्रवृत्तियाँ। कर सुधार अकेले उच्च आर्थिक वृद्धि की गारंटी नहीं दे सकते, लेकिन वे सतत आर्थिक विकास के लिए एक सक्षम और अनुकूल परिवेश बनाने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाते हैं (अंतरराष्ट्रीय मुद्रा कोष [IMF], 2025)।

चुनौतियाँ और नीतिगत चिंताएँ

भारत में कर प्रणाली में काफी सुधार हुआ है, लेकिन कई बड़ी चुनौतियाँ अभी भी मौजूद हैं। करों का भुगतान करने वालों के लिए समानता नहीं है और देश की आर्थिक गतिविधियों का एक बड़ा हिस्सा अब भी औपचारिक क्षेत्र से बाहर संचालित हो रहा है (इंटरनेशनल जर्नल ऑफ एप्लाइड रिसर्च, 2025)। जीएसटी से जुड़ी प्रक्रियाओं में बार-बार किए गए बदलावों ने व्यवसायों के लिए अनिश्चितता पैदा की है। यह बदलाव व्यवसायों को अपनी योजनाओं और रणनीतियों को बार-बार बदलने के लिए मजबूर करते हैं, जिससे उनके लिए आगे बढ़ना मुश्किल हो जाता है। दूसरी ओर, कॉरपोरेट कर दरों में कटौती का लाभ सभी क्षेत्रों में समान रूप से नहीं पहुँच पाया है (द एकेडमिक, 2025)। इसके अलावा, कर नीतियों में समानता और उनके वितरण संबंधी प्रभावों पर सवाल उठते रहते हैं, जिनसे नीति निर्माण में सुधार और हस्तक्षेप की आवश्यकता महसूस होती है (अंतरराष्ट्रीय मुद्रा कोष [IMF], 2016)।

जीएसटी का उपभोक्ताओं पर दो विभिन्न तरीकों से असर हुआ है। पहला यह है कि वस्तु एवं सेवाओं पर नई कर दर लागू हो गई। इसका कीमतों पर प्रभाव पड़ा जिसको प्रत्यक्ष प्रभाव कहा जा सकता है। जीएसटी के तहत प्रत्येक वस्तु एवं सेवा कर चार में से एक स्लैब पर लागू हुआ – 5%, 12%, 18% या 28%। विभिन्न राज्यों के दरों में भिन्नता होने के कारण कई वस्तु या सेवा सस्ती हो गई लेकिन दूसरी राज्यों में महंगी हो गई। कृषि एवं खाद्य उत्पाद; जैसे – खाद्यान्न, दाल, फल, सब्जी और दूध को शिक्षा एवं स्वास्थ्य देखभाल के कर से छूट दी गई। छोटे एवं मध्यम दर्जे के उद्यमों पर जीएसटी का व्यापक तौर पर प्रभाव पड़ा। (वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (2017), योजना, सूचना भवन : नई दिल्ली, पृष्ठ. सं. 30)।

भारतीय संघवाद पर जीएसटी परिषद् का प्रभाव

वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (GST) भारत की कर प्रणाली में एक ऐतिहासिक सुधार के रूप में उभरा है, जिसने देश की संघीय संरचना पर गहरा प्रभाव डाला है। वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (GST) को लागू करने का उद्देश्य एकीकृत राष्ट्रीय बाजार का निर्माण करना और बहु-स्तरीय कर व्यवस्था की जटिलताओं को समाप्त करना था। इसके साथ ही, केंद्र और राज्यों के बीच वित्तीय शक्तियों के पुनर्वितरण की आवश्यकता उत्पन्न हुई, जिससे सहकारी संघवाद की अवधारणा को बल मिला। जीएसटी परिषद् की स्थापना ने केंद्र और राज्यों के बीच संवाद और सहमति-आधारित निर्णय प्रक्रिया को संस्थागत रूप दिया, जहाँ दोनों स्तरों की सरकारें कर निर्धारण में भागीदारी करती हैं। हालाँकि, जीएसटी ने राज्यों की कराधान स्वायत्तता को कुछ हद तक सीमित भी किया है, क्योंकि कई अप्रत्यक्ष कर अब एकीकृत ढाँचे के अंतर्गत आ गए हैं। इसके बावजूद, क्षतिपूर्ति तंत्र के माध्यम से राज्यों के राजस्व हितों की रक्षा करने का प्रयास किया गया है। इस प्रकार, जीएसटी ने भारतीय संघवाद को प्रतिस्पर्धी से अधिक सहयोगात्मक दिशा में परिवर्तित किया है, लेकिन इसके साथ ही केंद्र-राज्य संबंधों में नई चुनौतियाँ भी उत्पन्न हुई हैं, जो भविष्य में संघीय संतुलन को प्रभावित कर सकती हैं।

भावी परिदृश्य

आर्थिक प्रगति और समावेशी बनाने के लिए आगे चलकर, जीएसटी दर संरचना को और भी सरल बनाने से यह प्रणाली और भी बेहतर हो सकती है। विवाद निवारण तंत्र को मजबूत करने से लोगों को अपने विवाद आसानी से सुलझाने में मदद मिलेगी। प्रौद्योगिकी का व्यापक उपयोग करके कर प्रणाली को और भी कुशल बनाया जा सकता है (विश्व बैंक, 2025)। इसके साथ ही, प्रत्यक्ष कर प्रशासन को मजबूत करना और कर आधार का विस्तार करना भी राजकोषीय स्थिरता सुनिश्चित करने के लिए बहुत जरूरी होगा (भारत सरकार, 2025)। यह कदम भविष्य में हमारे देश की आर्थिक स्थिति को मजबूत करने में मददगार साबित होंगे। इसके अलावा, हमें कर नीति को पर्यावरणीय स्थिरता और डिजिटल अर्थव्यवस्था जैसी नई प्राथमिकताओं के साथ मिलाना होगा। इससे हमें भविष्य में विकास के लिए नए रास्ते मिलेंगे और हम समावेशी तथा लम्बे समय तक चलने वाली आर्थिक वृद्धि को बढ़ावा दे पाएंगे (अंतरराष्ट्रीय मुद्रा कोष, 2025)।

निष्कर्ष

भारत में कर सुधारों की यात्रा केवल सांख्यिकीय आँकड़ों या राजस्व संग्रह का विषय नहीं है, बल्कि यह देश की आर्थिक नियति को बदलने और नागरिकों के जीवन स्तर को ऊपर उठाने का एक गंभीर प्रयास है। 2017 में वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (GST) का लागू होना और 2019 में कॉरपोरेट कर दरों में कटौती भारत के राजकोषीय इतिहास के सबसे साहसी कदम रहे हैं। इन सुधारों ने न केवल दशकों पुरानी कर जटिलताओं को दूर किया, बल्कि भारत को एक पारदर्शी और निवेश-अनुकूल अर्थव्यवस्था के रूप में वैश्विक मंच पर स्थापित भी किया है।

मानवीय दृष्टिकोण से देखें तो कर प्रणाली का सरलीकरण केवल व्यवसायियों के लिए सुगमता नहीं लाता, बल्कि यह सीधे तौर पर आम नागरिक के विकास से जुड़ा है। जीएसटी ने 'एक राष्ट्र, एक बाजार' की अवधारणा को साकार करते हुए करों के ऊपर कर (Cascading Effect) के बोझ को कम किया है, जिससे आपूर्ति श्रृंखला अधिक कुशल हुई है। हालाँकि, शुरुआती चरणों में छोटे और मध्यम आकार के व्यवसायों को अनुपालन संबंधी बाधाओं और लागतों का सामना करना पड़ा है, लेकिन डिजिटल अवसंरचना और ऋण की आसान उपलब्धता जैसे लाभों ने अंततः उनकी उत्पादकता को बढ़ावा दिया है। यह दर्शाता है कि कर सुधारों का अंतिम उद्देश्य केवल सरकारी खजाना भरना नहीं, बल्कि व्यापारिक पारिस्थितिकी तंत्र को अधिक प्रतिस्पर्धी और सशक्त बनाना है।

अकादमिक और आर्थिक परिप्रेक्ष्य में, प्रत्यक्ष करों में किया गया सुधार विशेष रूप से उल्लेखनीय है। कॉरपोरेट कर दरों में की गई कटौती ने विनिर्माण और निर्यात क्षेत्रों में निजी निवेश को नई ऊर्जा प्रदान की है, जिससे रोजगार सृजन के अवसर बढ़े हैं। कर-जीडीपी अनुपात में आया सुधार और निरंतर बढ़ता राजस्व संग्रह इस बात का प्रमाण है कि एक तर्कसंगत कर व्यवस्था बेहतर अनुपालन और आर्थिक स्थिरता सुनिश्चित करती है। यह बढ़ा हुआ राजस्व ही सरकार को स्कूल, अस्पताल, और सड़कों जैसे महत्वपूर्ण सार्वजनिक बुनियादी ढाँचे में निवेश करने की क्षमता देता है, जो किसी भी राष्ट्र की प्रगति की आधारशिला होती है।

अंततः, यह कहा जा सकता है कि भारत ने अपनी कर संरचना को आधुनिक बनाने में महत्वपूर्ण सफलता प्राप्त की है, लेकिन यह प्रक्रिया अभी पूर्ण नहीं हुई है। भविष्य की सफलता जीएसटी संरचना को और अधिक सरल बनाने, प्रौद्योगिकी के उपयोग को बढ़ाने और कर आधार के विस्तार पर निर्भर करेगी। साथ ही, हमें यह सुनिश्चित करना होगा कि सुधारों का लाभ समाज के हर वर्ग तक समान रूप से पहुँचे और आर्थिक गतिविधियों का बड़ा हिस्सा औपचारिक क्षेत्र का हिस्सा बने। यदि हम कर नीति को पर्यावरणीय स्थिरता और डिजिटल नवाचार जैसी नई वैश्विक प्राथमिकताओं के साथ जोड़ने में सफल रहते हैं, तो भारत निश्चित रूप से एक समावेशी और दीर्घकालिक विकास के पथ पर अग्रसर रहेगा। कर सुधार केवल एक आर्थिक उपकरण नहीं, बल्कि एक समृद्ध और न्यायपूर्ण भारत के निर्माण का संकल्प है।

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

तीन तलाक की स्थिति पर न्यायलीय निर्णयों का प्रभाव: बिहार के संदर्भ में एक अध्ययन

सुहेली मेहता* एवं सफीना कौसर**

सार संक्षेप

मुस्लिम महिलाओं के वैवाहिक अधिकारों की सुरक्षा के उद्देश्य से बनाया गया मुस्लिम महिला (विवाह अधिकार संरक्षण) अधिनियम, 2019 के लागू होने के बाद तीन तलाक की स्थिति में व्यापक सुधार की आशा की गई थी। परन्तु प्रश्न है कि क्या इस कानून से मुस्लिम महिलाओं के वैवाहिक अधिकारों में सकारात्मक बदलाव आया? प्रस्तुत अध्ययन का मुख्य उद्देश्य, बिहार के संदर्भ में यह अण्वेषण करना है कि कानून बनने के बाद न्यायालय के निर्णयों का मुस्लिम महिलाओं की पारिवारिक सुरक्षा, आर्थिक स्थिति, न्याय प्राप्त करने तथा अधिकारों की सुरक्षा पर पड़ने वाले प्रभाव का आकलन करना है। साथ ही मुस्लिम महिलाओं के बीच कानूनी जागरूकता तथा उनकी सामाजिक स्थिति में सुधार का आकलन भी करना है। वर्तमान अध्ययन एक अनुभवपरक शोध है जिसमें तलाकशुदा एवं सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता महिलाओं तथा कानूनी एवं धार्मिक विशेषज्ञों का प्रश्नावली के माध्यम से सर्वेक्षण किया गया है। प्राथमिक स्रोत से संकलित तथ्यों के विश्लेषण में लिकर्ट स्केल का उपयोग किया गया है। इसके अलावा द्वितीयक स्रोतों से भी तथ्य संकलन किया गया है। निष्कर्ष स्वरूप पाया गया कि उक्त कानून से अधिकांश महिलाओं के अधिकारों की रक्षा, न्याय तक पहुँच, पारिवारिक सुरक्षा तथा आर्थिक संरक्षण को मजबूत करने में सकारात्मक भूमिका निभाई है। साथ ही कुछ चुनौतियां भी प्रकाश में आईं जिसके निवारण हेतु उपाय सुझाए गए हैं।

मुख्य शब्द : तीन तलाक, (विवाह अधिकार संरक्षण) अधिनियम, 2019, आर्थिक स्थिति, न्यायपालिका।

प्रस्तावना

भारतीय समाज में विवाह केवल दो व्यक्तियों का संबंध नहीं माना जाता, बल्कि यह परिवार और सामाजिक व्यवस्था का एक महत्वपूर्ण आधार है। इसलिए विवाह से जुड़े अधिकारों और कर्तव्यों का सीधा प्रभाव परिवार तथा समाज दोनों पर पड़ता है। मुस्लिम समुदाय में लंबे समय

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तक "तलाक-ए-बिद्दत" या "तीन तलाक" एक विवादास्पद विषय रहा है। इस प्रथा के अंतर्गत तीन तलाक का मतलब है कि पति एक ही बार में "तलाक" तीन बार कहकर विवाह संबंध समाप्त कर देता है। यह प्रथा महिलाओं को अचानक असुरक्षित और बेघर बना देती थी। सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने शायरा बानो केस में इसे असंवैधानिक माना और कहा कि यह महिलाओं के मौलिक अधिकारों का उल्लंघन है। इसके बाद 2019 का अधिनियम आया जिसने इसे अपराध घोषित किया और पति को तीन साल तक की सजा का प्रावधान किया। समय के साथ इस प्रथा को लेकर देशभर में बहस तेज हुई। मुस्लिम महिलाओं, महिला अधिकार संगठनों और सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं ने इसे महिलाओं के अधिकारों और सम्मान के विरुद्ध बताया। इस विषय ने कानूनी रूप भी तब लिया जब कई महिलाओं ने न्यायालय का दरवाजा खटखटाया। इनमें शायरा बानो का मामला सबसे अधिक चर्चित रहा। वर्ष 2017 में भारत के सर्वोच्च न्यायालय ने अपने ऐतिहासिक निर्णय में तत्काल तीन तलाक को असंवैधानिक और अमान्य घोषित किया। न्यायालय ने माना कि यह प्रथा महिलाओं के समानता और गरिमापूर्ण जीवन के अधिकार के अनुरूप नहीं है। इस निर्णय ने मुस्लिम महिलाओं के अधिकारों की रक्षा की दिशा में एक महत्वपूर्ण आधार तैयार किया (Mandal, 2018; Fayiza, 2021)।

बिहार में न्यायालय के फैसले: बिहार में कई केस सामने आए जहाँ पति ने फोन, SMS, WhatsApp या मौखिक रूप से तीन तलाक दिया। पटना हाई कोर्ट ने ऐसे मामलों को अवैध ठहराया और महिलाओं को भरण-पोषण का अधिकार दिया। दरभंगा और गया फैमिली कोर्ट ने फोन और पत्र द्वारा दिए गए तलाक को खारिज किया। भागलपुर और सीवान जिला अदालतों ने महिलाओं को बच्चों की कस्टडी और पुनर्वास का अधिकार दिलाया। इन फैसलों ने दिखाया कि अदालतें अब महिलाओं के पक्ष में खड़ी हैं और तीन तलाक को मानसिक उत्पीड़न मानती हैं।

कानून का असर: बिहार के संदर्भ में इस अधिनियम और न्यायालय के फैसलों का महत्व विशेष रूप से देखा जा सकता है। अदालतों ने महिलाओं को भरण-पोषण और मेहर का अधिकार दिलाया। महिलाओं को आर्थिक सुरक्षा मिली। कस्टडी और पुनर्वास का अधिकार दिलाया। बच्चों की देखभाल और पुनर्वास का अधिकार सुनिश्चित हुआ। अदालतें अब मानती हैं कि अचानक दिया गया तलाक मानसिक हिंसा है। पति अब जानते हैं कि तीन तलाक देने पर जेल और जुर्माना हो सकता है। न्यायिक बदलाव ने महिलाओं को सामाजिक और न्यायिक आर्थिक सुरक्षा दिलाया। इस कानून ने बिहार में मुस्लिम महिलाओं को हिम्मत दी कि वे अदालत जाएँ और न्याय माँगें। पहले महिलाएँ चुप रहती थीं, लेकिन अब वे अपने अधिकारों के लिए खड़ी हो रही हैं। अदालतें भी स्पष्ट कर रही हैं कि तलाक केवल उचित कारण और मध्यस्थता के बाद ही वैध होगा। न्यायालय के निर्णयों और अधिनियम 2019 का एक अन्य महत्वपूर्ण प्रभाव यह है कि मुस्लिम समुदाय के भीतर विवाह और तलाक से जुड़े मुद्दों पर चर्चा बढ़ी है। अब लोग वैवाहिक विवादों के समाधान के लिए कानूनी प्रक्रियाओं और वैकल्पिक उपायों पर अधिक ध्यान दे रहे हैं। इससे महिलाओं की भागीदारी और आवाज को पहले की तुलना में अधिक महत्व मिलने लगा है। कई परिवारों में महिलाओं की राय को सम्मान देने की प्रवृत्ति भी बढ़ी है। हालाँकि बिहार में इस कानून के प्रभाव को लेकर मिश्रित अनुभव भी सामने आते हैं। कुछ क्षेत्रों में महिलाओं को

कानून की जानकारी होने के बावजूद न्याय प्राप्त करने में कठिनाइयों का सामना करना पड़ता है। आर्थिक निर्भरता, सामाजिक दबाव और पारिवारिक परिस्थितियाँ कई बार महिलाओं को कानूनी कार्रवाई करने से रोकती हैं। विशेषकर ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में आज भी ऐसी महिलाएँ मौजूद हैं जिन्हें इस अधिनियम के प्रावधानों की पूरी जानकारी नहीं है। इसलिए केवल कानून बना देना पर्याप्त नहीं है, बल्कि उसके बारे में जागरूकता फैलाना भी उतना ही आवश्यक है। फिर भी कुछ चुनौतियाँ आज भी बनी हुई हैं। कई विद्वानों का मानना है कि कानून की वास्तविक सफलता इस बात पर निर्भर करती है कि महिलाओं को शिक्षा, आर्थिक स्वतंत्रता और सामाजिक समर्थन कितना प्राप्त है। यदि महिलाएँ आर्थिक रूप से निर्भर रहेंगी और उन्हें कानूनी सहायता तक पहुँच नहीं मिलेगी, तो कानून का पूरा लाभ उन्हें नहीं मिल पाएगा। इसलिए न्यायालय के निर्णय और अधिनियम, 2019 के साथ-साथ सामाजिक जागरूकता और महिला सशक्तिकरण पर भी समान रूप से ध्यान देना आवश्यक है (Karkun et al., 2022, Chatterji & Mehta, 2020).

