INDIAN DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

BY TEAM VIF

Vivekananda
International
Foundation

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Contents

Foreword

The Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) receives a large number of foreign delegations, student groups and individuals who do not have a great deal of familiarity with India but wish to know about the country, its history, geography, civilisation, culture, foreign policy, security challenges, etc. A need has been felt for an authentic and informative set of notes which can be used for briefings and be shared with visiting delegations.

Accordingly, experts and scholars at the VIF have put together a handbook on Indian democracy and governance, covering topics ranging from democracy and governance, security challenges, foreign policy, soft power and new policy initiatives. Treatment has been kept deliberately concise so as not to overwhelm the reader with excessive details, yet achieve the objective of conveying the essence of the topic.

Inevitably, a handbook of this nature will leave some topics and details out, and yet, hopefully convey essential features of democratic India's governance system.

Arvind Gupta Director, VIF
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Democracy and Governance

Geography

The concept of Bharata-Varsha (Land of Bharat), can be traced in sacred texts of Hinduism like the Vishnu Purana. According to the Vishnu Purana,"The country that lies north of the ocean and south of the snowy mountains is called Bhārata, for there dwelt the descendants of Bharata." It also mentions that "The seven main chains of mountains in Bhārata are Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Śuktimat, Rikṣa, Vindhya, and Pāripātra."

India shares land borders with seven countries and sea/water boundaries with two countries. These are:

• To the northwest of the country lie Afghanistan and Pakistan;

• To the north lie China, Nepal and Bhutan;

• To the far east, India is surrounded by Bangladesh and Myanmar.

According to India's Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the length of India's land borders with neighbouring countries is as follows:

• To the south-east of India lies Sri Lanka, while to the south-west is Maldives (India shares sea/water boundaries with both countries).

• Pakistan and Bangladesh share both land and maritime borders with India, while Sri Lanka shares only a maritime border via the "Ram Setu" (a chain of natural limestone shoals existing between Pamban or Rameswaram Island, located off the south-eastern coast of India's Tamil Nadu state, and Mannar Island, located off Sri Lanka's north-western coast.

• India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands share a maritime border with Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia.

The geological regions of India broadly follow physical features and may be grouped as: 1) 'the Himalayas and their associated group of mountains, the Indo-Gangetic Plain and the Peninsular Shield; 2) The Himalayan mountain belt lying to the north and the Naga-Lushai mountain range in the east, which surfaced due to compression of sediment and basement rocks; 3)The Indo-Gangetic plains, a large alluvial tract that separates the northern Himalayas from the Peninsular south; 4) The Peninsular south is a region of relative stability, but experiences occasional seismic disturbances (igneous, metamorphic and Deccan Trap formation).

India's river systems can be divided into four groups – the Himalayan rivers; the coastal rivers, the Deccan rivers and the inland drainage basin rivers. The country has been divided into 20 river basins/groups of river basins, consisting of 12 major and eight composite ones. The 12 major river basins are: (1) Indus (2) Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna (3) Godavari (4) Krishna (5) Cauvery (6) Mahanadi (7) Pennar (8) Brahmani Baitarni (9) Sabarmati (10) Mahi (11) Narmada and (12) Tapti. Each river basin has a drainage area exceeding 20,000 square kilometres. The eight composite river basins together include all of the other remaining medium river systems (drainage area of 2,000 to 20,000 square kilometres) and small river systems (drainage area of less than 2000 square kilometres) for the purpose of planning and management. In general, Bharat's climate can be described as a 'tropical monsoon' one, with rich and diverse flora and faunal resources.

Democracy in Ancient India

The Republic of India is also officially called as Bhārat Gaṇarājya. While Bhārat denotes India and its living culture, Gaṇarājya means Republic. Gaṇa could be translated as number and Rājya can be loosely translated as states; which would roughly mean the rule of the numbers, or the rule of many. All of these terms can be traced back at least to around 2000 B.C.E. Apart from material evidence, literary evidence like the Dharmaśāstrā texts, the Arthaśāstra, the Pañcatantra, or Tamil literature like Tirukkuraḷ, etc., give us information about India's ancient forms of government and their ideas of governance. The mention of oligarchic forms of government are found in the Vedās and reflected extensively in the epic, Mahābhārata. The Mahābhārata's Śāntiparva has portions dedicated to the nature and issues of republican polity, the duties of kings and leaders, codes of conduct in times of adversity, etc. In the Rig Veda (dating back to at least to 2000 B.C.E), we find terms like Sabha and Samiti, which denote assemblies where the election of kings are conducted. The famous 16 Mahājanapadās, often called oligarchic republics, can be traced back to between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C.E. These are classical examples of India's ancient republics.

Strong archaeological evidences are also found, like the Chola Inscriptions of Uttaramerur, where we find mention about villages dating back to around 920 C.E., where details about modes of conducting elections, qualification and disqualification of candidates, constitution of wards and committees, their functions, etc., are revealed. Similarly, we find inscriptions from different eras in various parts of India that discuss ideas on democracy, like the Pandyan Inscriptions of Manur (12th century CE), the Allahabad Pillar inscriptions of Samudra Gupta (4th century CE). Such evidence indicates the strong presence of a local governance system in the journey of Indian democracy. An important aspect of Indian democracy from ancient to contemporary times is its constant effort to decentralise, or establish 'self-rule', for instance, the idea of Grām Swarāj (village self-governance).

The system of local self-government in villages, called 'Panchayati Raj', can be traced back to at least the second millennium B.C.E. Indian thought leaders like Gāndhi considered parliamentary democracy as a tyranny of the majority, in the absence of 'self-governance' or 'Swarāj' in the background. When India gained its independence, it was acknowledged that the foundation of its democracy would be this village community rather than the individualism of the West. Despite the tyranny of "development," India's village communities continue to be a major structure for production, governance, and social interaction, whereas the village, as a unit of community, has almost vanished from the industrialised West. Understanding the democratic and socio-cultural significance of Panchayati, the Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act was passed in 1992 to promote democracy from the grassroots level. India today has around 250,000 Grām Panchayats.

Because of such local governance and self-rule practices, the idea of monarchy in India was never in conflict with the ideas of democracy. The king was not viewed as an 'absolute', with authority over everything. In classical Indian thought, monarchy could not be separated from the idea of self-rule by members of a guild, families, a social group, a village, or an extended kin-group. Likewise, each occupational social group, or family, was directly linked to the functioning of the state. In such a democratic setting, people not only participated in 'electing' a 'ruler', but also each individual participated in the process of nation building. It is through such a diverse ecosystem that sustainable self-government thrived in India, producing strong republicanism and democratic values. If India's civilisation retained continuity despite the tyranny of constant invasions, colonialism and unsustainable ideas of 'development', et al, its thoughts and practices of self-rule at the village level can and should be given due credit.

Living in an era conceptualises modern nation-states as liberation from monarchy. India, on the contrary, stands unique, where 565 princely states willingly merged to make the Union of India. This conflict-less merger was possible at a time when the world was busy in wars only because of the outlook that the people of India had for monarchy from their past experiences as well as the cultural consciousness of these monarchs. Their timely actions and strategic decisions were based on wisdom handed down through the ages and traditions. The integration of Indian wisdom with contemporary problems and the modern ideas of nation-states are an ongoing discussion and practice.

Suggested Readings

Altekar, A.S.: State and Government in Ancient India, 3rd edition. New Delhi: 1958

Dharampal, Dharampal: Collected Writings: Panchayati Raj and India's Polity, Volume IV. Mapusa: Other India Press, 2007

History of Ancient India: Vivekananda International Foundation, 2014.

Menon, Vapal Pangunni: Transfer of Power in India, United States, Princeton University Press, 2015.

Menon, Vapal Pangunni: Integration of the Indian States: Orient Blackswan, 2014.

Languages

India has the world's second highest number of languages, 780, second only to Papua New Guinea (839). According to the People's Linguistic Survey of India, Indian languages belong to four major language families -- Indo-European, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic and Sino-Tibetan. In India, 78.05 percent of its population speaks the Indo-Aryan family of languages, while 19.64 percent of the population speaks the Dravidian family of languages. Less than three per-cent of the population speaks Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai and other minor languages in India.

India has at least 25 writing systems of which 14 are primary scripts. Twelve out of the 14 writing systems originate from the Brāhmī Script. Historically, apart from the Brāhmī Script, the Indus Valley Script and the Kharosthī Script were more prominently and widely used in India.

Sanskrit is an ancient language with deep historical and cultural significance. It is often considered the mother of many modern Indian languages and is the language in which several ancient texts and scriptures were written. These texts included the Vedas, Upanishads, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, besides other religious, philosophical and literary works.

Sanskrit has played a crucial role in shaping India's intellectual and spiritual traditions. The Vedas, which are the oldest texts in Hindu tradition, were composed in Sanskrit and contain a wealth of knowledge in fields ranging from philosophy and cosmology to linguistics and ritual practices. The language has also been a medium for expressing complex philosophical concepts, intricate poetry and scientific ideas in fields like mathematics and astronomy.

Sanskrit has significantly influenced many languages in the Indian subcontinent and is a precursor to many, including Prakrit. Prakrit languages emerged as vernaculars from the more formal and classical Sanskrit. Brahmi, on the other hand, refers to an ancient script from which various Indian scripts, including Devanagari (used for Sanskrit), have evolved.

The Constitution of India's 8th Schedule recognises 22 languages as major languages of India. About 96.71 per-cent of the population speaks one of the Scheduled Languages. According to the 2011 Census of India, there are 99 non-scheduled languages. Apart from Scheduled Languages, there are over 19,500 dialects and languages are spoken as the mother tongue, according to the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India. Out of these, 1,369 are rationalised mother tongues and 1,474 are unclassified mother tongues.

Of the 22 major languages, Assamese, Bengali, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi and Urdu belong to the Indo-Aryan group of languages. The Dravidian language family includes Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu, while Manipuri and Bodo fall in the Sino-Tibetan language family. Santali falls under the head of the Munda language. The Government of India has awarded Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu classical language status owing to their independent nature and rich heritage.

Before independence, India used English at the central level. Apart from that, Urdu and Hindi were the official languages. Post-independence India does not have a national language. However Article 343(1) of the Constitution mentions that, "The official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script. The form of numerals to be used for the official purposes of the Union shall be the international form of Indian numerals." According to the Official Languages Act, 1963, Clause Three says, "Continuation of English Language for official purposes of the Union and for use in Parliament." Thus, Hindi and English are used for official purposes in India. To accommodate the diversity of languages in various states, the state governments have the liberty to specify their official state language(s) through legislation.

Features of the Indian Constitution

India or Bharat is a union of states. The Constitution of India, which was approved by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949, and took effect on January 26, 1950, governs the country. The Indian Constitution is the lengthiest written constitution in the world. It originally had 395 Articles and eight Schedules. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee and Chief Architect of the Constitution. Each article has been included after thorough deliberations in the Constitution Assembly, keeping in consideration the religious, linguistic, social and cultural diversity of a 5000-year-old civilisation. The Constitution presently incorporates 448 Articles and 12 Schedules.

The people of India are the custodians of the Constitution. The Preamble represents the philosophy and aspirations of India:

"WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA,having solemnly resolved to constitute India

into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC

REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

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

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;

and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and

the unity and integrity of the Nation...."

The Constitution establishes a parliamentary form of government at the Centre, comprising of the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) and the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament). The President is the constitutional head of the Executive of the Union. According to the Constitution, there must be a Council of Ministers, headed by the Prime Minister, to aid and advise the President, who carries out his or her duties in accordance with the council's advice. Thus, the Council of Ministers, with the Prime Minister as its head, is vested with real executive power.

The Constitution includes every feature of a federal government with certain unitary characteristics. It provides a dual system of government –Centre and States, and the separation of powers among the three branches of government —Executive, Judiciary and Legislature. India has an independent judiciary with the power of judicial review, which establishes its supremacy. The Supreme Court of India acts as the "Guardian of the Constitution" and serves as the "final court of appeal".

 Part III of the Constitution provides Fundamental Rights to citizens: Right to Equality; Right to Freedom; Right against Exploitation; Right to Freedom of Religion; Cultural and Educational Rights; and Right to Constitutional Remedies. These rights are justiciable in nature to prevent any encroachment, but are not absolute and allow for reasonable restrictions to be imposed in emergency situations. Affirmative action is indeed mentioned in the Indian Constitution. Article 15 prohibits discrimination based on grounds such as religion, ethnicity, caste, gender, and or place of birth.

Through the 42nd Amendment of the Constitution, which was tabled and approved by Parliament in 1976, ten Fundamental Duties have been added. As rights and duties are correlative to each other, these duties expect citizens to uphold some fundamental norms of democratic conduct and behaviour. Although duties are not enforceable in nature, yet they are regarded as important in the governance of the country.

The Constitution of India recognises and protects the rights of minorities. These rights ensure that individuals are not subjected to discrimination based on their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or religious identity. It explicitly outlines the provisions on various important issues such as special rights for tribal and socially backward communities, free and fair elections, grassroots-level governance, and the division and sharing of powers between the Centre and the States. There are a total of 12 Schedules that serve as appendices in the Indian Constitution. Each Schedule

addresses a specific aspect of governance such as languages recognised by the Constitution, the representation of Scheduled Tribes and land reforms. These Schedules are considered an integral part of the Constitution and can be amended by Parliament if necessary.

There are a number of bodies in India that derive their powers and authority from the Constitution and any changes to their mechanism would require an amendment. The list includes bodies such as the Attorney General of India, Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), Election Commission, Finance Commission, National Commission for Scheduled Castes, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, National Commission for Backward Classes, Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities, the Union Public Service Commission and the State Public Service Commission. A detailed explanation of the roles and responsibilities of each body is given in the Article linked to it within the Constitution.

In a nutshell, the Indian Constitution is a document "of the people, for the people and by the people". For more than 70 years, it has been the guiding light for India for it to become one of the most successful and vibrant democracies in the world.

For more information,

National Portal of India- "Constitution of India", https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india

Elections

At the heart of the world's largest constitutional democracy is the holding of free and fair elections. India's first general elections were held in 1952 with 53 political parties and 1,874 candidates. The last general elections for the 17th Lok Sabha were held in 2019. Over 650 parties contested the elections with 8,039 candidates. There has been an increase in voter turnout from 44.87 percent in the first general elections in 1951-52 to the highest ever of 67.40 percent in 2019. This indicates a growing political consciousness among the people. Political parties represent the voice of the people and their diversity.

Articles 324 to 329 of the Indian Constitution state the provisions for conducting of elections. The Election Commission of India (ECI) is vested with powers to conduct elections to Parliament and all state legislatures, as well as to the offices of the President and the Vice President (Article 324). The ECI currently consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners (as the President may fix from time to time). To ensure fair elections, the Constitution envisages an independent and autonomous Election Commission by securing its terms and conditions of and for service.

The elections are conducted on the basis of Universal Adult Franchise (Article 326). . With the objective of making India a participative democracy, the ECI launched the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation Program (SVEEP) in 2009. The purpose of the program was to ensure voter education, to spread voter awareness and to promote voter literacy. The voting system has also evolved from a separate ballot system to Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) starting in 2000. Recently, Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trial (VVPAT) strengthened participatory democracy and ensured the voters' faith. To further enable outreach and bring in efficiency and accountability, the ECI incorporated around 20 Apps, such as ERONET, cVIGIL, Candidate Suvidha, Election Expenditure and many more, providing a seamless interface for all stakeholders.

In addition to the above mentioned election-related categories, polls are also held for legislative assemblies and Councils, besides local bodies. India is divided into States and Union Territories, wherein each state has a Governor as administrative head and the executive authority resting with the chief minister, who is the leader of the party, or political alliance that has won a majority in the State Assembly Elections. Some Union Territories also elect an assembly and have a territorial government, while other (mainly smaller) Union Territories are governed by a person appointed by the President of India. All these state-level bodies have elections after a specified duration. The smooth transfer of power post elections reflect that polls held are free and fair, and that Indian democracy is mature.

For more information, please refer to the following websites

Election Commission of India: https://eci.gov.in/

https://eci.gov.in/general-election/general-elections-2019/

MEA: https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf1/Part15.pdf

PRS India: https://prsindia.org/theprsblog/analysis-of-the-contesting-candidates-in-general-election-2019

https://prsindia.org/theprsblog/how-votes-are-counted-in-indian-elections

Federalism

The salient features of federalism of the Indian Constitution include a written Constitution, dual polity and the division of powers between the Union Government and the States. The rigidity and supremacy of the Constitution, a legislature that is bicameral and an independent judiciary, is, therefore, firmly established. The Constitution of India also has some non-federal/unitary features like a strong centre, indestructible states, single citizenship, flexibility in the constitution, etc.   The Supreme Court of India in the S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994) case laid down that the Indian Constitution is federal and "characterised federalism as its 'basic feature". Under the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution, the following three lists provide for the distribution of powers between the central and state governments:

- the Union List (List I) – Consisting of 100 subjects of national importance and requiring a uniform law for the entire country, like, Foreign Affairs, Defence, Currency, etc. Only Parliament can make legislation pertaining to these matters.
- State List (List II) – Consisting of 61 subjects of local or interests of the States, like, Public Order and Police, Health, etc. These come under the legislative competence of the state legislature (under normal circumstances).
- Concurrent List (List III) - Consisting of 52 subjects. In these, both Parliament and state legislatures can make laws, but in case of a conflict, the law made by the Union Government shall prevail. Examples include subjects pertaining to education, forests, etc.

