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Warning signals for India from NATO's Ankara summit

Ajai Shukla

Former Indian Army officer (colonel), who now analyses issues and events relating to defence

The heads of state or government of the 32 countries that are politico-military allies under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) met in Ankara, Türkiye, on July 7-8, 2026 for what is called the Ankara Summit. Their stated objective was to review progress made since the 2025 Summit in The Hague and to set out a roadmap for continuing delivery on NATO's key objectives.

The gathering in Ankara is being regarded as one of NATO's more successful summits, despite the abrasive presence of United States President Donald Trump, who devoted most of his speaking time to extolling the putative success of U.S. strategy and talking up the superiority of American weapons systems.

A strategic road map

Four substantive commitments came out of Ankara. First, the 32 NATO allies – too often divided by divergent objectives and capacities – agreed on their "ironclad commitment to (their) collective defence under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, and to the transatlantic bond"; second, the unanimous endorsement of "The Hague defence commitment", in which all NATO members undertook last year to allocate at least five per cent of their respective Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) on defence by 2035 – an unprecedented hike over the two per cent spending pledge that existed earlier. Third, NATO declared its "unwavering support for Ukraine in defending its freedom, sovereignty and territorial integrity", and fourth, the alliance partners vowed to build a high technology, high capacity, Europewide defence industrial base (DIB) – the term for the network of firms, factories, laboratories and skilled workers needed to build and sustain a country's military power.

The focus in Ankara was overwhelmingly on implementation – turning political commitments into military capability through investment, industrial capacity and innovation.

Europe's defence revival and commitments may create new challenges for India's defence needs

Russia accuses the U.S. and European democracies of unbridled expansionism, through NATO's progressive incorporation of East and Central European countries. These include Poland, Romania, the Baltic states, and former Soviet republics that Moscow has historically regarded as lying within its sphere of influence. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was driven in part by the fear that Kyiv was inching towards joining the Atlantic alliance, a step that would have increased NATO's numbers from just 12 countries at its founding in 1949 to 31 now. The Russian invasion effectively blocked Ukraine, but spooked historically neutral Finland and Sweden into abandoning nonalignment and becoming NATO's 31st and 32nd members.

NATO's transformations

NATO, however, sees itself not as expansionist, but as merely adapting to Europe's changing strategic landscape. In 1990-91, with the relatively peaceful ending of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, NATO shifted its focus to out of area operations in theatres such as the Balkans. After the 9/11 strikes in 2001 on the World Trade Center towers, NATO made another strategic shift, joining the Global War on Terror. Now, with Russia and China joining hands in a new era of superpower confrontation, NATO is adapting once again.

It was evident from the discussions at the Ankara Summit that Europe has prioritised the revitalisation of its DIB. The European defence industry was struggling to scale up production even before the five per cent defence spending pledge at The Hague. European defence industry giants, MBDA and Rheinmetall, have warned of shortages in ammunition production.

Operation Epic Fury, the U.S.-Israel bombing campaign against Iran, illustrates the inevitability of weapons and ammunition shortages when Asian allies' demands for U.S. weaponry compete with ongoing European needs. The U.S. has fired more than 850 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Iran during this campaign. At the current production rate of 85 per year, replacing these would take a decade.

Many NATO members have capable defence industrial bases, but there is little coordination of alliance-wide priorities. The resulting strategic mismatch has been found during the Ukraine war to cluster in the critical categories of air defence missiles and interceptors, precision guided munitions, and artillery rockets. While the U.S. decision to allow Ukraine to produce Patriot air defence systems under licence is a strong signal of support to Ukraine, more needs to be done.

Without a major revitalisation of Europe's defence industry, NATO's five per cent pledge will only deepen its dependency on the U.S. Half of Europe's defence spending between 2022-2024, came from the U.S., up from 28% in 2019-2021. Foreign Military Sales notifications to the U.S. Congress for European customers have quadrupled since 2008 to $76 billion in 2024.

Need for self-reliance

For the world's big arms buyers and especially for India, this spike in European demand is bad news. As NATO spends more, the international arms bazaar is shifting inexorably from a buyers' market to a sellers' market. The first sign of this was the delay by U.S. firm General Electric Aerospace in supplying India with F-404 fighter jet engines, which are critically needed for the Indian Air Force's Tejas light combat aircraft programme.

