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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS



APRIL 24

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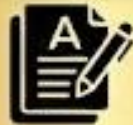
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How effective is reservation as a tool to address gender inequality?

Reservation will give us greater voice



ADITI NARAYANI PASHAN

IT is the small yet impactful changes happening in India's villages which show that a dramatic transformation is underway. Here, the meaning of *naar shakti* is being quietly, but decisively, redefined — it is visible in how women's political participation through the Panchayati Raj institutions has initiated a subtle yet powerful restructuring of power relations. Women are becoming stakeholders by exercising legitimate authority over public resources — deciding where a hand pump is installed, which welfare scheme is prioritised, and how village roads are to be widened. If empowerment, for them, is not performative radicalism but the everyday practice of decision-making, anchored in the institutional power conferred on them by reservation, which is not charity but a connective tissue.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment deepened democratic governance in India by making it more transparent, accountable, equitable and participatory. It ensured effective political participation of women both as conscious voters and as vocal representatives.

When talking about women who have come to power at the panchayat level, there is a tendency to make the reductionist *problem-pull* argument. Yet, those who make this argument forget one simple truth: These are women who are elected representatives and their signatures that authorise state action. This authority, far from being procedural, becomes constitutive of power — extending from governance into the household, where decisions on daughters' education, marriage, and marriage are increasingly being renegotiated.

It is within this consciousness that the Sarva Shakti Vardak Adhikaran must be located. If the Panchayati Raj reservation has revolutionised the grammar of power at the grassroots, extending women's representation to the higher legislatures holds the potential to amplify this change structurally. The lesson from rural India is clear: Representation is the beginning of today's women's empowerment. Women's reservation in Parliament and state assemblies has the potential to address the democratic deficit by just institutionalising the presence of women across legislatures — ensuring that women in power are not an exception but a norm, thus further embodying the ethos of social justice.

Women's reservation would be the

single biggest reform to political and moral democracy since the framing of the Constitution itself. It would force national and national parties to initiate internal democratic reforms and recalibrate their programmes to meet the expectations of women, the biggest electorate of the country. Women leaders having a greater say in the nation's politics and policies would enable the creation of a sustainable ecosystem for women's leadership and participation in other fields.

The trickle-down effect would force corporate India to rethink its glass ceilings or break it altogether, ensuring more women in boardrooms. In the coming decades, it would create a broad-based grassroots female leadership. The spillover effect would be the diminishing importance of dynastic, elite politics and the creation of a new political class that truly embraces those pushed to the margins.

As political representation of women grows, it would help advance rights-based discourse. It would be a crucial instrument for social and gender justice which would further dismantle attempts to frame issues affecting women through a narrow, elitist lens. Crucially, the *Nari Shakti Vardak Adhikaran* seeks to move beyond token representation by enabling their women to exercise independent political agency, recognising their distinct experiences at the intersection of caste and gender, and allowing them to articulate their own priorities within multiple overlapping hierarchies.

Women's representation in political and policymaking institutions is crucial for enabling their substantive participation across the full spectrum of social life. In the absence of gendered representation in these domains, women's agency remains structurally limited and their participation continues to be circumscribed by hegemonic power relations.

Women's leadership in politics, government, and public life will not only help advance the goal of gender equality — it could actually bring about sustainable and inclusive growth and development. Hence, women's reservation in legislatures is, in the truest sense, a reform that has the potential to destabilise the political hegemony that has persisted for centuries. The true measure of success for this is not increasing the number of elected members in Parliament but of ensuring that the "harkens people" have a greater voice. It will be seen in the transition from welfare citizenship to political citizenship and the uncomfortable questions about dignity, equity and representation that will be asked, more and more, in the corridors of power.

The writer is associate professor, Dr Ambedkar International Centre

We belong, let our performance speak



RAMA BHARGURKAR

INDIAN POLITICS has always been more respectful of the value of women leaders than Indian businesses. Yet reservation for women in Parliament has historically been a rocky road, while reservation for women on corporate boards has been smooth. Of course, there was no voting on this issue, just a diktat handed out.

The first phase of mandatory representation of women on corporate boards happened in 2004, when the Companies Act, 2003 stipulated that listed and large public companies must have a woman board director. The appointments that followed were mostly women connected with the promoter/owner families, many of whom did not work in the business. So, compliance was achieved without much change in the overall governance system.

Five years later, regulator SEBI raised the bar and mandated that the top-500 listed companies must have at least one female independent director on their board. This paved the way for women professionals outside of the promoter/owner families. Since then, considerable progress has been made — both the number of boards having independent women directors and the pool of women director candidates have grown steadily.

Was there a lot of resistance to this mandatory representation? Not at all. There were several other issues that bothered India Inc more, including new regulations from SEBI and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, which were more expensive, onerous and disruptive to the long-established conflict zones of boards.

What has the journey from compliance to acceptance of women in the boardrooms been? Initially, we heard a lot of "but where are the women who qualify" claims, because qualification was not on the list of "must-haves" when the first round of non-independent women directors were appointed. Everyone pursued the same handful of marquee names.

The salient seemed to be "if we are forced to appoint a woman, she must be held to a higher bar of track record, visibility, experience etc." — the usual stance of having to be twice as good as the average male counterpart to be acceptable. As more search firms jumped into the fray, this complaint mellowed.

More significant was the sudden explosion in "women director training" programmes. The message seemed to be

that if you are to be appointed via reservation, then you probably need special training to get up to speed.

As someone who has served on listed, blue-chip company boards since the early 2000s, I had never come across such training programmes for men, despite many being first-time directors. It was presumed that men were capable of learning on the job while women needed to be trained.

Women went with it, hoping for a platform to network and improve chances of future board appointments. These offering women director training were resistant to suggestions that they should instead offer training programmes for board and non-board committee chairmen on how to build more gender-inclusive boards and widen the pool of women directors.

Interestingly, these training programmes were not helping women figure out how to make themselves get heard and seen there in a room full of assertive men. They were mostly about things you could read in a book or learn on the job quite quickly.

In addition to training firms, there were several well-meaning, experienced male directors who started offering "women director mentoring". Some of the discourse from them was strange, to put it kindly, and paternalistic, to put it bedignantly.

Their idea was that women on boards were the *vis* to the *yang* of the existing boardrooms, or "toxic mothers" who made discussions calmer and more polite. They frequently noted out advice to not be controversial and to "fit in". None of this did much to help the cause of women directors or of diversity. Hopefully now, with more women as directors and in C-level roles, women will be mentored more relevantly by other women and taught the importance of seeking to perform rather than to belong.

Of course, women do get a lot of "mentorship" and "be-prot" in boardrooms. Management often demurs questions from male directors worthy of more serious answers than those from women, especially if they have a softer, not "man-like" demeanour.

But there, what's new? The main thing is that a seat at the table has been provided and it does not come with conditions of how to behave and what issues to engage with. We need more diversity — of values, world views and leadership styles in the boardrooms. It is here that the next set of women on boards have to step up.

The good news is that many boards now have more than one woman to recognise this.

The writer is a business adviser and independent director

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Reservation (Affirmative Action):** A policy measure that sets aside a certain percentage of seats or positions for underrepresented groups. In India, it is constitutionally mandated for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes in education, employment, and legislatures. For women, it operates as a horizontal reservation, cutting across all vertical categories. *Example: 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj institutions.*
- **Pradhan Pati Syndrome:** A term describing a situation where the husband of an elected woman representative (usually a Pradhan or head of a panchayat) exercises actual power, reducing the woman to a proxy. This reflects patriarchal control over women's political agency.
- **Substantive Representation vs. Descriptive Representation:** Descriptive representation means having representatives who share certain characteristics (e.g., gender, caste) with those they represent. Substantive representation goes further—it is about acting in the interests of the represented group, influencing policy, and bringing about real change.
- **Intersectionality:** A framework that examines how overlapping social identities—like caste, class, and gender—combine to create distinct experiences of discrimination or privilege. A Dalit woman faces both caste and gender oppression, different from that faced by an upper-caste woman or a Dalit man.
- **Glass Ceiling:** An invisible, unacknowledged barrier that prevents women and minorities from rising to top positions in organizations, despite qualifications and achievements. *Example: Few women in boardrooms or C-suite roles in corporate India.*
- **Horizontal vs. Vertical Reservation:** Vertical reservation applies for SC, ST, and OBC communities as a whole. Horizontal reservation cuts across these vertical categories, ensuring representation for groups like women, disabled persons, etc. A woman from an SC community fills both a vertical (SC) and horizontal (women's) quota.
- **Corporate Board Diversity Mandate:** In India, the Companies Act, 2013 first required at least one woman director on the board of certain listed and public companies. In 2018, SEBI mandated at least one independent woman director for the top 500 listed companies (by market capitalization). This was a regulatory push for gender diversity in corporate governance.
- **Tokenism:** The practice of making only a superficial or symbolic effort to be inclusive by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups, giving an illusion of equality without challenging existing power structures.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Core Thesis of First Perspective (Political Reservation):**

- Reservation in PRIs has restructured power relations at the grassroots. Women exercise legitimate authority over public resources, redefining empowerment as everyday decision-making rather than performative radicalism.
- The “pradhan pati” critique underestimates the constitutive power of an elected position; the signature of a woman representative authorizes state action and spills into household decision-making (education, nutrition, marriage).
- Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam is the logical extension of PRI success to higher legislatures. It would institutionalize women’s presence, forcing political parties to undertake internal reforms and broadening the political agenda to include gender concerns.
- Reservation is a corrective measure, not charity. It addresses a democratic deficit and empowers Dalit women to articulate distinct priorities at the intersection of caste and gender.
- Women’s political representation has a transformative potential across all spheres, destabilizing entrenched political hegemony and producing a transition from welfare citizenship to political citizenship.

- **Core Thesis of Second Perspective (Corporate Boards):**

- Unlike politics, corporate India accepted gender mandates on boards without much resistance, partly because it was a regulatory fiat, not subject to voting.
- The journey from compliance to acceptance was shallow: early appointments were promoter-family women; then came independent directors. The emphasis on “where are the qualified women?” and the proliferation of women director training programs reflect patronizing attitudes.
- Training programs implicitly suggested that women need remedial help to function, unlike men, who were assumed capable of learning on the job. Mentorship often advised women to “fit in” and not be controversial.
- Reservations provided a “seat at the table” but not necessarily equal influence—women face mansplaining, hepeating, and dismissive responses.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-Independence Era:** Women's participation in the freedom movement and demands for universal adult franchise laid the foundation. The Government of India Act, 1935 provided limited reserved seats for women on communal lines.

- **Constituent Assembly Debates:** Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Hansa Mehta, and others advocated for equal rights. The Constitution adopted universal adult franchise (Article 326), but no special reservation for women in legislatures.

- **1950s–1980s:** Periodic discussions on women's reservation failed to gain legislative momentum. Women's representation in Lok Sabha remained below 10%.

- **73rd and 74th Amendments (1992):** Landmark in recognizing women's political participation. Mandated one-third reservation for women in all panchayat and municipal bodies. Several states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra later increased it to 50%. This created a large cadre of women grassroots leaders.

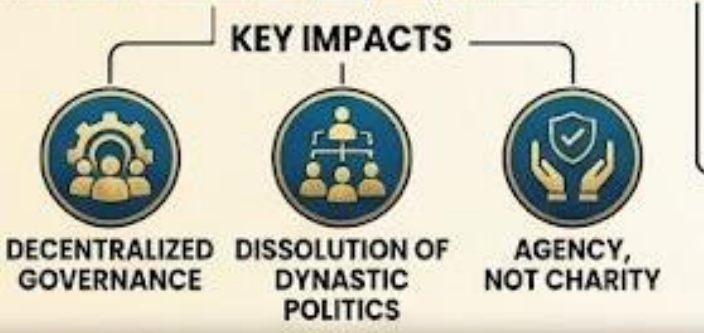
- **Women's Reservation Bill Odyssey:** First introduced in 1996, repeatedly lapsed or stalled due to lack of political consensus, demands for OBC sub-quota, and fears of upsetting male dominance.