India's system of federalism does not follow   the 'American model' (or the traditional federal models), but the 'Canadian model'. The significant difference between these two models is that the Canadian federal system includes a "very strong centre". Concisely, the features of Indian federalism resemble that of Canada and are of a "centralising tendency", i.e, a nation-state, as opposed to the American way, i.e., of an agreement amongst states of the country and "in its preference to the term Union".

A significant feature of India is its focus on cooperative federalism. Experts opine that historically, India's economic and political integrity has been based on cooperative federalism, an approach that embraces mutually 'beneficial coordination between the central and state governments in solving problems and unlocking capabilities'. An example of India's cooperative federalism is the adoption of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017, which marked an immense Centre-State alignment. The GST was introduced with the objective of augmenting the integration of the Indian economy and to potentially encourage   foreign investment. States transferred significant tax collection powers to the Centre under the GST regime in return for economic efficiencies, experts noted. Another shining example of India's cooperative federalism was reflected in its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the combined effort of all states in India in the spirit of cooperative federalism was the force that helped the country to emerge from the pandemic. Prime Minister Modi added that every state played a critical role 'according to its strength and contributed to India's fight against Covid. India emerged as an example for developing nations to look up to it as a global leader. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has time and again stressed on the importance of incorporating cooperative federalism in the governance of India.

Along with cooperative federalism, the Prime Minister has also advocated the need for competitive federalism. During his 2022 Independence Day address to the nation, he 'called for cooperative competitive federalism where states seek to outshine each other on the development front'. He added that there is a need for an environment of competition between states as well as various units of the government in order to attain new heights of development. "Programmes can be different, working style can be different, but dreams for the country cannot be different," he reminded, while referring to federalism.

The Union government formed the NITI Aayog to actualise the key objective of cooperative federalism and to enable good governance in India. It was formed via a resolution of the Union Cabinet on January 1, 2015. 'On the premise that strong states make a strong nation, NITI Aayog acts as the quintessential platform for the Government of India by bringing States together as 'Team India' to work towards the national development agenda', explains the website of NITI Aayog. In order to promote cooperative federalism through structured support initiatives and engagement with the States/UTs on a continual basis, the NITI Aayog has taken many steps. These include:

• Meetings between the Prime Minister/Cabinet Ministers and all Chief Ministers
• Sub-groups of Chief Ministers on subjects of national importance
• Sharing of best practices
• Policy support and capacity development of State/UT functionaries
• Launching of the Aspirational Districts Programme for development of backward districts
• Theme-based extensive engagements in various sectors
• Framing model laws for land leasing and agriculture marketing reforms
• Area-specific interventions for the North-Eastern and Himalayan States and island development

To promote competitive federalism, the NITI Aayog encourages healthy competition among states via transparent rankings in various sectors, along with a hand-holding approach. Some of the indices launched by the NITI Aayog include:

• State Health IndexSchool Education Quality Index
• Sustainable Development Goals Index

- Composite Water Management Index
- India Innovation Index and Export Competitiveness Index

According to experts, India's spirit of federalism is also reflected in how its Constitution specifies the distribution of revenues where exclusive powers are given to the Stateto collect taxes, and exclusive powers are also given to the Union in relation to taxes. There are three lists namely, Central, State and concurrent, where the distribution of taxes is there in various entries. The state possesses tax from the jurisdiction of the state list and the Union possesses the same from the Union List. However, the Concurrent List includes no taxes. The taxes collected both by the Centre and the States is distributed between the two. For instance, CGST (Central Goods and Services Tax) and SGST (State Goods and Services Tax) are received by the Centre and each state respectively, while IGST (Integrated Goods and Services Tax) is received by the Centre and redistributed between states. This is a precise example of cooperative federalism in the financial sphere, say experts. As a matter of fact, it is being widely perceived that by passing these four bills relating to different aspects of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), in 2017, the Lok Sabha has, perhaps for the first time, put limitations on its own powers in the interest of federalism and signed off on a pooling of sovereignty in taxation matters with states and Union territory legislatures. Additionally, the Supreme Court, in a 2022 judgment, championed the importance of "cooperative federalism" for the well-being of democracy, held that Union and state legislatures have "equal, simultaneous and unique powers" to make laws on Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the recommendations of the GST Council are not binding on them.

For services that are common to the entire country, the Indian Constitution has All-India Services like IAS (Indian Administrative Service), IPS (Indian Police Service) and IFS (Indian Forest Service). The All-India Service refers to a group of civil servants who work at the national level and are common to both the Union (i.e., the central government) and the States (i.e., the individual state governments). Under India's Constitution, special provisions have been provided to 12 states (Maharashtra, Gujarat, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Sikkim, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa and Karnataka). For instance, according to the special provision under Article 371B, the president may provide for the Constitution and functions of a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the state consisting of members elected from the tribal areas of Assam. Similarly, Article 371J grants special status to six backward districts of Hyderabad-Karnataka region. The special provision requires that a separate development board be established for these regions (similar to Maharashtra and Gujarat) and also ensures local reservation in education and government jobs.

Local Government

Panchayati Raj and Urban Local governments represent local government in India. In this, the Panchayati Raj denotes local self-governance system in rural India. This system ensures democracy at the grassroots level and, through it, ensures the development of the rural parts of the country. It has been established in all Indian states by "the Acts of the state legislatures". In India, Panchayati Raj was constitutionalised through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992. The act added Part IX to the Indian Constitution, which is titled "The Panchayats". India celebrates April 24th as National Panchayati Raj Day.

Pertinently, the 73rd Amendment Act has brought Panchayati Raj under the 'justiciable part' of the Indian Constitution. Now, neither the panchayat formation nor the regular conduct of its elections will depend on the state government's willingness to do it. They have a 'constitutional obligation' to adopt the system according to the provisions mandated by the Act. The main features of the Act include:

- A gram sabha, three tier system (i.e., panchayats at village, intermediate and district level – barring states with population not exceeding 20 lakhs, wherein they can skip the intermediate level)

- A five-year term for panchayats

- A state election commission (appointed by the governor) that conducts and supervises Panchayat elections

- The reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes in every panchayat and at all other levels, etc.

- Also, the 11th Schedule of the Act has kept many functional items under the purview of panchayats. For instance, agriculture, drinking water, rural housing, education (primary and secondary level), family welfare, etc.

According to Panchayat statistics provided in the 'Thirty First Report - Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (2022-2023)', currently there are 255,600 village-level Gram Panchayats, 6,697 block-level Panchayats and 665 district-level Panchayats in the country. The report further mentions that the total number of elected Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members is 30.45 lakh. Out of these, women representatives are 13.79 lakh (1.37 million or 45 percent).   Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while addressing the G-20 Ministerial Conference on Women Empowerment in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, acknowledged that the country's '1.4 million elected women representatives in rural local bodies have been key agents of economic, environmental and social change in India'.

Coming to a few critical schemes/projects targeting grassroots-level development in the country, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has adopted nine thematic approaches by grouping together 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to Localise Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) by 2030 in mission mode. These nine themes are: (i). Healthy Village (ii) Poverty Free and Enhanced Livelihoods Village (iii) Water Sufficient Village (iv) Clean & Green Village (v) Child-friendly Village (vi) Village with Good Governance (vii). Socially- Secured and Socially-Just Villages (viii) Village with Self-Sufficient Infrastructure and (ix) Women-friendly Village.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has revamped its principal scheme, the central government sponsored scheme of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) to reorient capacity and training of elected representatives towards LSDGs by adopting the above themes. The restructured RGSA has been approved by the government with a focus on capacity building and training, and is being implemented by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj since 2018-19. Pertinently, the RGSA also aims at enhancing capabilities of Panchayats to raise own revenue sources and provide for interventions to fill gaps in economic development and in the income enhancement of Panchayats.

Another latest scheme for strengthening socio-economic development of rural India is SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages Abadi and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas). A central government scheme under the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, SVAMITVA, was launched nation-wide by Prime Minister Modi on National Panchayati Raj Day (April 24, 2021) after the successful completion of the pilot phase of the scheme (2020-2021) in nine states. The scheme is seen as a reformative step towards facilitating clear ownership of property in rural inhabited (Abadi) areas by mapping of land parcels using drone technology and, providing 'Record of Rights' to village household owners with issuance of legal ownership cards (property cards/title deeds). This initiative is expected to unlock the value of land in inhabited areas in villages and accelerate both the construction

and financing of commercial and residential buildings through banks. The scheme would cover all villages by March 2025. The scheme is being implemented with the help of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Revenue Departments, State Panchayati Raj Departments and the Survey of India. SVAMITVA incorporates many aspects namely, reducing property-related disputes, comprehensive village-level planning, facilitating monetisation of properties and enabling bank loans. It is being viewed as a 'stepping-stone towards achieving Gram Swaraj in true sense and making rural India Atmanirbhar'.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj explains that Article 243G of Indian Constitution allows discretion to the States and not to the Central Government in the matter of devolution of powers (funds, functions and functionaries) to Panchayats. The states vary in extent to which they have devolved powers to the Panchayats to plan, monitor and implement various schemes for social justice and economic development, including those matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Therefore, the Ministry says that it is not facing any limitations/ constraints in attaining the goal of 'decentralised and participatory local self-government through PRIs'.

In a written reply to Lok Sabha (March 2023), Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj, Kapil Moreshwar Patil, informed that -- 'under (the) Fifteenth Finance Commission (XV FC), grants to the tune of Rs.60, 750 crores were allocated for the interim period FY 2020-21 and Rs.2, 36,805 crores are allocated for the period FY 2021-26 to Panchayats in all the three tiers and traditional local bodies and Sixth Schedule areas in 28 States. The XV FC grants have two components—Tied and Untied. Tied Grants are to be used for drinking water, rainwater harvesting, water recycling, sanitation and maintenance of ODF status. Untied Grants are to be used for felt needs under the 29 subjects enshrined in the XI Schedule of the Constitution of India, except for salaries and other establishment costs'. The release of the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) Scheme and the Central Finance Commission (CFC) Grants for Rural Local Bodies during the last three years as well as the current year is as under: Urban Local Government in the country denotes governance by elected representatives in India's urban regions. There are eight types of urban local government in the country, namely, municipality, Municipal Corporation, town area committee, notified area committee, township, cantonment board, special purpose agency and port trust. The 74th Amendment Act of 1992 "gave constitutional status to municipalities" and added a new Part IX-A to the Indian Constitution which is titled "The Municipalities". The Twelfth Schedule to the Constitution of India consists of as many as 18 "functional items of municipalities".

Women in Politics

Since ancient times, women in India have been given significant decision-making roles. Women were part of political committees called Sabhas and Samitis. In "Bharata Varsha", women in fact held far more superior positions than men and were called "Shakti", a feminine term meaning "power" and "strength". As society progressed, due to multiple invasions, the position of women was restricted to household activities. However, with the rise of socio-religious movements and the national movement against the Britishers, women in India started holding important political positions. For instance, there was Sarojini Naidu, who was elected as the first woman president of the Indian National Congress in 1925.

Since the rise of political consciousness, women in Indian politics have started acquiring significant roles and positions. They were participants in the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930) and the Quit India Movement (1942). Post-Independence, women were promoted in politics through various provisions of the Constitution, which

provided equal social, political and economic rights for both men and women. In the first Parliament, only three percent of women were part of it. In the 17th Lok Sabha, this percentage has increased to around 14 percent. Out of 542 members in the 17th Lok Sabha, 78 women have been elected for the first time since independence.

A study by Sadia Hussain has revealed that there has been a decrease in the gap in voter turnout between men and women, and an increase in the number of questions asked by women. These changes are a positive sign of gender inclusivity in the political sphere. However, this number is still not representative of the actual number of women in the country. Furthermore, women have raised more questions on issues like health, human resource development, finance and railways, understanding the importance of socio-economic development of the country.

At the grassroots level, womens' representation has increased since the introduction of the 73rd Amendment Act, 1993, which provided for one-third reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI). A study reported that after women's reservations were established, political participation in women rose from four to five percent to 25 to 40 percent.

Even political procedures are attempting to be gender-neutral. In 2014, the Rules of Procedure of the Lok Sabha were amended to refer to the Lok Sabha Committee Heads as Chairperson, not Chairmen, in all documents. This initiative proves that amendments are taking place to make them inclusive of all genders. India is also a signatory to the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Both conventions obligate India and other signatory nations to introduce measures that allow the participation of women in government and politics and eliminate any discrimination against them. Former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi has said that with the increase in voter turnout of women, it is now important to focus on getting women elected to legislative positions and to participate in the decision-making of political parties. Therefore, the passing the Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, also known as the Women's Reservation Bill, to provide one-third reservation for women in the Parliament and State Assemblies is a step in the right direction.

For more information, please refer to the following links

Sadia Hussain, 'Performance of Women in Parliament: A Quantitative Study of Questions by Women Members in Lok Sabha (1999-2019), https://www.shethepeople.tv/news/meet-indias-first-woman-sarpanch-with-an-mba-chhavi-rajawat/

Human Rights

As the world's largest democracy, with a pluralistic, multicultural, multilingual, multi-religious and multi-ethnic society, India places a premium on democratic values enshrined in its rights-oriented Constitution. Human Rights are an integral part of India's constitutional framework, protected by secular and democratic institutions, with an independent judiciary and effective national-level mechanisms. India's Constitution places emphasis on Fundamental Rights that guarantee basic human rights to all of its citizens irrespective of religion, class, creed, sex, or place of birth. With a wide range of national and state-level human rights commissions, a free press and an active civil society, India continues to promote the enjoyment of civil political rights and socio-economic development. The Constitution gives socially conscious individuals and organisations the right to seek judicial review of administrative and executive actions through Public Interest Litigations (PILs) in the Supreme Court and the High Courts of India through a consultative mechanism.

Historically, human rights and dignity have been enshrined in India's civilisational heritage, stretching with unbroken continuity from the Indus Valley Civilisation to the modern version. Human Rights are the cornerstone of India's dharmic and philosophical traditions that facilitate unity in diversity since time immemorial. India's ancient approach to human rights is 'dharma'-based, meaning duty towards family, society, nation and the world at large, leading to the existence of a universal legal order. In Indian tradition, the individual and the nation form a spiritual whole that collectively works towards securing basic human rights and dignity.

Since independence, India has prioritised the eradication of poverty, promotion of liberty and the protection of human rights, especially for people from marginalised sections of society who are most vulnerable to violation of their human rights. As a result, India has been able to pull nearly 415 million people out of multi-dimensional forms of poverty in recent years. India's vision of promoting human rights for all is deeply socio-economic and development-oriented, and aimed at increasing GDP, creating jobs, ensuring access to healthcare, adequate housing and a minimum standard of sanitation and water for all. The country is developing resilient infrastructure and reducing the ill effects of disruption emanating from pandemics, and climate change. India's efforts to promote the human rights of its people mirror the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

Religion and Culture

Soft Power

Joseph Nye coined the term 'soft power' in 1990 as an analytical tool that can help measure a country's ability to influence apart from the use of coercion or compensation. India had been using soft power diplomacy even before Nye's concept of soft power was announced to the world. In the Indian context, an exercise in soft power has been present in its policies since independence, In fact it can be traced back to Mauryan Emperor Asoka, who can be called the embodiment of what Nye termed as "smart power", i.e., he gave up war, but never gave up his army, which acted as a deterrent. On the other hand, Emperor Asoka's "Dharma-Sravana", or "Proclamations on Morality", as found in his edicts, or in post-independent India's foreign policies, are also important because it highlights India's stand on working for and sustaining the higher principle. Further, Ancient Indian ideas retain their salience and relevance in contemporary times.

In this context, the concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", with its underlying philosophy of oneness, is relevant and effective in alleviating global conflicts in present times. This aphorism clearly brings out the fact that "we all are linked together, our destinies are linked together". Over the years, India has transformed its soft power into a concrete state policy through its glorious history, culture, political values, civilisational uniqueness and foreign policy. As a democracy, India has maintained unity in diversity, strengthening the concept of a federal, plural and secular state, and leveraging its soft power potential. It has been upholding the value and political utility of its democracy in its foreign relations, especially while dealing with other countries. Indian cuisine, Bollywood cinema, Indian art and literature, as well as Indian spirituality, from yoga to alternative lifestyles, have a global presence today. However, India's soft power is much more than the oft cited "Yoga, Bollywood, Ayurveda and Cuisine". As a land whose people have reflected on the deepest philosophical questions, India has something profound to say on every aspect of life.