Looking ahead, as India's defence increasingly relies on new-age defence technologies and weaponry, such as drones, artificial intelligence, cyber and electronic warfare and resilient networks, it will become critical for its defence industry to achieve self-reliance in these technology realms, rather than relying on overstretched suppliers who have their own battles to fight.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Article 5 of the Washington Treaty (Collective Defence):**
    - *Concept:* The founding pillar of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), signed in 1949. It states that an armed attack against one or more member nations in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all, requiring collective military response.
- **Defence Industrial Base (DIB):**
    - *Concept:* The comprehensive network of government agencies, private corporations, research laboratories, manufacturing plants, and skilled labor required to design, produce, maintain, and modernize a nation's or alliance's military hardware and technology.
- **The Hague Defence Commitment (5% GDP Target):**
    - *Concept:* A structural shift in alliance financing where member states commit to escalating defense expenditures to 5% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2035, up from the historical 2% target established at the 2014 Wales Summit.
- **Sellers' Market vs. Buyers' Market in Global Arms Trade:**
    - *Concept:* A *buyers' market* occurs when supply exceeds demand, allowing purchasing nations to negotiate lower prices, demand technology transfer, and set delivery timelines. A *sellers' market* occurs when global demand far outstrips manufacturing capacity, allowing defense suppliers to dictate terms, raise prices, and prioritize high-value alliance partners over non-aligned buyers.
- **Foreign Military Sales (FMS):**
    - *Concept:* The United States government's program for transferring defense articles, services, and training to foreign governments. FMS involves government-to-government procurement managed by the U.S. Department of Defense.
    - *Example:* Congressional notifications for weapon sales to European allies through the FMS framework quadrupled to $76 billion as European nations sought immediate off-the-shelf replacements for donated equipment.
- **Out-of-Area Operations:**
    - *Concept:* Military interventions or peacekeeping missions conducted by an alliance outside the formal territorial boundaries of its member states.
    - *Example:* NATO's intervention in the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, Kosovo in 1999) marked its post-Cold War evolution from a regional defensive shield to a global security actor.
- **Strategic Autonomy:**
    - *Concept:* The capacity of a nation state to execute its foreign policy and military strategy independently, without structural reliance on foreign powers for critical defense technologies, supply chains, or security guarantees.
    - *Example:* India’s pursuit of self-reliance through the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* initiative in defense aims to ensure that its fighter jet and missile programs are not vulnerable to external supply chain disruptions.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- **1. The Revitalization and Militarization of the Transatlantic Alliance**
- The global security landscape is witnessing its most significant structural pivot since the end of the Cold War. The consensus achieved among NATO's 32 member states reinforces an ironclad commitment to collective defense under Article 5. By institutionalizing the Hague commitment to target a 5% GDP defense expenditure by 2035, the alliance is shifting from political posture to concrete, high-capacity militarization. This commitment is designed to transition political promises into tangible warfighting capabilities—specifically through heavy investment in high-technology equipment, expanded industrial capacity, and technological innovation.
- **2. The European Defence Industrial Base (DIB) Friction**
- A core vulnerability facing Western security architecture is the structural inadequacy of the European Defence Industrial Base. Decades of post-Cold War underinvestment ("peace dividends") left European defense firms ill-equipped for sustained, high-intensity industrial warfare. Key defense manufacturers have publicly highlighted critical shortfalls in ammunition, rocket artillery, and air-defense interceptor production.
- **3. The Transatlantic Dependency Paradox**
- Despite Europe’s stated objective to build an independent, Europe-wide defense industrial complex, the immediate reality reveals a deepening structural dependency on the United States.
- **Surge in Procurement:** Between 2022 and 2024, half of European defense spending on hardware went directly to U.S. manufacturers—a sharp rise from under 30% in prior years.