- **Corporate Governance Reforms:** Companies Act, 2013 mandated at least one woman director on boards of certain public companies (effective 2014). In 2018, SEBI amended listing regulations requiring at least one independent woman director for the top 500 listed entities.

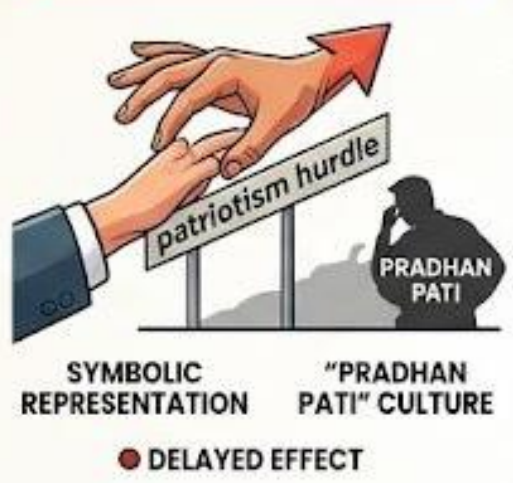
- **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023:** Passed in September 2023, providing 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and state assemblies. It includes sub-reservation for SC/ST women. Implementation is contingent on the first delimitation exercise after the amendment, and reservation shall continue for 15 years.

A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS: GENDER RESERVATION AS A TOOL FOR EQUALITY

PART I: POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT - A VOICE AT THE TABLE



CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION



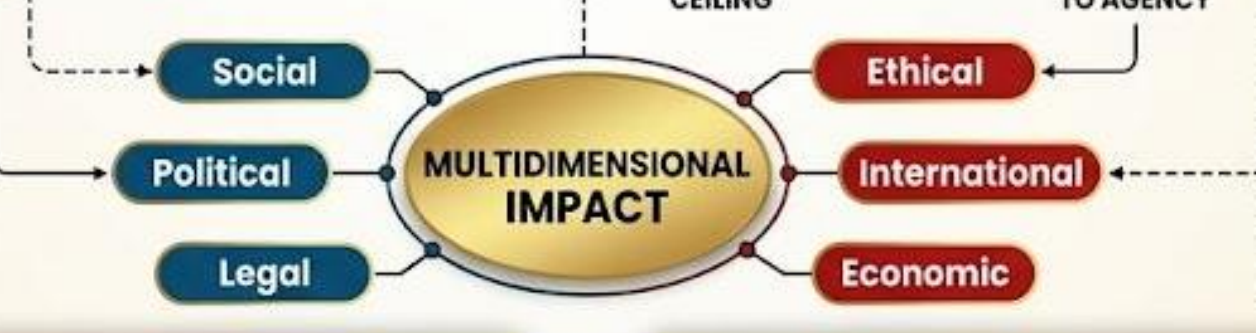
PART II: CORPORATE REFORMS - MERIT OVER MANDATE



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TIMELINE OF ISSUES



- **Logical and Philosophical Base**

- **Equality vs. Equity:** Formal equality (equal treatment) fails to address structural barriers. Reservation is rooted in the principle of substantive equality—treating differently situated groups differently to achieve genuine parity. The argument frames reservation as a “corrective measure” that compensates for centuries of exclusion.
- **Capability Approach (Amartya Sen):** Empowerment is about expanding people’s capabilities to lead lives they value. Reservation provides institutional capabilities—authority over resources, decision-making power—that translate into improved agency at home and beyond.
- **Justice as Fairness (John Rawls):** The “difference principle” justifies inequalities only if they benefit the least advantaged. Reservation for women, especially those facing intersecting disadvantages (Dalit women), aligns with this redistributive justice.
- **Critical Mass Theory:** When a minority group’s representation in a body reaches a critical threshold (often around 30%), it can influence the culture and decision-making. The 33% reservation aims for this critical mass.
- **Feminist Standpoint Theory:** Knowledge is socially situated; marginalized groups can offer unique perspectives on social reality. Women’s presence brings lived experiences that reshape policy priorities (e.g., sanitation, safety).
- **Libertarian Critique:** Free choice and merit should determine representation; state-imposed quotas distort competition and efficiency. This view sees reservation as an artificial interference.
- **Communitarian Argument:** The community’s well-being requires fair representation of all its constituent groups. Democracy is not just about individuals but about groups having voice; reservation ensures historically silenced groups are heard.
- **Institutional Theory:** Changing formal rules (mandating seats) can gradually reshape informal norms and cultural attitudes. Even if initial participation is proxy-like, institutional presence eventually alters power dynamics, as seen in PRIs.

- **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **Social Dimension**

- Enhanced visibility of women in public roles challenges rigid gender roles, particularly in rural areas.
 - Potential to prioritise social issues like health, education, sanitation, women's safety, and child welfare; this can alter household-level power equations over time.

- **Political Dimension**

- Changes candidate selection, campaign strategies, and party outreach; women's issues become explicit electoral themes.
 - Over time, may push parties to institutionalise women's wings, leadership programmes, and gender-sensitive manifestos.

- **Legal Dimension**

- Constitutional entrenchment through amendments (106th, 73rd, 74th) gives strong legal backing, limiting easy rollback.
 - Corporate mandates under Companies Act and SEBI regulations embed gender diversity within regulatory frameworks.

- **Ethical Dimension**

- Raises questions of fairness (to men displaced from seats) versus corrective justice for women historically excluded.
 - Also engages debates on merit, dignity, and whether representation should mirror social composition as a normative democratic ideal.

- **International Dimension**

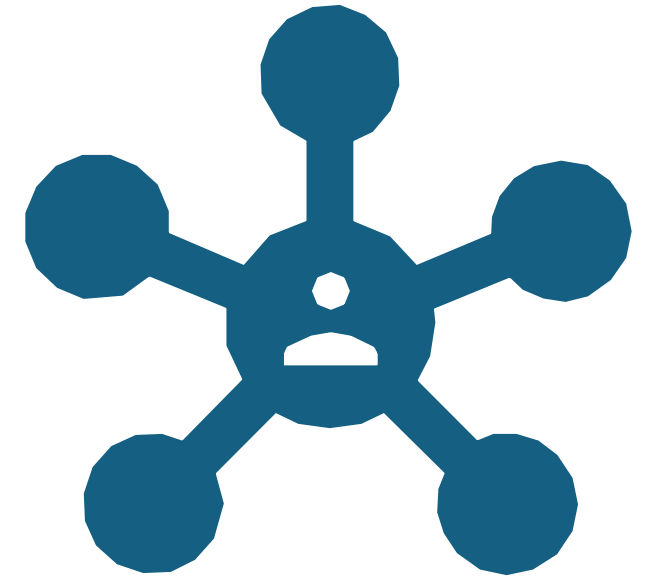
- India aligns with global trends under CEDAW and SDG-5 on women's political participation and leadership.
 - Experience with women's quotas in countries like Rwanda, Nordic states, and Latin America provides comparative learning on design and impact.

- **Economic Dimension**

- Better governance and inclusive decision-making can improve delivery of welfare schemes, indirectly supporting human capital formation.
 - Diverse corporate boards are associated globally with better risk management, innovation, and sometimes improved financial performance, offering an economic rationale for gender diversity.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**

- **Class 6–8 Social Science (Civics / Social and Political Life)**
 - Chapters on *Panchayati Raj, Local Government, Key Elements of a Democratic Government, Understanding Marginalisation*.
 - Help students see how local-level reservations bring women into decision-making and why representation matters.
- **Class 9 Democratic Politics – I**
 - Chapters on *Democracy in the Contemporary World, Constitutional Design, Democratic Rights*.
 - Provide conceptual grounding on equality, representation and rights relevant to women’s political reservation.
- **Class 10 Democratic Politics – II**
 - *Gender, Religion and Caste* directly discusses political representation of women and need for reservation.
 - *Working of Institutions and Federalism* connect to Parliament, State Assemblies and local governments where quotas operate.
- **Class 11 Indian Constitution at Work**
 - Chapters like *Constitution as a Living Document, Elections and Representation, Local Governments* link to the 73rd/74th Amendments and reservation debates.
 - Good base for discussing constitutional amendments and affirmative action in representative bodies.
- **Class 12 Politics in India since Independence / Contemporary World Politics**
 - Topics on social movements, women’s movements and democratic deepening help contextualise the long struggle for women’s reservation.





- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**

- **GS Paper I**

- Indian society: role of women, population issues, social empowerment.
- Salient features of Indian society; women's movement; effects of globalisation on Indian society.

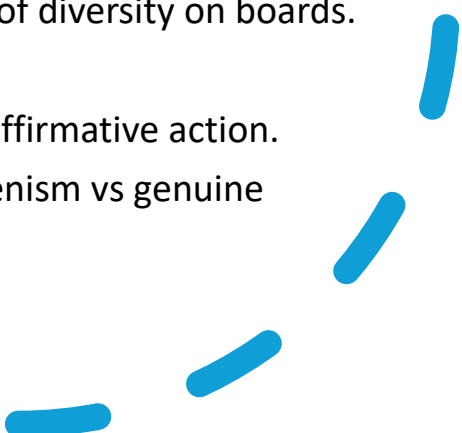
- **GS Paper II**

- Indian Constitution: features, amendments, significant provisions; 73rd & 74th Amendments; 106th Amendment.
- Parliament and State Legislatures – structure, functioning, issues with representation.
- Role of NGOs, SHGs, and women's organisations in governance and development.

- **GS Paper III**

- Inclusive growth and issues arising from it; social sector services.
- Corporate governance, transparency and accountability; role of diversity on boards.

- **GS Paper IV (Ethics)**

- Values of justice, equality, empathy, compassion; fairness vs affirmative action.
 - Case studies on conflict between merit and reservations, tokenism vs genuine inclusion, integrity in public life.
- 

Way Forward

Timely Implementation with Robust Roadmap

- Conduct pending census and delimitation transparently, with clear communication on timelines for women's reservation in legislatures.
- Start preparatory work now: training modules, political education camps, and leadership programmes for potential women candidates.

Institutional Capacity-Building

- Set up non-partisan training institutes or strengthen existing ones to focus on legislative skills, budgeting, law-making and oversight for women representatives.
- For corporate boards, invest in systematic director-training, mentoring and succession planning, rather than one-off compliance workshops.

Strengthening Party-Level Democracy

- Internal quotas in party organisational structures; transparent and merit-based ticket distribution to women.
- Encourage issue-based women's caucuses within parties and legislatures.

Intersectional and Context-Specific Support

- Sub-quotas for SC/ST women must be operationalised carefully; debate on OBC women's sub-reservation should be addressed through informed deliberation.
- Tailored support for first-generation women representatives from marginalised communities.

Beyond Numbers: Evaluating Outcomes

- Periodic, independent assessments of how reservation impacts policy priorities, quality of debate, constituency service, and governance indicators.
- Use this evidence during the 15-year review to refine design rather than simply extend or end quotas.

Culture Change and Social Support Systems

- Invest in safe public spaces, childcare, transport, and digital connectivity to reduce the practical barriers women face in public life.
- Encourage media to move away from stereotyping women leaders and instead focus on performance and policy.

Corporate Governance Reforms

- Move from "at least one woman" to encouraging multiple women on key committees (audit, risk, nomination) to reduce tokenism.
- Link diversity outcomes to ESG reporting and board-evaluation processes.