In 2014, the Narendra Modi government started using soft power as the main instrument in its foreign policy. Under Prime Minister Modi, India has been using this potential to enhance its reputation abroad. In 2015, on completing a year in office, Prime Minister Modi declared the "Panchamrit", or five pillars of his foreign policy as: Samriddhi (economic prosperity), Suraksha (national security), Samman (dignity and honour of India and Indians), Samvad (greater engagement) and Sanskriti evam Sabhyata (cultural and civilisational linkages). There have been various policies that disseminate the idea of soft power from "Neighbourhood First" policy, the "Act East" policy

and the "Connect Central Asia" policy, among others. The Government of India had initiated the campaign for national brands such as Made in India, Swachh Bharath Abhiyan and Incredible India to promote the country's image globally. There have been several initiatives, such as forming a public diplomacy division under the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the activities of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, or ICCR, an the autonomous organisation under the MEA, which has put in place a formidable infrastructure to project soft power. The Indian diaspora has also emerged as a soft power instrument, influencing and enriching India's relationship with their host countries. The diaspora has also served as India's cultural ambassadors, promoting her pluralism and diversity, spiritualism, civilisational ethos, etc., across the world. Further, in the background of the Covid-19 pandemic, India has been at the forefront of providing vaccines and utilising health diplomacy to reach out to the world. Indeed, India has made soft power an effective tool in its foreign policy.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam - "Earth as One Family"

"In the ancient books written thousands of years ago in Sanskrit, Indian philosophers have said: "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam". It means "the whole world is one family". In essence, we all have been joined with each other like a family and our destiny links us with a common thread. Today, this concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is even more relevant in bridging the gaps and distances." ~ Shri. Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India

India's leaders, from Jawaharlal Nehru to Narendra Modi, have frequently quoted "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" in multiple contexts. Rajiv Gandhi, for instance, used Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam to refute the notion of the first, second and third worlds, and embraced the concept of "One World," and advanced the idea of an "Earth Citizen" in 1989. Atal Bihari Vajpayee used it in 2002 to claim that, "India's understanding and promotion of human rights are as universal as they are ancient," at an Asia Pacific Forum meeting on national human rights institutions. Dr. Manmohan Singh used the phrase in 2007 to convey India's stance on global warming and climate change. Meanwhile, current Prime Minister Narendra Modi has used the phrase more frequently, even to highlight the world body's inability to combat cross-border terrorism.

In his Book 'The India Way", India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar mentions something that calls for an intellectual attention, which is in the following way "...unlike in many other powers, that sense of nationalism does not translate into an 'us versus the world' mentality. He goes on to say that despite the immeasurable damage done by the West, Indian nationalism, or India's self-identity, is not driven by an anti-Western sentiment, or a sense of victimhood.   Jaishankar identifies this as a distinguishable feature from the China of the 1950s, or the Japan of the 1930s. This observation requires intellectual attention on multiple grounds, i.e., to think why India didn't fall into the hands of any stream of ideologies that were getting popular in the last two centuries, which essentially functioned on victimhood, or an 'Us versus Them' mentality. Even in times of misery and of unjust rule by the British, Indians resonated more with nationalist thought leaders who had a 'Universalist Outlook', whether it was Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, or Subramanya Bharathi. Arguably, this position has helped India to retain its originality and preserve its civilisational character to the best, and the thought and practice of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam could be credited for the same. Even though Indians keep diverse identities locally, simultaneously they have retained a universal outlook and such identities have never conflicted with one another. In the words of Jaishankar "... there is a tradition of reconciling nationalism with global engagement."

In a world where conflicts over identities, memories and ideologies are burdening the earth increasingly, India's way forward to strengthen ties among our people and harmony with mother earth is through the wisdom of

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. In that context, India has adopted the same theme for her G20 presidency. Envisioning the earth as one family is an Indian thought and practice prevalent even today. The major reference to the phrase Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is found in the ancient Indian text called Mahā Upaniṣad. The concept could be found in many other texts in many different ways, for which the ancient Tamil Saṅgam literature called Puṟanāṉūṟu also stands as an example. The Mahā Upaniṣad reference reads as follows;

Ayaṃ nijaḥ paro veti gaṇanā laghucetasām | udāracaritānāṃ tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam ||

(Mahopaniṣad 6.71-75)

It is often translated as:

"The narrow-minded like to ask, 'Is this person one of us, or is he a stranger?' But to those of noble character the whole world is one family."

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is not a call for a utopian tomorrow; rather, it is a concept that reminds us about the essential nature of the existing universe. It reminds us about the interdependency of all species on the earth to one another, as well as bringing into our consciousness that the 'other' is nothing but an extension of the self. Just as in India, Sṛṣṭi (Self-creation) is not considered as an act of creating an 'other', rather, it is an extension of the Brahman itself. In such a consciousness, to experience our real nature, we seek for self-knowledge, and through knowledge, harmony. When our approach to solve problems among humans, nations and with nature moves in that direction, our discussions would tend to be issue (knowledge) based and less of identity (ego) based. It is not to blur or wash away all identities, rather, to say that identities do have a harmless place when they are organically formed and bask in a sense of seeking self-knowledge (Ātma Jñāna). Ideally, the theme of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam should offer the world room for such quality discussions and dialogues, if not to promise a utopia like many other 'Universalisms'.

Suggested Readings

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: Relevance of India's Ancient Thinking to Contemporary Strategic Reality. India: Aryan Books International, 2020.

Aurobindo, Sri. The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination. India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997.

Jaishankar, Subrahmanyam. The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World. India: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2020.

Unity in Diversity in India

The concept of unity in diversity is a characteristic feature of Indian society. Sociologically, diversity means collective differences. Therefore, diversity means variety. Unity means integration, a social psychological condition that binds diverse groups with one another. It connotes a sense of one-ness. One must understand the difference between unity and uniformity, where uniformity means similarity; unity does not.

There are various forms of diversity in India. First is "Varna" and "Jati" diversity. Varna refers to the four-fold division of Hindu society based on functional criterion, i.e., Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Jati refers

to a hereditary endogamous status group practicing a specific traditional occupation and, there are more than 3,000 Jatis in India. Also, this practice of the caste system is prevalent across religions, i.e. Hindus, Muslims and Christians. The second is linguistic diversity. The Constitution of India has recognised 22 official languages. Though officially, there are 122 languages, the Peoples Linguistic Survey of India has identified 780 languages.

Third is religious diversity. There are six major religions -- Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism. The religious diversity also includes thousands of sects and cults within each religion. And finally, is tribal diversity. India has the second-largest tribal population in the world. As per the Census 2011, the tribal population constitutes about 8.9 per cent of India's total population. Tribal people throughout the country have rich traditions, cultures and heritage, unique lifestyles and customs. Then there are other kinds of diversities, such as settlement systems, kinship systems and regional diversity.

To unite these differences, there are bonds of unity. First is the geographical unity marked by the Himalayas in the North and the Indian Ocean in the South? Politically, India is now a sovereign state. There is one Constitution, a parliament and a judiciary that governs every part of India. There are 29 states, with more than 750 districts. The norms of democracy, secularism and socialism have their bases in ancient India, such as the concepts of Bharatvarsha, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Chakravarti.

Another source of unity in India is the network of shrines and sacred places spread throughout the country. The age-old pilgrimage culture has helped people move to various parts of the country and create a sense of geo-cultural unity. Finally, the tradition of accommodation and interdependence unites the people of the country. Despite having a Hindu majority, it can be best described as a federation of faiths. There are also mechanisms for the coexistence of different faiths. Hindus and Muslims have participated in each other's functions, festivities and feasts. Similarly, we find the blending of Hindu and Muslim styles in the field of art and architecture.

The tradition of interdependence has been prevalent since ancient times in the form of the Jajmani System, i.e., a mechanism of functional interdependence of castes. Post-Independence, India opted for a composite cultural model of national unity, rather than a uniform cultural model. However, one must not take this unity for granted. There are challenges to this unity in the form of caste riots, communal riots, or even secessionist movements. Nevertheless, the bonds of unity have been stronger than the forces of disintegration. There are societal discords or even secessionist movements, but the Constitution of India provides us a framework for handling these differences.

Hinduism – Dharma or Religion?

The inadequacy of the theoretical framework of religion for the Indian context is recognised by many scholars today in academia and outside. It is argued that the use of religion makes sense only within a western framework, based on Biblical themes. However, this framework has been used by academia and media to understand; represent and teach about Hinduism for centuries, which in turn, has created many misconceptions about Hinduism, even among Indians. But with the rise of India as an independent global voice, coupled by the increasing demand in the modern world to experience time-tested Indian traditional wisdom, there is a contemporary need to rethink on 'religion' in India. On the one hand, when India tries to rethink religion and narrate how it is different from 'religion(s)', there is an argument that says that its decentralised biocultural formations, diversity, absence of a central authority, or a clergy, non-proselytising nature, etc., that could/should be seen as positive qualities, are in turn often articulated

to negate its existence. One should be mindful and fascinated to take note of popular statements like "Hinduism is not a religion", which is used in a polemical sense to reduce the Hindu as a fake identity, or merely as a colonial construct. The same statement is often used constructively to rethink religion in India by people, who wish to understand and talk about Hindu Dharma in its own terms.

It is clear that the word 'religion' in the sense that it is being used in the secular global discourse distorts the traditions of Indian origin, or even traditions that are characterised as 'indigenous'. The term religion, in its secular use, embodies certain principles, which are Judeo-Christian cultural constructs. It implies that each religion holds a 'final truth'; is 'exclusive' and hence, it is separative from any other group, or its own past affiliations. This is why a Muslim cannot be a Christian/Jew at the same time, or vice versa. But in the case of Indian traditions, though there are specific identities, drawing a mosaic distinction between traditions like Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists isn't possible. However, we must be aware of post-19th century tendencies that have led to forming concrete religious boundaries among these traditions of Dharma that have created conflicts among them, which on one hand have not succeeded enough because of the inherent nature of these traditions.

The traditions of Dharma are not exclusive, falsify gods and paths, or do not have a revolutionary formation in its history. This is different from the case of monotheism, where they are 'secondary religions' that have been revolutionised from a preceding tradition, or religion, and have a concrete historical beginning and founder, holding a historical truth claim. With a reservation of oversimplification, one may classify Hinduism as a 'primary religion' not, because it is the ancient most living one, but because it is 'timeless' and doesn't have a historical beginning, or a 'founder'. The traditions of Dharma are not formed out of a revolutionary act from a preceding religion. Swami Vivekananda and other Gurus of contemporary Hinduism have identified this ahistorical or timeless character of Hinduism to be the foundation for its universality. This universality is all about the aspect of reality, which is 'eternal' or 'sanatana', and Dharma is in tuning towards that which is changeless, or constant in this world. It is very much 'this wordly' tradition that could be experienced right here and is not other-worldly, or afterlife promise, or judgement. In Hinduism, the Gods are indivisible from creation. Here, God doesn't 'create' and run the world sitting up from heaven in a pre-destined way. Rather, its gods and deities living along with human beings and interact with them in nature, in this world. In simple words, Hinduism does not carry a 'theology', or any philosophy or concept that is devoid of its practice and experiential realm.

While saying Hindu Dharma is not a religion, is not exclusive, does not have commandments nor falsifies others, it does not mean that Hinduism is casual, free for all, or merely a 'way of life' as it is fashionable to say. There are indeed specific sets of actions an individual is expected to do to call themselves a Hindu. These actions are not uniform for all, rather, it is diverse and based on traditions, the community into which one is born and the various responsibilities they take up in the walks of life. These deeds also take the form of a set of rituals and practices that Hindus follow on a daily basis and are essential for one's inner purification. The Hindu Cosmos is based on the fulfilment of duties and responsibilities as individuals and groups. These are the collective responsibilities we have towards nature, culture and ancestors who we are indebted to. This way, though Hinduism is known to be a non-proselytising religion, the conversion to Hinduism would mean the initiation to discovering one's duty to attain self-realisation.

This way, the Hindu Dharma becomes indivisible from the daily actions of our lives. In fact, it is through performing roles and actions that we attain the four pillars of human pursuit (Purusharthas) – Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Hinduism, in philosophy and practice, tries to address the fundamental questions that the

human mind often asks, "Who am I?", "What ought I do?", "On what basis can I discriminate between right and wrong?" and "How can I be happy?" Srimad Bhagavad Gita is one of the major Hindu scriptures that addresses these subtle questions, which are to be initiated and learned from a Guru.

India's Living Heritage: Taking the Heritage Project beyond Conservation

The popular imagination of 'modernity', especially in its Western form, is driven by the idea of 'breaking away from the past'. As though the future, or progress, is all about constantly destroying old structures with an endless craving for the new. But in just a century or so, this idea of a utopian future is replaced by a future that is perceived for sustainability, where 'break from the past' is replaced by a 'care for the past'. Since then, the word 'sustainability' has taken over the privilege that the word 'progress' used to enjoy. Though the term sustainability is more commonly spoken of in the context of ecological crises and development, it has also paved the way for a demand to protect cultural heritage, memory and identity of the past.

Initially, the topic of heritage hardly attracted intellectual interest, so much so, that a term 'heritage industry' was coined in the polemical sense, claiming that the whole idea of heritage is merely manufactured by nation-states to promote their tourism industries, and for the sake of identity politics promote national symbols. While not negating this criticism completely, it must be noted that reducing 'heritage' merely to such categories often comes from voices that dream of building a future by 'breaking away' from the past. However, this criticism on the 'heritage industry' became gradually irrelevant after the frequent attacks on Western and Eastern heritage sites by Islamic State (IS) forces. The IS troops also run for the dream of creating a utopian future by flushing out the symbols of the past. Each totalitarian regime is fostered by such attempts of purification, to begin a new regime from the Tabula Rasa by destroying all remains of the past. During the period of the Protestant Reformation, in the Western world there were acts like iconoclasm, which were seen as purifying acts. The recent attacks on ancient heritage sites across the world can only be seen as a new version of age-old vandalism.

The Western veneration for antiquities and heritage was a secular project that became popular after a phase that had led to their mass destruction. The value of these heritage sites are recognised and are held with great regard after the extinction of such cultures in the Western world. It has now become a part of universities, where scholars working on them, hold the position of priests. A sense of holiness and veneration is paid for the site of ruins, museums and historic relics, which are handled carefully. To the eyes of Islamic States, both the heritage held by the modern West and Eastern world may stand alike. However, when it comes to countries like India, you are dealing with a lively heritage rather than a dead past.

In India, the so-called past is not a frozen object; rather, it is lively and acts as a normative reference point available for us to re-learn it in our present context and inherit it in the future. The number of ancient temples, rituals, idols and medieval sites are not mere archaeological sites/objects, relics or archive materials; rather, they are sites and materials alive and practiced, or experienced today. Hence, even if there is a heritage site that was destroyed in the past, or in the present, there is a civilisational commitment for a living tradition like India; for its reconstruction and continuity to keep it alive rather than dead to move into becoming a product of the past. Something can only be a 'historical product' to be shelved in a museum when the last witness to it has gone away and there is no one left to have a say in the way it is interpreted or understood. As a provocative statement goes, "a historical witness is the natural enemy of the historians" could be understood better as we discuss this. This way, India's living ancients, are seen as a threat to many 'modern' historians.

Like anywhere else, heritage sites attract many visitors to India as tourists and pilgrims. This is true not only for the sites and intangible heritage listed by UNESCO, but also for many other age-old sites and heritage practices (smaller or larger) in every part of India as India is a civilisational state. Since they attract a lot of visitors, they are also targets of violence, which could be traumatic and create a break in the tradition, which in turn could become a wound in a civilisation like India. Especially in the age of terrorism, these sites could turn into sites of agony and dismay.

Therefore, it is necessary for living traditions like India to vouch for a policy of 'reconstruction', rather than merely pursuing a policy of 'conservation' when it relates to cultural heritage. The purpose of institutions like UNESCO cannot be merely restricted to protecting our past ruins; rather, it should strive for facilitating a paradigm shift in global approaches towards cultural heritage to make it more lively and glorious, and avoid looking at it with antiquarian interest. Taking India as a major example of being an ancient and yet a continuous (or living) civilisation, the world should take steps to 'reconstruct' their own indigenous ancient sites to being live based on the basis of their experiential knowledge. Rather than limiting global heritage projects to conservation and identity politics, it must be concerned about the rejuvenation of knowledge traditions, thereby finding solutions to many of today's contemporary problems.

Suggested Readings:

Chapter titled Futures of the Past: Mnemocultures and the Question of Inheritance in Rao, D. Venkat. Cultures of Memory in South Asia: Orality, Literacy and the Problem of Inheritance. India: Springer India, 2014.