- **Operational Strain:** Concurrent military engagements—such as massive U.S. missile expenditures in Middle Eastern operational theaters like Operation Epic Fury—have strained inventory. Expending hundreds of precision-guided munitions (such as Tomahawk cruise missiles) at rates far exceeding annual manufacturing capacity demonstrates how global operational demands can rapidly deplete defense stockpiles.
- **4. Expansionism vs. Strategic Adaptation**
- The political discourse surrounding NATO’s structural growth reflects two competing strategic narratives:
- **The Russian Perspective:** Moscow views NATO’s eastwards expansion—incorporating Central and Eastern European nations, the Baltic states, and aspiring former Soviet republics—as aggressive encirclement and an infringement on its historical sphere of influence. Russian military actions in Ukraine were explicitly framed as an effort to halt Kyiv's integration into the Western alliance.
- **The NATO Alliance Perspective:** NATO frames its enlargement not as active expansionism, but as a demand-driven, democratic adaptation to Russian assertiveness. This dynamic is illustrated by the decision of historically non-aligned nations like Finland and Sweden to join the alliance as its 31st and 32nd members to secure Article 5 guarantees.
- **5. Adverse Ripple Effects on the Global South and India**
- The massive reallocation of Western capital toward defense procurement is fundamentally restructuring the global arms market.
- **Shift to a Sellers' Market:** As European nations scramble to rebuild depleted arsenals, Western defense contractors prioritize domestic and treaty-bound allies.
- **Impact on Indian Modernization:** Non-aligned major defense importers bear the brunt of these disruptions. India has experienced delays in the delivery of critical components—such as General Electric F-404 jet engines required for the indigenous Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Mark-1A program.
- **Imperative for Self-Reliance:** These delays underscore that relying on foreign defense supply chains during periods of systemic global rearmament poses a direct threat to national security, making domestic technological self-reliance essential.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Phase 1: Cold War Foundations and Containment (1949–1989)**
- **1949:** The North Atlantic Treaty is signed in Washington, D.C., creating a collective security framework of 12 Western nations designed to deter Soviet expansionism in post-WWII Europe.
- **1955:** The integration of West Germany into NATO triggers the creation of the Warsaw Pact by the Soviet Union, institutionalizing a rigid, bipolar security architecture in Europe.
- **Indian Stance:** Under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, India pioneered the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), opting out of military blocs to preserve foreign policy independence while remaining heavily dependent on Western and Soviet equipment for basic military needs.
- **Phase 2: Post-Cold War Pivot and Out-of-Area Interventions (1990–2001)**
- **1991:** The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact removes NATO's primary adversary. The alliance shifts its doctrine toward crisis management, regional stabilization, and peacekeeping.
- **1995–1999:** NATO conducts its first major military interventions in the Balkans (Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia and Operation Allied Force in Kosovo), expanding its operational mandate beyond collective defense to out-of-area combat operations.
- **1999:** The first wave of post-Cold War eastern enlargement begins, admitting former Warsaw Pact members Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.
- **Phase 3: The Global War on Terror Era (2001–2013)**
- **2001:** Following the September 11 attacks, NATO invokes Article 5 for the first time in its history.
- **2003–2014:** NATO leads the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, marking a decade of focus on counter-insurgency and expeditionary warfare at the expense of conventional, high-intensity continental defense capabilities.
- **2004–2009:** Second major eastern enlargement wave incorporates Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, and Croatia, bringing NATO directly to Russia's borders.
- **Phase 4: Return of Great Power Rivalry and Continental Rearmament (2014–Present)**
- **2014:** The annexation of Crimea by Russia prompts the Wales Summit, where NATO allies agree to reverse defense budget cuts and commit to spending at least 2% of GDP on defense within a decade.
- **2022:** The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine fundamentally reshapes European security. Historically neutral nations Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024) join NATO, raising total membership to 32 countries.
- **2025–2026:** NATO adopts the Hague and Ankara commitments, raising the spending target to an unprecedented 5% of GDP by 2035. This shift forces a rapid expansion of the Western Defence Industrial Base and disrupts global supply chains for non-aligned importers like India.