- **UPSC – Prelims**

- Questions on features and provisions of the 73rd and 74th Amendments (Panchayati Raj, reservation for women and SC/ST).
- Questions on which bodies can have reservation, nature of local self-government, role of Gram Sabha.
- Questions on Companies Act / SEBI regulations related to corporate governance (occasionally in CSE or other exams).

- **UPSC – Mains GS I**

- “Women’s empowerment in India is incomplete without their political empowerment.” Discuss.
- Impact of Panchayati Raj reforms on democratic participation and women’s leadership.

- **UPSC – Mains GS II**

- Importance of 73rd/74th Amendments in deepening democracy and empowering women.
- Debate on women’s reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies; arguments for and against.
- Role of constitutional amendments in strengthening representative democracy.

- **UPSC – Mains GS IV (Ethics)**

- Case studies involving reservation and merit, fairness in public employment, and dilemmas around tokenism vs genuine empowerment.

Has a weakening of unionisation hurt workers?



Kingshuk Sarkar

Professor and Area Chair for general management and economics, Goa Institute of Management



Fredy K. Tharhath

National President, Trade Union Centre of India

PARLEY

Since March, the country has witnessed a number of agitations by workers, particularly by those in the manufacturing sector. In the background of these protests for minimum wages; expansion of the social security ambit; and against the contractualisation of jobs, the role of trade unions have come up for discussion. There have been concerns about the impact of deunionisation and how it has affected the workers. Kingshuk Sarkar and Fredy K. Tharhath discuss the question in a conversation moderated by A. M. Jyeshth.

What is the extent of the deunionisation among Indian workers?

Kingshuk Sarkar: Amidst the shifting global, political and economic landscape, the nature of the Indian labour movement, particularly the trade union movement, has undergone substantial changes over the last four decades. Before 1991, unions had relatively better bargaining power, mainly in the public sector. Post liberalisation, mainstream trade unions gradually suffered from declining bargaining power as the labour market became predominantly informal, in the sense that these workers lack employment contracts or do not have access to institutional social security.

Mainstream trade unions suffered from fragmentation and ideological divisions and this weakened trade union effectiveness. Trade unions mostly focused on the regular permanent workforce; and their penetration among the growing segment of contract workers was not high. Global competition and the weakening of regulatory regimes led to the deterioration in labour standards and wages. Secure, well-paid jobs have declined, replaced by flexible work arrangements and non-standard employment, including part-time, short-time, and self-employment. Also, younger workers have a negative perception about trade unions. Today, the unionisation rate among the workforce is only 6.3% – 1.8% in the private sector and 11.8% in the public sector. The recent enactment of the Labour Code is going to further aggravate the situation.

Fredy K. Tharhath: Challenges to the trade union movement have happened not just because of empirical adversities. It's because of the sharpening of the general crisis of capitalism and the resulting drive for fetishistic methods of outsourcing and fragmentation of industries. Unlike in many other capitalist countries, it was the working class that fanned the fire of the Indian freedom struggle. The working class



Living on the edge: Police officers patrol a street after workers demanded a wage hike, and soaring prices, in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, on April 23, 2019.

fought colonial rulers compelling them to make labour laws. When the republic was born, the fruits of those labour laws were reaped by the workers for the first two to three decades, called the dirigisme period. The public sector grew. But after the Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG) policies came in 1991, this was not the case. There has been a counter offensive from the side of capital, especially from finance capital and its adjuncts. It is not that contract labour grew because of the timidity of the existing trade union movement, it is because of the impact of a general onslaught upon the working class, and because of the privatisation of public sector units, which led to those sections of the working class getting trimmed off, lessening its bargaining power. So it is a phenomena based outcome, not just a behavioural outcome.

Forming a trade union is a fundamental right, but they are often seen as a "problem". What has been the Indian experience?

KS: The growth of Indian trade unions and political developments are very closely related. Since 1991, we have seen a lot of outsourcing happening. A person may be working for an organised sector, but many do not have a direct relation with the employer. So sometimes it becomes difficult for trade unions to engage or mobilise workers as union members. Also, because of the political affiliations of mainstream trade unions, there have been misgivings among the workers as they see trade unions as an extension of the political ideology. In the public sector, employment decreased from 19.6 million in 1991 to 17.5 million in 2008. Economic reforms lead to the closure or downsizing of uncompetitive public sector units and traditional industries.

FKT: In regions such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu,



Mainstream trade unions suffered from fragmentation and ideological divisions and this weakened trade union effectiveness. Trade unions mostly focused on the regular permanent workforce; and their penetration among the growing segment of contract workers was not high

KINGSHUK SARKAR

when general strikes occur, contract unions are a part of it. The contracted workers are also unionised as separate entities. Even with this kind of an arrangement, the general drive was for the abolition of contractualisation. Now, because of LPG policies and the dimming democratic atmosphere in the country – unlike in the days of the freedom struggle, when the working class struggle and the democratic struggle to overthrow imperialism went hand in hand – things have gotten worse. After Independence, the general democratic movement among the people helped to galvanise the worker-peasant alliance. It was not simply the legislative or statute part of trade union rights that helped the movement. But now because of the general onslaught, the working class movement has begun to fight defensively. The question of abolishing contractualisation and the question of making a living wage have gone behind the question of manifesting a minimum wage.

The present crisis is around a minimum wage for workers and increasing prices. Have the presence of trade unions helped the government and industries to amicably address these problems?

FKT: When trade union leaders are in house arrest, there is no favour in Parliament or Assemblies. There are no headlines in major newspapers. This is a kind of de-democratisation. A trade union is an agency within the capitalist system. It is not a revolutionary movement. So even though it is within the system, it is curtailed and not at all talked about. And this is because of the political and economic perspective of LPG policies.

KS: The apparent reason behind this unrest in the national capital region is that the minimum wage was not enough for subsistence. State governments decide the minimum wage, determined by a minimum wage advisory board. It is a tripartite, equally represented committee, with representatives from the trade union, the employers and the government. So trade unions have a role to play in the revision of minimum

wages. They should be more vocal within this tripartite labour administrative structure so that the voices of workers are raised and States are compelled to revise minimum wages.

Another issue is that labour market dynamics are creating more problems for trade unions because we have so much of surplus labour coming out of agriculture. Agriculture provides only 14% of the national income, but the employment share of agriculture is more than 45%. This labour needs to be meaningfully employed in the industrial and tertiary sector, which is not happening.

The implementation of the four Labour Codes is being projected as a solution. What do you think is the way forward for addressing the problems of workers?

KS: The Labour Codes do not favour the workers, it is in some cases favouring the employers. However, it is not a huge change from the laws that we already had. Under the labour laws, minimum wages become more progressive because minimum wage has been added to all employments.

However, in the last 40 years, whatever that has been already mentioned in the labour laws have not been implemented. Rather than formalising the informal, our labour force has become more informal over the years in spite of a protective labour law framework being there. So I think the situations are different but we should go back to the basics. Whatever that is there for the workers should be implemented.

FKT: It is a fight for survival. In the last three decades, apart from defensive general strikes, nobody can cite sector-wise indefinite strikes or floor level strikes with aggressive demands. Now, it is evident from the Labour Codes that the capitalists are not happy with even contractualisation. The state, and the oligarchy corporates are going for 'fixed term employment'. This is a phenomena-based situation, because of which phenomena-based outbreaks happen.

Under the Labour Codes, trade unions cannot be formed without 10% of the workforce; unlike in the earlier case of eight workers coming together and forming a trade union. There is no statutory supervision by the Labour Department at all. This is a catastrophic phenomena-based outcome, and not a behavioural issue of existing trade unions.



To listen to the full interview
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- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Deunionisation**

The steady decline in trade union membership and influence over the workforce. In India, only 6.3% of workers are unionised—1.8% in the private sector and 11.8% in the public sector. Deunionisation reduces collective bargaining power, making it harder for workers to negotiate better wages, job security, and working conditions.

- **Informal Labour / Informalisation**

Workers who lack formal employment contracts, job security, or access to institutional social security (like provident fund, health insurance, pension). Post-1991, the share of informal workers even within the organised sector grew sharply due to outsourcing and contract labour.

- **Contractualisation**

The practice of hiring workers through third-party contractors rather than directly by the principal employer. Such workers are legally employees of the contractor, not the firm where they work. This arrangement fragments the workforce, weakens unionisation, and often denies statutory benefits.

- **Fixed-term Employment**

A newer model under the Labour Codes that allows firms to hire workers for a fixed duration with predetermined terms of termination. While it offers some written contract and statutory benefits, it effectively bypasses regular permanent employment, making workforce flexibility easier for employers but increasing job insecurity for workers.

- **Minimum Wage vs. Living Wage**

Minimum wage is the statutory floor below which wages cannot fall; it is meant to cover bare subsistence. A living wage, in contrast, accounts for a decent standard of living, including education, healthcare, and savings. The article notes that the current crisis is about even a minimum wage not being sufficient, let alone a living wage.

- **Tripartite Labour Administrative Structure**

A framework where representatives of trade unions, employers, and the government sit together on bodies like the Minimum Wage Advisory Board to deliberate and decide labour standards. The weakening of this structure post-1991 has diluted worker representation.

- **Labour Codes**

The four new codes—Code on Wages, Industrial Relations Code, Social Security Code, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code—subsume 29 existing central labour laws. They aim to simplify compliance but also introduce provisions like a 10% workforce threshold for union recognition and easier hire-and-fire for smaller establishments.

- **Dirigisme Period**

The first three decades after Independence when the state actively directed economic activity, with a large public sector and relatively stronger labour protection. This period saw relatively better union bargaining power and formal employment growth.

- **LPG Policies (Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation)**

The 1991 economic reforms that opened the Indian economy to global competition, reduced the role of the public sector, and promoted flexible labour markets. These policies are identified in the discussion as a turning point that weakened trade unions.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Core Thesis**

Trade union decline in India is not merely a behavioural or organisational failure but a structural outcome of economic liberalisation and the global crisis of capitalism. While unions suffer from fragmentation and political baggage, the deeper driver is the systematic casualisation of labour and the state's tilt towards employers.

- **Kingshuk Sarkar's Key Points**

- Bargaining power has shifted drastically after 1991; unions remain concentrated among permanent public-sector workers and have failed to penetrate the expanding contract workforce.
- Union fragmentation along political-ideological lines dilutes collective strength and alienates younger workers who view unions as extensions of political parties.
- Unionisation rate is a mere 6.3% overall, with private sector unionisation near collapse.
- The new Labour Codes, by further legalising flexible work and raising union-formation thresholds, will aggravate de-unionisation.
- While labour laws on paper are protective, non-implementation has been the norm; the solution lies in enforcing existing provisions rather than radically new legislative architecture.

- **Fredy K. Thazhath's Key Points**

- De-unionisation is not due to trade union timidity but a “phenomena-based outcome” of the capitalist offensive after LPG—privatisation trimmed the organised working class, reducing its collective power.
- The Indian working class historically led the freedom struggle, compelling colonial rulers to enact labour laws. The post-Independence dirigisme period allowed workers to reap the benefits of that legacy.
- Today's defensive unionism—where strikes are aimed at preserving minimum wages rather than demanding living wages or abolishing contractualisation—is a direct consequence of the deteriorating democratic and economic environment.
- The Labour Codes' 10% threshold for union registration and removal of statutory labour department supervision fundamentally alter the legal terrain, making union formation harder.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-Independence Era (Late 19th Century – 1947)**

The working class was at the forefront of the anti-colonial struggle. Landmark labour laws—Factories Act, Trade Unions Act (1926), Industrial Disputes Act—were wrested from the British after continuous pressure from textile, railway, and plantation workers. Trade unions emerged as both economic and political entities.

- **Dirigisme Period (1947 – late 1970s)**

The state-led development model expanded public sector employment and granted strong legal protection to workers. Trade unions became powerful stakeholders in tripartite bodies. Unionisation rates were relatively high, and permanent employees enjoyed job security, pensions, and collective bargaining clout.