Indian Philosophy and Culture

Indian philosophy and culture have a rich and diverse history spanning several millennia. The foundations of both can be traced back to the ancient Vedic texts, to around 1500 BCE. These texts form the basis of Hinduism, also denoted as a religion on the one hand and as a way of life on the other. Philosophically, it includes various schools of thought like Vedanta, Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, and Mimamsa. These schools of thought deal with many topics, such as interpretation, aesthetics, metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. Each of these schools has contributed significantly to developing Indian philosophy and culture. While stressing the importance of living a mind-ful life and advocating non-violence and other peaceful practices, these ancient practices in Indian philosophy and culture are still relevant today. For instance, the deep seated values of harmony, peace, interconnectedness and respect for all that make up Indian culture, are just as relevant today as they were in the past.

Ancient Indian philosophy has contributed significantly to the development of modern science, mathematics and technology, besides profoundly influencing the development of modern spiritual and religious thoughts. Indian philosophy has also had a significant impact in the development of modern art, literature and music in the world. Core Indian philosophies such as yoga, meditation and mindfulness have been increasingly embraced by people from all walks of life, including therapists and medical practitioners, who incorporate them into their treatment regimens. Besides, ancient Indian religion and philosophy also recognises the relationship between humans and nature, and emphasizes that humans must care for the environment. This recognition led to practices such as the Jain community's idea of non-violence that enabled the development of sustainable agriculture. Indian philosophy thus, has played a major role in promoting a sustainable environment. Such concepts and practices continue to shape contemporary conservation and environmental protection efforts.

In an ever-changing world, Indian values and beliefs remind us of the importance of connection and compassion. Its emphasis on the interconnected approach to life is helping us to establish a connection with our inner selves and guides us towards living a more balanced and conscientious lives. Additionally, aspects of Indian philosophy such as the belief in karma and reincarnation are becoming increasingly popular due to their ability to explain life's complexities in a simple and elegant manner. The concept of karma in Indian philosophy is the idea that one's actions in the present will have consequences in the future. Another important concept is Dharma is that it deliberates on the idea of duty or righteousness and refers to moral and ethical principles that guide human behavior. Moreover, Indian culture is also increasingly relevant due to its emphasis on celebrating diversity, understanding multiple perspectives and being kind and respectful to one another. Overall, Indian philosophy and culture are known for their diversity and coexistence, at both the internal and external level. In short, it has universally always promoted peace and coexistence.

India's Historical Trade Networks and Maritime Linkages

The relevance of the Indo-Pacific to global GDP and maritime trade is demonstrated in a gradual shift of the world's economic center towards the Indo-Pacific region. According to the Asian Economic Integration Report (AEIR), a study released by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in February 2022, wherein it was revealed that trade between economies in the Indo-Pacific rose to its highest level in three decades.

Trade among the Indo-Pacific economies rose to 29.6 percent in the first three quarters of 2021, compared to a worldwide trade growth of 27.8 percent. Following a 3.1 percent contraction in 2020, regional trade increased by 31.2 percent in the same period. In 2020, intra-regional commerce accounted for 58.5 percent of total trade, the highest since 1990.

A significant step with regard to trade integration in the Indo-Pacific region occurred in May 2022, during the QUAD summit in Tokyo, when the United States announced the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). The IPEF would be led by the US with 12 Asian countries, including India, Australia, Japan and South Korea, but excludes China. Taiwan has shown interest in joining the IPEF, but it has been left out so far in order to secure the participation of other countries that do not want to alienate China.

When India withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) two years ago, the action was criticised as a protectionist move. India, however, signalled its readiness to join the IPEF along with countries from East and Southeast Asia to build an inclusive and flexible framework. The creation of the IPEF provides India with an opportunity to raise its profile in the region, reshape the Indo-Pacific in its favour and maybe lead to stronger ties with the US. According to India's External Affairs Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, "Countries in the [Indo-Pacific] area can overcome geography and rewrite history if they get (their) policies and economics right".

Many believe that China's growing influence is a major factor in India's decision to revitalise its activities in the Indo-Pacific region. Historically, India has played a significant role in the region because of its strategic location between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The Indonesian Islands were known as "Suvarna-Dvipa," or the "Islands of Gold". Ancient India traded with "Suvarna-Dvipa", "Suvarnabhumi," (the Land of Gold, now identified as Malaysia) and the other countries located in the eastern Indian Ocean region, including Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. On the eastern seaboard, the ancient sea ports like Tamaralipti, Mahabalipuram (Tamluk), Palura near Gopalpur, and

Broach, Debal and Orhet were well connected, forming a robust trade network. Southeast Asian nations adopted Hinduism and Buddhism swiftly and thoroughly in this fashion, and their impacts are still visible.

Despite the fact that it has now emerged as one of its most important pillars, India initially had challenges defining its place and significance in the Indo-Pacific regional architecture. But through Prime Minister Modi's address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018, India eventually identified its role and presented its own vision. In order for India to maintain its position going forward, she must consider the Indo-Pacific as a key region to assert its position in a changing security environment.

Indian Media

Indian media consists of different types of communications, like television, radio, cinema, newspapers, magazines and Internet-based websites/portals. Indian media was active as early as the late 18th century, with print media having a start in 1780. Radio broadcasting was initiated in 1927 and the screening of the Auguste and Louis Lumière moving pictures in Bombay was initiated in July 1895. It is among the oldest and largest media in the world. Media in India has essentially been free and independent throughout most of its history, even before the establishment of the Mauryan Empire under Ashoka the Great, on the foundation of righteousness, openness, morality and spirituality. The period of Emergency (1975–1977), declared by former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi was a time when India's media faced government retribution.

There were 833 million Internet users by July 2022, comprising 59 percent of the population (Internetworldstats. com). This is the second largest number of internet users in the world after China. Facebook is the leading social network, with around 515 million users by 2022. Twitter is used by celebrities, journalists and politicians, some of whom have a mass following. There are around 197 million homes, many of them using direct-to-home satellite and cable services. Nearly 900 private satellite TV stations are on air; around half of them are devoted to news coverage. Doordarshan, the public broadcaster, operates multiple services, including flagship DD1, which reaches out to millions of viewers. Music-based FM radio stations abound. However, only All India Radio (AIR) can produce news programming. AIR stations reach over 99 percent of the population. The Indian press is lively with around 17,000 newspaper titles. Driven by a growing middle class, the cumulative newspaper circulation figure is over 400 million.

Key Drivers of India's Foreign Policy

Strategic Autonomy and Multi-Alignment

India's civilisational principles are deeply embedded in the country's political and moral foundations, including its strict adherence to democracy; rule of law; secularism and tolerance. These values have served as the core of India's foreign policy orientation in the post-independence period. As a global leader in the fight against colonialism, its foreign policy was driven by anti-imperialism, non-aggression, non-expansionism and non-alignment in the light of the superpower rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. India's principle of autonomy has helped it to balance its strategic interests and provide impetus for its economic growth. In recent years, there is a gradual shift in India's foreign policy from traditional non-alignment towards multi-alignment by building more realistic partnerships in multiple sectors with key states. India, as an emerging power, aspires to influence global dynamics by using forums to expand its growing leverage. India's engagements in groupings like BRICS, G20, SCO, the Indo-Pacific centric QUAD, the West Asia centric QUAD, etc. Indian diplomacy is seeking better access to technology and markets; stronger protection; reliable and resilient supply chains. Our foreign policy priorities have been harnessed to improve the ease of doing business, introduce and promote production-linked incentives, develop digital infrastructure, and ensure health, pension and social benefits, etc.

Engaging Indian Diaspora Abroad

The Indian government established the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) in 2004 to ensure the well-being of Indians and preserve the connectivity of the diaspora community with the homeland. The government has set up institutional mechanisms such as the Overseas Workers Resource Centre (OWRC) to provide emigration-related information; register, respond and monitor complaints, and facilitate grievance redressal of the emigrant community. The government has signed MOUs with Gulf States to ensure the welfare of Indian labourers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indian government repatriated hundreds of citizens under its Vande Bharat Mission.

India is also keen to engage with Indian Diaspora to provide economic and investment opportunities. India's diaspora engagement policy is based on the cornerstone of 4Cs, i.e., Care, Connect, Celebrate and Contribute. Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is celebrated on 9 January every year since 2003 to commemorate the return of Mahatma Gandhi from South Africa on January 9, 1915. During the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas held in January 2021, the theme

was "Contributing to Atmanirbhar Bharat". The event focussed on the role of the diaspora in "Atmanirbhar Bharat"; facing post-COVID-19 challenges – scenario in health, economy, social and international relations. The forum has emerged as an effective medium to exchange ideas and utilise the intellectual and economic prowess of the diaspora community for India's progress. The next Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was held in Indore in 2023 on the theme, "Diaspora: Reliable Partners for India's Progress in Amrit Kaal".

India's Development Partnerships

India's Development Partnership is primarily driven by its Independence struggle and is human centric in its approach. It is a manifestation of the idea 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', that means that "the world is one family". Mahatma Gandhi believed that the duty of a human being is not just towards one's nation, but towards all humanity. The Development Partnership Initiative was built in that same spirit. It is an initiative to encourage South-South cooperation efforts in development and humanitarian needs.

The general principles of India's Development Partnerships coincide with the targets set by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Some of these are:

1. The development partnership should meet the requirements, development goals and aspirations of the recipient country, as well as that of the home country.
2. The projects undertaken should be based on mutual consultation.
3. The oversight and management of the project taken up should be done jointly between the involved parties.
4. Mention clear timelines for starting and completing the project.
5. Share knowledge with interested parties and provide assistance to the best of their capabilities when approached.

The development package allocated is a sizable USD 40 billion since 2007. India's Development Partnership gives Grants in Aid of about a billion USD and extends Lines of Credit of about USD 4 million per year. India provides developmental assistance to developing nations in the Global South with the help of three instruments, that is, Grant Assistance and Aid, Line of Credit and Capacity Building and Technical Assistance.

Line of Credit: Concessional Lines of Credit has been extended to 64 countries, which is expected to be expanded to 75 countries soon. The repayment terms are largely affordable. The projects are taken up in critical infrastructure sectors like transportation connectivity, power generation, agriculture, manufacturing industry, etc. Around 650 projects have been taken up in these 64 countries, out of which 300 have already been completed.

A lot of these projects have been taken up in the immediate neighbourhood, especially in Bhutan and Bangladesh, but some iconic projects have also been completed in African countries, like the power projects in Sudan and Rwanda that play an important role in their entire power supply grids. Many of first of their kind manufacturing industries of essential products like cement, oil, milk and sugar have also been established in several African countries

Grants in Aid: Projects worth USD 4 billion have also been taken up and completed in the immediate neighbourhood and beyond in infrastructure, hydroelectricity, power transmission, agriculture, etc.

During the Covid 19 pandemic, under the Grants in aid projects, vaccines were sent out to countries as far in Latin America. Out of the 36 million doses that India provided, 20 percent were exclusively in the Grants in Aid strata. About 150 countries received medicine packages as Grants in Aid from India when the pandemic began.

Capacity building and technical assistance: Military training, deputation of experts, training of civilians, vocational training institutes and the like come under this instrument. The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme is the flagship programme and under it, about 12,000 civilians and 2,000 defence personnel in 160 countries are trained.

Scholarships under this program are extended to about 100 premier institutes in India for 350 courses. The solar energy and rural development project of Solar Mamas in Latin America was widely appreciated and is seen to be extremely effective. Rapid response teams were also sent to the Maldives, Kuwait, Mauritius and the Comoros to help control the spread of virus and to train health-line workers.

Apart from the three instruments mentioned, culture and heritage cooperation projects have also become a strong soft power tool. For example, IIT Madras in Angkor Wat (Cambodia) helped preserve the civilisational ties of India with South East Asia through restoration projects.

For more information, please refer to the following websites

MEA/Development partnerships: https://meacms.mea.gov.in/development-partnership.htm

The Global Goals for Sustainable Development: https://www.globalgoals.org/17-partnerships-for-the-goals

Reformed Multilateralism

India strongly advocates reform of multilateral institutions that have been built around the core of the United Nations. While a case for reform of the UN has been made by India and other countries for long, the most recent impetus for it came from Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2020 during the UN General Assembly (UNGA) session to commemorate 75 years of the formation of the United Nations. Prime Minister Modi said that the world needs "reformed multilateralism that reflects today's realities, gives voice to all stakeholders, addresses contemporary challenges and focuses on human welfare." His emphasis was on the reform of responses, processes and character of the United Nations.

In his speech, he also highlighted the inadequacy of the UN Security Council (UNSC) in mitigating wars, civil and other, and terrorist attacks. This, he said, was not only affecting peace and security, but also the development initiatives of countries, and therefore, the UNSC needed to be reformed to include more members to address complex contemporary issues.

Elaborating on the idea, External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, in the General Debate of the 77th General Assembly in September 2022, referred to the five pledges India has undertaken to fulfil; one among them was the pledge to overcome colonial mindsets, the external manifestation of which would be in realising "reformed multilateralism" and more contemporary global governance.

In December 2022, as part of its ongoing term as member of the Security Council, India hosted a signature event on reformed multilateralism, where it emphasised a new orientation that envisaged reform of all three pillars of the current multilateral architecture- peace and security, development and human rights.

India has been at the forefront of the debate on reform of multilateral institutions. On the subject of UNSC reform, India has adopted the stance that the Security Council needs to be enlarged to reflect contemporary power structure and realities. It has also supported comprehensive reform of the veto power, making the functioning of (not clear about this word?) development, India calls for a need to reinvigorate the means of providing technology and finance for achieving Agenda 2030. On human rights, India has argued for reform and empowerment of the Human Rights Council.

Multi-polarity

Multi-polarity means the presence of multiple powers of significance in the international system, as against unipolarity or bipolarity. India views the contemporary world order not only as being multipolar, but becoming increasingly so. As the Minister of External Affairs, during a visit to the UAE in September 2022, stated, "I think the economics of the world, the politics of the world and the demographic of the world is making the world more multipolar." India thus regards multi-polarity as a contemporary reality.

In addition, multi-polarity is an aspirational goal for India. Therefore, India has committed itself to the maintenance of a multipolar world and is constantly striving towards realising it. It is in this context that India has supported the rise of Africa to its true potential and emerge as an important pole in the global order.

India is also looked upon to play a critical role in the creation of a multipolar world order. On the eve of his visit to India in October 2022, the UN Secretary General said, "...I think India has a key role to play in the build-up of this multipolar world and my main message to the Indian leadership is exactly to assume India's role, helping to create this multipolar world, a world based on the values of the UN Charter, a world in which peace, justice, equality will be possible to make a reality..." India has often also been referred to as a pole in the current international system.

Therefore, India's foreign policy has been shaped in a manner to promote the furtherance of a multipolar world. First, India has evolved from being non-aligned to a more avowedly multi-aligned nation today than it was ever before. It has forged strategic partnerships with over thirty countries of the world. Second, India has become a member of new mini-lateral, or pluri-lateral forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) , the Russia-India-China Trilateral, etc., which it regards as symbols of the multipolar world. Finally, India is supporting the rise of countries of the Global South, especially Africa, as resilient poles in the international order.

'SAGAR' -Security and Growth for All in the Region

'SAGAR', or the Security and Growth for All in the Region, represents India's vision for maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The term was first used by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 12, 2015, in a speech delivered in Port Louis, Maldives. He outlined that the goal of IOR nations should be to "seek a climate of trust and transparency; respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries; sensitivity to each other's interests; peaceful resolution of maritime issues and increase in maritime cooperation." Since then, the idea of SAGAR has been used in various government platforms to provide a blueprint for India's approach towards the Indian Ocean Region and the Indo-Pacific Region at large.

The "Blue Economy" is critical to India's economic growth. India possesses a 7517-km-long coastline with nine coastal states and 1382 islands. Over two million square kilometres of India's Exclusive Economic Zone are rich in

living and non-living resources, with significant recoverable crude oil and natural gas resources. Ninety five percent of India's trade, measured in volume, transits the sea and the nation has 187 minor ports that handle about 1400 million tonnes of cargo annually. Maritime has become a focal point of Indian foreign policy in recent years. Hence, the vision of SAGAR underlines India's aspiration to work for a secure Indian Ocean that would strengthen "Blue Economy" collaborations with its maritime neighbours.

In congruence with the idea of "Security and Growth for All in the Region", Mission Sagar was launched by the Indian government in May 2020 as an initiative to assist countries along the Indian Ocean Littorals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Indian Navy deployed ships to 15 friendly foreign countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Indonesia, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Sudan, South Sudan, Thailand and Vietnam) as part of this mission. These deployments lasted 215 days at sea and delivered more than 3,000 MT of food aid, 300 MT of liquid medical oxygen, 900 oxygen concentrators and 20 ISO containers. During these missions, Indian Naval ships travelled nearly 40,000 nautical miles.

The Indian Navy has also engaged in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) activities in the IOR. Under this initiative, almost 3,500 people received rescue, medical attention and relief from Indian Navy ships in the Mozambican city of Beira following Cyclone IDAI. Another Indian Naval ship, INS MAGAR, delivered 250 MT of rice and 500 kg of epidemic medications for the affected population at Beira in April 2019. In December 2021, the INS Kesari sent 500 MT of food supplies to Mozambique.