UPSC CIVIL SERVICES EXAM - ANKARA
NATO SUMMIT 2026: COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

ANKARA SUMMIT: THE STRATEGIC ROADMAP

THE EVENT & OBJECTIVES

July 7-8, 2026

- Review Hague Progress
- Set out roadmap for delivery on NATO's key objectives

NATO'S ADAPTATIONS

1949: Founding (12)

1990-91: Post-Cold War (Balkans)

2001: War on Terror

NOW: Russia-China Confrontation

FOUR KEY COMMITMENTS

ARTICLE 5 - IRONCLAD COLLECTIVE DEFENCE & TRANSATLANTIC BOND

THE HAGUE DEFENCE COMMITMENT - ALL ALLIES TO ALLOCATE 5% GDP ON DEFENSE BY 2035

UNPRECEDENTED HIKE

UNWAVERING SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE: Defending freedom, sovereignty, integrity

BUILDING EUROPEWIDE DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL BASE (DIB)

IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL ARMS MARKET & INDIA

IMPACT ON INDIA

- Delay in key components (e.g., GE F-404 for Tejas LCA)
- Need for Self-Reliance in new-age tech

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

THE DIB STRUGGLE

Ammunition & Weapon Shortages

Lack of Coordination

Strategic Mismatch (Air Defense, PGMs, Artillery Rockets)

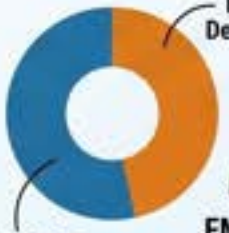
DEMAND COMPETITION

Operation Epic Fury
e.g, high Tomahawk expenditure

VS

European Needs

EUROPE'S DEPENDENCY ON U.S.



Half of Europe Defense Spending from U.S.

Half of Europe Defense Spending (2022-24) from U.S.

FMS to Europe quadrupled

WAY FORWARD: INDIA'S NEED FOR SELF-RELIANCE

DRONES

AI

CYBER & EW

RESILIENT NETWORKS

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**
- **1. Structural Realism (Neorealism) and the Security Dilemma**
- The current transformation of NATO is rooted in structural realism, particularly John Mearsheimer's theory of *Offensive Realism* and Kenneth Waltz's *Defensive Realism*.
- **Anarchy and Survival:** In an anarchic international system, state survival depends on military capabilities. NATO's escalation of defense budgets to 5% of GDP reflects a structural response to an altered balance of power in Eurasia.
- **The Security Dilemma (Robert Jervis):** Actions taken by NATO to increase its security—such as expanding eastern footprints and building high-capacity defense bases—are interpreted by Russia as existential threats. Russia's countermeasures (e.g., military build-ups and interventions) then force NATO to further escalate its military readiness, creating a perpetual cycle of rearmament.
- **2. Liberal Institutionalism vs. Hegemony**
- From a liberal institutionalist framework (Robert Keohane), NATO serves as a multilateral framework that lowers transaction costs for collective defense, standardizes defense protocols, and fosters democratic alliance cohesion. However, the operational reality reflects *Hegemonic Stability Theory*:
- The alliance remains heavily reliant on U.S. security guarantees and defense manufacturing.
- European efforts to build Strategic Autonomy are constrained by structural reliance on American hardware, highlighting the tension between multilateral coordination and foreign military dependency.
- **3. Balance of Threat Theory (Stephen Walt)**
- States alliance-build not merely against power, but against perceived threat. The rapid accession of Finland and Sweden, along with Europe's willingness to absorb economic disruptions, demonstrates that European nations perceive Russian military aggression—rather than American economic dominance—as the primary existential threat to their sovereignty.
- **4. Philosophical Foundation of Indian Strategic Autonomy**
- India's foreign policy logic draws from *Kautilyan Realism* (*Arthashastra*) combined with modern constitutional pragmatism:
- **Self-Reliance as Sovereignty:** Kautilya stressed that a state's security must rely on its own intrinsic strength (*Prabhav Shakti*) rather than volatile external alliances (*Mitra*).
- **Avoiding Entanglement:** Relying on overstretched foreign suppliers during global rearmament compromises national decision-making. Strategic autonomy is not isolationism; it is the freedom to make independent choices based on domestic industrial capacity.