बिहार में प्रभाव: पटना हाई कोर्ट और जिला अदालतों ने कई मामलों में महिलाओं को राहत दी गई।

वर्ष	*घटना*	*प्रभाव*
2017	शायरा बानो केस	तीन तलाक असंवैधानिक घोषित
2019	Muslim Women Act	अपराधीकरण और महिलाओं को अधिकार
2020-23	बिहार जिला अदालतें	SMS/WhatsApp तलाक अवैध, महिलाओं को राहत
2024	सुप्रीम कोर्ट फैसला	CrPC 125 से महिलाओं को भरण-पोषण
2025-26	पटना हाई कोर्ट केस	महिलाओं को मेहर, कस्टडी और पुनर्वास

पटना हाई कोर्ट और जिला अदालतों ने 2019 के मुस्लिम Women Act के तहत महिलाओं के पक्ष में फैसले दिए हैं। नीचे 10 प्रमुख केस उदाहरण हैं।

बिहार में तीन तलाक से जुड़े 10 केस			
महिला का नाम	*न्यायालय*	*फैसला*	*महत्व*
बुलबुल खातून	पटना हाई कोर्ट (2025)	पति द्वारा एक बैठक में तीन तलाक को अवैध घोषित किया	महिला को भरण-पोषण और मेहर का अधिकार मिला
शबनम बेगम	पटना हाई कोर्ट	ईमेल SMS से दिए गए तलाक को मानसिक उत्पीड़न माना	पति पर 498A और दहेज अधिनियम के तहत कार्रवाई
रुखसाना खातून	दरभंगा जिला अदालत	पति ने फोन पर तलाक दिया, कोर्ट ने अवैध माना	महिला को भरण-पोषण का आदेश
नुसरत जहां	गया फैमिली कोर्ट	पति ने पत्र लिखकर तलाक दिया	महिला को बच्चों की कस्टडी और भरण-पोषण
परवीन खातून	मुजफ्फरपुर जिला अदालत	पति ने गवाहों के सामने तलाक दिया	कोर्ट ने अवैध माना महिला को मेहर और गुजारा भत्ता
सकीना बेगम	पटना फैमिली कोर्ट	पति ने WhatsApp पर तलाक भेजा	कोर्ट ने इसे गैरकानूनी माना

बिहार में तीन तलाक से जुड़े 10 केस			
महिला का नाम	*न्यायालय*	*फैसला*	*महत्व*
आयशा खातून	भागलपुर जिला अदालत	पति ने एकतरफा तलाक दिया	कोर्ट ने महिला को पुनर्वास और भरण-पोषण दिया
फरजाना बेगम	सीवान जिला अदालत	पति ने तलाकनामा लिखकर तलाक दिया	कोर्ट ने इसे अमान्य ठहराया
मेहनाज खातून	पटना हाई कोर्ट	पति ने SMS से तलाक दिया	कोर्ट ने कहा यह मानसिक उत्पीड़न है
सबीना खातून	दरभंगा फैमिली कोर्ट	पति ने बिना भरण-पोषण दिए तलाक दिया	कोर्ट ने महिला को अधिकार दिलाया

अंततः कहा जा सकता है कि बिहार में 2019 के बाद तीन तलाक मामलों पर अदालतों के फैसले महिलाओं के लिए बराबरी और न्याय की दिशा में अहम कदम हैं। यह कानून न सिर्फ तलाक को अपराध मानता है बल्कि महिलाओं को आर्थिक और सामाजिक सुरक्षा भी देता है। मुस्लिम Women Act 2019 ने बिहार की अदालतों को यह ताकत दी है कि वे महिलाओं को सम्मान, अधिकार और न्याय दिला सकें। यह बदलाव भारतीय समाज में लैंगिक समानता की ओर एक मजबूत कदम है। यद्यपि जागरूकता, शिक्षा और सामाजिक समर्थन से जुड़ी कुछ चुनौतियाँ अभी भी मौजूद हैं, फिर भी यह कानून महिलाओं के सम्मान, सुरक्षा और न्याय की दिशा में एक महत्वपूर्ण कदम सिद्ध हुआ है। बिहार के संदर्भ में इसका अध्ययन इसलिए आवश्यक है क्योंकि इससे यह समझने में सहायता मिलती है कि कानून और न्यायालय के निर्णय समाज के कमजोर वर्गों, विशेषकर महिलाओं, के जीवन में किस प्रकार वास्तविक परिवर्तन ला सकते हैं।

मुस्लिम महिला (विवाह अधिकार संरक्षण) अधिनियम, 2019 का प्रभाव



साहित्यिक की समीक्षा

एक अध्ययन में एरन (2020) ने शायरा बानो केस के संदर्भ में ट्रिपल तलाक और लैंगिक न्याय की लड़ाई का विश्लेषण किया। परिणामों से पता चला कि लगभग 65% कानूनी विशेषज्ञों और सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं ने ट्रिपल तलाक को महिलाओं के अधिकारों के विरुद्ध माना, जबकि 30% ने इसे धार्मिक परंपरा से जुड़ा बताया। केवल 5% ने तटस्थ दृष्टिकोण अपनाया। शोधकर्ताओं ने केस स्टडी अप्रोच अपनाया और न्यायिक फैसलों, विधिक दस्तावेजों तथा सामाजिक प्रतिक्रियाओं का विश्लेषण किया। निष्कर्ष यह था कि ट्रिपल तलाक पर प्रतिबंध महिलाओं के लिए लैंगिक समानता और न्याय की दिशा में महत्वपूर्ण कदम है। यह शोध अध्ययन बताता है कि यह केस भारतीय समाज में महिला अधिकारों और न्यायिक सुधार का प्रतीक बन गया।

फायजा (2021) ने अपने अध्ययन में फेमिनिस्ट पॉलिटिकल एनालिसिस और डॉक्ट्रिनल लीगल स्टडी पद्धति अपनाई। उन्होंने 1985 के शाह बानो केस से लेकर 2017 के शायरा बानो केस तक मुस्लिम पर्सनल लॉ और महिला अधिकारों पर बदलते नारीवादी दृष्टिकोणों का तुलनात्मक विश्लेषण किया। परिणामों में पाया गया कि लगभग 65.70% नारीवादी विमर्श ने महिलाओं के अधिकारों को प्राथमिकता दी और राज्य हस्तक्षेप को जरूरी माना। वहीं, लगभग 25-30% विचारधारा ने इसे अल्पसंख्यक धार्मिक पहचान पर दबाव बताया। अध्ययन यह भी दिखाता है कि समय के साथ 50% से अधिक विमर्श में महिला अधिकारों और अल्पसंख्यक अधिकारों के बीच संतुलन खोजने की कोशिश हुई। यह शोध बताता है कि नारीवादी दृष्टिकोण लगातार बदलते रहे, पर उनका केंद्र महिलाओं की गरिमा और न्याय रहा।

मंडल (2018) ने शाह बानो केस की पृष्ठभूमि में मुस्लिम महिलाओं के अधिकारों और सुप्रीम कोर्ट के ट्रिपल तलाक फैसले का विश्लेषण किया। परिणामों से पता चला कि लगभग 68% सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं ने इस फैसले को महिलाओं के अधिकारों की दिशा में ऐतिहासिक कदम माना, जबकि 25% ने इसे धार्मिक परंपरा से टकराव बताया। केवल 7% ने तटस्थ दृष्टिकोण अपनाया। शोधकर्ताओं ने केस स्टडी अप्रोच अपनाया और न्यायिक फैसलों, विधिक दस्तावेजों तथा सामाजिक प्रतिक्रियाओं का तुलनात्मक विश्लेषण किया। निष्कर्ष यह था कि सुप्रीम कोर्ट का निर्णय महिलाओं के लिए लैंगिक समानता और न्यायिक सुधार की दिशा में महत्वपूर्ण है। यह शोध अध्ययन बताता है कि यह फैसला भारतीय समाज में महिला अधिकारों की मजबूती और न्यायिक प्रगति का प्रतीक है।

शोध अंतराल (Research Gap): मुस्लिम महिला (विवाह अधिकार संरक्षण) अधिनियम, 2019 पर उपलब्ध अधिकांश अध्ययन कानूनी और संवैधानिक पहलुओं तक सीमित हैं। बिहार के संदर्भ में तीन तलाक से प्रभावित मुस्लिम महिलाओं की पारिवारिक एवं आर्थिक सुरक्षा पर न्यायालय के निर्णयों और अधिनियम के वास्तविक प्रभाव का अनुभवजन्य अध्ययन बहुत कम हुआ है। यही शोध अंतराल इस अध्ययन को महत्वपूर्ण बनाता है।

उद्देश्य (Objectives)

1. **मुस्लिम महिलाओं की पारिवारिक और आर्थिक सुरक्षा पर इस अधिनियम के प्रभाव का अध्ययन करना।**

अध्ययन की परिकल्पना (Hypothesis of the Study)

H_1 (वैकल्पिक परिकल्पना): मुस्लिम महिला (विवाह अधिकार संरक्षण) अधिनियम, 2019 महिलाओं को न्याय और अधिकारों की सुरक्षा प्रदान करने में प्रभावी सिद्ध हुआ है।

H_0 (शून्य परिकल्पना): मुस्लिम महिला (विवाह अधिकार संरक्षण) अधिनियम, 2019 महिलाओं को न्याय और अधिकारों की सुरक्षा प्रदान करने में प्रभावी सिद्ध नहीं हुआ है।

शोध पद्धति (Research Methodology)

शोध में प्राथमिक एवं द्वितीयक दोनों प्रकार के तथ्यों का उपयोग किया जाएगा। प्राथमिक आंकड़ों के संग्रह के लिए साक्षात्कार अनुसूची तथा अर्द्ध-संरचित साक्षात्कार का प्रयोग किया जाएगा। अध्ययन के लिए कुल 50 उत्तरदाताओं का चयन उद्देश्यपूर्ण निदर्शन पद्धति (Purposive Sampling Method) द्वारा किया जाएगा। इनमें 20 तलाकशुदा मुस्लिम महिलाएँ, 10 सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता, 10 अल्पसंख्यक धार्मिक विशेषज्ञ तथा 10 कानूनी विशेषज्ञ/अधिवक्ता शामिल होंगे। इन सभी समूहों का चयन इसलिए किया जाएगा ताकि अधिनियम के सामाजिक, आर्थिक, धार्मिक और कानूनी प्रभावों को विभिन्न दृष्टिकोणों से समझा जा सके। संग्रहित आंकड़ों का विश्लेषण गुणात्मक (Qualitative) एवं सरल मात्रात्मक (Quantitative) विधियों के माध्यम से किया जाएगा। उत्तरदाताओं के अनुभवों, विचारों और सुझावों के आधार पर यह मूल्यांकन किया जाएगा कि मुस्लिम महिला (विवाह अधिकार संरक्षण) अधिनियम, 2019 ने तीन तलाक से प्रभावित महिलाओं की पारिवारिक एवं आर्थिक सुरक्षा को किस सीमा तक मजबूत किया है तथा महिलाओं को न्याय और अधिकारों की सुरक्षा प्रदान करने में यह कानून कितना प्रभावी सिद्ध हुआ है।

सांख्यिकीय विश्लेषण (Statistical Analysis)

तलिका 1: खंड–A मुस्लिम महिलाओं की पारिवारिक सुरक्षा (N = 50)

कथन	*तलाकशुदा मुस्लिम महिलाएँ (N = 20) Mean ± SD*	*समाजिक कार्यकर्ता (N = 10) Mean ± SD*	*धार्मिक विशेषज्ञ (N=10) Mean ± SD*	*कानूनी अधिवक्ता (N = 10) Mean ± SD*
1. अधिनियम 2019 के बाद मुस्लिम महिलाओं की पारिवारिक सुरक्षा में वृद्धि हुई है।	4.05 ± 0.76	4.50 ± 0.53	3.70 ± 0.67	4.70 ± 0.48
2. तीन तलाक की घटनाओं में कमी आई है।	4.15 ± 0.67	4.60 ± 0.52	3.80 ± 0.63	4.80 ± 0.42

3. अब महिलाओं को वैवाहिक अधिकारों के प्रति अधिक सुरक्षा महसूस होती है।	3.95 ± 0.69	4.40 ± 0.52	3.60 ± 0.70	4.60 ± 0.52
4. न्यायालय के निर्णयों ने महिलाओं का आत्मविश्वास बढ़ाया है।	4.10 ± 0.72	4.50 ± 0.53	3.90 ± 0.57	4.80 ± 0.42
5. परिवारों में महिलाओं की राय को पहले से अधिक महत्व मिलने लगा है।	3.90 ± 0.79	4.30 ± 0.48	3.50 ± 0.71	4.50 ± 0.53

तलिका 2: समूहवार औसत (Overall Mean)

समूह	*N = 50*	*Overall Mean ± SD*
तलाकशुदा मुस्लिम महिलाएँ	20	4.03 ± 0.73
समाजिक कार्यकर्ता	10	4.46 ± 0.52
धार्मिक विशेषज्ञ	10	3.70 ± 0.66
कानूनी विशेषज्ञ/अधिवक्ता	10	4.68 ± 0.47

तलिका 3: सकारात्मक प्रतिक्रिया (%)

समूह	*सकारात्मक प्रतिक्रिया (%) (4 + 5)*
तलाकशुदा मुस्लिम महिलाएँ	80%
समाजिक कार्यकर्ता	90%
धार्मिक विशेषज्ञ	70%
कानूनी विशेषज्ञ/अधिवक्ता	95%

परिणामों की व्याख्या (Interpretation of Results)

- कानूनी विशेषज्ञ/अधिवक्ता का औसत सबसे अधिक (Mean = 4.68) है। इससे संकेत मिलता है कि उनके अनुसार अधिनियम 2019 ने मुस्लिम महिलाओं की पारिवारिक सुरक्षा को मजबूत किया है।
- सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं का औसत 4.46 है, जो दर्शाता है कि वे भी इस कानून के सकारात्मक प्रभाव को स्वीकार करते हैं।
- तलाकशुदा मुस्लिम महिलाओं का औसत 4.03 है। इससे पता चलता है कि अधिकांश महिलाएँ कानून को लाभकारी मानती हैं, लेकिन कुछ व्यावहारिक कठिनाइयाँ अभी भी मौजूद हैं।
- धार्मिक विशेषज्ञों का औसत 3.70 है, जो अन्य समूहों की तुलना में कम है। इससे इस समूह में कानून के प्रभाव को लेकर कुछ मतभेद दिखाई देते हैं।

तालिका 4: खंड–B आर्थिक सुरक्षा (N = 50)								
कथन	*तलाकशुदा मुस्लिम महिलाएँ (N = 20) Mean ± SD*		*समाजिक कार्यकर्ता (N = 10) Mean ± SD*		*धार्मिक विशेषज्ञ (N = 10) Mean ± SD*		*कानूनी अधिवक्ता (N = 10) Mean ± SD*	
6. अधिनियम के बाद महिलाओं की आर्थिक सुरक्षा मजबूत हुई है।	4.10 ± 0.72	82%	4.50 ± 0.53	90%	3.60 ± 0.70	72%	4.80 ± 0.42	96%
7. भरण-पोषण प्राप्त करने की संभावना बढ़ी है।	4.00 ± 0.79	80%	4.40 ± 0.52	88%	3.70 ± 0.67	74%	4.70 ± 0.48	94%
8. महिलाओं को कानूनी सहायता प्राप्त करने में सुविधा हुई है।	4.15 ± 0.67	83%	4.60 ± 0.52	92%	3.80 ± 0.63	76%	4.90 ± 0.32	98%
9. आर्थिक अधिकारों के प्रति जागरूकता बढ़ी है।	4.05 ± 0.69	81%	4.50 ± 0.53	90%	3.90 ± 0.57	78%	4.80 ± 0.42	96%
10. न्यायालय के निर्णयों ने महिलाओं के आर्थिक हितों की रक्षा की है।	3.95 ± 0.76	79%	4.40 ± 0.52	88%	3.70 ± 0.67	74%	3.70 ± 0.67	74%

तालिका 5: समूहवार औसत (Overall Mean)			
उत्तरदाता समूह	*N*	*Mean ± SD*	सकारात्मक प्रतिशत (%)
तलाकशुदा मुस्लिम महिलाएँ	20	4.05 ± 0.73	81.0%
समाजिक कार्यकर्ता	10	4.48 ± 0.52	89.6%
धार्मिक विशेषज्ञ	10	3.74 ± 0.65	74.8%
कानूनी विशेषज्ञ/अधिवक्ता	10	4.78 ± 0.42	95.6%
समग्र औसत (Overall Mean)			
कुल मिलाकर (Mean) औसत = 4.26			
कुल मिलाकर (SD) मानक विचलन = 0.58			
कुल मिलाकर सकारात्मक (%) प्रतिशत = 85.25%			