- **Crisis and Shift (1980s)**

Slow economic growth, inefficiencies in public enterprises, and the rise of informal employment began to weaken the traditional industrial working class. The 1982 amendment to the Industrial Disputes Act made it easier to use contract labour in non-core activities, planting the seeds of casualisation.

- **LPG Reforms and After (1991 onwards)**

Economic liberalisation brought in a pro-employer tilt: outsourcing, closure of unviable public sector units, and flexible labour practices became common. Public sector employment shrank from 19.6 million in 1991 to 17.5 million by 2008. The workforce increasingly moved to informal, contract-based arrangements, and union bargaining power plummeted.

- **Labour Codes Era (2020 onwards)**

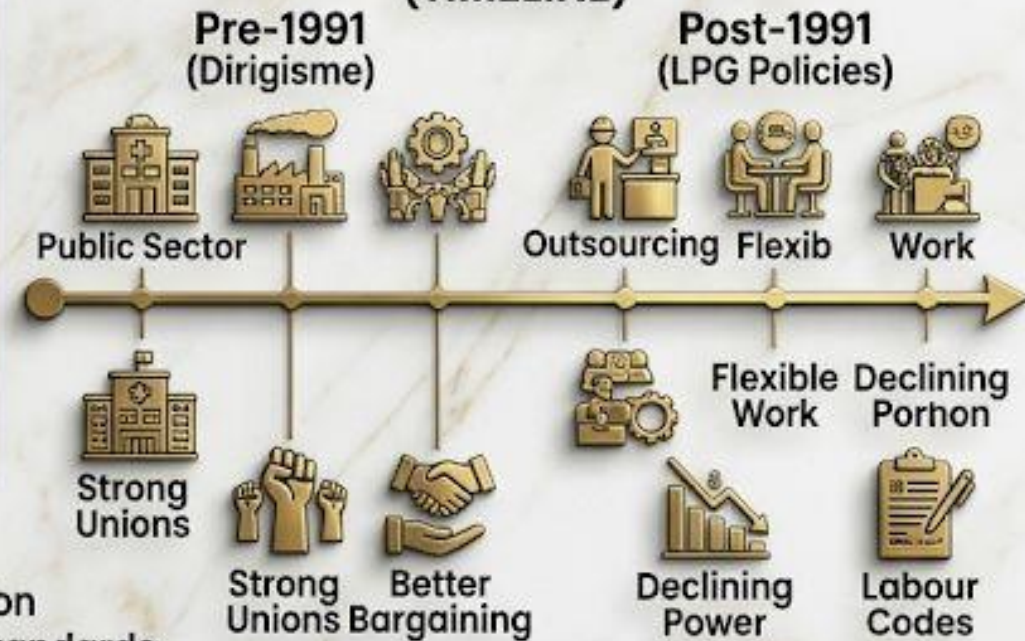
The four Labour Codes were passed but not yet fully implemented. They represent a paradigm shift: fixing a 10% workforce threshold for union recognition, introducing fixed-term employment, expanding the minimum wage net to all employments, but simultaneously reducing statutory checks. Critics see this as the culmination of the post-1991 counter-offensive against labour.



AXIA
IAS ACADEMY

**COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS:
DEUNIONISATION AND THE
CHANGING LABOUR LANDSCAPE**

**HISTORICAL EVOLUTION
(TIMELINE)**



THE CRISIS & EXTENT



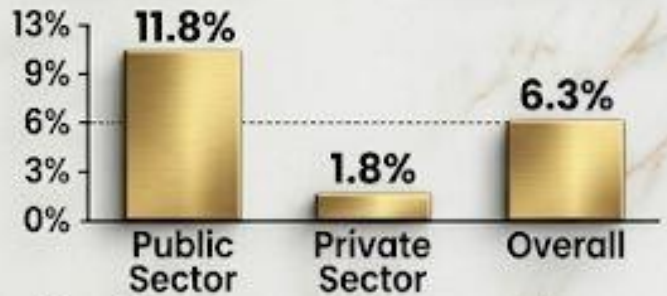
Striking workers to high union work



MAIN PLANT
Permanent jobs
High union %



CONTRACTOR
Contract jobs
Low union %



Key Concerns:

- Declining Bargaining Power
- Contractualisation and Informalisation
- Global Competition & Detriment to Standards

MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS



Legal Labour Codes



Social Inequality



Economic Surplus Labour



Ethical Justice

**WAY FORWARD
(Balanced Solutions)**



- Skilling & Formalisation
- Inclusive Tripartism
- Modernized Unionism

Logical and Philosophical Base

Capital vs. Labour Dialectic
Thazhath's argument rests on a Marxist understanding: capitalism inherently seeks to reduce the share of labour to maximise surplus value. Outsourcing, contractualisation, and fixed-term employment are logical instruments of capital to increase flexibility and profitability. Labour laws are therefore a site of constant class struggle, not a one-time settlement.

Neoliberal Rationality
From the opposing perspective (only indirectly present in the text), flexible labour markets are seen as essential for competitiveness and job creation. Excessive protection, the argument goes, deters investment and fuels automation. The article critiques this by underlining that even stringent laws on paper did not prevent informalisation, implying that the neoliberal logic leads to a race-to-the-bottom in wages and standards.

Constitutional Socialism and DPSPs
The Indian Constitution's Directive Principles (Articles 38, 39, 41, 42, 43) call for a living wage, just working conditions, and worker participation in management. The discussion implies that the current trajectory—reducing trade union strength and promoting flexible employment—runs counter to these constitutional ideals.

Democratic Right vs. Market Efficiency
The right to form associations (Article 19(1)(c)) is a fundamental right. The article highlights the tension between this democratic right and the market-driven imperative to minimise labour "friction". When trade union leaders face house arrest and their struggles go unnoticed by mainstream media, it signals a deeper "de-democratisation" beyond the economic sphere.



- **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **Social:** Increasing inequality between the "protected" 6% and the "precarious" 94% of the workforce.

- **Political:** Shrinking space for democratic dissent within the industrial sphere; "de-democratisation."

- **Legal:** Transition from complex, protective "Inspector Raj" to self-certification and digital compliance under the new Codes.

- **Ethical:** Is it ethical to have workers in the same factory doing the same job but with vastly different pay and safety nets based on "contract" status?

- **International:** International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on the "Right to Organise" (C087 and C098) which India has not fully ratified.

- **Economic:** The "Middle-Income Trap" —if wages don't rise because of weak bargaining, India cannot transition to a consumption-led high-growth economy.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Class 11 Economics – Indian Economic Development**
 - Chapter on “Employment: Growth, Informalisation and Other Issues” directly discusses informalisation, underemployment, and structural change, which parallel the trends described here.
- **Class 10 Social Science – Understanding Economic Development**
 - Chapters on “Sectors of the Indian Economy” and “Globalisation and the Indian Economy” cover organised vs unorganised sectors, globalisation’s impact on workers.
- **Class 12 Political Science – Contemporary World Politics / Politics in India Since Independence**
 - Topics on globalisation, social movements, and democratic politics provide the political context for labour struggles.
- **Class 9 and 10 Democratic Politics**
 - Chapters on rights, democracy, and working of institutions help in understanding trade unions as part of democratic participation.



- **Linkages with UPSC CSE syllabus**

- **GS Paper 1**

- Indian society: class structure, social empowerment, role of organised groups.
 - Post-independence consolidation: role of working class in the national movement.

- **GS Paper 2**

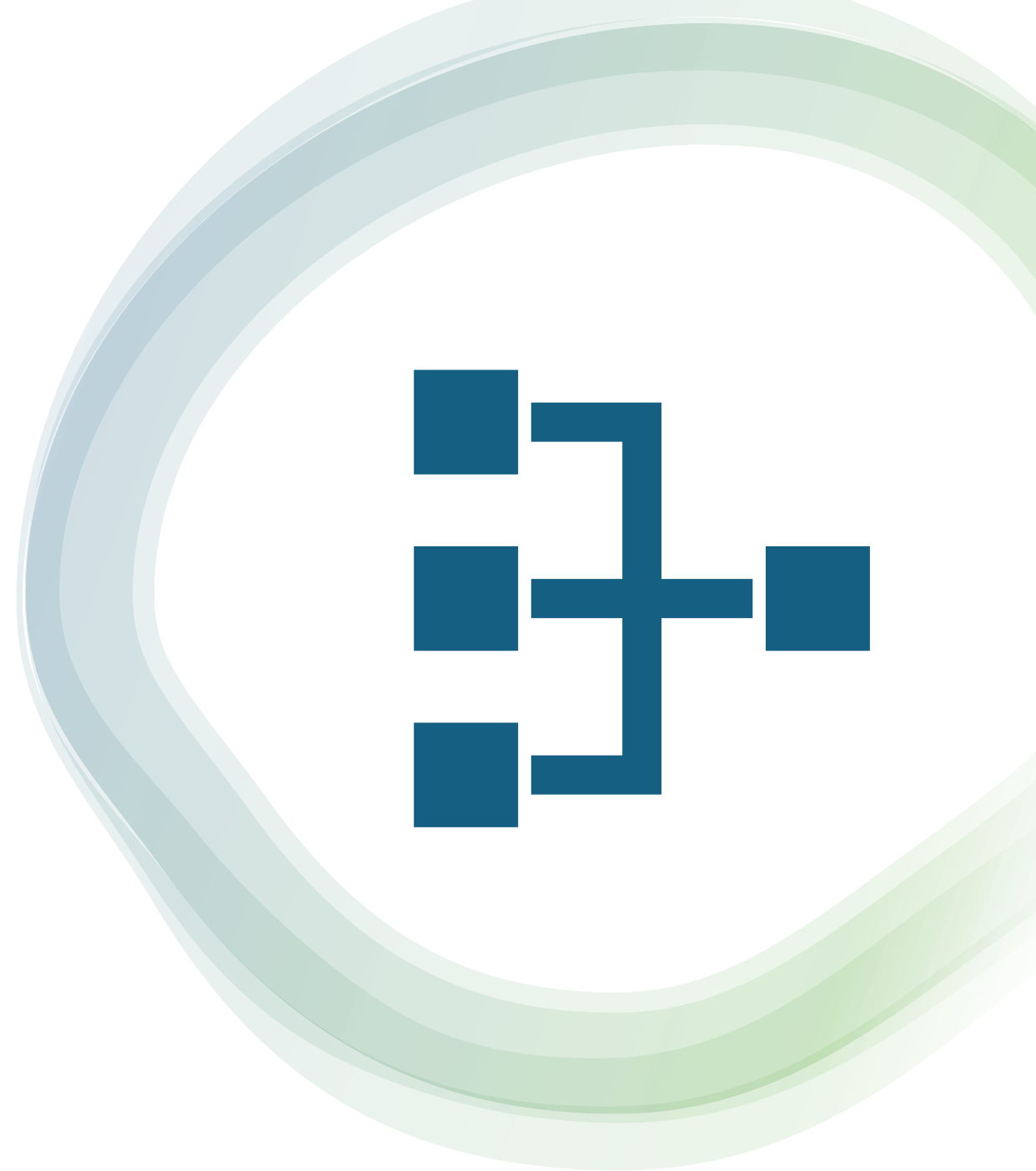
- Polity and governance:
 - Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles (right to association, living wage, social justice).
 - Role of pressure groups and formal/informal associations.
 - Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors (labour reforms, Labour Codes).

- **GS Paper 3**

- Indian economy:
 - Inclusive growth and associated issues.
 - Employment, informal sector, labour reforms, minimum wage policies.
 - Effects of liberalisation on the economy and industrial growth.

- **GS Paper 4 (Ethics)**

- Ethics in public and private relationships; case studies on worker exploitation, whistle-blowing, and fairness in employment.
 - Values of justice, equality, sensitivity to weaker sections.