The vision of SAGAR concords with India's increasing engagement in maritime domain awareness through policies such as the Act East Policy, Project Mausam, Project Sagarmala and the Blue Economy Policy. As the IOR tackles the challenge of natural disasters and piracy, SAGAR provides the roadmap for India to collaborate with Littoral states and become the 'net security provider' in the region.

For more information,

"Text of the PM's Remarks on the Commissioning of Coast Ship Barracuda" (March 12, 2015), Press Information Bureau, https://pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=116881

"Text of Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue" (June 01, 2018), Press Information Bureau https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=179711

"Mission SAGAR", Press Information Bureau https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1796165

"SagarMala: Port-led Prosperity", Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways http://sagarmala.gov.in/

Connect Central Asia

From time immemorial, India and Central Asia have had significant historical and cultural ties. There has been continuous exchange of goods, thoughts, and beliefs. Nevertheless, the colonial dominance over India and the partition of India in 1947 impeded this continuity. As a result, there is no direct overland route connecting India to the five Central Asian nations, yet the centuries-old interactions and goodwill that it fostered have created many possibilities for friendly relationships between both these regions.

India maintained friendly relations with the region during the Soviet era and beyond. In many sectors, including trade, connectivity and energy security, there has been a convergence of interests between these regions.

Notwithstanding several obstacles to its outreach to Central Asia, New Delhi maintained consistent efforts to remain involved. The region was included in India's 'Extended Neighbourhood' policy, which was announced in 2001. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of five independent Central Asian countries, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visited Turkmenistan in 1993. He again visited Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan in 1995. In 2002, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited the region. Similar high-level visits by Central Asian leaders have also occurred, helping to raise the level of bilateral and multilateral engagement.

Given the importance of Central Asia in India's strategic calculations, E.Ahamed, former Minister of State for External Affairs, unveiled the Connect Central Asia policy in 2012. The "Connect Central Asia" policy is comprehensive, embracing political, security, economic and cultural relations. The importance of this policy was highlighted in 2015 when Prime Minister Modi visited all five Central Asian republics.

India-Central Asia relations accelerated after Prime Minister Modi's visit to the region. In 2017, India became a permanent member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, providing a critical platform for New Delhi to reconnect with Central Asian countries. Numerous new initiatives have been established to boost India's outreach to this region, including the India-Central Asia Dialogue (at the Foreign Ministers level), the India-Central Asia Business Council and, most recently, the India-Central Asia Leaders' Summit. India has invested in Iran's Chabahar Port to overcome the connectivity gap and is working to revitalise the International North-South Transport Corridor. Together, with other forms of cooperation, India-Central Asia defence cooperation has received attention and now, both sides are working to strengthen ties in this area. Although, India's connect Central Asia policy has been sluggish, it has been consistent and there is still potential for growth in the rapidly shifting regional and international strategic environment.

International Solar Alliance (ISA)

The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is a treaty-based inter-governmental organisation that was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former French President François Hollande on 30 November 2015. It currently has 110 members and is headquartered in Gurugram, India. The ISA, therefore, is the first inter-governmental organisation to be headquartered in the country. The ISA is seen as a platform for cooperation among sun-rich countries that are located fully or partially between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. Its goal, described as "Towards 1000", included the following:

a) Unlock an investment of USD 1,000 billion in solar energy solutions by 2030;

b) Deliver renewable based energy access to 1000 million people;

c) Install 1000GW solar power capacity and

d) Mitigate 1,000 million tons of CO2 annually through the use of solar energy.

To achieve these goals, the ISA has pursued a programme-based approach and it currently has nine programmes - scaling solar applications for agricultural use; affordable finance at scale; scaling solar mini-grids; scaling solar rooftops; scaling solar e-mobility and storage; solar parks; solarising heat and cooling systems; solar photovoltaic battery and waste management and solar for green hydrogen. The ISA represented a culmination of India's commitment to find a solution to global challenges like climate change. Besides playing a key role in establishing the ISA, India continues to set its agenda. For example, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the "One Sun One World One Grid" (OSOWOG) Initiative in 2018. This initiative aims to create a transnational/continental

electricity grid. The grid would enable the supply of clean and renewable power across regions throughout the world. OSOWOG has now become the overarching goal of the ISA. During the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), the UK and India launched a new flagship international initiative, the Green Grids Initiative – One Sun One World One Grid" (GGI-OSOWOG). GGI-OSOWOG will further accelerate the development and deployment of interconnected electricity grids across continents, countries and communities, and improve energy access for the poorest through mini-grids and off-grid solutions. Also, India has provided training to master trainers from fellow ISA countries in the field of solar energy through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Scheme. The duration of such trainings is of 21 days and all expenses are covered by India. Through this scheme, India has trained 133 candidates from 25 ISA member countries in 2018-2019 at the National Institute of Solar Energy in Gurugram. Since its formation in 2015, the ISA has gone from strength to strength. It is now an important pillar in the global effort to combat climate change and a key driver of developing countries' clean energy transition.

Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

- The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) is a partnership of national governments, UN Agencies and programs, multilateral development banks and financing mechanisms, the private sector, and knowledge institutions that aims to promote the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks in support of sustainable development.

- The CDRI was launched by the Prime Minister of India during the United Nations Climate Action Summit on the 23rd September, 2019, at New York. It is the second major global initiative launched by the Government of India and is a demonstration of India's leadership role in climate change and disaster resilience matters globally.

- On 28th August, 2019, the Cabinet had approved the setting up of the CDRI with its secretariat in New Delhi along with a support of Rs.480 crore. The support from the Government of India (GOI) serves as a corpus for the CDRI to fund technical assistance and research projects on an ongoing basis, setting up the Secretariat Office and covering recurring expenditures over a period of five years from 2019-20 to 2023-24.

- The CDRI further aims to promote the resilience of infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks, thereby ensuring sustainable development.

- Since its launch, thirty-one (31) Countries, six (06) International Organisations and two (02) private sector organisations have joined as CDRI members. The coalition has been expanding its membership consistently by attracting a wide variety of economically advanced countries, developing countries and countries that are most vulnerable to climate change and disasters.

Recent Developments

- On 29th June, 2022, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved the categorisation of the CDRI as an 'International Organisation' and the signing of the Headquarters Agreement (HQA) with the CDRI for granting it the exemptions, immunities and privileges as contemplated under the

United Nations (Privileges & Immunities) Act, 1947. This will provide the coalition an independent and international legal persona so that it can efficiently and effectively carry out its functions globally.

- Additionally, on 9th November, 2022, the CDRI announced the Infrastructure Resilience Accelerator Fund (IRAF), a CDRI Multi-Partner Trust Fund, at the India Pavilion, at COP 27, Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt.

- The IRAF was established with the support of the UNDP and the UNDRR, and will be managed by the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund (UN MPTFO), New York, to support global action on disaster resilience of infrastructure systems, especially in developing countries and Small Island Developing Countries (SIDS).

- To promote the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems, the IRAF will play a critical role in equipping the coalition to deliver on improved infrastructure governance, inclusive infrastructure services and diversified knowledge and financing for resilient infrastructure globally.

- Within an initial duration of five years, around USD 50 million in financial commitments has already been announced and more are expected in the coming months. So far, commitments have been made by the Government of India, the United Kingdom, Australia and the European Union for the next five years.

- One of the first initiatives to be supported by the IRAF is the Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS).

Security Challenges

India's Defence Forces

India ranks fourth among powerful militaries of the world. The Indian Constitution outlines the structure and role of the Indian defence forces. Relevant articles pertaining to them are to be found primarily in Part XIV of the Constitution, which deals with the "Services under the Union and the States." Article 53 states that the Executive Power of the Union (central government) is vested in the President and is exercised by him or her either directly, or through officers subordinate to him or her. The Constitution collectively establishes the framework for the authority and jurisdiction of the nation's armed forces, with the President acting as its Supreme Commander and Parliament having legislative powers over defence matters. The Constitution places significant importance on the unity and security of the nation while maintaining a balance between the Union and State governments.

The Union Cabinet oversees national defence through the Ministry of Defence, which gives the armed forces the resources and the policy framework under which they are to carry out their duties. The Ministry of Defence comprises of five departments, viz. Department of Defence (DOD), Department of Defence Production (DDP), Department of Defence Research & Development (DDR&D) and the Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare. There is also a Finance Division. The Indian Army, Navy and Air Force make up India's armed forces. The Chief of Army Staff (COAS) oversees all aspects of the Indian Army, including command, control and administration at the army headquarters in New Delhi.

The armed forces have to be battle ready to meet any eventuality. Towards that end, non-salary revenue outlay has been enhanced significantly from Rs.62,431 crores in Budget Estimates (BE) 2022-23 to Rs.90,000 crores in BE 2023-24, i.e., a 44 percent jump. This expenditure is expected to close critical gaps in combat capabilities and equip the forces in terms of ammunition, sustenance of weapons and assets, military reserves, etc. This Budget Estimate also sustains the thrust on the modernisation and infrastructure development of the defence services by continuing an upward trend in Capital Outlay.

The Union Budget for Fiscal 2023-24 envisages a total outlay of Rs.45, 03,097 crores. Of this, the Ministry of Defence has been allocated Rs.5, 93,537.64 crores, which is 13.18 percent of the total budget. This includes Rs.1, 38,205 crores for defence pensions. The total defence budget represents an enhancement of Rs.68, 371.49 crores (13 percent) over the Budget of 2022-23.

A major accomplishment of Indian democracy is that the military has remained professional, disciplined and respectful of civilian authority. Yet, many strategists believe that civilian control has been unbalanced, making optimization and synergisation of Civil-Military Relations (CMR) difficult. The rate of implementable reform has remained incredibly sluggish, despite several initiatives by succeeding governments, showing a tacit institutional understanding of the issue at hand. This peculiarity is expected to change with the establishment of Department of Military Affairs (DMA) in December 2019 and the appointment of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) as the Principal Military Advisor to the government in general and the Minister of Defence in particular on all tri-service matters.

These advances provide the military with a foothold in national security policymaking and promise to give it considerable autonomy in numerous internal affairs. These are positive moves towards a stronger institutional framework for seamless communication, fostering confidence across diverse state power apparatuses, thereby contributing to national security without jeopardising civilian control principles. These changes have the potential to pave the path for significant integration and increased efficiency in the MoD, as it is the crucial link between the state and the armed forces.

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https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1895472

National Security Council

The National Security Council (NSC) of India is the apex executive body tasked with advising the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on matters of Internal Security, External Affairs, Science and Technology (S&T), Defence and Economic Affairs. It is headed by the Prime Minister of India and the National Security Advisor (NSA) is its Secretary. The NSA presides over all NSC meetings and is also the principal advisor to the Prime Minister. The NSC was established after India's nuclear tests in 1998 on the recommendation of the K.C. Pant Task Force to conduct long-term strategic planning and integrate tools of statecraft. The NSC headquarters is located in New Delhi and the current NSA is Ajit Doval.

At present, the NSC has three Deputy NSAs and one Military Adviser. The Deputy NSAs deal with Internal Security issues such as policy planning, counter-terrorism, border area infrastructure, J&K and the northeast; External Affairs which include India's relations with US, Russia, China, and neighborhood developments; and S&T issues, which include cyber security, space and future technologies. The Military Adviser handles issues relating to defence strategy, net assessment, future defence technologies and other defence-related issues. Besides the NSA, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), the three Deputy NSAs, the Ministers of Home Affairs, Defence, External Affairs, Finance and the Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog are members of the NSC. Other government members may be invited to attend its meetings whenever required. The Prime Minister sometimes chairs the NSC meetings.

The NSC is the apex body of the three-tiered structure of the Indian National Security System. The three tiers are the Strategic Policy Group (SPG), the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), which work under the Cabinet Secretariat. The SPG is the first level of this three-tier structure and NSA Ajit Doval is its current chairman. It forms the core of the decision-making apparatus of the NSC. SPG members include the Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog; the CDS; the Cabinet Secretary; the three Services Chiefs; the RBI Governor; Secretaries of Home, Defence, Foreign, Finance, Atomic Energy, Space and the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW); the Director General of Intelligence Bureau (IB), besides other senior government officers.

It undertakes the Strategic Defence Review, a blueprint of short and long-term security threats, as well as possible policy options on a priority basis.

The NSAB consists of a group of eminent national security experts outside of government. NSAB members usually consist of senior retired government officials, civilians as well as military, academics and distinguished members of civil society drawn from and having expertise of internal and external security, foreign affairs, S&T, defence and economic affairs. The NSCS assists the NSC, NSAB and the SPG and prepares papers for consideration by the NSC and the SPG. The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), which was merged into the NSCS, analyses and coordinates intelligence assessment of both domestic and foreign intelligence gathered from the IB, RAW and the Directorates of Military, Naval and Air Intelligence. Hence, in India's national security management system, the NSC drives functional security and strategic issues. Over the last two decades, it has become a critical part of the decision-making process on matters of national security and strategic interest.

For more information,

Arvind Gupta, *How India Manages Its National Security*, Gurgaon, India: Penguin Viking, 2018.

Law Enforcement in India

India's Constitution delegates the responsibility for maintaining law and order mainly to the States and Union Territories (UTs), and the law is enforced by several organisations. Maintaining the country's internal security is the Government of India's (GoI) fundamental responsibility.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) maintains internal security through various organisations and agencies. The MHA supports the efforts of state governments by providing financial assistance for the modernisation of their police and paramilitary forces in terms of weaponry, communication, equipment, mobility, training and other infrastructure under the Scheme of Modernisation of State Police Forces.

Additionally, central security and intelligence agencies routinely exchange intelligence inputs with state law enforcement authorities to prevent crimes and other events associated with law and order. The MHA is responsible for the UTs' police forces. While the Home Secretary serves as the Administrative Head of the ministry, the Minister of Home Affairs represents it in the Union Cabinet.

Table: Law Enforcement Agencies under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs [Source: MHA, India]

Ministry of Home Affairs	
Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)	**Central Investigation and Intelligence Institutions**
Border Security Force (BSF)	Intelligence Bureau (IB)
Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)	Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)
Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)	National Investigation Agency (NIA)
Assam Rifles (AR)	National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)
Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)	Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)
National Security Guard (NSG)	Central Economic Intelligence Bureau (CEIB)
Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)	

Generally, law and order issues are State subjects, and are dealt under State jurisdiction. However, due to their interconnectivity with various aspects at the national level, such issues can be elevated to become national security subjects that require the intervention of the central government through appropriate legislation.

Digital Governance and Securing Cyberspace

Technology is an essential component of Digital India campaign's vision. The Government of India is constantly attempting to transform India into a knowledge economy and a digitally empowered society through its flagship Digital India programme. Digital India is an umbrella programme that incorporates several government ministries and departments into a single action plan, allowing the ideas to germinate and be implemented as part of a larger vision. The Government of India coordinates the programme with the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY). The foundations of Digital India's vision of on-demand governance and services, digitally empowering citizens and supporting the government's social inclusion initiatives are social media, mobility, analytics and clouds. Digital India's Nine Pillars are:

1. Broadband Highways
2. Universal Access to Mobile Connectivity
3. Public Internet Access Programme
4. E-Governance: Reforming Government through Technology
5. E-Kranti: Electronic Delivery of Services
6. Information for All
7. Electronics Manufacturing
8. Information Technology for Jobs
9. Early Harvest Programmes.

With increased digital traffic to e-services portals and mobile applications for citizens, precautionary measures to counter cyber attacks are required. During the Wuhan Virus, aka COVID-19 outbreak, cyber criminals adopted new tactics to target users, primarily Work-From-Home users, including those from the central and state governments, and to cripple IT infrastructure. Cyber security is essential for any IT infrastructure, critical or non-critical. Every e-governance project covers the security aspect in its design phase.

The Cyber and Information Security (C&IS) division of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) deals with cyber security, cybercrime, the National Information Security Policy & Guidelines (NISPG), and the implementation of NISPG and NATGRID (National Grid), among other things. To effectively deal with cybercrime incidents, the Government of India has taken steps to ensure cyber security, including establishing the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the MHA to deal with all types of cyber-crime.

In 2019, the Central Government launched the online National Cyber Crime (NCC) reporting portal "www. cybecrime.gov.in" to allow citizens to report complaints about all types of cybercrime, with a particular emphasis on cybercrimes against women and children. Furthermore, a toll-free number, "1930", has been activated to assist citizens in lodging online complaints on the portal in their native language. To ensure the safe use of digital technologies, the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) issues regular alerts and advisories on the latest cyber threats and counter-measures.

The government runs the Cyber Swachhta Kendra (Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre). The centre detects malicious programmes and provides free tools for citizens and organisations to remove them. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) is running programmes to raise awareness about information security. Specific books, videos and online materials about information security are developed for children, parents and general users, and distributed through portals such as "www.infosecawareness.in" and "www.cyberswachhtakendra.gov.in".