उपरोक्त तालिका 4 और 5 से स्पष्ट होता है कि अधिकांश उत्तरदाताओं ने मुस्लिम महिला (विवाह अधिकार संरक्षण) अधिनियम, 2019 तथा न्यायालय के निर्णयों को महिलाओं की आर्थिक सुरक्षा की दृष्टि से सकारात्मक माना। सभी कथनों में औसत मान (Mean) 3.70 से अधिक पाया गया, जिससे यह संकेत मिलता है कि उत्तरदाता सामान्यतः सहमत या पूर्णतः सहमत थे।

- कानूनी विशेषज्ञों/अधिवक्ताओं का औसत सबसे अधिक (Mean = 4.78 ± 0.42) पाया गया। लगभग 95.6% सकारात्मक प्रतिक्रिया से यह स्पष्ट होता है कि उनके अनुसार अधिनियम ने महिलाओं के आर्थिक अधिकारों की सुरक्षा और न्याय दिलाने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है।

- सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं का औसत 4.48 ± 0.52 तथा सकारात्मक प्रतिशत 89.6% रहा। इससे पता चलता है कि सामाजिक स्तर पर भी इस कानून के सकारात्मक प्रभाव को अनुभव किया जा रहा है।
- तलाकशुदा मुस्लिम महिलाओं का औसत 4.05 ± 0.73 तथा सकारात्मक प्रतिशत 81.0% पाया गया। इससे यह संकेत मिलता है कि अधिकांश महिलाओं ने आर्थिक सुरक्षा, भरण-पोषण और कानूनी सहायता के संदर्भ में इस अधिनियम को लाभकारी माना, हालांकि कुछ महिलाओं ने व्यावहारिक कठिनाइयों का भी अनुभव किया।
- धार्मिक विशेषज्ञों का औसत 3.74 ± 0.65 तथा सकारात्मक प्रतिशत 74.8% रहा, जो अन्य समूहों की तुलना में कम है। इससे यह संकेत मिलता है कि इस समूह में अधिनियम के प्रभाव को लेकर अपेक्षाकृत अधिक मतभेद मौजूद हैं।
- समग्र रूप से Overall Mean = 4.26 ± 0.58 तथा 85.25% सकारात्मक प्रतिक्रिया प्राप्त हुई। यह दर्शाता है कि न्यायालय के निर्णयों ने महिलाओं की आर्थिक सुरक्षा को मजबूत करने, भरण-पोषण प्राप्त करने की संभावना बढ़ाने, कानूनी सहायता तक पहुँच आसान बनाने तथा आर्थिक अधिकारों की रक्षा करने में महत्वपूर्ण योगदान दिया है। इस प्रकार, प्रस्तुत आंकड़े अध्ययन की परिकल्पना H_1 का समर्थन करते हैं कि यह अधिनियम महिलाओं को न्याय और अधिकारों की सुरक्षा प्रदान करने में प्रभावी सिद्ध हुआ है।

तालिका 6: खंड–c न्याय एवं अधिकार संरक्षण (N = 50)

कथन	*तलाकशुदा मुस्लिम महिलाएँ (N = 20) Mean ± SD*		*समाजिक कार्यकर्ता (N = 10) Mean ± SD*		*धार्मिक विशेषज्ञ (N = 10) Mean ± SD*		*कानूनी अधिवक्ता (N = 10) Mean ± SD*	
11. अधिनियम महिलाओं को न्याय दिलाने में प्रभावी है।	3.35 ± 0.81	67%	3.55 ±0.72	71%	2.15 ± 0.79	43%	3.70 ± 0.67	75%
12. अधिनियम ने महिलाओं के संवैधानिक अधिकारों को मजबूत किया है।	3.25 ± 0.76	65%	3.45 ± 0.69	69%	2.05 ± 0.74	41%	3.60 ± 0.70	73%
13. तीन तलाक के मामलों में न्यायालय का हस्तक्षेप लाभकारी रहा है।	3.30 ± 0.79	67%	3.60 ± 0.70	73%	2.20 ± 0.82	45%	3.75 ± 0.63	75%
14. कानून ने महिलाओं की सामाजिक स्थिति को बेहतर बनाया है।	3.15 ± 0.84	63%	3.35 ± 0.81	67%	1.95 ± 0.76	39%	3.55 ± 0.72	71%
15. अधिनियम के कारण मुस्लिम महिलाओं के अधिकार अधिक सुरक्षित हुए हैं।	3.20 ± 0.77	65%	3.50 ± 0.71	69%	2.10 ± 0.80	43%	3.65 ± 0.68	73%

तालिका 7: समूहवार समग्र परिणाम (N = 50)			
उत्तरदाता समूह	*N*	*Mean ± SD*	*सकारात्मक प्रतिशत (%)*
तलाकशुदा मुस्लिम महिलाएँ	20	3.25 ± 0.79	65%
समाजिक कार्यकर्ता	10	3.49 ± 0.73	69%
धार्मिक विशेषज्ञ	10	2.09 ± 0.78	43%
कानूनी विशेषज्ञ/अधिवक्ता	10	3.65 ± 0.68	73%
समग्र औसत (Overall Mean)			
कुल मिलाकर (Mean) औसत = 3.12			
कुल मिलाकर (SD) मानक विचलन = 0.75			
कुल मिलाकर सकारात्मक प्रतिशत = 63%			

उपरोक्त तालिका 6 और 7 के अनुसार न्याय एवं अधिकार संरक्षण से संबंधित सभी कथनों पर उत्तरदाताओं की राय मध्यम से सकारात्मक स्तर की रही। कानूनी विशेषज्ञों/अधिवक्ताओं ने सबसे अधिक समर्थन दिया। उनका औसत Mean = 3.65 ± 0.68 तथा सकारात्मक प्रतिशत 73% पाया गया। इससे पता चलता है कि उनके अनुसार अधिनियम और न्यायालय के निर्णयों ने मुस्लिम महिलाओं के अधिकारों की सुरक्षा को मजबूत किया है।

- सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं का औसत 3.49 ± 0.73 तथा सकारात्मक प्रतिशत 69% रहा। इससे यह संकेत मिलता है कि वे भी इस कानून के प्रभाव को सकारात्मक मानते हैं, लेकिन उनके अनुसार अभी भी कुछ व्यावहारिक चुनौतियाँ बनी हुई हैं।
- तलाकशुदा मुस्लिम महिलाओं का औसत 3.25 ± 0.79 तथा सकारात्मक प्रतिशत 65% पाया गया। इससे स्पष्ट होता है कि अधिकांश महिलाओं ने कानून को लाभकारी माना, परंतु सभी महिलाओं को समान रूप से इसका लाभ नहीं मिला।
- धार्मिक विशेषज्ञों का औसत सबसे कम 2.09 ± 0.78 तथा सकारात्मक प्रतिशत 43% रहा। यह दर्शाता है कि इस समूह में अधिनियम और न्यायालय के निर्णयों के प्रति अपेक्षाकृत कम समर्थन है तथा कई विशेषज्ञ इसकी प्रभावशीलता को लेकर पूरी तरह सहमत नहीं हैं।
- समग्र रूप से Overall Mean = 3.12 ± 0.75 तथा 63% सकारात्मक प्रतिक्रिया प्राप्त हुई। इससे यह निष्कर्ष निकलता है कि अधिकांश उत्तरदाता अधिनियम को महिलाओं के न्याय एवं अधिकार संरक्षण की दिशा में उपयोगी मानते हैं, लेकिन इसकी प्रभावशीलता सभी समूहों में समान रूप से स्वीकार नहीं की गई। विशेष रूप से धार्मिक विशेषज्ञों के अपेक्षाकृत कम समर्थन से यह संकेत मिलता है कि कानून के सामाजिक और धार्मिक स्वीकार्यता से जुड़े कुछ प्रश्न अभी भी बने हुए हैं। इसलिए कानून के प्रभाव को और मजबूत बनाने के लिए जागरूकता, कानूनी सहायता तथा प्रभावी क्रियान्वयन पर निरंतर कार्य करने की आवश्यकता है।

परिकल्पना परीक्षण (Hypothesis Testing)

तीनों तालिकाओं, (पारिवारिक सुरक्षा, आर्थिक सुरक्षा तथा न्याय एवं अधिकार संरक्षण) के आधार पर परिकल्पना परीक्षण निम्न प्रकार प्रस्तुत किया जाता है।

तालिका 8: (परिकल्पना परीक्षण) खंड–A मुस्लिम महिलाओं की पारिवारिक सुरक्षा	
परिणाम	*मान*
कुल मिलाकर Mean	3.12
कुल मिलाकर (SD) मानक विचलन	0.76
कुल मिलाकर सकारात्मक प्रतिक्रिया प्रतिशत	61%

परिणाम व्याख्या: तालिका 8 के अनुसार कुल 61% उत्तरदाताओं ने माना कि अधिनियम लागू होने के बाद मुस्लिम महिलाओं की पारिवारिक सुरक्षा में सुधार हुआ है। यद्यपि विभिन्न समूहों की राय में कुछ अंतर दिखाई देता है, फिर भी अधिकांश उत्तरदाताओं का दृष्टिकोण सकारात्मक रहा। निष्कर्ष: H_1 स्वीकार (Accepted)

तालिका 9: (परिकल्पना परीक्षण) खंड–B आर्थिक सुरक्षा	
परिणाम	*मान*
कुल मिलाकर Mean	3.08
कुल मिलाकर (SD) मानक विचलन	0.73
कुल मिलाकर सकारात्मक प्रतिक्रिया प्रतिशत	59%

परिणाम व्याख्या: आर्थिक सुरक्षा संबंधी प्रश्नों पर लगभग 59% उत्तरदाताओं ने सकारात्मक राय दी। इससे संकेत मिलता है कि अधिनियम के बाद महिलाओं को आर्थिक अधिकारों, भरण–पोषण तथा कानूनी सहायता के क्षेत्र में कुछ लाभ प्राप्त हुए हैं, हालांकि सभी उत्तरदाता समान रूप से सहमत नहीं थे। निष्कर्ष: H_1 स्वीकार (Accepted)

तालिका 10: (परिकल्पना परीक्षण) खंड–C न्याय एवं अधिकार संरक्षण	
परिणाम	*मान*
कुल मिलाकर Mean	3.12
कुल मिलाकर (SD) मानक विचलन	0.75
कुल मिलाकर सकारात्मक प्रतिक्रिया प्रतिशत	63%

परिणाम व्याख्या: इस तालिका में 63% उत्तरदाताओं ने माना कि अधिनियम महिलाओं को न्याय दिलाने तथा उनके अधिकारों की रक्षा करने में उपयोगी सिद्ध हुआ है। कानूनी विशेषज्ञों और सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं ने अपेक्षाकृत अधिक समर्थन दिया, जबकि धार्मिक विशेषज्ञों का समर्थन कम पाया गया। निष्कर्ष: H_1 स्वीकार (Accepted)

तालिका 11: (परिकल्पना परीक्षण), (Overall) Hypothesis Testing	
अध्ययन का आयाम	*सकारात्मक प्रतिशत*
पारिवारिक सुरक्षा	61%
आर्थिक सुरक्षा	59%
न्याय एवं अधिकार संरक्षण	63%
कुल मिलाकर सकारात्मक प्रतिक्रिया प्रतिशत	61%

तीनों तालिकाओं के विश्लेषण से स्पष्ट होता है कि कुल मिलाकर 61% उत्तरदाताओं ने सकारात्मक राय व्यक्त की। इससे यह संकेत मिलता है कि मुस्लिम महिला (विवाह अधिकार संरक्षण) अधिनियम, 2019 ने मुस्लिम महिलाओं की पारिवारिक सुरक्षा, आर्थिक सुरक्षा तथा न्याय एवं अधिकारों की सुरक्षा पर सकारात्मक प्रभाव डाला है। यद्यपि विभिन्न समूहों में राय का स्तर अलग अलग पाया गया, फिर भी समग्र परिणाम अध्ययन की परिकल्पना का समर्थन करते हैं।

अतः प्रस्तुत आंकड़ों के आधार पर:

- H_0 (शून्य परिकल्पना) अस्वीकार (Rejected) की जाती है।
- H_1 (वैकल्पिक परिकल्पना) स्वीकार (Accepted) की जाती है।

निष्कर्ष एवं सुझाव

प्रस्तुत अण्वेषण से यह स्पष्ट होता है कि अधिकांश उत्तरदाताओं का मानना है कि इस अधिनियम ने मुस्लिम महिलाओं के अधिकारों की सुरक्षा को पहले की तुलना में अधिक मजबूत किया है। विशेष रूप से पारिवारिक सुरक्षा, आर्थिक सुरक्षा तथा न्याय प्राप्त करने के अवसरों में सकारात्मक परिवर्तन देखने को मिला। हालांकि धार्मिक विशेषज्ञों की राय अपेक्षाकृत कम सकारात्मक रही, जिससे यह संकेत मिलता है कि कानून की सामाजिक और धार्मिक स्वीकार्यता को लेकर अभी भी कुछ मतभेद मौजूद हैं। अध्ययन से यह भी सामने आया कि केवल कानून बना देना पर्याप्त नहीं है अपितु महिलाओं को अपने अधिकारों के प्रति जागरूक होना होगा। विशेषकर ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में आज भी कई महिलाओं को इस अधिनियम के प्रावधानों और उपलब्ध कानूनी सहायता के बारे में पर्याप्त जानकारी नहीं है। मुस्लिम महिला (विवाह अधिकार संरक्षण) अधिनियम, 2019 महिलाओं के अधिकारों की रक्षा और न्याय सुनिश्चित करने की दिशा में एक महत्वपूर्ण कदम है। यह अधिनियम महिलाओं के अधिकारों की सुरक्षा में सकारात्मक भूमिका निभा रहा है, हालांकि इसकी प्रभावशीलता को और बढ़ाने के लिए निरंतर प्रयास आवश्यक हैं।

सुझाव

- मुस्लिम महिलाओं, खासकर तीन तलाक से प्रभावित महिलाओं के बीच वर्तमान कानून के प्रति जागरूकता का प्रसार, निशुल्क कानूनी सहायता की जाए।

- स्वरोजगार के अवसर एवं कौशल विकास के सरकारी एवं गैर-सरकारी संगठनों द्वारा उपाय किए जाएँ।
- शिक्षा के स्तर पर विद्यालयों, महाविद्यालयों और विश्वविद्यालयों द्वारा महिला अधिकारों और कानूनी साक्षरता से संबंधित कार्यक्रम आयोजित किए जाएँ।
- वर्तमान अधिनियम के कार्यान्वयन की सामयिक समीक्षा, महिला हेल्प लाईन, शिकायत पोर्टल आदि को सक्रिय एवं प्रभावी बनाया जाए।
- इस अधिनियम के दीर्घकालिक सामाजिक, आर्थिक और कानूनी प्रभावों पर व्यापक शोध किए जाने की आवश्यकता है, ताकि नीतियों को परिमार्जित कर प्रभावशाली बनाया जाए।
- पुलिस, अधिवक्ताओं और न्यायिक अधिकारियों को इस अधिनियम के प्रभावी क्रियान्वयन के लिए समय समय पर प्रशिक्षण दिया जाए तकि महिलाओं को उनमें विश्वास पैदा हो।

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

मुंडा जनजाति की परम्परागत स्वशासन व्यवस्था और पेसा (PESA) अधिनियम का अंतर्संबंध : एक विश्लेषणात्मक अध्ययन

संजय यादव*

सार संक्षेप

भारत की जनगणना 2011 के आंकड़ों के अनुसार जनजातियों की संख्या 705 है जो भारत के कुल जनसंख्या के 8.6 प्रतिशत हैं। यह समुदाय भारत के सम्पूर्ण क्षेत्रफल के 15 प्रतिशत भूभाग पर बसते हैं। भारत का जनजातीय समाज अपनी विशिष्ट सामाजिक, सांस्कृतिक और राजनीतिक व्यवस्थाओं के लिए जाना जाता है। यह समाज अपनी परम्परागत व्यवस्था और भारत की समृद्ध संस्कृति का संवाहक है। इन्हीं में एक मुंडा जनजाति है। मुंडा जनजाति झारखंड, छत्तीसगढ़ और ओडिशा राज्यों में निवास करने वाली एक प्रमुख जनजाति है। मुंडा जनजाति की पारम्परिक राजनीतिक व्यवस्था अत्यंत समृद्ध, संगठित और आत्मनिर्भर रही है। सदियों पुरानी मुंडा-मांझी-परहा या मानकी परगना व्यवस्था ग्राम प्रशासन का संचालन करने के साथ-साथ न्यायिक, धार्मिक और सामाजिक कार्यों का भी समुचित प्रबंधन करती थी। इसमें ग्राम स्तर पर मांझी (मुखिया), धार्मिक कार्यों हेतु पाहन, सूचना के लिए डाकुआ, और समन्वय हेतु मानकी जैसे पद होते थे। यह परम्परा वंशानुगत न होकर सामूहिक सहभागिता एवं अनुभव पर आधारित होती थी। यह व्यवस्था वर्तमान लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों से मेल खाती है। दूसरी ओर, 1993 में पंचायती राज व्यवस्था के लागू होने के बाद जनजतीय प्रतिनिधित्व को मजबूत करने तथा लोकतांत्रिक बनाने के लिए भारत सरकार द्वारा 1996 में पेसा (अनुसूचित क्षेत्र पंचायत विस्तार अधिनियम, 1996) अधिनियम लागू किया गया। प्रस्तुत शोध जनजातीय परम्परागत स्वशासन व्यवस्था और पेसा अधिनियम द्वारा बनाई गई स्वशासन व्यवस्था के अंतर्संबंधों की व्याख्या करता है और इससे उत्पन्न चुनौतियों पर प्रकाश डालता है। साथ ही इसमें नीतिगत सुझाव देने का भी प्रयास किया गया है। वर्तमान अधिनियम न केवल मुण्डा जनजाति की परम्परागत रीति-रीवाजों को संबल प्रदान करता है अपितु उन्हें विकास प्रक्रिया एवं विवादों के शान्तिपूर्ण निपटारे में वैधानिक आधार भी प्रदान करता है। फिर भी पेसा अधि नियम के कार्यान्वयन में स्थानीय प्रशासन पर्याप्त रूप से योगदान नहीं देता है।