- **Way forward**

- **Re-energise tripartism**

- Make wage boards and labour advisory boards more transparent, data-driven, and inclusive of informal and women workers.
- Institutionalise periodic revisions of minimum wages linked to cost-of-living indices.

- **Strengthen freedom of association in practice**

- Simplify procedures for union registration and recognition, especially in smaller establishments.
- Protect union leaders and members from victimisation through swift grievance redressal.

- **Union innovation: reaching the informal and gig workforce**

- Promote community-based and sector-wide unions (e.g., across gig platforms, construction clusters).
- Use digital platforms for membership, communication, and legal support.

- **Balanced implementation of Labour Codes**

- Use rule-making power to safeguard worker rights—clear norms on fixed-term employment, layoffs, dispute resolution.
- Invest in labour administration capacity and ensure labour inspections are risk-based but not toothless.

- **Link social security with broader welfare architecture**

- Integrate labour-based schemes (EPF, ESIC) with public health, pensions, and skill programmes, particularly for informal workers.
- Explore hybrid funding models (employer, employee, state contributions).

- **Promote labour-intensive, high-productivity sectors**

- Encourage industries that can absorb surplus agricultural labour (textiles, food processing, MSMEs) with conditions on decent work standards.
- Align industrial policy with employment and labour rights objectives.

- **UPSC CSE Mains – GS 2 / GS 3**

- “Discuss the impact of post-1991 economic reforms on the structure of employment and labour relations in India.”
- “Critically examine the role of trade unions in India in the context of liberalisation and globalisation.”
- “Labour law reforms in India seek to promote ease of doing business but risk weakening labour protections. Comment.”
- “What do you understand by informalisation of labour? Discuss its implications for inclusive growth.”
- “Evaluate the effectiveness of minimum wage legislation in protecting vulnerable workers in India.”

- **UPSC CSE Essay**

- “Labour rights and economic growth: conflicting or complementary goals?”
- “Democracy, dissent and the politics of protest in contemporary India.”

Chasing the monsoon amid farm worries

While agriculture ministry is planning contingency measures after a below-normal monsoon forecast, there's a view that the overall impact of low rains on the farm sector may be much less than earlier due to a variety of reasons.



Has India's farm sector become more resilient to below-normal rains?

Year	Monsoon % of 100	Production (billion mt)	% change from previous year
2002	100	207.0	0.0
2003	100	212.0	+2.4
2004	100	218.0	+2.8
2005	100	225.0	+3.2
2006	100	232.0	+3.1
2007	100	240.0	+3.4
2008	100	248.0	+3.3
2009	100	256.0	+3.2
2010	100	264.0	+3.1

Area under micro-irrigation in horticulture crops



Production growth, supported by the rise in investment in agriculture, showed the Government's Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) in its report on the monsoon for 2010. The government is in a position to take the agricultural sector to the next level. The report also states that the overall impact of low rains on the farm sector may be much less than earlier due to a variety of reasons.

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• Key Terms and Explanations

- **Long Period Average (LPA):** The average rainfall received over a 50-year period, currently taken as 87 cm for the all-India southwest monsoon. It serves as a benchmark; a forecast of 92% of LPA means the country may receive around 80 cm of rain. *Example:* If a region's LPA is 100 cm, a 92% forecast implies only 92 cm, signalling a deficit.
- **El Niño:** A warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean that disrupts global atmospheric circulation. In India, it is statistically linked to suppressed monsoon rainfall, often causing droughts. The opposite phase, La Niña, brings cooler waters and generally boosts rainfall.
- **Below-Normal Monsoon:** A seasonal rainfall total between 90-95% of LPA. A deficit beyond 10% (below 90% LPA) is termed "deficient," while a "drought" is declared when the shortfall exceeds a certain threshold over a large area.
- **Micro-Irrigation:** Targeted water application systems like drip and sprinkler irrigation that deliver water directly to the root zone, minimising evaporative loss. *Example:* Drip irrigation in horticulture can reduce water usage by 40-60% and increase yield. The article notes the area under micro-irrigation in horticulture rose from 0.33% in 2015-16 to 56% in 2023-24.
- **Climate-Resilient Seeds:** Crop varieties bred to tolerate abiotic stresses such as drought, heat, salinity, or waterlogging. They sustain yields under adverse weather. In 2024, 109 such biofortified varieties were released.
- **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY):** A flagship crop insurance scheme providing comprehensive risk cover against non-preventable natural risks at subsidised premiums. Since 2016, it has paid out over ₹1.83 trillion in claims, acting as a social safety net.
- **Non-Bank Finance Companies – Microfinance Institutions (NBFC-MFIs):** Financial entities providing small loans to low-income groups, heavily tied to rural cash flows. A monsoon shock can impair their asset quality due to farmer distress.
- **Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD):** A coupled ocean-atmosphere phenomenon in the Indian Ocean, with a positive phase (warmer west, cooler east) that often aids monsoon rainfall, potentially counteracting El Niño's suppressive effect.
- **Horticulture Crops of Adversity:** Crops like tuber (yams, colocasia), cucurbits (melons, gourds), and arid fruits (ber, pomegranate, fig, jamun) that require less water and yield well even during rainfall deficits, offering farmers alternative income streams.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Core Thesis:** Despite a forecast of a below-normal 2026 monsoon (92% of LPA) and fears linked to El Niño, India's farm sector has built substantial structural resilience. The correlation between monsoon rainfall and foodgrain production has weakened, while the influence of irrigation, input availability, and technology has grown. However, risks persist, particularly in rain-fed regions and for water-intensive crops.

- **Supporting Evidence and Key Points:**

- **Weakening Rainfall-Production Link:** A regression analysis (2012-13 to 2022-23) found that foodgrain production now has only a “moderately positive” correlation with monsoon rainfall, but a “strongly positive” correlation with input prices, electricity, fertiliser availability, and irrigation coverage. Warehousing capacity showed a weak link. In deficit monsoon years like 2017, 2018, and 2023, foodgrain production did not dip; it marginally rose.

- **Irrigation as a Buffer:** Gross irrigated area as a percentage of gross cropped area (GCA) increased from 49.3% (FY16) to 55% (FY21). Expanded irrigation networks insulate crops, particularly in the rabi season, from monsoon failures.

- **Technological and Policy Interventions:**

- Micro-irrigation adoption surged, especially in horticulture (from 0.33% to 56% of area in 8 years), drastically improving water-use efficiency.
- Climate-resilient seed varieties allow crops to withstand heat and moisture stress.
- The PMFBY insurance safety net has covered claims worth ₹1.83 trillion, preventing farmer destitution.

- **Sectoral Resilience in Horticulture:** Production increased due to hybrid varieties, low-water crops (‘crops of adversity’), and micro-irrigation. Farmers are not entirely helpless during dry spells.

- **Persistent Regional and Crop-Specific Vulnerabilities:**

- Rain-fed Maharashtra and parts of Karnataka face the highest credit risk; NBFC-MFIs and agri-equipment financiers could see stress.
- Sugar cane in Maharashtra (Marathwada) may see lower yields (50-55 tonnes/acre to 35-45) and recovery rates (drop of 0.5-1%); shorter crushing seasons increase production costs.
- Demand for edible oil and pulse imports may rise if domestic oilseed and pulse output falls, adding inflationary pressure.
- Even with overall foodgrain stability, the spatial distribution of rainfall matters critically. As the IMD forecast indicates, most regions may see “below-normal” rains, which can create pockets of acute distress.

Historical Evolution of the Issue

Pre-Green Revolution (Before mid-1960s): Indian agriculture was predominantly rain-fed and monsoon-dependent. A single monsoon failure meant widespread famine and food scarcity. The Great Bengal Famine of 1943 highlighted this extreme vulnerability. Irrigation coverage was minimal, and high-yielding seeds were absent.

Green Revolution (Late 1960s – 1980s): Introduction of high-yielding varieties (HYVs) of wheat and rice, coupled with expansion of tube-well irrigation, fertilisers, and pesticides, decoupled production from monsoon to some extent—mainly in the irrigated belts of Punjab, Haryana, and western UP. However, large parts of the country remained rain-fed.

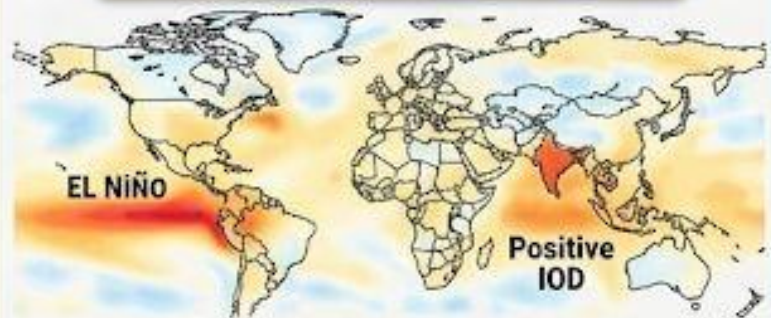
Droughts and El Niño Events (1980s – 2000s): Severe pan-India droughts in 1987, 2002, 2004, and 2009 caused sharp dips in agricultural GDP. The 2009 drought (deficit -22%) led to food inflation and a surge in import demand. These events exposed the limited reach of irrigation and insurance.

Policy Shifts Post-2010: Focus shifted towards managing risk rather than just augmenting production. Key developments:

- *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)* provided a consumption buffer.
- *Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)* (2015) aimed at “Har Khet Ko Pani” (water to every field), expanding micro-irrigation and water conservation.
- *PMFBY* (2016) replaced older insurance schemes with lower premiums and faster claims.
- *Soil Health Card Scheme* (2015) rationalised fertiliser use.
- Release of multiple drought-tolerant and climate-resilient crop varieties from 2014 onwards.

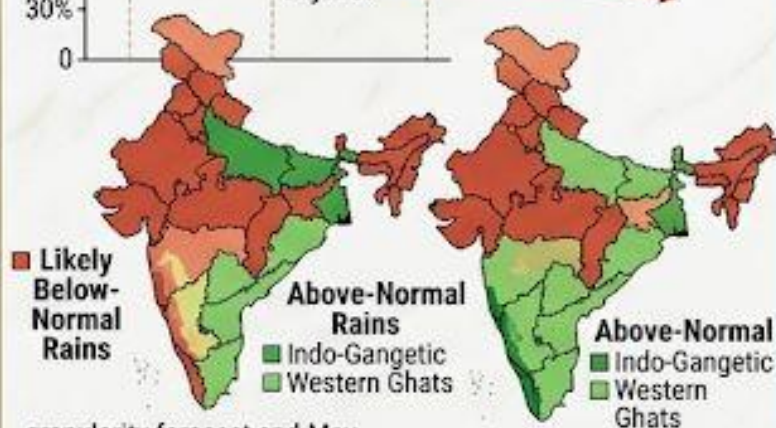
Recent Evidence (2015-2023): Despite below-normal monsoons in 2015, 2017, 2018, and 2023, foodgrain output set new records or remained stable. The 2015 (-12.7%) deficit saw a mere -0.19% change in production. This reinforced the “resilience” narrative. Yet, the 2023 deficit rekindled concerns over El Niño’s impact on pulses, oilseeds, and sugar, leading to export bans on sugar and wheat, and continued inflation in certain food items.