- **Multidimensional Analysis**
- **1. Social Dimension**
- **The "Guns vs. Butter" Dilemma:** Diverting public funds to meet a 5% GDP defense threshold requires fiscal trade-offs in European social welfare states. Funding military industrial capacity can lead to reductions in healthcare, education, and social security programs, risking civil unrest and political polarization.
- **Public Perception and War Fatigue:** While initial public support for defense spending surged following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, prolonged defense spending increases during periods of domestic economic inflation run the risk of generating public fatigue and resistance to sustained military budgets.
- **2. Political Dimension**
- **Transatlantic Friction and Domestic U.S. Politics:** The debate over transatlantic burden-sharing remains central to alliance politics. U.S. domestic political rhetoric demanding that European allies pay for their own defense has accelerated Europe's push toward self-reliance, even as European leaders struggle to balance alliance cohesion with domestic sovereignty.
- **Electoral Strains in Europe:** Political parties across Western Europe face difficult trade-offs. Hard-right and far-left political factions frequently exploit public dissatisfaction with rising defense costs, threatening the long-term political consensus required for multi-year defense investments.
- **3. Legal Dimension**
- **Treaty Commitments vs. Sovereign Fiscal Policy:** While NATO summit declarations set spending targets (such as 5% of GDP), these commitments are politically binding declarations rather than legally enforceable international treaties. Translating summit pledges into domestic law requires national parliamentary approval, leading to varying levels of compliance across sovereign member states.
- **Intellectual Property and Licensing Friction:** As demonstrated by U.S. decisions to allow foreign allies to produce advanced defense systems (like Patriot air defense batteries) under license, legal frameworks governing technology transfer, export controls (e.g., U.S. ITAR - International Traffic in Arms Regulations), and patent sharing remain key hurdles to building a truly unified defense industrial base.
- **4. Ethical Dimension**
- **Diversion of Global Capital:** Escalating global defense expenditures redirects hundreds of billions of dollars away from pressing global issues, including climate change mitigation, sustainable development goals (SDGs), global health infrastructure, and poverty alleviation.
- **Proliferation and the Arms Market:** The shift toward a high-volume, global arms market increases the risk of weapon diversion to conflict zones in the Global South, raising ethical questions about the humanitarian impact of prioritizing defense production over international peacebuilding mechanisms.
- **5. International Dimension**
- **Consolidation of a Sino-Russian Strategic Axis:** NATO's rearmament and eastwards expansion have accelerated strategic alignment between Russia and China. This partnership creates a counter-weight to Western power, deepening global geopolitical divisions across Eurasia, the Indo-Pacific, and global multilateral institutions.
- **Pressure on Non-Aligned and Global South States:** Countries in the Global South face mounting pressure to align with geopolitical blocs. The concentration of defense manufacturing in Western and Eurasian blocs restricts access to affordable military hardware for developing nations seeking to maintain an independent foreign policy.
- **6. Economic Dimension**
- **Inflation in the Defense Supply Chain:** Unprecedented demand for raw materials (such as titanium, specialized steel, and energetics), microchips, and skilled technical labor has triggered significant inflation across defense supply chains. This makes military procurement increasingly costly for all nations.
- **Market Distortion for Developing Importers:** As major Western defense firms reorient their order books toward long-term contracts with NATO partners, non-aligned defense importers face extended lead times, higher contract costs, and sudden supply disruptions for critical maintenance and modernization components.

Linkages with NCERTs

Book Title / Class	Chapter / Unit Name	Analytical Linkage & Conceptual Relevance
Class 12 Political Science *(Contemporary World Politics)*	**Chapter 1:** The Cold War Era & Non-Aligned Movement	Explains the historical emergence of collective security blocs (NATO vs. Warsaw Pact), the logic of deterrence, and why India adopted Non-Alignment to avoid bloc politics. Directly connects to NATO's modern transformation.
Class 12 Political Science *(Contemporary World Politics)*	**Chapter 4:** Alternative Centres of Power	Analyzes the European Union (EU) and regional economic integration. Helps evaluate Europe's structural challenges in building an independent Defence Industrial Base (DIB) alongside NATO.
Class 12 Political Science *(Politics in India Since Independence)*	**Chapter 4:** India’s External Relations	Outlines the evolution of Indian foreign policy from post-independence idealist non-alignment to pragmatic strategic autonomy. Highlights the risk of external military dependency during global crises.
Class 11 Economics *(Indian Economic Development)*	**Chapter 3:** Liberalisation, Privatisation, and Globalisation (LPG)	Framework to analyze how global supply chain bottlenecks impact domestic industrial growth, supporting arguments for domestic manufacturing through *Atmanirbhar Bharat*.
Class 11 Political Science *(Political Theory)*	**Chapter 8:** Secularism & **Chapter 10:** Development / Sovereignty	Connects state sovereignty with economic and military capacity. Provides theoretical backing for why defense indigenization is essential for preserving national self-determination.

- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **GS Paper 1: World History**
- **Syllabus Topic:** *Redrawal of national boundaries, Cold War, development of the world order.*
- **Relevance:** Traces the post-WWII evolution of NATO, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the ongoing shift from post-Cold War unipolarity to a complex multipolar world order defined by renewed great-power rivalry.
- **GS Paper 2: Governance, Polity, and International Relations**
- **Syllabus Topic:** *Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.*
- **Relevance:** Analyzes how NATO's 5% GDP spending pledge and Western rearmament affect global defense supply chains. Focuses on the resulting delays in Indian military modernization (e.g., GE engine delivery bottlenecks) and the implications for India's strategic positioning in the Indo-Pacific.
- **GS Paper 3: Science & Technology, Security, and Economy**
- **Syllabus Topic:** *Indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Security challenges and their management; Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.*
- **Relevance:** Directly addresses the need for domestic self-reliance in critical defense platforms (such as the Tejas LCA) and next-generation warfare technologies—including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), artificial intelligence, cyber defense, electronic warfare, and secure communication networks.
- **GS Paper 4: Ethics**
- **Syllabus Topic:** *Ethics in International Relations and Funding; Moral dilemmas in governance.*
- **Relevance:** Examines the moral trade-offs involved in military spending vs. human development, the ethical dilemmas of global arms sales during active conflicts, and the diversion of capital from global public goods like climate finance.

- **Way Forward**
- **1. Accelerating Domestic Defense Indigenization (*Atmanirbhar Bharat*)**
- To shield national security from global market disruptions, India must transform its defense manufacturing from assembly-based production to ground-up research, development, and manufacturing:
- **Empowering the Private Sector:** Expand initiatives like Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) and Defense Industrial Corridors (in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu). Encourage private defense firms and MSMEs to lead R&D through long-term procurement guarantees.
- **Boosting R&D Investment:** Significantly increase the proportion of the defense budget dedicated to domestic R&D, transforming the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) into a lean, venture-style research entity focused on core technologies like jet engine propulsion and advanced metallurgy.
- **2. Strategic Diversification and Dual-Sourcing Supply Chains**
- Until complete domestic indigenization is achieved, India must reduce single-source vulnerabilities:
- **Multi-Vendor Sourcing:** Avoid relying on a single foreign vendor for critical military components. Establish dual-sourcing requirements for jet engines, advanced sensors, and precision munitions across friendly nations in Europe, East Asia, and North America.
- **Mandatory Technology Transfer:** Require foreign original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) to establish local joint ventures with mandatory intellectual property and technology transfer agreements as a condition for major defense procurement contracts.
- **3. Leapfrogging to Next-Generation Warfare Technologies**
- Rather than focusing solely on catching up in legacy conventional platforms, India should prioritize asymmetrical, high-technology domains where global dominance is still up for grabs:
- **Asymmetric Capabilities:** Allocate resources toward autonomous drone swarms, counter-drone systems, artificial intelligence for battle management, quantum-encrypted communications, and electronic warfare (EW) suites.
- **Semiconductor and Cyber Security:** Secure domestic semiconductor manufacturing capabilities dedicated to military applications to protect defense platforms against foreign component denial or cyber espionage.
- **4. Rebalancing European Defense Partnerships**
- **Joint Ventures and Co-Development:** Shift relationships with European partners from a traditional buyer-seller dynamic toward joint design, co-development, and co-production models.
- **Leveraging Mutual Interests:** Work with European defense firms facing high domestic labor costs by offering India as a high-technology, cost-effective manufacturing hub for defense components destined for global supply chains.

UPSC CSE Prelims Questions

1.Which one of the following statements best reflects the idea behind 'Article 5' of the North Atlantic Treaty? (Conceptual)

1. (a) Economic integration among Western European nations.
2. (b) Collective defense, where an attack on one member is considered an attack on all.
3. (c) A framework for peaceful nuclear energy sharing among member states.
4. (d) Mandatory deployment of peacekeeping forces under United Nations mandates.

Correct Answer: **(b)**

2.With reference to NATO's expansion and global security dynamics, consider the following statements:

1. Finland and Sweden became the 31st and 32nd members of NATO, officially ending decades of military non-alignment.
2. All member states of NATO are legally bound by treaty to spend a minimum of 5% of their GDP on defense annually.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

1. (a) 1 only
2. (b) 2 only
3. (c) Both 1 and 2
4. (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Correct Answer: **(a)** *(Statement 2 is incorrect because NATO spending targets are politically agreed guidelines rather than legally binding treaty mandates enforced by international law).*

3.In the context of India's defense procurement, the 'Foreign Military Sales (FMS)' framework is associated with which nation?