मुख्य पदावली: मुण्डा-मानकी, परहा प्रणाली, सुलह, सामूहिक सहमति, पेसा अधिनियम, पत्थलगढी, मांझी, बाईस परहा।

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परिचय

संथाल, ओरांव के बाद मुंडा जनजाति झारखण्ड की तीसरी सबसे बड़ी जनजाति है। 2011 की जनगणना के अनुसार झारखंड में इनकी जनसंख्या 12.44 लाख है, जो राज्य की कुल जनजातीय जनसंख्या का 14.56 प्रतिशत है। छोटानागपुर पठार, खूंटी, रांची, गुमला और पश्चिमी सिंहभूमि में इनका निवास अधिक है। इनकी मुंडारी भाषा आस्टो एशियाट्रिक भाषा परिवार से संबंधित है। मुंडा जनजाति की परम्परागत राजनीतिक व्यवस्था सामूहिक निर्णय-प्रक्रिया पर आधारित व्यवस्था है। यह परम्परागत व्यवस्था लोकतांत्रिक प्रक्रिया पर आधारित होती है। इसमें सभी महत्वपूर्ण निर्णय सामूहिक रूप से लिए जाते हैं। सामाजिक और प्रशासनिक मामलों के लिए सामुदायिक बैठकें आयोजित की जाती हैं, जिसमें प्रत्येक व्यक्ति को अपनी बात रखने का अधिकार होता है। जनजातीय समाज के परम्परागत सामाजिक व्यवस्था को सुदृढ़ करने तथा सुरक्षित कर उन्हें राजनीतिक प्रतिनिधत्व देने के लिए भारत सरकार ने पेसा (PESA) अधिनियम (1996) द्वारा आदिवासी क्षेत्रों में स्थानीय स्वशासन की व्यवस्था को सुदृढ़ करने के लिए लागू किया। इसका उद्देश्य आदिवासी क्षेत्रों में उनके परम्परागत अधिकारों की रक्षा करना और पंचायतों को अधिकार देना था। इस अधिनियम को पांचवीं अनुसूची सम्बद्ध राज्यों में लागू करने का विधान है। यह जनजातीय समुदायों को स्थानीय संसाधनों के नियंत्रण, जल, जंगल और भूमि के अधिकारों में हिस्सेदारी प्रदान करता है।

शोध उद्देश्य

प्रस्तुत शोधपत्र के उद्देश्य - मुंडा जनजाति की पारम्परिक राजनीतिक व्यवस्था की वर्तमान स्थिति और कार्यप्रणाली का विवेचन, पेसा अधिनियम के क्रियान्वयन के बाद परम्परागत राजनीतिक व्यवस्था एवं पेसा अधिनियम के प्रावधानों के अन्तर्संबन्धों और उसके व्यावहारिक क्रियान्वयन का परीक्षण करना तथा पेसा अधिनियम के कारण होने वाले परिवर्तनों को चिह्नित करना है।

मुंडा जनजाति की पारम्परिक पंचायत व्यवस्था

भारत में आदिवासी समुदायों की स्वशासन व्यवस्था की ऐतिहासिक और सामाजिक महत्ता है। सभी जनजातीय समाजों में उनकी सामाजिक व्यवस्था के संचालन के पारम्परिक रीति-रिवाज और परम्पराएँ हैं। मुंडा जनजाति द्वारा विकसित किए गए प्रशासनिक-सामाजिक ढाँचे और ग्राम स्तर की पंचायत व्यवस्था लोकशासन में स्वतंत्रता और पहचान की विशेष व्यवस्था है। मुंडा जनजाति की पारम्परिक पंचायत व्यवस्था स्वशासी, सामुदायिक और लोकतांत्रिक ढांचे पर आधारित है। इसे 'मुंडा-मांझी-परहा प्रणाली' कहा जाता है। इस व्यवस्था में प्रत्येक गांव का प्रमुख 'मांझी' होता है। मांझी पंचायत का संचालन करता है। मांझी के सहयोगी के रूप में 'पाहान' (धार्मिक पुरोहित), 'डाकुआ' (सूचना संप्रेषक) और अन्य सामाजिक पदाधिकारी कार्य करते हैं। इनका चुनाव सामूहिक सहमति या अनुभव के आधार पर किया जाता है। यह प्रणाली वंशानुगत न होकर सामूहिक सहभागिता की भावना को दर्शाती है (राय, 1912)।

यह पंचायत व्यवस्था केवल प्रशासनिक कार्यों तक सीमित नहीं थी। यह सामाजिक न्याय, आपसी विवादों के समाधान, भूमि विवाद, विवाह सम्बन्धी विवाद, और जल-जंगल-जमीन के संरक्षण में भी विशेष भूमिका निभाती थी। मुंडा जनजाति के कई गांवों को मिलाकर एक 'परहा परिषद' बनती थी, जिसका नेतृत्व 'मानकी' करता था। मानकी सभी गांवों के प्रमुखों के साथ समन्वय करता था। छोटानागपुर पठार के कई क्षेत्रों में आज भी यह प्रणाली जीवित है, और आधुनिक प्रशासनिक ढांचे के साथ सह-अस्तित्व की ओर बढ़ रही है।

मुंडा-मानकी और परहा प्रणाली

मुंडा जनजाति की पारम्परिक प्रशासनिक और राजनीतिक व्यवस्था मुंडा-मानकी-परहा प्रणाली समुदाय में सामाजिक समरसता, न्याय और स्वशासन को बनाए रखने का एक संगठित ढांचा है। इस प्रणाली में आधार स्तर पर 'मुंडा' या 'मांझी' होता है, जो गाँव का प्रमुख होता है और स्थानीय विवादों का समाधान, त्योहारों तथा प्रशासनिक कार्यों का संचालन करता है। वह गांव की ग्राम सभा की अध्यक्षता करता है, और समुदाय का प्रतिनिधित्व करता है।

इसमें क्षेत्र के अनुसार 7, 9, 12, 21, 22 या 30 गांवों के समूह को मिलाकर एक 'परहा' बनता है, जो एक प्रकार की पारम्परिक पंचायत है। परहा में सम्मिलित प्रत्येक गांव का अपना मुंडा होता है। कई गांव को मिलाकर पटक पट्टी पंचायत होती है जिसका प्रमुख मानकी होता है। मानकी इन सभी मुंडाओं के ऊपर होता है। मानकी का कार्य अनेक गांवों के बीच समन्वय स्थापित करना, बड़े विवादों का निपटारा करना, और परम्पराओं की रक्षा करना होता है।

परहा परिषद में विशेष अवसरों पर सभी गांवों के प्रतिनिधि एकत्र होकर निर्णय लेते हैं। यह प्रणाली न्याय, सामाजिक नियंत्रण, और सांस्कृतिक पहचान का प्रतीक रही है। आधुनिक प्रशासनिक हस्तक्षेप के बावजूद, यह प्रणाली आज भी झारखंड और आसपास के क्षेत्रों में कई जगह प्रभावी रूप से कार्य कर रही है, और जनजातीय समाज के आत्मनिर्णय का आधार बनी हुई है। मुंडा समुदाय की पंचायत प्रणाली में तीन मुख्य स्तर हैं - ग्राम पंचायत (मुंडा), उसके ऊपर क्लस्टरस्तर (परहा), और उसी का समन्वय (मानकी)। प्रत्येक गाँव का मुंडा, अध्यक्षता एवं निर्णय प्रक्रिया का केन्द्र होता है। उसके द्वारा डाकुआ (सूचना सम्प्रेषक), पाहन (पुरोहित) व पुजहर (सहायक पुरोहित) जैसे अधिकारी नियुक्त होते हैं। ये सभी धार्मिक कार्य, सूचना और प्रशासन संभालते हैं (कुमार सॉय, 2019)।

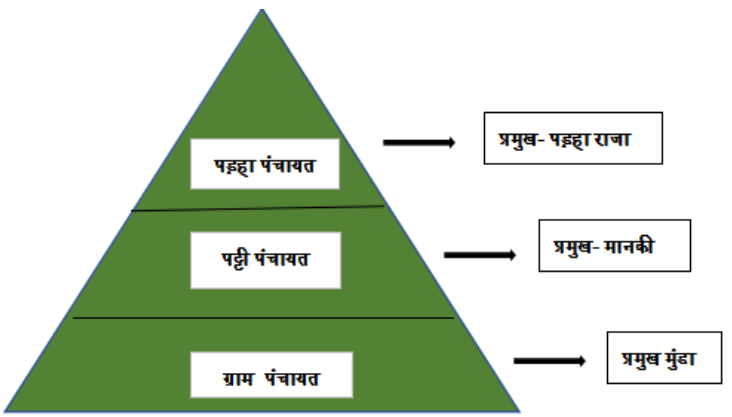
बाईस परहा व्यवस्था

मुख्यतः पाँच जिलों रांची, खूंटी, पश्चिमी सिंहभूम, सराइकेला और खरसावाँ में, मुंडा जनजाति द्वारा '22 किल्ली' के आधार पर गठित 'बाईस परहा' व्यवस्था संचालित होती है। प्रत्येक किल्ली एक विशिष्ट प्रशासनिक भूमिका निभाते हुए गाँवों का समन्वय करती है। यह सेवा-आधारित, सामूहिक लोकतांत्रिक प्रणाली है। 'परहा' का अर्थ है गांवों का समूह, और "बाईस" (22)

गांवों के समूह को मिलाकर यह परिषद बनती है (सच्चिदानंद, 2023)। हालांकि कुछ क्षेत्रों में इसकी संख्या कम-ज्यादा भी होती है अथवा हो सकती है।

इस व्यवस्था के अंतर्गत प्रत्येक गांव का प्रतिनिधित्व एक मांझी (ग्राम प्रमुख) द्वारा किया जाता है। इन सभी गाँव के मांझी मिलकर परहा पंचायत का निर्माण करते हैं। इस पंचायत का नेतृत्व एक परहा राजा करता है, जिसे समुदाय की सहमति से चुना जाता है। परिषद में अन्य पदाधिकारी जैसे - दीवान, पंडा, लाल, ठाकुर, भी होते हैं, जो न्याय, आयोजन, परम्पराओं और सामाजिक अनुशासन की जिम्मेदारी निभाते हैं। बाईस परहा परिषद का कार्य क्षेत्र सामाजिक न्याय, आपसी विवादों का निपटारा, रीति-रिवाजों का पालन, विवाह-संस्कार और जल, जंगल, जमीन से जुड़े निर्णयों तक विस्तारित होता है। यह प्रणाली मुंडा समाज की सामूहिकता, लोकतांत्रिक सोच और सांस्कृतिक एकता का उदाहरण है। आज भी यह व्यवस्था कई क्षेत्रों में जीवित है और आधुनिकता के साथ सामंजस्य की दिशा में आगे बढ़ रही है।

मुंडा जनजाति की त्रि-स्तरीय पंचायत व्यवस्था



निर्वाचन पद्धति

मुंडा जनजाति की पारम्परिक पंचायत व्यवस्था में निर्वाचन पद्धति आधुनिक चुनावों की तरह न होकर परम्पराओं और सामूहिक सहमति पर आधारित होती है। इस व्यवस्था में ग्राम स्तर पर 'मांझी' (ग्राम प्रमुख), 'पाहान' (धार्मिक पुरोहित), 'डाकुआ' (सूचना वाहक), और अन्य पदाधिकारी होते हैं। इनका चयन सामान्यतया पर वंशानुगत होता है। यदि किसी पद पर योग्य उत्तराधिकारी उपलब्ध न हो, तो ग्राम सभा की सहमति से किसी अन्य योग्य व्यक्ति को नियुक्त किया जाता है।

गांवों के समूह से बनी परहा परिषद में प्रत्येक गांव के मांझी प्रतिनिधि होते हैं। इन प्रतिनिधियों द्वारा मिलकर 'परहा राजा' या 'मानकी' (परहा प्रमुख) का चयन किया जाता है। मानकी का पद कभी-कभी वंशानुगत होता है, लेकिन समुदाय की सहमति, प्रतिष्ठा, अनुभव और

नेतृत्व क्षमता के आधार पर उसे बदला भी जा सकता है। निर्णय प्रक्रिया में बहुमत, सहमति और सामूहिक विचार-विमर्श को प्राथमिकता दी जाती है। यह प्रणाली स्थानीय सामाजिक संरचना, रीति-रिवाज और पारम्परिक ज्ञान पर आधारित है, जो जनजातीय लोकतंत्र और सामुदायिक सहभागिता का सशक्त उदाहरण प्रस्तुत करती है।

पंचायत व्यवस्था के कार्य

मुंडा जनजाति की पंचायत व्यवस्था पारम्परिक, सामुदायिक और स्वशासी ढांचा है। यह सदियों से सामाजिक न्याय, सांस्कृतिक अनुशासन और ग्राम प्रशासन का संचालन करती आ रही है। इसमें प्रशासनिक, सामाजिक, धार्मिक, न्यायिक और पारिस्थितिकीय कार्यों का समावेश होता है। इस प्रणाली का संचालन मुख्य रूप से ग्राम स्तर पर 'मांझी' (ग्राम प्रमुख), क्षेत्रीय स्तर पर 'मानकी' (क्षेत्र प्रमुख) और सामूहिक परिषद 'परहा परिषद' के माध्यम से होता है। इनके कार्यों का विस्तारित रूप इस प्रकार हैं -

प्रशासनिक कार्य

मुंडा पंचायत व्यवस्था का मूल उद्देश्य गांव में व्यवस्था बनाए रखना होता है। मांझी ग्राम सभा की बैठक बुलाता है, स्थानीय समस्याओं पर विचार करता है, और उस पर उचित और आवश्यक निर्णय लेता है। वह पंचायत के अन्य पदाधिकारियों - जैसे 'पाहन' (धार्मिक नेता), 'डाकुआ' (सूचना वाहक), और गोत्र प्रमुखों के साथ मिलकर कार्यों का समन्वय एवं संचालन करता है। ग्रामीणों के व्यवहार पर निगरानी रखना, नियमों का पालन कराना, और अनुशासन बनाए रखना इसके प्रशासनिक दायित्वों में आता है।

न्यायिक कार्य

मुंडा जनजाति की पंचायत प्रणाली एक परम्परागत न्यायिक निकाय के रूप में भी कार्य करती है। छोटे-बड़े विवादों जैसे भूमि-विवाद, घरेलू हिंसा, विवाह-विच्छेद सम्बन्धी विवाद, चोरी, और सामाजिक अपराधों का निपटारा पंचायत में होता है। न्याय देने में "सत्य की खोज", "सुलह" और "सामूहिक सहमति" को महत्व दिया जाता है। दंड के रूप में आर्थिक जुर्माना, सामाजिक बहिष्कार, या सार्वजनिक क्षमा जैसे उपाय अपनाए जाते हैं। इस न्याय व्यवस्था की विशेषता यह है कि यह स्थानीय रीति-रिवाजों और परम्पराओं के अनुरूप होती है। यह सुधारात्मक प्रकृति का दंड विधान होता है। इसका उद्देश्य दोषी को सुधारना होता है, न कि केवल दण्डित करना (गुप्ता, 2023)।

धार्मिक और सांस्कृतिक कार्य

मुंडा पंचायत व्यवस्था सामाजिक और धार्मिक आयोजनों में भी विशेष भूमिका निभाती है। गांव के धार्मिक अनुष्ठानों, जैसे सरहुल, कर्मा, और माघ पर्व में पंचायत की सहभागिता अनिवार्य

होती है। पाहन इन अनुष्ठानों का संचालन करता है। मांझी और अन्य पंचायत सदस्य आयोजन की व्यवस्था करते हैं। यह व्यवस्था समाज को एकजुट रखने और सांस्कृतिक पहचान को बनाए रखने में सहायक होती है।

पर्यावरणीय और संसाधन संरक्षण से संबंधित कार्य

मुंडा समाज का जल, जंगल और जमीन से गहरी आत्मीयता है। यह इनके सामूहिक जीवन का आधार होता है। पंचायत व्यवस्था इन प्राकृतिक संसाधनों के संरक्षण, उपयोग और देखरेख का भी कार्य करती है। जंगल की कटाई, नदी-नाले का अतिक्रमण, या भूमिहीनता जैसे विषयों पर पंचायत निर्णय लेती है, और स्थानीय नियम बनाती है। खूंटकटी प्रणाली, जो भूमि स्वामित्व और खेती के पारम्परिक नियमों पर आधारित है, यह भी पंचायत के माध्यम से संचालित होती है। भूमि का वितरण, उपयोग और सीमा निर्धारण पंचायत के माध्यम से तय होता है। यह निर्णय सहर्ष स्वीकार भी किया जाता है।

सामाजिक नियंत्रण और रीति-रिवाजों का पालन

पंचायत यह सुनिश्चित करती है कि समुदाय के सभी सदस्य सामाजिक नियमों और परम्पराओं का पालन करें। विवाह, मृत्यु, उत्सव, गोत्र व्यवस्था, और सांस्कृतिक आचारों का अनुपालन पंचायत की देखरेख में होता है। यदि कोई व्यक्ति सामाजिक नियमों का उल्लंघन करता है, तो पंचायत उसे दंडित करती है या चेतावनी देती है। यह उनके सामूहिक जीवन का परिचायक है। मुंडा जनजाति की पंचायत व्यवस्था केवल प्रशासनिक ढांचा नहीं है। यह एक जीवंत सामाजिक संस्था है, जो सामाजिक न्याय, संसाधनों का प्रबंधन, सांस्कृतिक धरोहर की रक्षा और समुदाय में समरसता बनाए रखने का कार्य करती है। यह व्यवस्था लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों, सामूहिक सहभागिता और परम्पराओं पर आधारित है।