CLIMATE CONTEXT & FORECAST



EL NIÑO IMPACT OFFSET BY POSITIVE IOD

MONSOON 2026 FORECAST

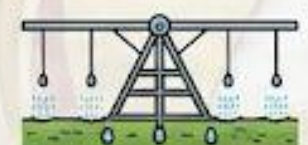


STRUCTURAL INTERVENTIONS & RESILIENCE


DECOUPLING EFFECT




KEY MITIGATION PILLARS




EXPANDED MICRO-IRRIGATION
(Horticulture: 0.33% in 2016 to 56% in 2024)



CLIMATE-RESILIENT SEED VARIETIES
(109 varieties in 2024)



SOCIAL SECURITY NET
(PMFBY Participation rising, ₹1.83 trillion paid)




DIVERSIFICATION: crops of adversity (tubers, gourds, pomegranate)


HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION



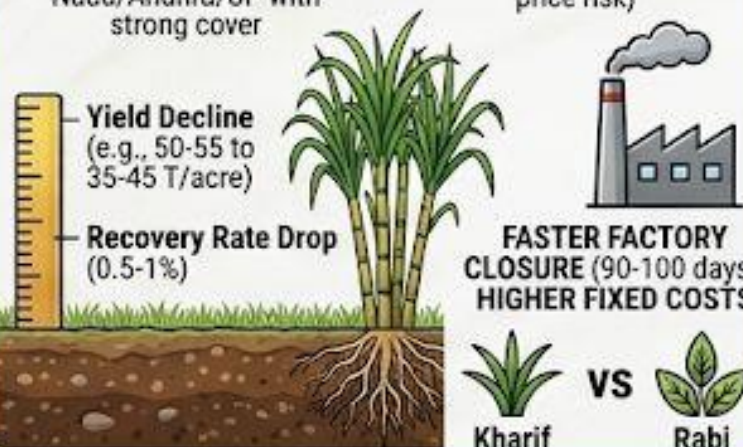
THE RISKS & SECTORAL IMPACTS



CREDIT STRESS: Localized for Maharashtra/Karnataka; Tamil Nadu/Andhra/UP with strong cover



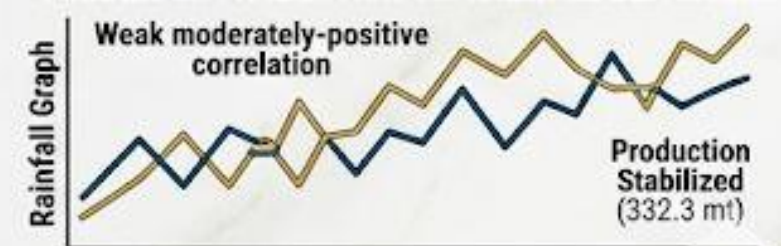
IMPORT RISKS & INFLATION
(Edible Oils, Pulses, Energy price risk)



Yield Decline (e.g., 50-55 to 35-45 T/acre)
Recovery Rate Drop (0.5-1%)
FASTER FACTORY CLOSURE (90-100 days), HIGHER FIXED COSTS

Kharif VS Rabi

FOODGRAIN PRODUCTION VS. RAINFALL DEPARTURE



- **Logical and Philosophical Base**

- **Logic of Decoupling:** The core logical shift is from “rainfall determinism” to a multi-factor input model. Production (P) = $f(\text{Rain, Irrigation, Seeds, Inputs, Technology})$. As the coefficients of irrigation and technology rise, the marginal impact of rain declines. This is an empirical, technocratic logic rooted in the Green Revolution’s success.
- **Ecological Modernisation:** The argument implicitly draws on the philosophy that human ingenuity and capital can overcome natural constraints. Micro-irrigation and climate-smart seeds reflect a belief that technology can harmonise productivity with resource scarcity.
- **Risk Management vs. Crisis Management:** Earlier responses were reactive (drought relief, fodder camps). The present approach (PMFBY, contingency planning, resilient seeds) is grounded in anticipatory, probabilistic thinking—accepting that shocks will occur, but their damage can be pre-mitigated.
- **Equity vs. Aggregate Growth:** A philosophical tension exists between aggregate food sufficiency and distributive justice. The resilience is uneven: large, irrigated farmers benefit, while marginal, rain-fed farmers face existential threats. The logic of “national food security” may mask the deepening vulnerability of specific groups, raising ethical questions about the ‘good life’ and distributive fairness.
- **Assumptions Under Scrutiny:** The resilience argument assumes continued government investment, stable fertiliser and power subsidies, and no catastrophic multi-year drought. It also presumes the “moderate positive correlation” will persist amid accelerating climate change—a tenuous assumption.

- **Multidimensional analysis**

- **Social**

- Monsoon failure disproportionately affects small and marginal farmers, landless labourers and women in agriculture, with spill-over into nutrition, health and education outcomes.
 - Social protection (PDS, MGNREGA, PMFBY payouts) can soften immediate distress but may not fully offset livelihood and indebtedness pressures.

- **Political**

- Drought or monsoon failure has historically influenced electoral behaviour and triggered protests, demands for loan waivers and free power.
 - Governments face a dilemma: short-term populist relief vs long-term structural reforms in water pricing, cropping patterns and input subsidies.

- **Legal**

- Water allocation disputes (inter-state rivers, groundwater regulation) sharpen in drought years; courts and tribunals get pulled into resource conflicts.
 - Implementation of environmental and groundwater laws becomes more contentious as competing user groups (farmers, industry, cities) face scarcity.

- **Ethical**

- Fair distribution of scarce irrigation water raises questions of intra-village and inter-region justice.
 - Over-extraction of groundwater by large farmers using subsidised power, at the cost of future generations, raises intergenerational justice concerns.

- **International**

- India's role as a major importer of edible oil and pulses and as an exporter of rice, sugar and wheat means monsoon performance affects global markets and South-South food security relationships.
 - Climate-induced price spikes can complicate India's commitments to neighbours under various food-security and trade arrangements.

- **Economic**

- Monsoon shocks affect growth via agriculture (output, incomes), rural demand for manufactured goods, and inflation dynamics (food, core).
 - Resilience investments (irrigation, insurance, seeds) are economically rational as "climate adaptation capital," but require good governance to deliver high returns and avoid waste.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**

- **Geography – Class 9 & 10 (India: Size and Location; Climate; Resources and Development)**

- Concepts: monsoon mechanism, distribution of rainfall, agriculture types, irrigation, water scarcity.
- Link: helps you ground the discussion on monsoon variability and irrigation expansion.

- **Geography – Class 11 (Fundamentals of Physical Geography; India: Physical Environment)**

- Chapters on climate, monsoon system, water resources, soils and agriculture.
- Link: scientific basis of monsoon, ENSO, IOD, droughts, and spatial patterns.

- **Economics – Class 11 & 12 (Indian Economic Development; Introductory Macroeconomics)**

- Agriculture's role in GDP, employment, poverty; impact of monsoon on growth and inflation.
- Link: use for understanding macroeconomic channels of monsoon shocks.

- **Political Science / Polity – Class 11 & 12 (Constitution at Work; Politics in India since Independence)**

- Directive Principles, welfare state, green revolution, rural development, public distribution.
- Link: normative basis for state responsibility in handling drought and farm distress.

- **Science – Class 8–10 (Environment and Climate)**

- Basic weather-climate distinctions, greenhouse effect, extreme events.
- Link: climate-change exacerbating monsoon variability.





- **Linkages with UPSC CSE syllabus**

- **GS Paper 1**

- Indian geography: monsoon system, climatic patterns, droughts.
- Distribution of key natural resources and changes in critical geographical features.

- **GS Paper 2**

- Government policies and interventions in farm and water sectors (PMKSY, PMFBY, PDMC).
- Issues relating to poverty, hunger, and welfare schemes in the context of monsoon shocks.

- **GS Paper 3**

- Major crops, irrigation, storage, marketing and related constraints.
- Effects of liberalisation and globalisation on agriculture and food processing (trade in edible oils, sugar, pulses).
- Disaster management (drought) and climate change, including adaptation measures.
- Inclusive growth and issues arising from it (rural credit, NBFC-MFIs).

- **GS Paper 4 (Ethics)**

- Ethical issues in resource allocation, environmental stewardship, climate justice and intergenerational equity.
- Case-study fodder: drought response, loan waivers, water allocation, crop insurance design.

- **Essay**

- Themes like “Agriculture in an era of climate uncertainty,” “Balancing growth, equity and environment,” or “Monsoon and the Indian state.”

- **Way forward**

- **Strengthen irrigation with sustainability**

- Prioritise completion of ongoing projects, minor irrigation and last-mile connectivity in backward rain-fed districts.
- Couple expansion with groundwater regulation, energy pricing reforms and aggressive micro-irrigation to avoid ecological over-shoot.

- **Deepen climate-smart agriculture**

- Scale up dissemination of climate-resilient and biofortified varieties, especially in dryland crops (millets, pulses, oilseeds).
- Institutionalise “crops of adversity” packages—agro-climatic zone-wise modules of low-water crops, agronomy and market linkages.

- **Reform risk-management architecture**

- Improve PMFBY’s claim settlement speed and transparency, promote remote-sensing-based yield estimation, and enhance participation of non-loanee farmers.
- Integrate weather-based insurance, savings products and credit in a bundled, affordable risk-management suite.

- **Smart market and trade management**

- Build dynamic buffer stocks in pulses and edible oils and use calibrated trade policy (tariff bands, import timing) rather than abrupt bans.
- Encourage value chains and storage (warehousing, cold chains) that reduce post-harvest losses in drought-tolerant horticulture crops.

- **Targeted support to vulnerable regions and sectors**

- Design district-level contingency plans with crop advisories, seed kits, and MGNREGA works focused on water conservation (check dams, farm ponds, watershed works).
- For sectors like sugar in rain-fed belts, encourage diversification, water-efficient varieties, and adjust cane pricing to reflect water stress.

- **Information, institutions and participation**

- Expand high-resolution weather and agro-advisory services in local languages via mobile platforms and FPOs.
- Promote community-based water governance (pani panchayats, watershed committees) to ensure equitable and efficient allocation in drought years.

- **UPSC Prelims**

- Questions on:

- El Niño, La Niña and their impact on Indian monsoon (multiple years).
- Indian Ocean Dipole and its effect on monsoon.
- PMFBY, PMKSY and micro-irrigation features.
- Distribution of rainfall and drought-prone areas.

- **UPSC Mains – GS 1**

- Qs on “account for spatial and temporal variations of Indian monsoon.”
- Qs on “droughts in India – causes, distribution and impacts.”

- **UPSC Mains – GS 3**

- “How do El Niño and La Niña affect Indian agriculture and economy?”
- “Discuss the role of micro-irrigation in increasing water-use efficiency in agriculture.”
- “Critically examine the performance of PMFBY/PMKSY in mitigating agrarian distress.”
- “How far is Indian agriculture climate-resilient? Discuss.”

- **Essay**

- Topics around climate change and agriculture, water crisis, or disaster management often invite monsoon-related content.



Indian police: Everyone's favourite punching bag

The Supreme Court passed directions for police reforms in 2006. The directions have not been implemented, but it is the police, and even bureaucrats, who face the flak

Everyday, the police in India face an Odyssean dilemma — the protagonist of Homer's epic, *Odyssey*, had to choose between Scylla, a six-headed monster, and sailing past Charybdis, a deadly whirlpool, on his tortuous voyage back home after the Trojan war. India's police force, similarly, has to choose between enforcing the rule of law and giving effect to the "law of rulers". The police may have taken an oath to enforce the rule of law but that, quite often, involves daunting risks of antagonising the political class, which has the power to transfer, punish, and humiliate policemen. Under the circumstances, the majority of police personnel choose — quite like Odysseus — what they perceive as the less painful path: Following the law of rulers.

This survival, of course, comes with a price. The police find themselves — justifiably or otherwise — at the receiving end of censure by different pillars of the State and the public.

The judiciary chastises the police for shoddy investigations and indefensible conduct, among other flaws. The bureaucracy finds fault with it for "failing to comply" faithfully with executive directions. The public, of course, blames it for a range of reasons, such as non-registration of FIR, rude behaviour, or use of third-degree methods. And so, the police — understaffed, overworked and functioning under enormous constraints — struggles round the clock. In fact, they receive mostly brickbats at the end of the day.