Terrorism/Extremism

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)'s Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Radicalisation (CTCR) division is responsible for matters related to policy and operational issues on terrorism, counter-radicalisation/de-radicalisation, countering terror financing and financial and statutory matters of India's federal investigation agency — the National Investigation Agency (NIA). The MHA actively participates in several Joint Working Groups (JWG) meetings on counter-terrorism with other nations. Law enforcement agencies, including the NIA, closely monitor the activities of fundamentalist/extremist organisations that impact security, peace and public tranquillity and, if appropriate, take appropriate legal action. Terrorism issues in India can be broadly categorised as follows: i) cross-border terrorism in the Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), ii) Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) in certain areas, iii) Islamic extremism (excluding terrorism in J&K), and iv) insurgency in some areas of the North-Eastern States.

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir: The UT of J&K has been affected by Pakistan's proxy war against India in the form of cross-border terrorism for the last three decades. Following the repeal of Articles 370 and 35A on 05 August, 2019, the coordination of security forces in the Kashmir Valley has significantly improved. Because of India's zero-tolerance policy toward terrorism, many terrorists, including key commanders of terror groups, have been eliminated from J&K.

Year	Incidents	Security Forces Personnel (Attained Veergati)	Terrorist Killed
2022*	**123**	**31**	**180**
2021	153	45	193
2020	140	56	232

   i) *data till November 2022.
   ii) Data Source: "*terrorist attacks in the country*", PIB, India (December 2022) & Sharma, Anurag. "*Terrorism Studies Review*", Vivekananda International Foundation (January 2022)

The decrease in the number of security forces personnel attaining martyrdom or *Veergati* (falling in battle) over the last three years has highlighted significant improvements in training and the effectiveness of counter-terrorism (CT) strategies during operations. The well-organised security and intelligence grids guarantee protection to people in J&K. Overall, J&K saw improved security conditions on the ground, marked by a decrease in the number of fatalities among security forces personnel and civilians and a decrease in the indoctrination of youth into terrorism in the Valley.

Left-Wing Extremism: Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), *aka* Naxalism, led by the Communist Party of India (Maoist), or CPI (Maoist), has carried out attacks on security personnel and civilians in India. The group — CPI (Maoist) and all of its manifestations are prohibited under India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act [UA(P)A], 1967, and they

are all included on the Schedule of Terrorist Organisations. Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra and Kerala are among the states most affected by LWE in various forms. The overall LWE situation has improved, which can be ascribed to the more significant presence of security forces, improved operational tactics and welfare programmes initiated by both the central and state governments for those residing in LWE-affected areas.

Several Maoists have given up their weapons and joined the mainstream. The increase in the number of Maoists turning themselves in, or being apprehended, defines the successful operational tactics being used locally to persuade the 'brainwashed' to stop using violence and join welfare programmes for the advancement of society. With assistance from the central government, the state governments in LWE-affected regions have been working continuously to put welfare schemes into place, which has helped to address the LWE issue.

Islamic Extremism (excluding terrorist activities in UT of J&K): The number of terrorist incidents in India inspired by Islamic extremism has decreased. Despite having the world's second-largest Muslim population (nearly 20 crore) and the presence of radical ideology, al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State (IS)/Daesh/Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have failed to leave a significant footprint in India. However, the terror group has repeatedly threatened India. By the end of 2017, the IS had lost control of territory in both Iraq and Syria. It has since been attempting to expand through linked groups in Africa and Afghanistan and preparing for attacks in these countries.

Insurgency in North-Eastern States: Through various measures, the central government supplements the efforts of state governments to curb the illicit activities of insurgent groups operating in the North-Eastern states. Insurgent groups like the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), the Meitei Extremist Organisation of Manipur, including the UNLF, PREPAK, KCP, All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang), are all proscribed as unlawful associations under Section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act [UA(P)A], 1967. The central government has been pursuing a policy of talks with insurgent groups which lay down weapons and seek peaceful solutions. As a result, many such groups have entered into a Suspension of Operations (SoO) mode, whereas some have signed Memoranda of Settlements (MoS) and dissolved themselves.

Since 1998, the MHA has been implementing a welfare scheme for surrender-cum-rehabilitation of insurgents, providing monetary assistance and vocational skills training, among other benefits. As a result of this scheme, several insurgents have surrendered and joined the mainstream.

Year	Incidents	Security Forces Personnel (Attained Veergati)	Insurgents killed	Insurgents Surrendered
2022*	**32**	**31**	**180**	**443**
2021	209	08	40	1,473
2020	163	05	21	2,696

*Data 09 December, 2022.

Economy: Growth and Development

Drivers of Indian Economic Growth

The Indian economy started the decade of 2010s on signs of high growth, fuelled by early recovery and limited effects on output from the financial crisis of 2008-09. Similarly, a successful vaccination program after the Covid-19 pandemic allowed India to recover economically. The Indian economy is advancing steadily and is expected to be one of the fastest growing in the decade ahead.

The Indian economy is largely driven by impulses like domestic consumption. It is 63.3 per-cent of GDP, of which private consumption is 60 percent. Domestic savings is 30 percent of GDP; domestic investment is 32 percent. Foreign Investment is 1.4 percent of GDP. In that sense, it is, unlike China, comparatively less dependent on the world for markets or investment.

India has a unique opportunity to become a global manufacturing hub in this decade. The three primary assets to capitalise on this unique opportunity are domestic demand, a young workforce and international partnerships. The Production Linked Incentives (PLI) scheme aims to invite foreign investors to set up their manufacturing units in India in 14 key sectors. Make in India 2.0 looks at 27 sectors, which include 15 manufacturing sectors and 12 service sectors.

India's technology industry total revenue was set to reach USD 227 billion in FY2022. It is also the third largest tech start up hub in the world, with nearly 25,000 start-ups valued at $333 billion. Technology patents filed during 2015-2021 are around 1, 38,000 and nearly 10,000 patents were filed in 2021 by the top five Indian technology firms. The workforce of the Indian technology sector is a total of 5.1 million and 4, 45,000 new hires.

Exports (including hardware) were recorded to be worth USD 178 billion, which is an over 51 percent share of India's total services exports. Digital infrastructure played a key role in driving India's tech adoption, with public digital platforms becoming the bedrock of India's digital advantage. The sub- sectors of the digital economy were estimated to be worth as follows during FY2022: e IT Services (USD 116 billion), BPM (USD44 billion), ER&D (USD 36 billion), Hardware USD 17 billion) and Software products (USD 13 billion). Ecommerce is valued at around USD 79 billion.

The other drivers of the Indian economy like agriculture, which contributed 15 percent of India's total GDP, has the potential to create a USD 24 billion Agritech market by 2025. Web 3.0 and block chains are estimated to

contribute USD one trillion to India's GDP by 2032. India's agricultural exports have grew by 19.92 percent during 2021-22 to touch USD 50.21 billion.

India Exim Trade

India's exports were pegged at a record high of USD 417.81 billion for Fiscal 2021-22, with an increase of 43.13 percent, from USD 291.18 billion in Fiscal 2020-21. Similarly, India's imports surged to USD 610.22 billion in FY 2021-22 from USD 394.44 billion in FY 2020-21.

Engineering goods, gemstones and jewellery, petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, organic chemicals and electronic goods are India's major exports. India's main imports are crude oil and petroleum products, electronics, gold, machinery and electrical appliances.   Increased global prices of coal and crude oil have raised the value of India's imports significantly.

The USA, UAE, China, Bangladesh, The Netherlands, Singapore, Hong Kong, The UK, Belgium and Germany are top ten destinations for India's exports.   China, The UAE, USA, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia and South Korea are top ten import destinations of India.

India First in Trade policy includes objectives like reducing non-essential imports and domestic manufacturing, promoting agricultural exports and doubling the farmer's income, developing districts as export hubs, promotion and diversification of the service sector, Special Economic Zone reform to attract investment and promote exports, promotion of quality products through standards, review of free trade agreements (FTA's) and a calibrated approach to and for future FTA's, reducing the compliance burden and logistics costs and use of public procurement to promote domestic value addition/manufacturing.

Agriculture

India is one of the world's leading agricultural nations with agricultural land forming a 60.2 percent share of total land area as of 2020. The country has two major cropping seasons - *Kharif* and *Rabi*. *Kharif* crops are sown in the summer during the monsoon season and are harvested in September and October. Rice, coarse cereals, maize, pulses, groundnut, soyabean, cotton, sugarcane, etc., are the major *Kharif* crops. *Rabi* crops on the other hand are sown during winter and harvested in spring. Wheat, mustard, barley, gram, peas, chickpeas, etc., are India's major *Rabi* crops. Agriculture is a key sector of the Indian economy. According to the *Economic Survey 2021-22*, an annual document of the Ministry of Finance, Government of India, 232.7 million out of India's total workforce of 535.3 million are engaged in the agriculture sector as of 2020. In other words, around 44 percent is engaged with agriculture. The agriculture sector also accounted for 20.2 percent of India's GDP in 2021. Most notably, from 1 April, 2021 to 31 March, 2022 (referred to as a "Financial Year"), India's agriculture exports reached a historic high of USD 50 billion. During that period, India recorded its highest ever exports for staples like rice (USD 9.65 billion), wheat (USD 2.19 billion), sugar (USD (4.6 billion) and other cereals (USD 1.08 billion). Exports of marine products, at USD 7.71 billion, was also the highest ever. Although India is now one of the world's leading agricultural nations, it has not always been so. The country's food situation from 1947, when it achieved its independence, to 1960, was so precarious that it was at risk of a major famine. India had already suffered a major famine in 1943 that resulted in the death of three million people. As a result of its precarious food situation, India initiated the "Green Revolution"

in the 1960s to increase food production, combat malnutrition and alleviate poverty. A major component of this effort was the introduction of high-yielding varieties of rice and wheat, the expansion of irrigation networks, large scale application of fertilisers, etc., that has drastically transformed India from a food-deficit country to a food-surplus one. In the years ahead, India's agriculture is likely to face growing pressure from climate change. That will probably require a second Green Revolution aimed at climate-proofing India's agriculture sector from the impact of climate change caused by heatwaves, water scarcity and floods.

Food Security in India

India was a food scarce country before the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution was initiated in the 1960s by introducing high-yielding varieties of rice and wheat to increase food production in order to alleviate hunger and poverty. Due to this, India has emerged now as a food surplus country. Food security is a top priority for the Government of India. Last year, India exported 20 million tons of rice and it had a reserve of over 100 million tons of cereals. Apart from raising its agricultural production, India has taken several steps to expand and strengthen its food safety net. A few of them are as follows:

- **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013-** India introduced the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013. The Act legally entitles 75 percent of the rural population and 50 percent of the urban population to receive subsidised food grains under the Targeted Public Distribution System. About two-thirds of the population is, therefore, covered under the Act to receive highly subsidised foodgrains. On an all India basis, out of a maximum 81.34 crore persons, around 80 crore are covered under the NFSA to get highly subsidised foodgrains.

- **Public Distribution System (PDS) –** The Public Distribution System (PDS) evolved as a system of management of scarcity through distribution of foodgrains at affordable prices. Over the years, the PDS has become an important part of the government's policy for management of the food economy. Under the PDS, commodities like wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene are allocated to the States and UTs for distribution. Some States and UTs also distribute additional items of mass consumption through PDS outlets. These include pulses, edible oils, iodized salt, spices, etc.

- **PM POSHAN Scheme-** The PM Poshan Scheme also known as the 'Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman' Scheme (earlier known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme) is a centrally sponsored scheme for providing one hot cooked meal in government – aided schools from 2021-22 to 2025-26 to children of pre-schools, or Bal Vatika (before Class I), as well as to 11.80 crore children of Classes I to VIII studying in 11.20 lakh schools. The main objective of this scheme is to address two of the pressing problems affecting a majority of the children in India, namely hunger and education.

- **Antodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) -** This scheme's main focus is on the poor and aimed at reducing hunger among the poorest segments of the Below the Poverty Line (BPL) population. The scheme involves identification of one crore poorest of the poor families from amongst the number of BPL families covered under Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) within States and providing them foodgrains at a highly subsidised rate of Rs.2 per kg for wheat and Rs.3 per kg of rice. The scheme was launched in December 2000. The scale of the issue that was initially 25 kg per family per month was increased to 35 kg per family per month with effect from 1st April, 2002. Since then, the scheme has been expanded thrice, with the

latest expansion taking place in 2005, where the coverage was increased to 2.5 crore households (i.e. 38 percent of BPL).

- **Integrated Management of the Public Distribution System-** There is also a consistent effort to improve upon these programs. These programs have moved from being manually operated systems to biometric systems. The Department of Food & Public Distribution, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, GOI, under PDS reforms, is implementing a technology-driven central sector scheme called the 'Integrated Management of Public Distribution System' (IM-PDS). The main objective of this scheme is to implement nation-wide portability of ration cards issued by States and UTs under the NFSA to access subsidised foodgrains anywhere in India. Presently, the system is better known as the 'One Nation One Ration Card' (ONORC) Plan. This is a program under which beneficiaries covered under the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) can get their quota of subsidised foodgrains from any electronic point of sale device (ePoS)-enabled fair price shops of their choice by using their existing ration cards with biometric authentication.

- **Buffer Stock-** The Food Corporation of India, a statutory body under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, stores the stock of foodgrains, namely wheat and rice, procured from farmers at a Minimum Support Price (MSP) in government granaries, so that in the future, surplus stock can be distributed in deficient areas and among the poorer sections of society at a price lower than the market price known as the "Issue Price". This storage of foodgrains helps during natural calamities.

- **India's food security response to Covid-19-** India used one of its most powerful programs, the 'Public Distribution System' (PDS) to tackle the issue of food security during the pandemic. The government doubled the amount of grain it normally provides to all beneficiaries during this period, added a new allocation of pulses and made it all free for eight months. It also announced a separate allocation of grain and pulses for migrant workers. This stands out as the largest food assistance program anywhere in the world during the pandemic in terms of the number of people covered, which is more than ten percent of the world population. India's goal at the start of its lockdown was to supply around 25 million metric tons of foodgrains under the PDS and other schemes to every part of the country for three months initially. The Government of India announced food assistance under the Prime Minister Garib Kalyan Yojana (Phase I and II). Phase I of this program was announced on 26th March, 2020, under which, five kilograms of free foodgrains (rice, wheat, or a combination of both) per person per month and one kilogram of free pulses per family per month under India's Food Security Act was included. Phase II was announced on 30th June, which included extension of free goods and pulses to beneficiaries of National Food Security Act. Additionally, under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Scheme, five kilograms of free foodgrains per person per month and one kilogram of free whole gram per family per month to migrant laborers, stranded and needy families, who were not covered under the National Food Security Act, was included.

India- "Pharmacy of the World"

The pharmaceutical industry's growth is one of India's success stories in its efforts to become 'Atmanirbhar' or self-reliant. The Indian pharmaceutical market is presently valued at USD 50 billion, contributing to around 1.72 percent of national GDP. Between 2014 and 2022, this sector grew exponentially, from USD 11.6 billion to USD - 24.6 billion.

The Indian pharmaceutical industry is recognised worldwide for high quality and cost effective generic medicines and vaccines. It is third globally in terms of production volume and 14th globally in value. India leads the world in vaccine production and generic medications, accounting for 20 percent of the total worldwide supply by volume.

India accounts for 5.92 percent of the global market for drugs and pharmaceuticals. With a share of 73.31 percent, formulations and biologics made up the majority of India's exports, followed by bulk pharmaceuticals and drug intermediates. The export of drugs and pharmaceuticals were USD 22.9 billion from April through February 2023. While exports of pharmaceutical items increased by 18 percent YoY to USD 24.4 billion in 2020–21, they increased by 24.62 billion dollars in 2021–22. Despite lockdowns, slowed manufacturing and worldwide supply chain disruptions, India's pharmaceutical exports have shown resilience.

Over 200-plus nations are covered by Indian pharmaceutical exports, making India a major global supplier. The US, the UK, South Africa, Russia and Nigeria are top export destinations for Indian pharmaceutical products. Over 55 percent of exports go to highly regulated markets in the US, Western Europe, Japan and Australia. India's exports to the US have grown at a CAGR of 6.9 percent over the last three years. Over 50 percent of Africa's need for generic drugs is met by India, as is 40 percent of generic drug demand in the US and 25 percent of all pharmaceuticals in the UK. India is the leading source of DPT, BCG and measles vaccines, and accounts for over 60 percent of global vaccine demand. According to the WHO's recommended vaccination schedule, 70 percent of the vaccinations come from India.

Being home to eight of the 20 global generic businesses, with more than 262 US-FDA-approved factories, including Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs), India is the only country outside of the US with such a huge number. India has 253 European Directorate of Quality Medicines (EDQM) authorised plants and almost 1400 pharmaceutical plants that have received WHO-GMP approval. These facilities are equipped with cutting-edge technology. India also provides 90 percent of WHO pre-qualified APIs.