पेसा अधिनियम (1996)

पेसा अधिनियम (Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas– Act), 1996 भारत सरकार द्वारा अनुसूचित क्षेत्रों में स्वशासन को बढ़ावा देने के लिए लागू किया गया एक महत्वपूर्ण कानून है। यह अधिनियम संविधान के 73वें संशोधन (1992) के तहत लागू पंचायती राज व्यवस्था को आदिवासी बहुल अनुसूचित क्षेत्रों तक विस्तारित करता है। इस अधिनियम में अनुसूचित क्षेत्रों में रहने वाले जनजातीय समुदायों को उनके सामाजिक जीवनवृत और सांस्कृतिक स्वरूप को केंद्र में रखते हुए संसाधनों, परम्पराओं और रीति-रिवाजों के अनुसार निर्णय लेने का अधिकार ग्राम सभा को दिए गए। इस कानून को लागू करने में यह मूल मंतव्य था कि इस अधिनियम द्वरा जनजातीय समाज की परम्परागत स्वशासन व्यवस्था और आधुनिक संस्थाओं के बीच उत्पन्न विसंगतियों को दूर किया जा सकेगा। इस कानून के अंतर्गत जनजातीय समाज के परम्परागत 'जाति पंचायत' को ग्राम सभा का कानूनी दर्जा दिया गया है। इस कानून के अनुसार अनुसूचित जनजाति के आरक्षण

50 प्रतिशत से कम नहीं होगा तथा ग्राम पंचायत का सरपंच का पद अनुसूचित जनजाति के लिए आरक्षित होगा (राजपूत, 2020)। वहां जनजातीय जनसंख्या पचास प्रतिशत होनी चाहिए।

पेसा अधिनियम में ग्राम सभा को सर्वोपरि माना गया है, और इसे जल, जंगल और जमीन पर निर्णय लेने, संसाधनों के संरक्षण, सामाजिक न्याय और पारम्परिक तरीकों से विवाद समाधान करने, सामुदायिक संसाधनों को सुरक्षित रखने, गाँव के विकास हेतु योजनाओं को अनुमोदित करने लाभार्थियों की पहचान करने, ग्रामीण हाट-बाजार का प्रबंधन करने, और खनन क्षेत्र को पट्टे पर देने जैसे अनेक मुलभूत अधिकार प्रदान करता है (चौबे, 2015)। यह अधिनियम भारत के उन 10 राज्यों के अनुसूचित क्षेत्रों में लागू है जहाँ पांचवीं अनुसूची लागू होती है। ये राज्य हैं - आंध्र प्रदेश, तेलंगाना, छत्तीसगढ़, गुजरात, हिमाचल प्रदेश, झारखंड, महाराष्ट्र, मध्य प्रदेश, ओडिशा और राजस्थान। इन राज्यों में इसकी अलग-अलग कार्यान्वयन स्थिति है।

ग्राम सभा को खनिज सम्पदा के उचित दोहन, भूमि अधिग्रहण, शराब नियंत्रण, बाजार व्यवस्था, तथा विकास योजनाओं के अनुमोदन का अधिकार दिया गया है। यह अधिनियम आदिवासी स्वायत्तता, सांस्कृतिक संरक्षण और सशक्तिकरण का आधार बनाता है। इस अधिनियम से एक तरफ पंचायतें लोकतांत्रिक रूप से विकेंद्रीकृत होंगी वहीं दूसरी तरफ सांस्कृतिक परम्परायें सुरक्षित होंगी। पेसा की प्रभावी क्रियान्वयन में कई राज्य सरकारों की उदासीनता, जागरूकता की कमी और राजनीतिक हस्तक्षेप जैसी चुनौतियाँ हैं (Ekka, 2000)।

अधिनियम का उद्देश्य

पेसा अधिनियम पारम्परिक ग्राम सभा व पंचायत व्यवस्था को संविधान के भाग IX के अंतर्गत अनुसूचित क्षेत्रों में लागू करता है। यह अधिनियम भूरिया समिति के प्रतिवेदन के आधार पर 24 दिसंबर 1996 को लागू हुआ। इसका मूल उद्देश्य आदिवासी समुदायों को स्वशासन, संसाधन नियंत्रण और सांस्कृतिक संरक्षण का अधिकार देना था। इस अधिनियम के प्रमुख प्रावधान इस प्रकार हैं (Deo, 2015) -

- अनुसूचित क्षेत्रों में प्रत्येक गाँव में ग्राम सभा अनिवार्य।
- ग्राम सभा को प्राकृतिक संसाधन, वन उत्पाद, खनिज, जलस्रोत आदि का संरक्षण और प्रबंधन करने का अधिकार।
- विकास योजनाओं का प्रस्ताव, लाभार्थी चयन, लक्ष्य निर्धारण में ग्राम सभा की भूमिका।
- स्थानीय आदिवासी रीति-रिवाजों के अनुसार न्यायिक निर्णय लेने का अधिकार ग्राम सभा और पंचायत को देना।

पारम्परिक पंचायत और पेसा अधिनियम

मुंडा जनजाति की पारम्परिक पंचायत व्यवस्था और भारत सरकार का पेसा अधिनियम, 1996 - दोनों ही स्वशासन और स्थानीय भागीदारी को सशक्त बनाने की दृष्टि से अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण हैं।

यद्यपि कि दोनों व्यवस्थाएँ अलग ऐतिहासिक और विधिक संदर्भों में स्थापित हुई हैं, फिर भी इनका उद्देश्य व्यापक सीमा तक एक समान है। दोनों का लक्ष्य आदिवासी समाज को आत्मनिर्भर, न्यायसंगत और सांस्कृतिक रूप से सुरक्षित बनाना है (Government of India, 2006)।

तुलनात्मक अवलोकन

पक्ष	पारम्परिक पंचायत	*PESA* अधिनियम
आधार	परम्परा और रीति-रिवाज	संविधान और कानून
निर्णय प्रक्रिया	सामूहिक सहमति व अनुभव	लोकतांत्रिक और मतदान आधारित
नेतृत्व	वंशानुगत या चयनित	निर्वाचित प्रतिनिधि
कार्यक्षेत्र	सामाजिक, धार्मिक, न्याय	संसाधन प्रबंधन, विकास, न्याय
दंड प्रणाली	सामाजिक, सामूहिक निर्णय	वैधानिक सीमाएं

जहाँ पारम्परिक पंचायतें मुंडा समाज की सांस्कृतिक और सामाजिक पहचान का प्रतीक हैं, वहीं पेसा अधिनियम इन व्यवस्थाओं को कानूनी संरक्षण और अधिकार प्रदान करता है। दोनों का समन्वय आदिवासी स्वशासन को मजबूत कर सकता है, यदि राज्य सरकारें पेसा को पूरी तरह लागू करें और पारम्परिक प्रणालियों को सम्मानपूर्वक समाहित करें। पेसा स्थानीय सामाजिक व्यवस्थाओं को कानूनी मान्यता देती है जिससे पारम्परिक मुंडामानकीपरहा प्रणाली ग्राम पंचायत और पंचायती राज संस्थान के रूप में संरक्षित होती है। इससे आदिवासी रीति-रिवाज और सामूहिक स्वशासन संरक्षित होता है।

वर्त्तमान चुनौतियाँ और व्यावहारिकता

पेसा कानून के क्रियान्वयन में अनेक चुनौतियाँ हैं। कुछ राज्यों में अब तक पेसा नियम अधिसूचित नहीं किए गए, जिससे अधिनियम का लागू होना बाधित हुआ है।

- झारखंड में लगातार अधिनियम कार्यान्वयन में देरी के कारण हाई कोर्ट ने सरकार को नोटिस भी जारी किया।
- रांची कार्यशाला (मई 2025) में पेसा नियमों पर विस्तृत विचार-विमर्श हुआ, लेकिन सामाजिक संगठनों ने अधिकारियों द्वारा हस्तक्षेप की आलोचना किया भी गया।
- ओडिशा ने नवंबर 2023 में प्रारूप नियम जारी किए, लेकिन अब भी अधिसूचना की समय सीमा तय नहीं हुई है।

पत्थलगड़ी आंदोलन

पत्थलगड़ी आंदोलन झारखंड के जनजातीय क्षेत्रों में शुरू हुआ एक सामाजिक और राजनीतिक आंदोलन है। इसका उद्देश्य जनजातीय समाज के संवैधानिक अधिकारों की रक्षा करना है। इस आंदोलन में ग्रामीण लोग अपने गांव की सीमा पर पत्थर की शिलाएं (पत्थलगड़ी) स्थापित करते हैं, जिन पर संविधान की पांचवीं अनुसूची (Fifth Schedule) और आदिवासी स्वशासन

से जुड़ी धाराएं लिखी होती हैं। यह आंदोलन सरकार की नीतियों, भूमि अधिग्रहण और बाहरी दखल के विरोध का प्रतीक बन गया है। यह आंदोलन आदिवासी समुदाय द्वारा पेसा और संविधान की 5वीं अनुसूची के अधिकारों का जागरूकता–आधारित अभियान था (Sharma & Tiwari, 2020)। इसमें आदिवासी समुदाय ने पत्थर पर खुदाई करके अपने अधिकारों की घोषणा की, और बाहरी हस्तक्षेप को निषेध किया। इनके क्षेत्रों में बाहरी हस्तक्षेप इनके लिए असह्य है। कुछ मामलों में इस आंदोलन को हिंसक बताया गया और सरकार द्वारा इसे विद्रोह के रूप में देखा गया (Jharkhand Government, 2013)।

मुंडा पंचायत व्यवस्था में पेसा की भूमिका

सकारात्मक पक्ष

- पारम्परिक न्याय और विवाद निपटान संरचना को संवैधानिक सुरक्षा मिलती है।
- ग्राम सभा को विकास योजनाओं, लाभार्थियों व संसाधनों पर नियंत्रण का अधिकार मिलता है। यह रोजगार, भूमि संरक्षण और सांस्कृतिक पहचान में सहायक है।
- बाईस परहा जैसे सामूहिक लोकतांत्रिक संस्थानों की भूमिका संरक्षित होती है।
- यह लोकतांत्रिक विकेन्द्रीकरण का उत्तम उदाहरण प्रस्तुत होगा।

सीमाएँ

- कई राज्यों में अधिनियम लागू नहीं हो पाया।
- सरकारी हस्तक्षेप का सामाजिक संगठनों द्वारा आलोचना, स्थानीय स्वशासन में सरकारी दखल की चिंता ऐसे बाधक हैं जो इसके क्रियान्वयन में अवरोधक का कार्य कर रहें हैं।
- युवा पीढ़ी का पारम्परिक व्यवस्थाओं से दूर होना, जिससे बाईस परहा व्यवस्था का भविष्य संकटग्रस्त है।
- युवा पीढ़ी पर पंचायत राज व्यवस्था का प्रभाव होने से आधुनिक चुनाव प्रणाली का समर्थन बढ़ रहा है।

सुझाव

1. अनुसूचित राज्यों में पेसा कानून के नियमों को शीघ्र लागू करना चाहिए।
2. ग्राम सभा का अधिकार सुनिश्चित करने के लिए स्थानीय जागरूकता अभियान और नीतिगत शिक्षा की आवश्यकता है।
3. युवा पीढ़ी को बाईस परहा व्यवस्था में शामिल करने हेतु शैक्षिक और डिजिटल पहल करनी चाहिए।

4. पारम्परिक न्यायपालिका (ग्राम सभा/परहा पंचायत) को आधुनिक न्यायाधिकरण से समन्वित करने हेतु संशोधित दिशा-निर्देश बनाए जाने की आवश्यकता है।
5. जागरूकता कार्यक्रमों द्वारा पेसा से प्राप्त होने वाले अधिकारों के प्रति सजग और सचेत करने की आवश्यकता है।

निष्कर्ष

मुंडा जनजाति की पारम्परिक पंचायत व्यवस्था और पेसा अधिनियम, दोनों ही जनजातीय समाज की सामाजिक संरचना, स्वशासन और सांस्कृतिक अस्मिता को बनाए रखने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाते हैं। मुंडा जनजाति की मांझी-मानकी-परहा प्रणाली सदियों से गांवों में न्याय, अनुशासन और सामाजिक समरसता सुनिश्चित करती रही है। यह व्यवस्था प्रशासनिक निर्णयों में सक्षम है। पारम्परिक ज्ञान, धार्मिक अनुष्ठानों, और संसाधन प्रबंधन में अत्यंत प्रभावी है। दूसरी ओर, पेसा अधिनियम 1996 एक संवैधानिक प्रयास है, जो अनुसूचित क्षेत्रों में ग्राम सभाओं को विधिक अधिकार और स्वायत्तता प्रदान करता है। यह अधिनियम पारम्परिक पंचायत व्यवस्था को संवैधानिक मान्यता देकर उसे आधुनिक लोकतांत्रिक प्रणाली से जोड़ने का कार्य करता है।

व्यावहारिक स्तर पर कई राज्यों में पेसा अधिनियम का पूर्ण क्रियान्वयन नहीं हो पाया है, जिससे पारम्परिक व्यवस्थाओं और कानूनी अधिकारों के बीच समन्वय में बाधाएँ उत्पन्न होती हैं। इसके अतिरिक्त, प्रशासनिक हस्तक्षेप और राजनीतिक उपेक्षा के कारण पारम्परिक पंचायतें कमजोर भी हुई हैं। पेसा अधिनियम को पूर्ण रूप से लागू करके पारम्परिक पंचायत व्यवस्थाओं के साथ समन्वित करने आवश्यकता है। मुंडा जनजाति की पारम्परिक व्यवस्थाएँ सामाजिक-राजनीतिक संरचना में लोक प्रशासन का सशक्त उदाहरण हैं। पेसा अधिनियम 1996 ने इन्हें कानूनी मान्यता दी, परंतु इसका कार्यान्वयन अभी अधूरा है। यदि दोनों व्यवस्थाओं को समान अधिकार और सम्मान मिले, तो मुंडा जनजाति सहित समस्त जनजतीय समाज सशक्त, आत्मनिर्भर और सांस्कृतिक रूप से सुरक्षित हो सकता है। इससे लोकतान्त्रिक विकेन्द्रीकरण को मजबूती मिलेगी।

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

सहमति-निर्माण की प्रक्रिया : अवधारणा, ऐतिहासिक विकास एवं प्रशासनिक दृष्टिकोण

अमिय आनन्द*

सार संक्षेप

यह शोध आलेख लोक प्रशासन में सहमति-निर्माण (कंसेंट मैन्युफैक्चरिंग) की अवधारणा का विश्लेषण करता है और बताता है कि जनमत स्वत: नहीं बनता, बल्कि राज्य, मीडिया और संस्थागत तंत्रों द्वारा योजनाबद्ध रूप से निर्मित किया जाता है। वाल्टर लिपमैन से लेकर नोम चॉम्स्की तक के विचारों के आधार पर अध्ययन यह स्पष्ट करता है कि लोक प्रशासन केवल नीतियों का क्रियान्वयन नहीं करता, बल्कि उन्हें सामाजिक वैधता दिलाने के लिए संचार और मनोवैज्ञानिक रणनीतियों का उपयोग करता है। ऐतिहासिक उदाहरणों के माध्यम से यह दिखाया गया है कि विभिन्न कालखंडों में सहमति निर्माण सत्ता की स्थिरता का प्रमुख साधन रहा है। डिजिटल युग में यह प्रक्रिया और अधिक प्रभावशाली हो गई है, जहाँ तकनीक और मीडिया के माध्यम से जनमत को सूक्ष्म स्तर पर प्रभावित किया जाता है। विशेष रूप से संकट स्थितियों में प्रशासन सहमति निर्माण के जरिए अपने निर्णयों को वैधता प्रदान करता है। अध्ययन निष्कर्ष देता है कि यह प्रक्रिया लोकतंत्र के लिए आवश्यक है, लेकिन इसका संतुलित और पारदर्शी उपयोग ही नागरिक स्वतंत्रता और लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों की रक्षा कर सकता है।

कुंजी शब्द : सहमति निर्माण, लोक प्रशासन, प्रॉपेगेण्डा, विश्व युद्ध, शीत युद्ध, औपनिवेशवाद, डिजिटल युग, माइक्रोटारगेटिंग, भू-राजनीति।

परिचय

लोक प्रशासन केवल नीति-निर्माण और संस्थागत ढाँचों तक सीमित नहीं है, बल्कि इसका विस्तार अत्यंत व्यापक है। यह उस सार्वजनिक वैधता पर भी आधारित होता है, जिसके माध्यम से राज्य अपने निर्णयों के प्रति आम नागरिकों की सहमति प्राप्त करता है। आधुनिक लोकतांत्रिक समाज में जब सरकार कोई निर्णय लेती है, तो वह केवल कागजी या तकनीकी निर्णय नहीं

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होता, बल्कि उसके साथ यह भी सुनिश्चित किया जाता है कि जनता उसे किस प्रकार समझेगी और किस रूप में अनुभव करेगी। यही प्रत्येक प्रशासनिक निर्णय का एक महत्वपूर्ण राजनीतिक तथा मनोवैज्ञानिक पक्ष होता है। इसी प्रक्रिया को 'सहमति-निर्माण की प्रक्रिया' अथवा 'कंसेंट मैन्युफैक्चरिंग' कहा जाता है। इसका आशय यह है कि जनता की राय सामान्यतः स्वतः निर्मित नहीं होती, बल्कि राज्य, मीडिया तथा संस्थागत ढाँचों द्वारा योजनाबद्ध ढंग से निर्मित की जाती है। यह प्रक्रिया लोक प्रशासन का आधार स्तंभ है, क्योंकि प्रशासनिक नीतियों की सफलता अनेक बार उनके क्रियान्वयन से अधिक उनके सामाजिक प्रस्तुतीकरण पर निर्भर करती है (हरमन, और चॉम्स्की: 1988)।