The Supreme Court recently criticised the West Bengal Police for not responding to calls from the Calcutta High Court chief justice on April 1, when the latter sought the protection of judicial officers from a mob in Malda district. There is no doubt that the state police should have promptly swung into action. But it didn't. What needs to be probed, therefore, is why it behaved in the manner it did. Across the country, the police have been made subordinate to the ruling dispensation. In Bengal, it is likely that the director general of police and the chief secretary failed to heed the HC chief justice's calls because that is how the political establishment wanted it — even if they won't ever admit this. The officer class in the states is always reluctant to do anything that would upset the ruling dispensation because, if it returns to power in an electoral race,

it can simply ruin the careers of those officers who refused to play ball. If the police carries out its mandated role in such a situation, it incurs the wrath of the political leadership of the state; if it doesn't respond in a manner befitting the situation — like the Bengal police — it is held accountable by the judiciary. What does the average policeman do in such a situation?

The Supreme Court passed comprehensive directions in 2006 to, *inter alia*, insulate the police from outside pressures. The directions have not been implemented, but the judiciary has not hauled up the states for contempt. Instead, the police, and even bureaucrats, are conveniently held accountable and given a tongue-lashing.

In the run-up to the assembly election in West Bengal, ECI carried out large-scale transfers to ensure the neutrality of officers. There have been no less than nine mass transfer orders. A total of 542 officers have been moved since March 16. Transfers on such a scale have never happened in any state on the eve of elections. One can appreciate the powers given to ECI, but why should such large-scale transfers be necessary at all?

It is nearly eight decades since Independence and we are still continuing with the colonial structure of policing. If the political establishment does not have the will to bring about the necessary changes and the



Prakash Singh



The police system in the country is in bad shape. It is the toughest and the most thankless of all jobs in the country.

SUNIL GHOSH/HT PHOTO

Supreme Court does not have power to enforce its writ on police reforms, then why subject the police personnel to unending sermons?

As far back as 1902, the Fraser Commission observed that "the police force is far from efficient; it is defective in training; it is inadequately supervised; it is generally regarded as corrupt and oppressive; and it has utterly failed to secure the confidence and cordial cooperation of the people". Time seems to have stood still all these years. Those in power like to use, misuse, and abuse the police. The police are damned if they act, and damned if they do not.

The Supreme Court upheld ECI's recent transfer orders relating to the West Bengal administration on grounds that there was a trust deficit between the poll regulator and the state government. Be that as it may, the remedy lies in addressing and mit-

igating the trust deficit by enforcing reforms that are absolutely necessary instead of virtually dismantling a state's official machinery.

The police system in the country is in bad shape. It is the toughest and the most thankless of all jobs in the country. With apologies to Shakespeare, one might say, "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the politicians; they transfer us for their sport". More policemen die in the performance of their duties every year in India than in all of Europe. The least that should be done is to grant them operational autonomy to perform their mandated duties, under a system of strict checks and balances. Is that asking for too much?

Prakash Singh, a retired police chief, has been campaigning for police reforms for the last three decades. The views expressed are personal

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **“Law of Rulers”**

An informal, extra-constitutional command structure where the police respond to the political executive’s wishes rather than legal norms. It converts the police into an instrument of the ruling party—deciding whom to investigate, whom to shield. The phrase captures the pervasive political interference that undermines institutional neutrality.

- **Odyssean Dilemma (Scylla and Charybdis)**

In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Odysseus had to steer between Scylla, a six-headed monster on the cliff, and Charybdis, a deadly whirlpool. For the Indian police, Scylla is judicial/public censure for poor investigation or inaction, and Charybdis is political reprisal—punishment transfers, suspensions, stalled careers—if they enforce the law against the ruling dispensation. The dilemma forces the police to choose the “less painful” path, often succumbing to the political whirlpool.

- **Prakash Singh Judgment (2006)**

The Supreme Court’s landmark directions in *Prakash Singh vs Union of India* to insulate police from external pressures. It mandated: fixed two-year tenure for key police officers; a State Security Commission to frame guidelines for transfers; a Police Establishment Board to decide postings/transfers; separation of investigation from law and order; a Police Complaints Authority. None of the states have fully complied, and the Court has not initiated contempt proceedings.

- **Fraser Commission (1902)**

An early indictment of the Indian police as inefficient, corrupt, and untrusted—ironically retaining colonial structure for maintaining subjugation. The Commission’s observations—“defective in training, inadequately supervised, regarded as corrupt and oppressive”—remain relevant, signaling the deep historical roots of the present crisis.

- **Third-Degree Methods**

Extra-legal use of custodial torture, violence, or psychological pressure to extract confessions. Rooted in colonial policing and sustained by a culture that prioritizes “results” over due process. The public loathes it, the judiciary condemns it, yet it persists because investigation remains under the same hierarchical, politically-pressured chain.

- **ECI Transfers (Election Commission of India)**

Under Article 324, the ECI can direct transfers of officials to ensure free and fair elections. In West Bengal’s 2021 assembly polls, 542 officers were moved in nine mass transfer orders—unprecedented scale—indicating a massive trust deficit between the ECI and the state’s permanent executive. It reveals a systemic failure: if democratic neutrality depends on dismantling the entire local bureaucracy every election, the police system is gravely ill.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Core Thesis**

The Indian police are trapped in a structural contradiction: formally sworn to uphold the rule of law, yet practically obligated to obey the “law of rulers.” This dual loyalty destroys institutional integrity and unfairly exposes police personnel to blame from all sides—the judiciary, bureaucracy, and public.

- **Key Contentions**

- *Structural Subordination*: The police are designed as a subordinate department of the executive, continuing the colonial Police Act, 1861. The political class directly controls postings, promotions, and entire career trajectories. Consequently, the survival instinct tilts officers toward pleasing the ruling dispensation rather than applying uniform legal standards.
- *Unfair Blame on Police*: When the police enforce the law against the powerful, they invite political retaliation; when they fail to act, the judiciary slams them for dereliction, and the public brands them as corrupt or hostile. The article argues that the source of malfunction lies not in individual moral failings but in a system that engineers this impossible choice.
- *Judicial Inconsistency*: The Supreme Court gave comprehensive directions in 2006 to insulate the police, yet states have defied them for over 15 years without facing contempt. Instead, the judiciary regularly reprimands the police for outcomes that are direct consequences of the non-implemented reforms, creating a cycle of scapegoating.
- *EC’s Mass Transfers as Symptom*: The extensive pre-election transfers in West Bengal illustrate the depth of politicization—officers were so deeply embedded in the ruling party’s agenda that their neutrality could only be assumed after uprooting them. This “remedy” dismantles the administrative machinery rather than curing the disease, highlighting the need for permanent institutional safeguards.
- *Operational Autonomy as Solution*: The article pleads for granting the police operational autonomy under strict checks and balances—not absolute independence, but freedom to perform mandated duties without fear of political vendetta, coupled with robust, independent accountability mechanisms.

• Historical evolution of the issue

- **Police Act, 1861:**
 - Enacted after the 1857 revolt to create a centralised, disciplined, and politically loyal force to secure the Raj.
 - Emphasis: law and order, regime security, not citizens' rights.
- **Fraser Commission (1902–03):**
 - Diagnosed inefficiency, corruption and oppressive character of police, and lack of public trust.
 - Limited reforms; basic colonial logic remained intact.
- Early independence (1947–1970s)
- Constitution established rule of law, fundamental rights, judicial review – but **police remained a State subject** under Seventh Schedule.
- The 1861 Act continued with minor modifications; most states replicated its structure in state police laws.
- Political leadership used police as an instrument of control (e.g., handling agrarian unrest, Naxal movement, communal riots) with strong emphasis on “law and order” over civil liberties.
- Era of commissions and unimplemented recommendations (1970s–1990s)
- **National Police Commission (NPC), 1977–81:**
 - Recommended:
 - Fixed tenure for key posts,
 - Independent complaint authorities,
 - Clear separation between political direction (broad policy) and professional decisions.
 - Only partially implemented; states reluctant to dilute control.
- Multiple other expert bodies (Ribeiro Committee, Padmanabhaiah Committee, Malimath Committee) repeated calls for depoliticisation and modernisation.
- Judicial intervention and Prakash Singh case (1996–2006)
- Ex-DGPs filed PIL in 1996 asking SC to enforce NPC and related recommendations.
- **2006 judgment:** SC issues binding directives to kick-start police reforms, insisting on:
 - SSCs,
 - fixed tenure & merit-based appointments,
 - separation of investigation and law and order,
 - PEB and Complaints Authorities.
- Post-Prakash Singh era (2006 onwards)
- Many states passed new police acts or amended laws, but often **diluted** SC directives (e.g., making SSCs advisory, giving chief minister dominant role, weakening complaint bodies).
- SC periodically reviews compliance but has generally stopped short of stringent contempt action against non-compliant states.
- Continued allegations of custodial torture, encounter killings, communal bias, and political misuse reinforce perception of unreformed policing.

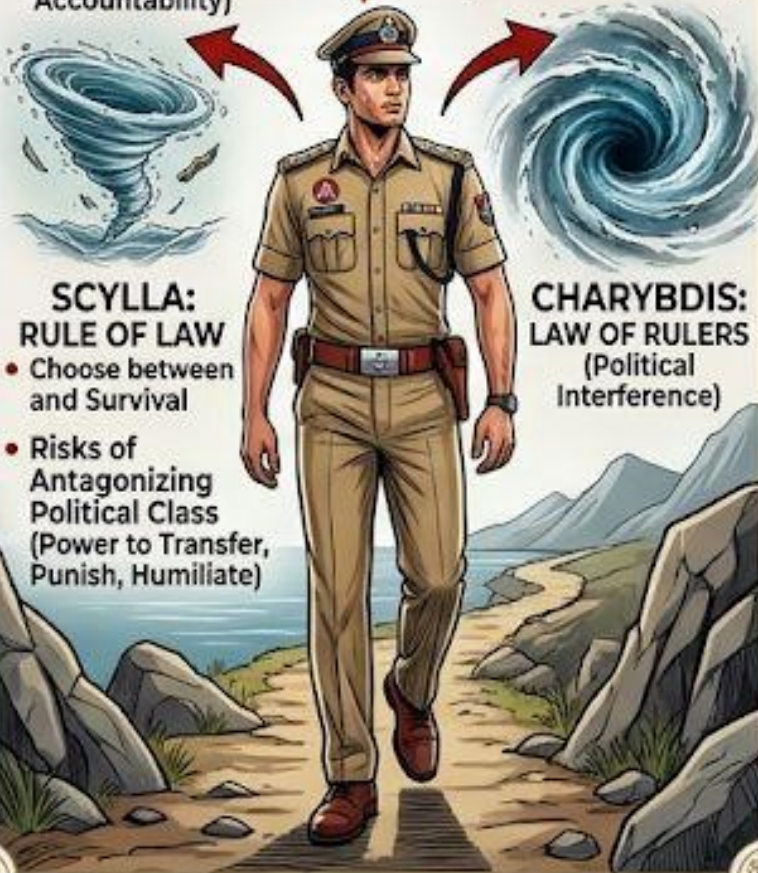
ANALYZING INDIA'S POLICE DILEMMA: RULE OF LAW OR LAW OF RULERS

THE ODYSSEAN DILEMMA

SCYLLA: RULE OF LAW
(Judiciary & Public Accountability)

← **CONFUSED CHOICE** →

CHARYBDIS: LAW OF RULERS
(Political Interference)



SCYLLA: RULE OF LAW

- Choose between and Survival
- Risks of Antagonizing Political Class (Power to Transfer, Punish, Humiliate)

CHARYBDIS: LAW OF RULERS
(Political Interference)

STRUCTURAL ROT: THE 'LAW OF RULERS'



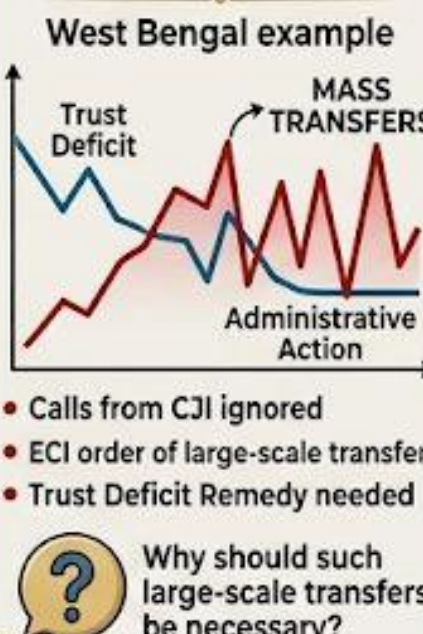
KEY CONSTRAINTS



HISTORICAL EVOLUTION: TIME STOOD STILL



ECI TRANSFERS: SYMPTOM OR CURE?