In 2021, India sold over 65 million doses of Covid vaccinations to almost 100 nations. The pharma industry worked closely with the government, academic institutes and others to quickly develop and refine manufacturing processes that helped to ensure a consistent supply of COVID-19 medicines such as Remdesivir, Ivermectin, Hydroxychloroquine, Dexamethasone, Tocilizumab and Favipiravir.

India also has a legal framework that provides Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) to pharmaceutical companies. The Indian Patents Act of 1970 gave pharmaceutical companies in India the right to patent all procedures used in the manufacturing their drugs. After India ratified the TRIPS Agreement in 1995, the country's patent laws experienced substantial changes. The 20-year patenting term was established by the 2002 amendments. Since then, a patent application had to be re-filed after 20 years had gone since the original filing date. The 2005 amendments provided protection for newly invented chemical compositions. Many salts, polymorphs, esters and derivatives of previously patented compounds are only eligible for patenting in India when they have been shown to be more effective in treating patients. In India, generic pharmaceutical producers may also apply for marketing rights of a patented product. Even though the patentee's patent status is active, their appeal will be taken into account. Pharmaceutical patents are granted by the Indian Patent Office, while marketing authorisation is given by the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI).

The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) is a scheme initiated by the Government of India to make quality generic medicines available at affordable prices for all, especially for the poor and marginalised

sections of society. Under this scheme, dedicated outlets called Janaushadhi Kendras are established to provide generic medicines at lower prices. As of March 31, 2023, there are 9303 Janaushadhi Kendras across the country. These medicines have the same potency and effectiveness as their branded counterparts and are more affordable. The PMBJP aims to ensure easy access to essential medications, contributing to the overall healthcare affordability and accessibility in India.

Favourable government policies executed by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilisers, have been playing a pivotal role in enhancing the manufacturing capabilities of the Indian pharma industry through Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes and initiatives like Strengthening of Pharmaceuticals Industry (SPI). There are approximately 10500 production facilities and over 80 pharmaceutical clusters. In terms of foreign investment, for Greenfield pharmaceuticals projects, FDI (foreign direct investment) of up to 100 percent has been permitted via the automatic route. For Brownfield pharmaceuticals projects, FDI is permitted up to 74 percent through the automatic route and up to 100 percent with government approval. According to GME analysis, the Indian Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) industry was valued at USD 11.04 billion in 2020 and is expected to grow to USD 18.08 billion by 2026, at an annual growth rate of 8.57 percent. India is also trying to achieve self-reliance in API production and reduce its dependence on other nations such as China for the same. Indian drug companies are looking for options to manufacture APIs locally. Improvements in dynamic drug fixing (API) production and bio-pharmaceutical development are driving market growth. The market expansion, combined with government initiatives, will encourage the establishment of API manufacturers in the country, significantly changing market dynamics. All these advancements are contributing to making India the "Pharmacy of the World".

For more information, visit:

Department of Pharmaceuticals, https://www.makeinindia.com/sector/pharmaceuticals

Make in India, https://www.makeinindia.com/sector/pharmaceuticals

Invest India, https://www.investindia.gov.in/sector/pharmaceuticals

Economic Diplomacy Division, Ministry of External Affairs, https://indbiz.gov.in/self-reliance-in-the-api-industry-making-india-pharmacy-of-the-world-indeed/

Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP), http://janaushadhi.gov.in/pmjy.aspx

Guidelines for Examination of Patent Applications in the Field of Pharmaceuticals, https://ipindia.gov.in/writereaddata/Portal/IPOGuidelinesManuals/1_37_1_3-guidelines-for-examination-of-patent-applications-pharmaceutical.pdf

Indian Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), https://www.ibef.org/exports/pharmaceutical-exports-from-india

Telecom Sector

As of August 2022, India's wireline and cellular customer count totalled 1.17 billion, making it the second-largest telecom market in the world. Affordable rates, accessibility, the introduction of Mobile Number Portability (MNP), the expansion and reinforcement of 3G and 4G coverage, a supportive regulatory environment, and the Government of India's (GoI's) goal-oriented initiatives to increase domestic telecom manufacturing capacity have all contributed to the telecom sector's exponential growth in recent years.

In July 2022, the GoI held an IMT/5G spectrum auction to raise USD 18.77 billion for the rollout of 5G services. The sale sped up the digital connection in India. The telecom industry ranks third in Foreign Direct Investment

(FDI), accounting for 6.43 percent of all FDI inflows. Additionally, 2.2 million people are employed directly and 1.8 million indirectly by the telecom industry.

In May 2022, the Department of Telecommunication (DoT) unveiled the "GatiSakti Sanchar" site in keeping with the vision of the Prime Minister for the integrated development of infrastructure services. To prepare India for the deployment of 5G, the IT systems of all States/UTs and effective infrastructure-related government ministries, such as the Railways and Highways, have been connected with the portal.

One of the world's most significant rural telecom projects, BharatNet, was phased in to all Gram Panchayats (about 2.5 lakh) in the nation to give all telecom service providers equal access to broadband connectivity. Through the BharatNet initiative, approximately 180,052 Gram Panchayats are connected and 596,151 km of optical fibre cable (OFC) have been laid. Additionally, 104,611 Wi-Fi hotspots have been installed, and 214,584 Fibre-To-The-Home (FTTH) connections have been commissioned to assure last-mile access (as on 26 September 2022). Under the Department of Telecommunications, on 01 October, 2022, the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) launched "**Telecom Technology Development Fund**" (TTDF), which assists in building state-of-the-art telecom technologies and enables the proliferation of affordable broadband and mobile services in rural and remote areas. The TTDF aims to finance Research and Development (R&D) in communication technology applications, specifically for rural areas and to create synergies between academia, start-ups, research institutes and the industry to create and develop the telecom ecosystem. The scheme also seeks to encourage indigenous manufacturing and technology ownership, foster a culture of technological collaboration, lower imports, increase export opportunities and foster intellectual property development. India is predicted to have 920 million mobile customers by 2025, including 88 million 5G connections, making it the second-largest smartphone market in the world after the US.

Mudra Loan Scheme

India has adopted a proactive policy of supporting small and medium-sized businesses. A special scheme for this purpose call the Mudra Loan Scheme was launched under the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) on 8 April, 2015. MUDRA stands for Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency Limited. The scheme facilitates the provision of loans up to 10 lakh INR (1 million USD) to small and micro businesses engaged in manufacturing, processing, trading and services sector. It aims to make such businesses contribute to GDP growth and employment generation. There are an estimated 5.77 crore (57.7 million) non-corporate small businesses involving 12 crore (120 million) people, who are unable to avail of loans from regular banks and rely on informal sources for investment. Nearly 60 percent of those engaged in such entrepreneurial activity belong to the socially and economically marginalised sections of society, of which, 54 percent are rural and 46 percent are urban-based. The scheme is geared towards encouraging entrepreneurship among them.

The quantum of loans disbursed has increased over the years.

Table 1: Provision of Mudra Loans

Financial Year	No. of PMMY loans sanctioned	Amount Sanctioned (INR Crore)	Amount Disbursed (Crore)
2015-16	34880924	137449.37	132954.73
2016-17	39701047	180528.54	175312.13
2017-18	48130593	253677.10	246437.40
2018-19	59870318	321722.79	311811.38
2019-20	62247606	337495.53	329715.03
2020-21	57035046	321759.25	311754.47
2021-22	53795526	339110.35	331402.20

Source: https://www.mudra.org.in/

The main non-farm sectors for which loans are provided are business, entertainment, dairy and animal industry, fitness and grooming, food, garments, home furnishing, transportation, manufacturing, repairing and opening of shops. The government does not give any loans directly. Rather, loans are provided through public and private sector banks, small finance banks, non-banking finance companies and microfinance institutions. Loans sanctioned are in three categories as per the stage of growth and funding needs:

i) Shishu- Loans upto Rs.50,000

ii) Kishore- Loans from Rs.50,000-Rs.5,00,000

iii) Tarun- Loans from Rs.5,00,000-Rs. 10,00,000

One of the advantages of this loan is that it can be availed without any collateral, or third-party guarantee. The RuPay platform has generated a debit card to provide hassle-free credit in a flexible manner.

New Policy Choices

New Education Policy 2020

The Indian education system is one of the largest in the world and has drastically expanded and undergone changes since independence in 1947. The National Education Policy of India, 2020 (NEP-2020), which was started on 29 July, 2020, outlines the vision of the new education system in India. The new policy replaces the previous 34-year-old National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986. The policy is built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability, and is the first education policy of the 21st century that aims to address the many growing developmental imperatives of India. NEP-2020 proposes a revision and revamping of all aspects of India's education structure, from regulation and governance, to creating a system that is focused on an individual's holistic development. It is pertinent to note that NEP-2020 is aligned to Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) of the 2030 Agenda adopted by India in 2015, i.e., to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".   NEP-2020 focuses on key reforms in both school and higher education, and is steeped in the emphasis on holistic and multidisciplinary education, digital literacy, written communication, problem-solving and logical reasoning. Though the policy is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, it also builds upon India's traditions and value systems. This rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge, and thought, has contributed significantly to the policy.

Some of the salient features of the policy

   i. Ensuring universal access at all levels of schooling from pre-primary school to Grade 12

  ii. Ensuring quality early childhood care and education for all children between 3-6 years

 iii. New curricular and pedagogical structure (5+3+3+4)

 iv. No hard separations between the arts and the sciences, between curricular and extra-curricular activities, between vocational and academic streams

  v. Establishing a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

 vi. Emphasis on promoting multilingualism and Indian languages; the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language

vii. Assessment reforms - Board Exams on up to two occasions during any given school year, one main examination and one for improvement, if desired

viii. Setting up of a new National Assessment Centre, PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development)

ix. Equitable and inclusive education - Special emphasis given on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)

x. A separate Gender Inclusion fund and Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and groups

xi. Robust and transparent processes for recruitment of teachers and merit based performance

xii. Ensuring availability of all resources through school complexes and clusters

(xiii) Setting up of State School Standards Authority (SSSA)

(xiv) Exposure of vocational education in school and higher education system

xv. Increasing GER in higher education to 50 percent

(xvi) Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education with multiple entry/exit options

xvii. NTA to offer Common Entrance Exam for Admission to HEIs

xviii. Establishment of Academic Bank of Credit

(xix) Setting up of Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs)

xx. Setting up of National Research Foundation (NRF)

(xxi) 'Light but tight' regulation

xxii. Single overarching umbrella body for promotion of higher education sector, including teacher education and excluding medical and legal education- the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)-with independent bodies for standard setting- the General Education Council; funding-Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC); accreditation- National Accreditation Council (NAC); and regulation- National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC)

xxiii. Expansion of open and distance learning to increase Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

xxiv. Internationalisation of Education

xxv. Professional Education will be an integral part of the higher education system. Stand-alone technical universities, health science universities, legal and agricultural universities, or institutions in these or other fields, will aim to become multi-disciplinary institutions

xxvi. Teacher Education – Four-year integrated stage-specific, subject- specific Bachelor of Education

xxvii. Establishing a National Mission for Mentoring

xxviii. Creation of an autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to provide a platform for the free exchange of ideas on the use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning, administration. Appropriate integration of technology into all levels of education

xxix. Achieving 100 percent youth and adult literacy

xxx. Multiple mechanisms with checks and balances will combat and stop the commercialisation of higher education

xxxi. All education institutions will be held to similar standards of audit and disclosure as a 'not for profit' entity

xxxii. The Centre and the States will work together to increase the public investment in Education sector to reach six percent of GDP at the earliest.

xxxiii. Strengthening of the Central Advisory Board of Education to ensure coordination to bring overall focus on quality education

NEP 2020 is a milestone document in the context of nation building as the vision of the policy is to instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that support a responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen. Guided by the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, who said that education must provide 'life-building, man-making and character-forming assimilation of ideas', the NEP- 2020 strives to produce engaged, productive and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive and plural society as envisaged by India's Constitution.

Aatmanirbhar Bharat

Post-Covid, India was confronted with simultaneous and interlocking crises of great magnitude. It faced a health crisis, an economic crisis and a national security crisis emanating from China-India military standoff. The Prime Minister's call for an "Aatmanirbhar Bharat", or a self-reliant India, on 12th May, 2020 was in response to dealing with these crises.

The call for an "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" galvanised the country into getting the nation out of the Covid-19 crisis. It provided the framework for deep-seated reforms, which would take India forward on an upward trajectory in an uncertain world. Building a self-reliant India will require internal reforms. A self-reliant India cannot be built unless we have a strong defence, a globally competitive economy and strong technological prowess.

Self-reliance is not a throwback to import substitution or autarky. There is a need to disengage the concept from its negative perceptions. Self-reliance is a wide-ranging concept with political, economic, social, cultural, technological, national security and foreign policy dimensions.

When the Prime Minister unfolded his vision of an "Aatmanirbhar Bharat", he identified five pillars, namely Economy, Infrastructure, Systems, Demography and Demand. He spoke of making local production available globally. Vocal for Local, an important pillar of the "Aatmanirbhar" programme implies encouragement for local production to become competitive and become visible globally.

By pushing towards an "Aatmanirbhar Bharat", the program seeks to utilise India's mammoth workforce and innovative skills in building domestic capacities as well as take steps to fully integrate itself with the global supply chain. This would provide jobs, boost the economy and enhance India's reputation in the world.

Keeping in view India's vision of becoming "Atmanirbhar" and to enhance India's manufacturing capabilities and exports, an outlay of INR 1.97 lakh crore was announced in the Union Budget 2021-22 for PLI schemes for 13 key sectors for a period of five years starting from Fiscal 2021-22. These 13 sectors include the already existing three sectors of (i) Mobile Manufacturing and Specified Electronic Components, (ii) Critical Key Starting Materials/Drug Intermediaries & Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients, and (iii) Manufacturing of Medical Devices, besides ten new sectors which have been approved by the Union Cabinet in November 2020. These 10 sectors are: (i) Automobiles and Auto Components, (ii) Pharmaceuticals Drugs, (iii) Specialty Steel, (iv) Telecom & Networking

Products, (v) Electronic/Technology Products, (vi) White Goods (ACs and LEDs), (vii) Food Products, (viii) Textile Products: MMF Segment and Technical Textiles, (ix) High Efficiency Solar PV Modules, and (x) Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery.
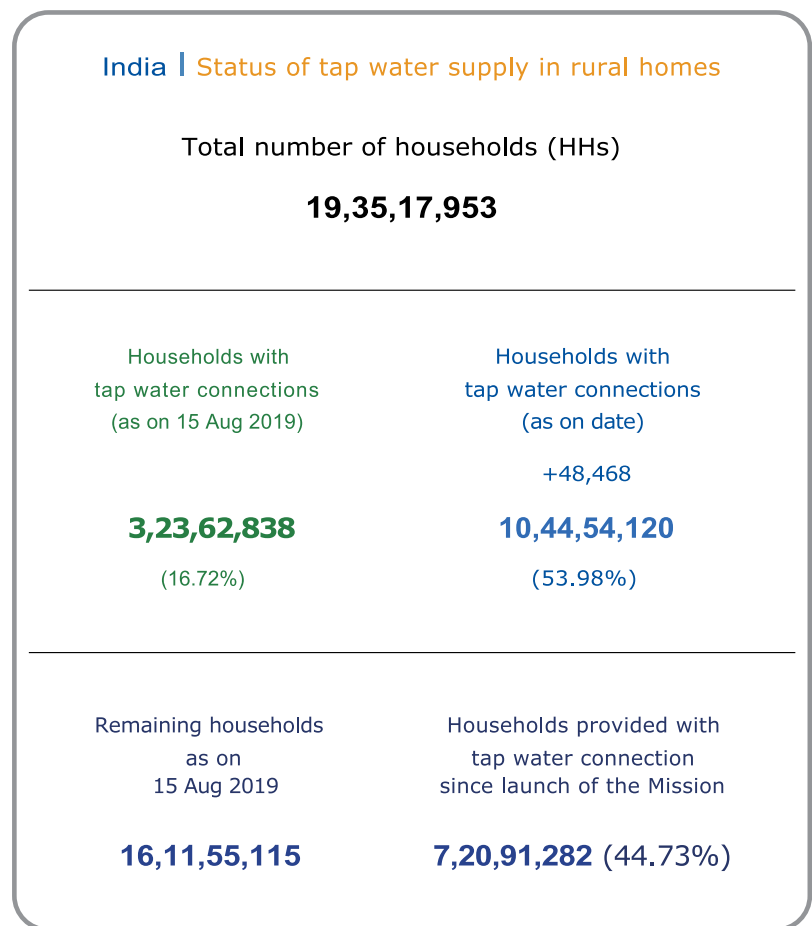
The PLI is an innovative scheme that provides incentives in cash to various companies for enhancing their domestic manufacturing apart from focusing on reducing import bills and improving the cost competitiveness of local goods. The PLI scheme offers incentives on incremental sales for products manufactured in India. The incentive could vary between four to six percent of turnover for most categories and can go up to ten percent for some products.