अनुसंधान पद्धति

यह अध्ययन मुख्यतः द्वितीयक स्त्रोतों पर आधारित है, जिनमें मीडिया अध्ययन, प्रशासनिक सिद्धांत, राजनीतिक अर्थशास्त्र तथा इतिहास के विश्वसनीय ग्रंथ और शोध कार्य सम्मिलित हैं। इसके साथ ही प्रथम विश्व युद्ध, औपनिवेशिक शासन, शीत युद्ध तथा विकासशील राज्यों में राष्ट्र-निर्माण जैसी प्रमुख ऐतिहासिक घटनाओं का तुलनात्मक विश्लेषण किया गया है। इस विश्लेषण का उद्देश्य यह समझना है कि विभिन्न कालखंडों में राज्य-प्रशासन ने किस प्रकार व्यापक स्तर पर सहमति का निर्माण किया तथा इस प्रक्रिया का शासन प्रणाली, नीतिगत वैधता और सामाजिक स्वीकृति पर क्या प्रभाव पड़ा।

सहमति-निर्माण की प्रक्रिया (कंसेंट मैन्युफैक्चरिंग): शब्द की उत्पत्ति और अर्थ

सहमति-निर्माण (कंसेंट मैन्युफैक्चरिंग) की अवधारणा का प्रारंभिक प्रतिपादन द्वारा उनकी प्रसिद्ध कृति 'पब्लिक ओपिनियन (Public Opinion)' में किया गया था। इस ग्रंथ में उन्होंने यह प्रतिपादित किया कि आधुनिक लोकतांत्रिक समाजों में नागरिक जटिल नीतिगत और प्रशासनिक प्रक्रियाओं को प्रत्यक्ष अनुभव या विश्लेषण के आधार पर नहीं समझ पाते, बल्कि वे उन प्रतीकात्मक छवियों और कथाओं के आधार पर अपनी राय बनाते हैं, जिन्हें सत्ता, मीडिया और संचार तंत्र द्वारा उनके समक्ष प्रस्तुत किया जाता है। लिपमैन के अनुसार वास्तविकता और जनमानस के बीच एक मध्यस्थ संरचना कार्य करती है, जो सूचना को सरल, चयनित और कभी-कभी विकृत रूप में प्रस्तुत कर जनमत को दिशा प्रदान करती है। इस प्रकार लोकतंत्र में जनमत का निर्माण एक स्वाभाविक प्रक्रिया न होकर संरचित और मध्य स्थित प्रक्रिया बन जाता है (लिपमैन : 1988)।

इस विचार को आगे विकसित करते हुए तथा एडवर्ड हरमन ने अपनी प्रसिद्ध कृति 'मैन्युफैक्चरिंग कंसेंट: द पॉलिटिकल इकॉनोमी ऑफ द मास मीडिया (Manufacturing Consent)' में इसे एक सुसंगत सैद्धांतिक ढाँचे के रूप में प्रस्तुत किया। उन्होंने "प्रोपेगैंडा मॉडेल (Propaganda Model)" के माध्यम से यह स्पष्ट किया कि मीडिया और संस्थागत शक्ति-तंत्र किस प्रकार सूचना के चयन, प्रस्तुतीकरण और पुनरावृत्ति के जरिए किसी नीति, विचार या राजनीतिक कार्रवाई को स्वाभाविक, आवश्यक और अनिवार्य के रूप में स्थापित करते हैं। इस

मॉडेल के अंतर्गत स्वामित्व, विज्ञापन, स्रोत-निर्भरता, आलोचनात्मक दबाव तथा वैचारिक प्रभुत्व जैसे कारक यह निर्धारित करते हैं कि कौन-सी सूचना प्रमुखता प्राप्त करेगी और किस प्रकार जनमानस को प्रभावित करेगी। इस प्रकार मीडिया को एक स्वतंत्र और निष्पक्ष संस्था मानने की धारणा पर प्रश्नचिह्न लगाते हुए यह सिद्ध किया गया कि वह व्यापक आर्थिक और राजनीतिक संरचनाओं से गहराई से जुड़ा हुआ तंत्र है, जो सत्ता-हितों के अनुरूप जनमत को आकार देता है।

लोक प्रशासन के संदर्भ में यह अवधारणा विशेष रूप से महत्वपूर्ण हो जाती है, क्योंकि यह स्पष्ट करती है कि प्रशासनिक निर्णयों की वैधता केवल संवैधानिक या कानूनी आधार पर स्थापित नहीं होती, बल्कि वह उस सार्वजनिक सहमति पर भी निर्भर करती है जिसे योजनाबद्ध संचार, प्रतीकात्मक अभिव्यक्तियों और नीतिगत प्रस्तुतीकरण के माध्यम से निर्मित किया जाता है। यहाँ जनमत को एक स्वतः उत्पन्न सामाजिक प्रतिक्रिया के रूप में नहीं, बल्कि पूर्व-निर्धारित उद्देश्यों की प्राप्ति हेतु निर्मित प्रक्रिया के रूप में समझा जाना चाहिए। दूसरे शब्दों में, यह एक ऐसी सहमति है जो सतही रूप से लोकतांत्रिक प्रतीत होती है, किंतु उसके अंतर्गत निहित कथाएँ, प्रतीक और विचारधाराएँ सत्ता-संरचनाओं द्वारा निर्मित एवं नियंत्रित होती हैं। इस प्रकार सहमति-निर्माण न केवल सूचना-प्रबंधन की प्रक्रिया है, बल्कि यह शासन की वैधता, स्थिरता और नीति-स्वीकृति को सुनिश्चित करने वाला एक केंद्रीय प्रशासनिक उपकरण भी है (चतुर्वेदी, और सिंह: 2008)।

ऐतिहासिक परिप्रेक्ष्य और लोक प्रशासन की भूमिका

लोक प्रशासन और सहमति-निर्माण का संबंध इतिहास में अत्यंत स्पष्ट रूप से परिलक्षित होता है, क्योंकि सत्ता-संरचनाएँ केवल आदेश जारी करने तक सीमित नहीं रहतीं, बल्कि वे ऐसे मानसिक और वैचारिक ढाँचों का निर्माण भी करती हैं, जो जनता को उन आदेशों को न्यायसंगत, आवश्यक और स्वाभाविक मानने के लिए प्रेरित करते हैं। इस दृष्टि से सहमति-निर्माण केवल आधुनिक लोकतांत्रिक संचार-रणनीति नहीं है, बल्कि यह शासन-प्रक्रिया के इतिहास में गहराई से अंतर्निहित एक व्यावहारिक तथा प्रशासनिक उपकरण के रूप में विद्यमान रहा है। यदि इसे व्यापक परिप्रेक्ष्य में देखा जाए, तो प्रथम विश्व युद्ध, औपनिवेशिक भारत, नाजी जर्मनी, शीत युद्ध काल तथा उपनिवेशोत्तर विकास प्रशासन जैसे ऐतिहासिक उदाहरण यह स्पष्ट करते हैं कि किस प्रकार लोक प्रशासन ने नीति-निर्माण, संचार-प्रबंधन और मनोवैज्ञानिक प्रभावों के संयोजन के माध्यम से जनमत का निर्माण किया तथा उसके आधार पर सत्ता को वैधता प्रदान की।

प्रथम विश्व युद्ध का उदाहरण यह दर्शाता है कि किस प्रकार एक संगठित प्रशासनिक तंत्र युद्ध जैसे जटिल और विवादास्पद निर्णय को व्यापक जनसमर्थन में परिवर्तित कर सकता है। संयुक्त राज्य अमेरिका में स्थापित "कमिटी ऑन पब्लिक इन्फॉर्मेशन (Committee on Public Information – CPI)" इस प्रक्रिया का एक महत्वपूर्ण उदाहरण है। इस संस्था ने केवल सूचना-प्रसार का कार्य नहीं किया, बल्कि एक सुव्यवस्थित संचार-रणनीति के माध्यम से युद्ध को नैतिक कर्तव्य और राष्ट्रीय दायित्व के रूप में प्रस्तुत किया। मीडिया, फिल्मों, सार्वजनिक रैलियों, प्रचार सामग्रियों, भाषण एजेंसियों तथा सैनिक नायकों की प्रतीकात्मक छवियों के माध्यम

से एक ऐसा भावनात्मक वातावरण निर्मित किया गया, जिसमें युद्ध के प्रति समर्थन स्वाभाविक प्रतीत होने लगा। यहाँ लोक प्रशासन ने केवल नीतियों का क्रियान्वयन नहीं किया, बल्कि संचार और भावनात्मक अपील के माध्यम से सहमति-निर्माण को एक संस्थागत प्रक्रिया के रूप में विकसित किया, जिसने नीति-वैधता को सुदृढ़ किया (क्रील : 1920)।

ब्रिटिश औपनिवेशिक शासन भारत में इसी प्रवृत्ति का एक दीर्घकालिक उदाहरण प्रस्तुत करता है, जहाँ प्रशासनिक तंत्र ने वैचारिक प्रभुत्व स्थापित करने के लिए सहमति-निर्माण का सुनियोजित उपयोग किया। ब्रिटेन ने अपने साम्राज्यवादी विस्तार को "श्वेत जाति का दायित्व (The White Man's Burden)" के सिद्धांत के माध्यम से नैतिक औचित्य प्रदान किया और यह स्थापित करने का प्रयास किया कि वह सभ्यता, कानून और प्रगति का वाहक है। इस विचार को सुदृढ़ करने के लिए शिक्षा-प्रणाली, प्रेस, न्यायिक ढाँचा और प्रशासनिक रिपोर्टों का उपयोग किया गया, जिनके माध्यम से एक ऐसा विमर्श निर्मित किया गया जिसमें औपनिवेशिक शासन को आवश्यक और लाभकारी बताया गया। भारतीय समाज को यह विश्वास दिलाने का प्रयास किया गया कि वे स्वयं शासन के योग्य नहीं हैं और ब्रिटिश प्रशासन उनके विकास के लिए अनिवार्य है। इस प्रकार सहमति-निर्माण का यह उपनिवेशवादी स्वरूप केवल राजनीतिक नियंत्रण तक सीमित नहीं था, बल्कि उसने दीर्घकालिक वैचारिक अधीनता को जन्म दिया। यहाँ लोक प्रशासन केवल शासन लागू करने वाला तंत्र नहीं रहा, बल्कि वह वैचारिक संरचना गढ़ने वाला माध्यम भी बन गया।

द्वितीय विश्व युद्ध से पूर्व नाजी जर्मनी का परिदृश्य सहमति-निर्माण की प्रक्रिया का चरम और उग्र स्वरूप प्रस्तुत करता है। जोसेफ गोएबल्स के नेतृत्व में स्थापित प्रचार मंत्रालय (Ministry of Propaganda) ने मीडिया, शिक्षा, कला और सांस्कृतिक अभिव्यक्तियों को पूर्णतः नियंत्रित करते हुए एक केंद्रीकृत वैचारिक ढाँचा निर्मित किया। इस प्रक्रिया में प्रशासनिक तंत्र ने केवल आदेश और दमन का सहारा नहीं लिया, बल्कि प्रतीकों, मिथकों, भाषा और भय की योजनाबद्ध संरचना के माध्यम से जनचेतना को प्रभावित किया। आर्य श्रेष्ठता और यहूदी-विरोध जैसे विचारों को शासन की नीतियों के औचित्य के रूप में प्रस्तुत किया गया। विद्यालयों, समाचार माध्यमों, सार्वजनिक सभाओं और सांस्कृतिक कार्यक्रमों के माध्यम से एक ऐसी सामूहिक चेतना विकसित की गई, जिसमें वैकल्पिक विचारों के लिए कोई स्थान नहीं बचा। यह सहमति-निर्माण का वह रूप था जिसमें प्रशासन ने सीधे जनता की चेतना को अपनी विचारधारा के अनुरूप ढाल दिया, और इस प्रकार नीति-वैधता को पूर्णतः नियंत्रित वैचारिक आधार पर स्थापित किया (श्रीनेत, 2012)।

शीत युद्ध काल सहमति-निर्माण के भू-राजनीतिक उपयोग का एक विशिष्ट उदाहरण प्रस्तुत करता है, जहाँ संयुक्त राज्य अमेरिका और सोवियत संघ दोनों ने अपने-अपने प्रशासनिक ढाँचों के माध्यम से वैचारिक समर्थन तैयार करने का प्रयास किया। इस काल में प्रचार, शिक्षा-नियंत्रण, सांस्कृतिक कूटनीति और मीडिया प्रस्तुतीकरण को औपचारिक प्रशासनिक रणनीति का हिस्सा बनाया गया। लोकतंत्र बनाम साम्यवाद का द्वंद्व केवल सैन्य प्रतिस्पर्धा तक सीमित नहीं था, बल्कि यह नागरिकों के भीतर वैचारिक सहमति उत्पन्न करने की प्रक्रिया से

भी जुड़ा हुआ था। फिल्मों, कार्टूनों, पाठ्य-पुस्तकों, समाचार एजेंसियों और भाषाई अभिव्यक्तियों के माध्यम से प्रशासन ने एक ऐसा मनोवैज्ञानिक वातावरण निर्मित किया, जिसमें प्रत्येक पक्ष स्वयं को श्रेष्ठ और अनिवार्य विकल्प के रूप में प्रस्तुत करता था। इस प्रकार लोक प्रशासन ने वैश्विक स्तर पर सहमति-निर्माण को एक रणनीतिक उपकरण के रूप में उपयोग किया।

उपनिवेशोत्तर राष्ट्र-निर्माण की प्रक्रिया सहमति-निर्माण के एक अपेक्षाकृत भिन्न, किंतु महत्वपूर्ण रूप को सामने लाती है, जहाँ नवस्वतंत्र राज्यों ने विकास को केंद्रीय नैरेटिव के रूप में स्थापित किया। स्वतंत्रता के पश्चात भारत सहित अनेक देशों में औद्योगीकरण, सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र का विस्तार, पंचवर्षीय योजनाएँ, गरीबी उन्मूलन कार्यक्रम और राष्ट्रीय एकता जैसे लक्ष्यों को प्रशासनिक प्राथमिकता दी गई। यह केवल नीति-निर्माण नहीं था, बल्कि एक ऐसी प्रशासनिक भाषा और विमर्श का निर्माण था, जिसमें विकास को प्रगति का एकमात्र मार्ग प्रस्तुत किया गया। मीडिया, सरकारी भाषणों, सांख्यिकीय रिपोर्टों और शैक्षणिक विमर्श के माध्यम से यह विश्वास स्थापित किया गया कि राज्य-नियंत्रित विकास ही सामाजिक परिवर्तन का सर्वोत्तम साधन है। कुछ संदर्भों में इस प्रक्रिया ने जनभागीदारी और राष्ट्रीय एकता को सुदृढ़ किया, जबकि अन्य संदर्भों में आलोचना को सीमित करने की प्रवृत्ति भी दिखाई दी। इस प्रकार सहमति-निर्माण ने राष्ट्र-निर्माण और नीति-वैधता दोनों को प्रभावित किया (लैसवेल : 1927)।

इन सभी उदाहरणों के समग्र विश्लेषण से यह स्पष्ट होता है कि लोक प्रशासन केवल निष्पक्ष आदेश देने वाला तंत्र नहीं है, बल्कि वह एक सक्रिय संचार माध्यम भी है, जो नीतियों को अर्थ, वैधता और भावनात्मक समर्थन प्रदान करता है। सहमति-निर्माण एक ओर सत्ता के लिए प्रभावी उपकरण के रूप में कार्य करता है, वहीं दूसरी ओर यह सामाजिक अनुबंध का भी हिस्सा बनता है, जहाँ नागरिक राज्य की नीतियों को अपनी स्वीकृति प्रदान करते हैं।

यह ऐतिहासिक विश्लेषण यह भी संकेत करता है कि सहमति-निर्माण लोकतांत्रिक शासन के लिए आवश्यक तो है, किंतु इसके दुरुपयोग की संभावना भी उतनी ही प्रबल है। जब प्रशासन इसे संवाद और सहभागिता के माध्यम के बजाय आलोचना-नियंत्रण या विचार-दमन के साधन के रूप में प्रयोग करता है, तब यह लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों के लिए चुनौती बन सकता है। अतः समकालीन संदर्भ में यह एक महत्वपूर्ण प्रश्न बन जाता है कि लोक प्रशासन सहमति-निर्माण को किस प्रकार संतुलित करे, एक संवादात्मक, सहभागितामूलक प्रक्रिया के रूप में या एक नियंत्रणात्मक और एकतरफा तंत्र के रूप में। यही संतुलन आधुनिक शासन की वैधता और लोकतांत्रिक स्थिरता को निर्धारित करता है।

डिजिटल युग में लोक प्रशासन और सहमति-निर्माण

समकालीन समय में डिजिटल तकनीक ने सहमति-निर्माण की प्रक्रिया को पहले की अपेक्षा कहीं अधिक जटिल, बहुस्तरीय और सूक्ष्म बना दिया है। इंटरनेट, स्मार्टफोन और सोशल मीडिया प्लेटफॉर्मों ने नागरिकों और राज्य के बीच प्रत्यक्ष संवाद की एक नई संरचना प्रस्तुत की है, जिससे यह प्रतीत होता है कि संचार अधिक खुला, सहभागी और लोकतांत्रिक हो गया है। किंतु गहन विश्लेषण करने पर यह स्पष्ट होता है कि यही माध्यम नियंत्रण, दिशा-निर्देशन