THE PATH FORWARD (PROPOSED REFORMS)



- **Logical and philosophical base**

- **Logic of institutional design**

- Premise: Behaviour of individual officers is shaped much more by institutional incentives and constraints than by personal morality alone.
- Therefore, durable change demands **structural reforms** (tenure protection, independent oversight, clear legal mandates) rather than mere moral exhortation or isolated punishment.

- **Philosophy of rule of law and constitutionalism**

- The article's reasoning assumes that **rule of law** is a foundational constitutional value, superior to transient political interests.
- Police should be guardians of constitutional rights, not instruments of partisan control.
- This aligns with the idea of a "**Rechtsstaat**" or constitutional state where state power is always bound by law.

- **Separation of powers and checks-and-balances**

- The judiciary, ECI, and executive each have distinct but intersecting roles in supervising police.
- The argument is that excessive political control disrupts this balance, forcing other organs (courts, ECI) into more aggressive interventions that may themselves strain federalism and administrative stability.

- **Ethics of responsibility vs ethics of conviction (Weber)**

- Police officers may personally believe (ethics of conviction) they must uphold the law, but professional survival demands consideration of consequences (ethics of responsibility) of angering powerful political actors.
- The article suggests that the institutional environment pushes them towards a "responsibility" that prioritises career security over legal fidelity.

- **Humanisation of the state functionary**

- Philosophically, the text pushes back against simplistic narratives that treat police as pure villains or pure heroes.
- It emphasises structural constraints, excessive workload, and the **moral injury** inherent in constantly being asked to act against one's oath.

- **Multidimensional analysis**

- **Social dimension**

- Persistent mistrust between police and citizens, especially marginalised communities, women, minorities, and the poor.
- Under-registration of crimes and reluctance to approach police feed cycles of under-reporting and impunity.
- Reformed, citizen-centric policing could enhance social cohesion and enable better grievance redress.

- **Political dimension**

- Police often used for: managing protests, influencing elections, harassment of political opponents, and selective use of criminal law.
- Mass transfer orders by ECI and judiciary's frequent criticism reflect deep politicisation.
- Genuine reform would alter centre–state dynamics, party–state relations, and even intra-party power structures.

- **Legal dimension**

- Article 21 jurisprudence increasingly demands humane policing and fair investigation.
- *Prakash Singh* has effectively constitutionalised minimum standards for police structure.
- Lack of compliance raises questions about rule of law, separation of powers, and effectiveness of judicial remedies.

- **Ethical dimension**

- Ethical conflict for individual officers between professional integrity and obedience to unlawful orders.
- Widespread acceptance of custodial torture and “encounter justice” reveals ethical corrosion in state practice and public attitudes.
- Granting autonomy with oversight aims to align professional ethics with constitutional morality.

- **International dimension**

- India's human rights record on custodial violence and police brutality figures in UN reports and international NGOs' assessments.
- International best practices (community policing, independent oversight commissions, robust forensic systems) can serve as benchmarks.
- Comparative experiences (UK's Peelian principles, US debates on “defund the police”, etc.) provide useful reference points for reform debates.

- **Economic dimension**

- Poor policing increases transaction costs for businesses (extortion, protection money, insecurity).
- Effective crime control and contract enforcement support investment and economic growth.
- However, serious reform requires sustained capital and revenue expenditure – training, technology, infrastructure.

Linkages with NCERTS

Indian Constitution at Work – Class 11 (Political Science)

- Chapters on Constitution, Judiciary, Executive, and federalism help frame:
 - Rule of law,
 - Separation of powers,
 - Role of independent institutions like ECI.

Political Theory – Class 11

- Chapters on Freedom, Equality, Rights, Justice, and State.
- Useful to discuss whether the present policing structure furthers or violates these normative ideals.

Indian Democracy at Work / Politics in India Since Independence – Class 12

- Chapters on challenges to democracy, communalism, regional movements, and emergency.
- Show how policing has been used in suppressing dissent or maintaining order, and how politicisation undermines democracy.

Social Change and Development in India – Class 12 (Sociology)

- Chapters on social movements, marginalised groups, crime and deviance.
- Help analyse how different social groups experience policing differently and how social structure shapes crime control.

Indian Economic Development – Class 11 (Economics)

- While not directly about policing, discussions on institutional quality and development can be applied: good law enforcement is a critical institution for economic growth.

Linkages with UPSC CSE syllabus

GS-II (Polity and Governance)

- “Functioning of the Executive and Judiciary; Parliament and State Legislatures”.
- “Structure, organisation and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary; Ministries and Departments of the Government”.
- “Separation of powers between various organs; dispute redressal mechanisms; quasi-judicial bodies.”
- “Role of civil services in a democracy.” (police as part of permanent executive).
- “Governance, transparency and accountability; institutional and other measures.”

GS-I (Society)

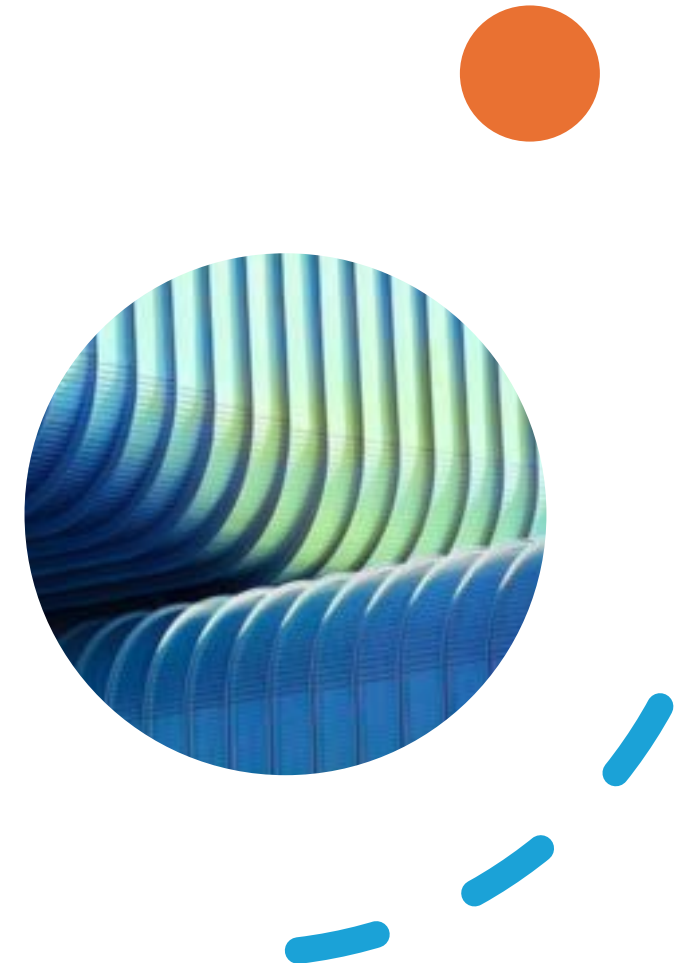
- “Salient features of Indian society, diversity of India.”
- “Role of women and women’s organisations, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues.”
- Policing and its impact on vulnerable sections, social conflict, mob violence.

GS-III (Internal security)

- “Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.”
- “Various security forces and agencies and their mandate.”
- Reformed policing directly affects counter-terrorism, insurgency, and law-and-order roles.

GS-IV (Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude)

- “Ethics in public administration; status and problems; ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions.”
- Case studies on obeying unlawful orders, political pressure, protection of fundamental rights vs career risk.



- **Way Forward**
- **Implementation of Prakash Singh Directives:** Specifically, the **State Security Commission** to set policy and the **Police Establishment Board** to handle transfers.
- **Separation of Functions:** Separate the "Law and Order" wing from the "Investigation" wing to improve professional standards and reduce political interference.
- **Fixed Tenure:** Ensure a minimum tenure for key posts (DGP, SP, SHO) to prevent "transfer-as-punishment."
- **Independent Oversight:** Strengthening the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) to handle grievances against police misconduct.
- **Digitalization:** Mandatory body-cameras and digitizing FIRs to reduce "third-degree" and "non-registration" issues.



UPSC CSE – Mains

GS-II

- 2015: “The rising role of NGOs and civil society has strengthened democracy in India, but their accountability is a concern.” (Link: oversight and accountability of powerful institutions, including police.)
- 2016: “How do pressure groups and movements exert influence on the polity?” (Link: public pressure and reform in institutions like police.)
- 2018: Question on criminal justice system reforms and judicial delays.
- 2019: “Critically examine the role of the Supreme Court in strengthening the criminal justice system.”
- 2020/2021 (various years): Questions on federalism, ECI’s role, and independent institutions – link to ECI’s power over transfers and trust deficit.

GS-III

- 2013 onwards: Repeated questions on “role of Central and State agencies in internal security”, “border management”, “organised crime” – each implicitly demands discussion of quality of policing.
- 2017: “Discuss the role of social media in internal security challenges.” (Police’s modern roles, capacity deficits.)

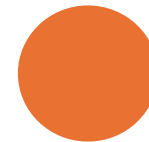
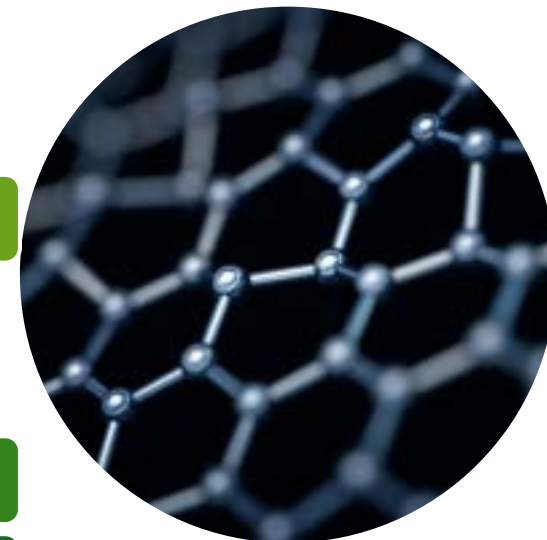
GS-IV (Ethics)

- Case studies across years: officers facing pressure from political bosses, dilemmas between legality and loyalty – directly comparable to the Odyssean dilemma.
- 2013–2022: Repeated questions on “probity in governance”, “conflict of interest”, “emotional intelligence in administration”, “public service values” – all usable to analyse police behaviour under pressure.

UPSC CSE – Prelims

Questions on:

- FRs and DPSPs (Article 14, 21, 22).
- Organisation of police, CBI, NIA, NHRC, SHRC.
- Powers of ECI during elections.





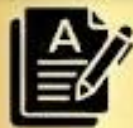
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