Water Security

The world is facing the worst water crisis in its history and India is no exception. However, the Government of India has made water security a priority in its policies and decisions. It has introduced significant programs and schemes to address this issue. These programs are meant to make India a water secure country. Some of them are discussed below:

- **Jal Jeevan Mission: -** In 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Jal Jeevan Mission. The mission is envisioned to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India. A number of steps have been taken to plan and implement the mission across the country with speed, which includes joint discussion and a finalisation of the Annual Action Plan of States (AAP) of States/UTs, regular review of implementation, capacity building and knowledge sharing through workshops/ conferences/webinars and field visits by a multi-disciplinary team to provide technical support, etc. So far, the states of Goa, Telangana, Haryana and Gujarat, and the Union Territories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu and Puducherry have reported to provide tap water

India | Status of tap water supply in rural homes

Total number of households (HHs)

19,35,17,953

Households with tap water connections (as on 15 Aug 2019)	Households with tap water connections (as on date)
	+48,468
3,23,62,838	**10,44,54,120**
(16.72%)	(53.98%)

Remaining households as on 15 Aug 2019	Households provided with tap water connection since launch of the Mission
16,11,55,115	**7,20,91,282** (44.73%)

Source- Jal Jeevan Mission, Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti.

connections to all households. Since the mission's launch, more than seven crore rural households have got water tap connections.

- **Jal Shakti Abhiyan-** It is a campaign which was launched in 2019 in 1592 blocks in 256 water stressed districts of India to promote water conservation and water resource management by focusing on accelerated implementation of five targeted interventions, viz., water conservation and rainwater harvesting, renovation of technology and other water bodies, reuse of water and recharging of structures, watershed development and intensive afforestation. Later on, the scope of this campaign was expanded and the "Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain" with the theme "Catch the Rain- Where it Falls, When it Falls" was taken up to cover all blocks of all districts (rural and urban) across the country between 22nd March, 2021 and 30th November, 2021. This 2021 campaign also included the idea of "awareness generation". The third series of the campaign was launched across the country between 29th March, 2022 and 30th November, 2022. These campaigns have been extremely successful. As of April 2022, around 6.20 lakh water related works were completed and 12.36 crore intensive afforestation was carried out under the first phase of the campaign. In the second phase, more than 46.70 lakh water related works were taken up along with more than 36.75 crore intensive afforestation activities were carried out.

Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch The Rain

Intervention Wise Progress Report

S.N.	Jal Shakti Abhiyan	Water Conservation and Rain Water Harvesting Structures		Renovation of Traditional Water Bodies		Reuse and Recharge Structures	Watershed Development	Total Water Related Works		Intensive Afforestation	Training Programmes/ Kisan Melas
		Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban			Rural	Urban		
1.A	Total Nos. of Work Completed	7,91,240	0	1,63,948	438			23,22,052	438		
		7,91,240		1,64,386		4,98,286	8,68,578	23,22,490		6,58,98,101	55,716
1.B	Total Nos. of Works Ongoing	3,75,504		1,07,801		1,44,035	5,14,154	11,41,494		5,90,506	
2	Total of Completed and Ongoing Works	11,66,744		2,72,187		6,42,321	13,82,732	34,63,984		6,64,88,607	
3	Expenditure in Rs Crores*	6,721		3,393		245	5,931	16,290		1,727	
4	**Total Expenditure Including Water related works and Afforestation (In Rs Crores)***								18,017		

* Expenditure is given only for the works carried out by DoRD under MGNREGS

Source- **https://jsactr.mowr.gov.in/PublicDashboard.aspx.**

- **Atal Bhujal Yojana:-** The Atal Bhujal Yojana (ATAL JAL) is a World Bank-aided central sector scheme of the Government of India with a total outlay of Rs.6000 crore, out of which, Rs.3000 crore will be the loan from the World Bank. The main focus of the scheme is on community participation and demand side interventions for sustainable ground water management in identified water-stressed areas of seven states- Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. This scheme is expected to contribute significantly towards the water and food security of participating states. It is being implemented in 8,562 Gram Panchayats of 80 districts of the above-mentioned states.

- Water is a state subject in India. Hence, steps for augmentation, conservation and efficient management of water resources are primarily undertaken by the respective state governments. In order to supplement the efforts of state governments, the central government provides technical and financial assistance

to them through various schemes and programs. The central government has taken various steps for rainwater harvesting in the country.

•   National Water Policy (2012) advocates rain water harvesting and conservation of water, and highlights the need for augmenting the availability of water through direct use of rainfall. The policy also advocates conservation of river, river bodies and infrastructure should be undertaken in a scientifically planned manner through community participation.

•   The Ministry of Jal Shakti, which was created in 2019 to address water related issues on priority, has circulated a Model Bill to all states/UTs to enable them to enact suitable groundwater legislation for regulation of its development and also include the provision of rainwater harvesting.

•   Master Plan for Artificial Recharge to Groundwater- 2020 has been prepared by Central Groundwater Board, a national apex agency, entrusted with responsibilities of providing scientific inputs management, exploration, monitoring, assessment, augmentation and regulation of groundwater resources of the country, in consultation with all states/UTs, which is a macro-level plan indicating various structures for the different terrain conditions of the country, including estimated costs. The Master Plan envisages the construction of about 1.42 crore rain water harvesting and artificial recharge structures in the country to harness185 Billion Cubic Metres (BCMs) of monsoon rainfall.

•   Model Building Bye Laws (MBBL) - 2016 was circulated by the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, which includes the provision of rainwater harvesting, and it has been shared with all states/UTs. So far, 32 states/UTs have adopted the rainwater harvesting provisions of MBBL-2016.

These programs and schemes have been implemented by the Government of India to move the country on the path to making it water and food secure. For the government, community participation and awareness are the keys to achieving its goal.

India's Climate Change Actions

Although India has contributed only around four percent of global cumulative emissions, it has taken its fair share of responsibility in addressing the issue of climate change. India's effort to combat climate change was set in motion following the launch of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) in June 2008. The NAPCC outlined a national plan for climate change action and it included eight "national missions" pertaining to areas such as solar, energy efficiency, water, sustainable agriculture, Himalayan ecosystems, etc. These missions are under various stages of implementation. All states and union territories (UTs) of India have also prepared State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCC) that are consistent with the strategy outlined in the NAPCC. India subsequently submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) that outlined targets up to 2030 to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in October 2015. That has since been converted to the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). It included meeting 40 percent of its total electricity requirements from renewable energy sources by 2030; reducing the emissions intensity of GDP by 33 to 35 percent, compared to 2005 levels by 2030; and creating additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO_2 equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.

Then in August 2022, India officially submitted its updated NDC to the UNFCCC. The updated NDC now aim to meet 50 percent of India's total electricity requirements from renewable energy sources by 2030 and achieve net zero emissions by 2070. Beyond this, India has also been instrumental in establishing the International Solar Alliance (ISA), an alliance of over 100 signatory countries that aim to harness solar power and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) that seeks to promote the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks. India has also launched the "Lifestyle for the Environment (LiFE) Movement" in June 2022 to promote a lifestyle "that is in tune with our planet and does not harm it." India is a firm believer in the principles of equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). CBDR-RC acknowledges the different capabilities and differing responsibilities of individual countries in addressing climate change.

Not surprisingly, India has reiterated for a long time that while climate change is a universal problem that all countries have an obligation to address, developed countries should take a bigger share of the burden as they have historically emitted most of the planet-warming greenhouse gases.

India's Clean Energy Transition

As part of an effort to combat climate change, India has embarked on an unprecedented transition towards cleaner energy. Underpinning this transition are the country's commitment to meet 50 percent of its electricity requirements from renewable energy sources by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2070. Prime Minister Narendra Modi first announced these targets during the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, or COP26, in Glasgow, the UK, in November 2021. These targets are now formalised as India's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and were submitted to the UNFCCC in August 2022. Given the current pace of India's clean energy transition, it is highly likely that the country will achieve its targets for 2030. As of July 2022, renewables (hydro power, wind power, bio-power, and solar power) accounted for 40.44 percent of India's total installed electricity capacity of 407,796.57 MW/407.79 GW. Solar power accounted for 14.91 percent of India's total installed electricity capacity, the highest among all renewable energy sources in the country. Wind power on the other hand accounted for 10.21 percent.

Projections indicate that solar power alone could account for as much as 34.28 percent of India's total installed electricity capacity by 2030, thereby becoming the largest source of electricity in India. Meanwhile, India's transportation sector has also witnessed major shift towards cleaner energy. The country aims to have Electric Vehicles (EVs) sales accounting for 30 percent of private cars, 70 per-cent for commercial cars, 40 per-cent for buses, and 80 per-cent for two-wheelers and three-wheelers by 2030. In other words, there could be 80 million EVs on Indian roads by 2030. Against these targets, India currently has 1.2 million EVs and that could rise to four million by the end of 2022 and 30 million in the next two years. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimated that on an average, India will need USD 160 billion per year to achieve its 2030 clean energy targets. Moreover, it will need over USD 10 trillion to achieve its net-zero emission target by 2070. Support from the international community in the form of low-cost and long-term capital, therefore, will be the key if India is to fully realise its short-term (2030) and long-term (2070) clean energy transition targets.

All India Installed Capacity in MW/GW of Power Stations (As on 30 September 2022).

	Energy sources	Installed capacity	Share in India's total installed electricity capacity
Thermal	Coal	204,079.49 MW/204.07 GW	50.04%
	Gas	24,824.21 MW/24.82 GW	6.08%
	Lignite	6,620 MW/6.62 GW	1.62%
	Diesel	562.37 MW/0.56 GW	0.13%
	Total	236,086.07 MW/236.08 GW	57.89%
Nuclear		6,780 MW/6.78 GW	1.66%
Renewable	Solar	60,813.90 MW/60.81 GW	14.91%
	Hydro	51,749.68 MW/51.74 GW	12.69%
	Wind	41,666.08 MW/41.66 GW	10.21%
	Bio	10,700.84 MW/10.70 GW	2.62%
	Total	164,930.5 MW/164.93 GW	40.44%
All India		407,796.57 MW/407.79 GW	

Source: Central Electricity Authority (CEA), 2022.

Digital India

In July 2015, the Modi Government launched the Digital India (DI) Mission with an aim to transform India into a digitally empowered society. It was felt that by infusing digital technologies into the public service ecosystem, India would become adept at emerging technologies and transform itself into a leading knowledge economy. The DI Mission aims to give access to digital information, knowledge and services to every citizen. It strives to achieve inclusive growth in areas of electronic services, manufacturing and job opportunities, and plans to connect rural areas with high-speed internet networks and improve digital literacy.

The DI programme main focus is in three key areas: i) Providing digital infrastructure as a core utility to every citizen through availability of high speed internet, digital identity, access to common service centres, shareable private space on a public cloud, safe and security cyber-space; ii) Governance and services on demand through seamlessly integrated services across departments or jurisdictions; availability of services in real time from online and mobile platforms; digitally transformed services for improving ease of doing business; making financial transactions electronic & cashless; leveraging Geospatial Information Systems (GIS) for decision support systems & development and, iii) Digital empowerment of citizens through universal digital literacy, universally accessible digital resources, availability of digital services in Indian languages, collaborative digital platforms for participative governance and citizens not required to physically submit documents.

Since DI focuses on a technology-enabled societal transformation, the overarching mission works in tandem with multiple government departments under several ministries. Under the DI mission, the government has targeted nine pillars of growth and digitisation, viz., Broadband Highways, Universal Access to Mobile Connectivity, Public Internet Access Programme, e-Governance: Reforming Government through Technology, e-Kranti – Electronic Delivery of Services, Information for All, Electronics Manufacturing, IT for Jobs and Early Harvest Programmes.

Moreover, several initiatives have been launched under the DI campaign such as 'DigiLockers' where citizens can store their documents free of charge; 'E-Hospitals' which connect patients, hospitals and doctors through a single digital platform; 'E-Pathshala', which showcases and disseminates all educational e-resources and the 'BHIM' App, which makes payment transactions simple, easy and quick, using the Unified Payments Interface (UPI). Over the last seven years, the DI campaign has registered significant achievements, including making India the largest 'connected' nation in the world with more than 800 million broadband users. There is also a remarkable increase in electronic transactions related to e-governance. Consequently, the Indian digital economy is estimated to grow from USD 200 billion in 2017-18 to a staggering USD 1 trillion by 2025.

Make in India

In September 2014, the Modi Government launched the 'Make in India' (MII) Initiative, a flagship programme of the government, which aims to facilitate investment, foster innovation, build the best in class infrastructure, enhance skill development and make India a hub for innovation, design and manufacturing. The MII Initiative opens up new sectors for foreign capital. It invites potential investors and partners all over the world to participate in the growth story of 'New India'. This initiative, which completed eight years on 25th September, 2022, is one of the unique 'Vocal for Local' initiatives promoting India's innovation and manufacturing domains to the world. In last eight years, it has registered significant achievements and currently it focuses on 27 strategic sectors of manufacturing and services under MII 2.0.

While the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade coordinates action plans for 15 manufacturing sectors, the Department of Commerce coordinates 12 service sector plans. For increasing investment in the country, various steps have been taken, which include the introduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST), reduction in Corporate taxes, financial market reforms, consolidation of public sector banks, enactment of labour codes, improving ease of doing business, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy reforms (which resulted in increased FDI inflows to the country from US $ 45.15 billion in 2014-2015 to US $ 81.97 billion in 2020-21), reduction in compliance burden, policy measures to boost domestic manufacturing through public procurement orders and Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP).

Moreover, a series of measures have been taken, including "Atmanirbhar" packages and Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes across 14 key manufacturing sectors in 2020-21 with allocation of over US$ 26 billion, investment opportunities under National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) and National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP), India Industrial Land Bank (IILB), Industrial Park Rating System (IPRS) and the soft launch of the National Single Window System (NSWS) to improve the economic situation and convert the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic into an opportunity for growth. Several industrial corridor projects, which are a part of the National Industrial Corridor (NIC) Development Programme, have been approved, while the GatiShakti National Master Plan provides a transformative approach for ensuring multi-modal connectivity to various economic zones. The MII Initiative has been striving to ensure that the business ecosystem is conducive for investors doing business in India and is contributing simultaneously to the growth and development of the country. Businesses in India are also aiming for 'Made in India' and 'Made for the World' products, adhering to global standards of quality.

PM Gati Shakti

The absence of agency coordination and collaboration has posed a significant obstacle to the timely completion of infrastructure projects in India. These projects have frequently encountered time and cost overruns, resulting in the loss of public money. The root of these cost and time overruns is the unsynchronised work of infrastructure projects by different line ministries. As an illustration, project delays can be caused by underestimating the initial project cost, skyrocketing land acquisition costs, delays in obtaining environmental, forestry, and wildlife clearances as well as industrial licencing approval, road crossing of pipelines and transmission lines, moving of utilities, delays in securing financing, delays in completing detailed engineering, etc. Additionally, the State Government has its own sets of bottlenecks.

The Gati Shakti National Master Plan for Multi-Modal Connectivity, announced by the Prime Minister in 2021, is poised to transform how infrastructure and logistical development projects are planned and carried out in India. The project will address significant gaps between macro planning and micro implementation by shattering departmental silos and bringing in more comprehensive and integrated project execution and management.

Essentially, the plan is to develop a digital platform that connects 16 ministries, including the railways and roadways, to carry out infrastructure connectivity projects in a synchronised manner. The PM Gati Shakti will cover infrastructure projects worth more than Rs.500 crores from various central and state government ministries, including UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagarik - subsidies for facilitating air travel) and Bharatmala, Sagarmala, inland waterways, dry/land ports, etc. To ensure unified and seamless last-mile connectivity from one mode of transportation to another for both people and freight, it is crucial to make sure that these projects are carried out in a coordinated and time-bound manner.

This scheme will deliver seamless connectivity across the nation with a reliable regulatory environment, benefiting businesses, trade and the general public. It will lower logistical expenses and speed up the movement of goods. This scheme also includes adding land records, which will hasten the swift execution of any project.

About the VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Vivekananda International Foundation is an independent non-partisan institution that conducts research and analysis on domestic and international issues, and offers a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Some of India's leading practitioners from the fields of security, military, diplomacy, government, academia and media fields have come together to generate ideas and stimulate action on national security issues.

The defining feature of VIF lies in its provision of core institutional support which enables the organization to be flexible in its approach and proactive in changing circumstances, with a long-term focus on India's strategic, developmental and civilisational interests. The VIF aims to channelize fresh insights and decades of experience harnessed from its faculty into fostering actionable ideas for the nation's stakeholders.

Since its establishment, VIF has successfully embarked on quality research and scholarship in an effort to highlight issues in governance and strengthen national security. This is being actualized through numerous activities like seminars, round tables, interactive-dialogues, Vimarsh (public discourse), conferences and briefings. The publications of the VIF form the lasting deliverables of the organisation's aspiration to impact on the prevailing discourse on issues concerning India's national interest.