और सूचना-प्रबंधन के अत्याधुनिक औजारों के रूप में भी कार्य कर रहे हैं। डेटा विश्लेषण, माइक्रोटार्गेटिंग, भावनात्मक संदेश-प्रवर्तन, एल्गोरिदमिक प्राथमिकता तथा कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता (Artificial Intelligence - AI) आधारित नियमन ने प्रशासन को यह क्षमता प्रदान की है कि वह केवल सूचना का प्रसार ही न करे, बल्कि यह भी नियंत्रित करे कि कौन-सी सूचना किस नागरिक समूह तक पहुँचे, किस समय पहुँचे और किस रूप में प्रस्तुत की जाए। इस प्रकार सूचना का प्रवाह अब निष्पक्ष या तटस्थ न होकर संरचित, लक्षित और उद्देश्यपूर्ण बन गया है।

नीतियों के समर्थन और स्वीकृति के लिए अब पारंपरिक साधन जैसे प्रेस विज्ञप्ति, सरकारी वक्तव्य या सार्वजनिक भाषण पर्याप्त नहीं रह गए हैं। इसके स्थान पर डिजिटल अभियानों का निर्माण, ऑनलाइन सहभागिता सफलता-कथाओं का व्यापक प्रसार तथा वैकल्पिक या विरोधी दृष्टिकोणों की दृश्यता को सीमित करना प्रशासनिक रणनीतियों का अभिन्न अंग बन चुका है। उदाहरण के रूप में ई-गवर्नेंस प्लेटफॉर्म, नागरिक सहभागिता पोर्टल तथा सोशल मीडिया आधारित सरकारी संचार तंत्र न केवल सूचना प्रदान करते हैं, बल्कि वे नागरिकों की प्रतिक्रियाओं को भी संरचित रूप में संकलित और प्रभावित करते हैं। इस प्रकार सहमति-निर्माण अब शासन की केवल पृष्ठभूमि प्रक्रिया न रहकर उसकी एक केंद्रीय कार्यक्षमता के रूप में स्थापित हो चुका है, जहाँ नीति-स्वीकृति और जनसमर्थन डिजिटल संचार संरचनाओं पर निर्भर होते जा रहे हैं।

इसके अतिरिक्त, डिजिटल युग में प्रशासनिक वैधता का प्रश्न भी संचार-प्रबंधन से गहराई से जुड़ गया है। किसी योजना की लोकप्रियता, ई-गवर्नेंस की सफलता, अथवा संकट की स्थिति जैसे महामारी या आपदा में प्रशासनिक निर्णयों की स्वीकार्यता इस बात पर निर्भर करती है कि उन्हें डिजिटल माध्यमों के जरिए किस प्रकार प्रस्तुत और संप्रेषित किया गया है। उदाहरणार्थ, सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य अभियानों, टीकाकरण कार्यक्रमों या स्वच्छता अभियानों में डिजिटल माध्यमों का उपयोग केवल सूचना देने तक सीमित नहीं रहता, बल्कि वह नागरिकों के व्यवहार, विश्वास और सहभागिता को सक्रिय रूप से प्रभावित करता है। इस संदर्भ में लोक प्रशासन का स्वरूप केवल तकनीकी प्रशासन तक सीमित न रहकर "मानसिकता-प्रशासन" के रूप में पुनर्परिभाषित होता दिखाई देता है, जहाँ नागरिकों की धारणा, विश्वास और भावनाएँ प्रशासनिक प्रक्रिया का अभिन्न हिस्सा बन जाती हैं (चॉम्स्की : 2002)।

निस्संदेह, आधुनिक शासन में किसी भी नीति का कार्यान्वयन उसके वास्तविक या प्राकृतिक लाभों से कम और उसके सामाजिक प्रतिरूप से अधिक प्रभावित होता है। दूसरे शब्दों में, यह आवश्यक नहीं कि कोई नीति केवल अपने वस्तुगत परिणामों के कारण सफल हो, उसकी सफलता इस बात पर भी निर्भर करती है कि उसे समाज में किस प्रकार प्रस्तुत किया गया है और नागरिक उसे किस रूप में ग्रहण करते हैं। यही कारण है कि सहमति-निर्माण अब केवल एक राजनीतिक अवधारणा या वाक्यांश न रहकर प्रशासनिक विज्ञान की एक आधारभूत संकल्पना बन चुका है। इस संदर्भ में शासन को अपनी नीतियों के पक्ष में निरंतर सामाजिक सहमति, मनोवैज्ञानिक स्वीकार्यता और वैचारिक वैधता का निर्माण करना पड़ता है, जो डिजिटल माध्यमों के जरिए अधिक तीव्र, व्यापक और प्रभावशाली रूप में संभव हो पाया है।

लोक प्रशासन, कंसेंट मैन्यफैक्चरिंग और आतंकवाद

आतंकवाद के संदर्भ में लोक प्रशासन और सहमति-निर्माण के बीच संबंध और अधिक स्पष्ट तथा संवेदनशील रूप में सामने आता है। आतंकवाद केवल भौतिक हिंसा या सुरक्षा-चुनौती तक सीमित नहीं होता, बल्कि यह सामाजिक धारणा, सामूहिक भय, असुरक्षा-बोध और राजनीतिक ध्रुवीकरण को जन्म देने वाली जटिल प्रक्रिया है। ऐसे संकटपूर्ण क्षणों में नागरिक स्वाभाविक रूप से राज्य से त्वरित और प्रभावी सुरक्षा उपायों की अपेक्षा करते हैं। यही वह परिस्थितियाँ होती हैं, जहाँ लोक प्रशासन सहमति-निर्माण की प्रक्रिया को सक्रिय रूप से संचालित करता है, ताकि सुरक्षा-संबंधी नीतियों और कठोर निर्णयों के लिए व्यापक जनसमर्थन सुनिश्चित किया जा सके। आतंकवादी घटनाओं के तुरंत पश्चात राज्य प्रायः कठोर कानूनों का निर्माण या विस्तार, निगरानी प्रणालियों का सुदृढ़ीकरण, पुलिस एवं सुरक्षा एजेंसियों के अधिकारों का विस्तार तथा आवश्यकता पड़ने पर बाह्य सैन्य कार्रवाई जैसे कदम उठाता है, और इन उपायों को राष्ट्रहित, देशभक्ति तथा अनिवार्य सुरक्षा-प्रतिक्रिया के रूप में प्रस्तुत किया जाता है।

इस संदर्भ में प्रशासन की भूमिका केवल संकट-व्यवस्थापन तक सीमित नहीं रहती, बल्कि वह "धारणा-व्यवस्थापन" पर भी विशेष बल देता है। मीडिया कवरेज, आधिकारिक वक्तव्य, राजनीतिक भाषा-शैली तथा प्रतीकात्मक राष्ट्रवाद मिलकर एक ऐसी कथा निर्मित करते हैं, जिसमें कठोर प्रशासनिक उपायों को आवश्यक और न्यायसंगत ठहराया जाता है, जबकि असहमति या आलोचनात्मक दृष्टिकोण को संदेहपूर्ण या राष्ट्रहित के प्रतिकूल के रूप में प्रस्तुत किया जा सकता है। उदाहरण के रूप में 11 सितम्बर 2001 की घटनाओं के पश्चात संयुक्त राज्य अमेरिका में लागू PATRIOT Act तथा भारत में UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act) जैसे विधायी उपाय यह दर्शाते हैं कि किस प्रकार सुरक्षा-आधारित नैरेटिव के माध्यम से व्यापक जनसमर्थन प्राप्त किया गया। इस प्रकार सहमति-निर्माण लोकतांत्रिक व्यवस्था में प्रशासनिक शक्ति को वैधता प्रदान करता है, किंतु इसके साथ ही यह नागरिक अधिकारों, निजता और अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता के संभावित क्षरण का जोखिम भी उत्पन्न करता है।

इसी कारण आतंकवाद, सहमति-निर्माण और लोक प्रशासन के बीच संबंध एक त्रिकोणीय संरचना के रूप में उभरता है, जहाँ सुरक्षा और स्वतंत्रता के बीच संतुलन केंद्रीय प्रश्न बन जाता है। "सुरक्षा स्थिरता" की भाषा अनेक बार शासन के लिए सहमति अर्जित करने का प्रभावी माध्यम बन जाती है, जिसके माध्यम से राज्य अपनी नीतियों के लिए त्वरित समर्थन प्राप्त करता है। तथापि, यह भी उतना ही महत्वपूर्ण है कि इस प्रक्रिया में लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों जैसे पारदर्शिता, उत्तरदायित्व और नागरिक स्वतंत्रता को संरक्षित रखा जाए। आधुनिक लोक प्रशासन के समक्ष सबसे बड़ी चुनौती यही है कि वह सुरक्षा सुनिश्चित करते हुए भी नागरिक अधिकारों, अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता और संस्थागत पारदर्शिता के बीच संतुलन बनाए रखे (जवरीमल्ल : 2006)।

अतः यह स्पष्ट होता है कि सहमति-निर्माण एक द्वैध प्रकृति वाली प्रक्रिया है। एक ओर यह प्रशासन को संकट-स्थितियों में प्रभावी निर्णय लेने और उन्हें वैधता प्रदान करने में सहायक होती है, वहीं दूसरी ओर इसके अतिरेक या दुरुपयोग से लोकतांत्रिक संरचनाओं पर प्रतिकूल

प्रभाव पड़ सकता है। यही संतुलन यह निर्धारित करता है कि सहमति-निर्माण केवल सत्ता का उपकरण बनकर रह जाएगा या लोकतांत्रिक उत्तरदायित्व का एक सशक्त माध्यम भी सिद्ध होगा।

निष्कर्ष

कंसेंट मैन्यफुैक्चरिंग (सहमति-निर्माण की प्रक्रिया) का अध्ययन लोक प्रशासन को यह समझने में सक्षम बनाता है कि जनमत, सत्ता और सूचना के बीच संबंध किस प्रकार एक राज्य की राजनीतिक स्थिरता, नीति-स्वीकृति और प्रशासनिक वैधता को प्रभावित करते हैं। यह स्पष्ट होता है कि लोकतांत्रिक शासन में सहमति प्राप्त करना राज्य के लिए उतना ही महत्वपूर्ण है जितना नीतियों का निर्माण और उनका प्रभावी क्रियान्वयन, क्योंकि बिना सामाजिक स्वीकृति के कोई भी नीति दीर्घकालिक रूप से सफल नहीं हो सकती। इस संदर्भ में सहमति-निर्माण केवल संचार की तकनीक नहीं, बल्कि शासन की एक केंद्रीय प्रक्रिया के रूप में उभरता है, जो प्रशासनिक निर्णयों को अर्थ, दिशा और स्वीकार्यता प्रदान करता है।

ऐतिहासिक विश्लेषण से यह प्रतिपादित होता है कि विभिन्न कालखंडों में सहमति-निर्माण ने शासन को स्थिरता प्रदान करने, नीतियों को वैधता देने और नागरिकों को राज्य की कार्यवाहियों के साथ जोड़ने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है। साथ ही यह भी स्पष्ट होता है कि इस प्रक्रिया का स्वरूप संदर्भानुसार परिवर्तित होता रहा है। कभी यह प्रचार और नियंत्रण के रूप में प्रकट हुआ, तो कभी सहभागिता और विकास-नैरेटिव के माध्यम से सकारात्मक सामाजिक एकजुटता का साधन बना। डिजिटल युग में सहमति-निर्माण के उपकरण अधिक उन्नत, तीव्र और लक्षित हो गए हैं, जिसके कारण इसका प्रभाव भी अधिक व्यापक और गहन हो गया है। डेटा, एल्गोरिदम और संचार तकनीकों के माध्यम से जनमत को प्रभावित करने की क्षमता ने प्रशासनिक संरचनाओं को नई संभावनाएँ प्रदान की हैं, किंतु इसके साथ ही पारदर्शिता, निजता और वैचारिक स्वतंत्रता से जुड़े नए प्रश्न भी उत्पन्न हुए हैं।

इस परिप्रेक्ष्य में यह आवश्यक हो जाता है कि लोक प्रशासन सहमति-निर्माण की प्रक्रिया को केवल नियंत्रणात्मक उपकरण के रूप में न अपनाकर उसे संवादात्मक और सहभागितामूलक प्रक्रिया के रूप में विकसित करे। गुड गवर्नेंस, सहभागितामूलक शासन और विचार-विमर्श आधारित लोकतंत्र जैसे सिद्धांत इस दिशा में मार्गदर्शक हो सकते हैं, जहाँ नागरिकों को केवल सूचना के उपभोक्ता के रूप में नहीं, बल्कि निर्णय-प्रक्रिया के सक्रिय भागीदार के रूप में देखा जाता है। इससे सहमति-निर्माण अधिक पारदर्शी, उत्तरदायी और लोकतांत्रिक स्वरूप ग्रहण कर सकता है।

अंततः यह कहा जा सकता है कि सहमति-निर्माण एक द्वैध प्रकृति वाली प्रक्रिया है - एक ओर यह शासन के लिए आवश्यक वैधता और स्थिरता का आधार प्रदान करती है, वहीं दूसरी ओर इसके असंतुलित या अपारदर्शी उपयोग से लोकतांत्रिक मूल्यों, नागरिक स्वतंत्रताओं और आलोचनात्मक विमर्श के लिए खतरा उत्पन्न हो सकता है। अतः समकालीन लोक प्रशासन के समक्ष सबसे बड़ी चुनौती यह है कि वह इस प्रक्रिया के बीच संतुलन स्थापित करे। ऐसा संतुलन, जिसमें नीति-प्रभावशीलता के साथ-साथ नागरिक अधिकारों, अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता और

संस्थागत पारदर्शिता का भी संरक्षण सुनिश्चित हो सके। यही संतुलित दृष्टिकोण सहमति-निर्माण को सत्ता के उपकरण से आगे बढ़ाकर लोकतांत्रिक उत्तरदायित्व के सशक्त माध्यम के रूप में स्थापित कर सकता है।

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BJPA ISSN: 0974-2735
New Series Vol. XXIII No. 1, Jan.-June, 2026

भारत में न्याय व्यवस्था की पुनर्कल्पना: कृत्रिम बुद्धिमता एवं अवसंरचना के संदर्भ में एक विचारोत्तेजक टिप्पणी

निशांत कुमार*

परिचय

आज भारत की न्यायिक प्रणाली पर लगभग 5.5 करोड़ लंबित मामलों का बोझ है, जिनमें से लगभग 85 से 87 प्रतिशत मामले निचली अदालतों में लंबित हैं, जो न्याय वितरण में मौजूद गंभीर संरचनात्मक कमजोरियों को उजागर करता है। विश्व का सबसे बड़ा लोकतंत्र होने के बावजूद, भारत में प्रति दस लाख जनसंख्या पर केवल 22 न्यायाधीश हैं, जबकि विधि आयोग ने प्रति दस लाख जनसंख्या पर 50 न्यायाधीशों की सिफारिश की है। यह संकट केवल मानव संसाधन तक ही सीमित नहीं है, क्योंकि आधी से भी कम निचली अदालतों में वीडियो कॉन्फ्रेंसिंग की उचित सुविधा है और कई अदालतों में अभी भी बुनियादी नागरिक सुविधाओं का अभाव है।

डिजिटल लोकतंत्रीकरण और ई-कोर्ट

न्यायपालिका ने डिजिटल अवसंरचना तक पहुँच को लागू करने योग्य मूल अधिकार के रूप में मान्यता देकर भौगोलिक बाधाओं को समाप्त कर दिया है। इस प्रतिमान परिवर्तन से प्रक्रियात्मक अड़चनों को वास्तविक स्वतंत्रता को बाधित करने से रोका जा सकेगा, जिससे वास्तविक काल में पारदर्शिता और त्वरित परीक्षण प्रबंधन सुनिश्चित होगा। वर्ष 2026 तक ई-कोर्ट के तीसरे चरण में 7,210 करोड़ रुपए के परिव्यय का उपयोग 6.37 बिलियन से अधिक पुराने पृष्ठों को डिजिटाइज करने के लिए किया गया। उदाहरण के लिए, अकेले दिल्ली उच्च न्यायालय ने चेक बाउंस के मामलों की सुनवाई के लिए 34 अलग-अलग डिजिटल अदालतों की स्थापना की है। सर्वोच्च न्यायालय की ई-समिति के आधिकारिक डेटा से पता चलता है कि ई-कोर्ट मोबाइल एप्लीकेशन को लॉन्च होने के बाद से कुल 3.5 करोड़ (35 मिलियन) डाउनलोड मिल चुके हैं, जबकि बहुभाषी ई-कोर्ट पोर्टल पर दैनिक डिजिटल ट्रैफिक 3.5 मिलियन (35 लाख) हिट्स प्रति दिन दर्ज करता है।

* डॉ. निशान्त कुमार, समाज सेवी एवं लेखक, राजनीति विज्ञान विभाग, वीर कुँअर सिंह विश्वविद्यालय, आरा से एम.ए., पी-एच.डी.

जलवायु न्याय एक मूल अधिकार के रूप में

पारिस्थितिक गिरावट के कमजोर समुदायों पर असमान प्रभाव का अभिनिर्धारण करते हुए, अदालतों ने जलवायु परिवर्तन के खिलाफ अधिकार को अनुच्छेद 14 और 21 में शामिल किया है। यह प्रगतिशील व्याख्या पर्यावरण न्यायशास्त्र को प्रतिक्रियात्मक प्रदूषण नियंत्रण से सक्रिय जलवायु अनुकूलन और अंतर-पीढ़ीगत समानता की ओर निर्देशित करती है। वर्ष 2024 के ऐतिहासिक एम.के. रंजीत सिंह मामले के निर्णय ने जलवायु परिवर्तन से निपटने की क्षमता को आधिकारिक तौर पर संवैधानिक ढाँचे के भीतर स्थापित कर दिया, जो भारत के अंतर्राष्ट्रीय UNFCCC दायित्वों के अनुरूप है।

मई 2026 में एक उपचारात्मक संवाद में सर्वोच्च न्यायालय ने सरकार से स्पष्ट रूप से आग्रह किया कि वह MTP अधिनियम में संशोधन करके यौन उत्पीड़न के नाबालिग पीड़ितों के लिए 24 सप्ताह की समय सीमा को हटा दे। साथ ही संवैधानिक अदालतें प्रायः नाबालिग की पसंद को प्राथमिकता देने के लिए अनुच्छेद 142 का हवाला देती हैं, यह सुनिश्चित करते हुए कि प्रणालीगत विलंब उन्हें आपातकालीन चिकित्सा गर्भपात से वंचित न करे।

एल्गोरिदम उत्तरदायित्व और AI-एथिक्स

डिजिटल क्षेत्र में प्रगति करते हुए, न्यायपालिका यह सुनिश्चित करने के लिए 'एल्गोरिदम निष्पक्षता' की दिशा में अग्रणी भूमिका निभा रही है कि स्वचालित राज्य प्रणालियाँ संवैधानिक समानता का उल्लंघन न करें।

यह तकनीकी-विधिक दृष्टिकोण यह अनिवार्य करता है कि सार्वजनिक अवसंरचना में AI की तैनाती व्याख्या योग्य बनी रहे, जिससे अस्पष्ट एल्गोरिदम पूर्वाग्रहों को नागरिकों के अधिकारों से वंचित करने से रोका जा सके। फरवरी 2026 में सर्वोच्च न्यायालय ने न्यायिक प्रक्रियाओं में कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता के उपयोग पर ऐतिहासिक दिशा-निर्देश जारी किए। न्यायालय ने स्पष्ट रूप से कहा कि कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता के परिणाम निर्णायक नहीं हो सकते, उन पर मानवीय निगरानी अनिवार्य होनी चाहिए और उनमें अंतर्निहित पूर्वाग्रह एवं अपारदर्शी 'ब्लैक बॉक्स' प्रोसेसिंग का सख्ती से मुकाबला किया जाना चाहिए।

न्यायिक अवसंरचना के माध्यम से संस्थागत सुदृढ़ीकरण

न्यायपालिका राज्य के धन की निष्क्रिय प्राप्तकर्त्ता से विकसित होकर अपनी भौतिक और डिजिटल अवसंरचना की सक्रिय निर्माता बन गई है तथा अदालती सुविधाओं को निष्पक्ष सुनवाई के अधिकार के लिए एक पूर्वापेक्षा के रूप में मानती है।

भारत में न्यायसंगत प्रणाली सुनिश्चित करने में प्रमुख बाधाएँ क्या हैं?

न्यायिक पदों की दीर्घकालिक रिक्तियाँ और लंबित मामले: न्यायाधीशों और जनसंख्या का अनुपात एक संरचनात्मक बाधा उत्पन्न करता है, जहाँ मामलों का प्रवाह न्यायिक निस्तारण की

संस्थागत क्षमता से कहीं अधिक होता है। यह कमी 'विधिसम्मत प्रक्रिया' को 'अनंत प्रक्रिया' में परिवर्तित कर देती है, जिससे वादकारी दशकों तक अनिश्चितता का सामना करते हैं और न्यायिक दक्षता में जन-विश्वास क्षीण होता है। वर्ष 2026 के मध्य तक कुल लंबित मामलों की संख्या 55 मिलियन के आंकड़े को पार कर गई है, जिसमें उच्च न्यायालय के न्यायिक पदों में से लगभग 28-31 प्रतिशत पद रिक्त हैं। राष्ट्रीय न्यायिक डेटा ग्रिड (NJDG) से पता चलता है कि अधीनस्थ न्यायालयों में 10 प्रतिशत से अधिक मामले एक दशक से अधिक समय से लंबित हैं।

राज्य का बाध्यकारी वादकारी के रूप में उभरना: सरकार न्यायिक गतिरोध में सबसे बड़ा योगदानकर्त्ता बनी हुई है, जो प्राय: सेवा-संबंधी या कर मामलों में अपीलें दायर करती है, जिनमें ठोस विधिक योग्यता का अभाव होता है। यह 'बाध्यकारी वादप्रवृत्ति' सार्वजनिक कोष पर अनावश्यक दबाव डालती है तथा न्यायालयों के बहुमूल्य समय का असमान उपभोग करती है, जिसे अन्यथा नागरिक स्वतंत्रताओं से जुड़े मामलों पर लगाया जा सकता था। विधि एवं न्याय मंत्रालय द्वारा अनावश्यक अपीलों को सीमित करने हेतु जारी 'वाद-प्रबंधन के कुशल और प्रभावी निर्देशन' के बावजूद, सरकारी मुकदमेबाजी कुल लंबित मामलों के लगभग 45 प्रतिशत के लिए उत्तरदायी है। ऑडिट से पता चलता है कि अंतर-विभागीय विवादों को न्यायालय तक पहुँचने से पहले ही हल होने में औसतन 7 वर्ष लग जाते हैं।

आर्थिक बाधाएँ: वरिष्ठ अधिवक्ताओं की अत्यधिक फीस और अप्रत्यक्ष व्यवस्थागत व्यय एक 'आर्थिक दीवार' निर्मित करते हैं, जिससे न्याय व्यवस्था वस्तुत: केवल अभिजात वर्ग की पहुँच तक सीमित हो जाती है। यद्यपि 'विधिक प्रतिनिधित्व का अधिकार' एक संवैधानिक गारंटी है, परंतु दीर्घकालिक वादप्रक्रिया की वित्तीय वास्तविकता अनेक निर्धनों को वैध दावों का परित्याग करने के लिए विवश करती है। भारत में विधिक प्रतिनिधित्व की औसत फीस अब प्रति पेशी 10 लाख से 30 लाख रुपए हैं, जबकि औसत भारतीय की वार्षिक आय अभी भी इसकी तुलना में बहुत कम है। परिणामस्वरूप, पात्र गरीब वादियों में से 15 प्रतिशत से भी कम लोग मौजूदा राज्य-प्रायोजित चैनलों के माध्यम से उच्च गुणवत्ता वाली विधिक सहायता प्राप्त करने में सफल होते हैं।

स्थगन की अंतर्निहित संस्कृति: प्रणालीगत 'स्थगन संस्कृति' और बार एसोसिएशन की लगातार हड़तालें रणनीतिक विलंब को बढ़ावा देती हैं, जिससे अधिक आर्थिक संसाधनों वाले पक्ष अपने विरोधियों को थका देने (विफल करने) में सक्षम हो जाते हैं।

प्रक्रियागत बाधाओं के कारण समय का दुरुपयोग होता है, जिससे यह सुनिश्चित होता है कि मुकदमे की प्रक्रिया ही कमजोर पक्ष के लिए सजा बन जाती है। NJDG-2025 की रिपोर्टों से पता चलता है कि जिला न्यायालय के एक मामले की अंतिम सुनवाई से पहले औसतन 14 बार सुनवाई स्थगित होती है।

इसके अलावा, स्थानीय बार एसोसिएशनों द्वारा 'हड़ताल के दिनों' के कारण पिछले कैलेंडर वर्ष में उत्तर भारत भर में अनुमानित 21 लाख न्यायिक घंटों का नुकसान हुआ।

विधिक सहायता की निम्न गुणवत्ता: हालांकि NALSA विधिक सहायता के लिए एक ढाँचा प्रदान करता है, लेकिन संस्थागत प्रोत्साहनों और धन की कमी के कारण 'नि:शुल्क' प्रतिनिधित्व की गुणवत्ता प्राय: प्रभावित होती है। इससे एक 'स्तरीकृत न्याय' प्रणाली का निर्माण होता है, जहाँ गरीबों को प्रशासनिक औपचारिकताएँ मिलती हैं जबकि धनी लोगों को ठोस, रणनीतिक संरक्षण प्राप्त होता है। भारत के कारागारों में बंद आबादी का 76 प्रतिशत से अधिक हिस्सा विचाराधीन कैदियों का है, जिनमें से कई केवल नियुक्त विधिक सहायता की अक्षमता के कारण ही जेल में बंद रहते हैं। वर्ष 2026 के हालिया सर्वेक्षणों से पता चलता है कि ग्रामीण जिलों में विधिक सहायता वकीलों को प्रति सुनवाई 2,000 रुपए मात्र का कम मुआवजा मिलता है, जिससे उच्च टर्नओवर और कम प्रेरणा होती है।

क्षेत्रीय डिजिटल विभाजन: ई-कोर्टों के असमान कार्यान्वयन से एक 'डिजिटल न्याय विभाजन' उत्पन्न होता है, जहाँ ग्रामीण या कम कनेक्टिविटी वाले क्षेत्रों में रहने वाले वादी कागज रहित प्रणालियों की ओर परिवर्तन के कारण उपेक्षित हो जाते हैं। डिजिटलीकरण से गति का वादा तो किया जाता है, लेकिन टियर-3 शहरों में डिजिटल साक्षरता और हार्डवेयर की कमी ई-कोर्ट परियोजना द्वारा परिकल्पित लोकतांत्रिक पहुँच को बाधित करती है। डेटा से पता चलता है कि 'शैडो जोन' के वादकारी केवल डिजिटल दस्तावेज दाखिल करने हेतु मध्यस्थों को 40 प्रतिशत तक अधिक 'सेवा लागत' का भुगतान करते हैं।

विधिक परिवर्तनों में प्रक्रियात्मक अवरोध: औपनिवेशिक काल के कानूनों से भारतीय न्याय संहिता (BNS) और भारतीय नागरिक सुरक्षा संहिता (BNSS) में संक्रमण ने प्रारंभिक व्याख्यात्मक अंतर्विरोध और प्रक्रियात्मक विलंब उत्पन्न किए हैं। न्यायिक प्रशिक्षण संस्थानों की रिपोर्ट है कि जिला न्यायपालिका के 40 प्रतिशत से अधिक हिस्से को अभी भी नए कानूनों के डिजिटल-साक्ष्य प्रावधानों में दक्षता प्राप्त करने के लिए उन्नत कार्यशालाओं की आवश्यकता है।

अपर्याप्त भौतिक अवसंरचना: जर्जर न्यायालय परिसर तथा बाल-अनुकूल कक्षों या दिव्यांग-अनुकूल पहुँच जैसी मूलभूत सुविधाओं का अभाव वंचित समूहों को न्याय प्राप्ति से हतोत्साहित करता है। अवसंरचना केवल सौंदर्य का प्रश्न नहीं है, यह 'अभिगम्यता' का मूलभूत घटक है, जिसकी अनुपस्थिति उत्तरजीवियों के लिए प्रतिकूल वातावरण निर्मित करती है। राष्ट्रीय न्यायिक अवसंरचना प्राधिकरण द्वारा वर्ष 2025 में किए गए एक ऑडिट में पाया गया कि 19.7 प्रतिशत जिला न्यायालयों (भारत के सर्वोच्च न्यायालय के अनुसंधान और योजना केंद्र द्वारा प्रकाशित न्यायपालिका की स्थिति रिपोर्ट के अनुसार) में महिलाओं के लिए पृथक शौचालय नहीं हैं। सर्वोच्च न्यायालय की राष्ट्रीय अभिगम्यता रिपोर्ट (जिसका शीर्षक 'सभी के लिए एक न्यायालय' है) इस बात को उजागर करती है कि केवल 30.4 प्रतिशत जिला न्यायालय परिसरों में ही दिव्यांगजनों के लिए पृथक शौचालय हैं। इससे भी अधिक महत्त्वपूर्ण बात यह है कि देश भर में अवर न्यायालयों में से केवल 5.1 प्रतिशत में ही दृष्टिबाधित वादियों की सहायता हेतु स्पर्श-पथ की व्यवस्था है, जबकि केवल 2.8 प्रतिशत न्यायिक जिलों में ही सक्रिय मुकदमे के दौरान श्रवण-बाधित व्यक्तियों की सहायता हेतु सांकेतिक भाषा दुभाषिए उपलब्ध हैं।

सुधार के उपाय

उच्च न्यायालयों और सर्वोच्च न्यायालय में अवसंरचना' की अवधारणा को केवल भौतिक भवनों तक सीमित न रखकर AI-संचालित न्यायालय कक्षों तथा संवेदनशील साक्षी बयान केंद्रों (VWDC) तक विस्तारित किया जा सकेगा। न्यायिक निधियों पर स्वायत्त बजटीय नियंत्रण का प्रयोग करके, यह प्रणाली सुनिश्चित कर सकती है कि आधुनिकीकरण के लिए आवंटित राशि से अधिक की राशि का उपयोग पीड़ित-केंद्रित योजनाओं और डिजिटल सार्वजनिक अवसंरचना (DPI) के लिए किया जाए, न कि इसे सामान्य प्रशासनिक कार्यों में लगाया जाए।

केस-फ्लो प्रबंधन के लिए AI-संचालित पूर्वानुमान विश्लेषण को लागू करके, सिस्टम विभिन्न केस श्रेणियों के लिए सख्त 'समय मानक' लागू कर सकता है, यह सुनिश्चित करते हुए कि न्यायिक घंटे प्रक्रियात्मक औपचारिकताओं के बजाय विशेष रूप से वास्तविक निर्णय के लिए समर्पित हों।

हाइब्रिड सुनवाई और ODR ढाँचे को मुख्य धारा में लाना: अभिगम्यता को लोकतांत्रिक बनाने के लिए, 'हाइब्रिड कोर्ट' मॉडेल को महामारी के दौरान दी गई अस्थायी प्रतिक्रिया से बदलकर सभी न्यायिक स्तरों पर एक स्थायी वैधानिक व्यवस्था में परिवर्तित किया जाना चाहिए।

अधिक संख्या में, कम मूल्य वाले दीवानी और वाणिज्यिक विवादों के लिए ऑनलाइन विवाद समाधान (ODR) को एकीकृत करने से न्याय को भौतिक स्थान से पृथक किया जा सकेगा, जिससे यात्रा और भौतिक अभिलेखन से जुड़े 'वाद-व्यय कर' में उल्लेखनीय रूप से में कमी आएगी।

योग्यता आधारित भर्ती के लिए अखिल भारतीय न्यायिक सेवा (AIJS): AIJS के माध्यम से एक केंद्रीकृत भर्ती कैडर को लागू करने से न्यायिक प्रतिभाओं के मानकीकृत, योग्यता-आधारित प्रवाह को सुनिश्चित किया जा सकेगा, जिससे लंबे समय से चली आ रही रिक्तियों की कमी को पूरा किया जा सके।

सरकारी वादों पर वैधानिक सीमा

राज्य को अनावश्यक वादकर्त्ता से उत्तरदायी वादकर्त्ता में रूपांतरित करने हेतु एक सशक्त 'राष्ट्रीय वाद नीति' को विधिक रूप प्रदान किया जाना चाहिए, जिसके अंतर्गत आंतरिक पूर्व-विवाद परीक्षण अनिवार्य हों।

तुच्छ अपीलों के लिए विभागों पर जुर्माना लगाकर और अंतर-विभागीय विवादों में अनिवार्य मध्यस्थता को प्राथमिकता देकर, न्यायपालिका अपने वर्तमान मामलों की संख्या का लगभग आधा हिस्सा कम कर सकती है, जिससे तात्कालिक संवैधानिक मामलों के लिए संस्थागत क्षमता मुक्त होगी।

परिवर्तनकारी विधिक सहायता और 'निःशुल्क विधिक सेवा' का एकीकरण: विधिक सहायता तंत्र को 'दान-आधारित' सहायता से आगे बढ़कर 'गुणवत्ता-सुनिश्चित' पेशेवर प्रतिनिधित्व

की ओर संक्रमण की आवश्यकता है, जिसके लिए वरिष्ठ विधि-व्यवसायियों को अनिवार्य निःशुल्क विधिक सेवा कोटा अपनाने के लिए प्रोत्साहित किया जाना चाहिए।

सर्वोच्च न्यायालय की क्षेत्रीय पीठों के माध्यम से पुनर्गठनः अपील संबंधी मामलों के लिए सर्वोच्च न्यायालय की क्षेत्रीय पीठों की स्थापना करने से 'संवैधानिक न्यायालय' और 'राष्ट्रीय अपीलीय न्यायालय' के कार्यों का पृथक्करण संभव हो जाएगा। यह स्थानिक विकेंद्रीकरण देश के सर्वोच्च न्यायालय तक पहुँच के अधिकार को सुदृढ़ करता है तथा यह सुनिश्चित करता है कि सर्वोच्च न्यायालय नियमित त्रुटि-संशोधन के बजाय प्रणालीगत संवैधानिक व्याख्या पर केंद्रित रहे।

निष्कर्ष

भारतीय न्यायपालिका वर्तमान में एक ऐसे निर्णायक मोड़ पर खड़ी है, जहाँ अधिकार-आधारित शासन व्यवस्था के प्रहरी के रूप में इसकी भूमिका का परीक्षण हो रहा है, क्योंकि इसमें संरचनात्मक और अवसंरचनात्मक कमियाँ स्पष्ट रूप से मौजूद हैं। यद्यपि जलवायु न्याय तथा डिजिटल अधिकारों की प्रगतिशील व्याख्याएँ एक परिवर्तनकारी संवैधानिक दृष्टिकोण का परिचय देती हैं, तथापि सामान्य नागरिक पर आरोपित व्यवस्थागत 'वाद-व्यय का बोझ' अब भी एक गंभीर अवरोध बना हुआ है। समयबद्ध और सुलभ न्याय के भविष्य को सुनिश्चित करने के लिए क्रमिक सुधारों से आगे बढ़कर वित्तीय स्वायत्तता एवं व्यावसायिक प्रबंधन से युक्त 'मिशन-मोड' आधारित व्यापक पुनर्गठन की आवश्यकता है।

BIHAR JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

(ISSN: 0974 - 2735)

UGC-CARE Reference List of Journals in Social Sciences

Impact Factor: 6.880 (Cosmos)

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Printed by: Victorious Publishers (India), D-5 G/F, Ground Floor, Pandav Nagar, Near Shanti Nursing Home, (In Front of Mother Dairy), New Delhi-110092; Email: victorioupublishers12@gmail.com; Mob.: +91 8826941497