1. (a) Russia
2. (b) France
3. (c) United States of America
4. (d) Israel

Correct Answer: **(c)**

4.Consider the following pairs of Indigenous Defense Platforms and their primary category:

1. Tejas – Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)
2. MBT Arjun – Main Battle Tank
3. INS Vikrant – Nuclear-powered Submarine

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

1. (a) 1 and 2 only
2. (b) 2 and 3 only
3. (c) 1 and 3 only
4. (d) 1, 2 and 3

Correct Answer: **(a)** *(INS Vikrant is an Aircraft Carrier, not a Nuclear Submarine).*

Is corruption the biggest threat to India's future?

Shailesh Gandhi

Former Central Information Commissioner

Anjali Bhardwaj

A transparency activist associated with Satark Nagrik Sangathan

PARLEY

Corruption has shaped elections, toppled governments, and sparked some of the biggest public protests in independent India. With digitalisation and the Right to Information (RTI) Act, citizens were promised greater transparency. Yet has India actually become less corrupt?

This question has become pertinent as thousands of students hold protests seeking accountability after the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) paper was leaked earlier this year. Their campaign has revived memories of the India Against Corruption movement that galvanised the country more than a decade ago.

Is corruption the biggest threat to India's future? Shailesh Gandhi and Anjali Bhardwaj discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Nivedita Varadarajan**.

For many, corruption is paying a bribe to get a service delivered. Has digitalisation helped reduce such petty corruption?

Anjali Bhardwaj: Corruption in India goes from the highest to the very lowest offices in the country and people find it difficult to access even their basic rights and entitlements. Unfortunately, digitalisation is being pushed as a magic wand, as if it would make everything alright. But experience on the ground shows that digitalisation by itself is not going to prevent corruption. If you just go into any government office today, it's an open secret that there will be somebody who will expect to be bribed.

In fact, with digitalisation, another layer has been added for the poor and the marginalised who find it very difficult to access services because they are often unlettered and do not have access to the Internet. They can't easily fill up forms on their own. Another middleman has been added. They have to go to these private cafes where they are charged obnoxious amounts [to get government services].

A proper grievance redressal mechanism needs to be put in place, where if somebody is facing corruption, they can file a complaint and it will be redressed in a time bound manner. A grievance redressal law is required, and it has not been brought through although Parliament had discussed it in great detail in 2014.

The Right to Information Act was intended to make the government accountable. Has the Act lived up to its promise?

Shailesh Gandhi: The Act was one of the best transparency Acts in the world. However, it has been murdered by Supreme Court judgments and bureaucracy. The law has now been modified to such an extent by the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, that all information relating to corruption can be denied. A lot of countries do not have vigilance departments in most government departments. We have them in almost every government department, but they don't work. Now we also have a Lokpal burning ₹50-060 crore a year delivering nothing. Lokayukta has been there for years and yet we are not getting accountability.

Section 19 of the so-called Prevention of Corruption Act used to say that sanction for prosecution was required if a public servant was accused of corruption. In 2018, Section 17A was introduced, requiring government permission to investigate corruption charges. Our judicial system is creaking. Unless we enforce the rule, corruption cannot reduce.

Going strong: Students shout slogans during a protest in solidarity with the ongoing protest at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar, in Amritsar on July 23. PTI

How is DPDP undermining the RTI Act?

SG: The original Act had an 87-word definition for personal information. It said personal information which was not part of public activity or was intrusion of privacy could be denied, but with a caveat that information shall not be denied to Parliament or State legislatures; only that information could be denied to citizens. It was misinterpreted in the *Girish Ramchandra Deshpande* judgment which said that all personal information could be exempt. The *Puttaswamy* judgment also created such a theory without ensuring that there was a balance between right to information and right to privacy. In fact, right to privacy has been called a fundamental right without a balance act; it has made it easy for the government to refuse sharing all kinds of personal information. Your name is personal, your age is personal, everything is personal. Information is being denied and will slowly finish the RTI Act.

Does that make uncovering corruption so much harder now than before?

> In a democracy, it is important to ensure that institutions of accountability, which are the Executive, the Judiciary, and the Legislature, remain accountable and function properly. Unfortunately, these institutions have been systematically weakened
>
> ANJALI BHARDWAJ

AB: The RTI Act came because of a very strong demand for an information access law. It has been used to access information to hold governments accountable.

We see that every year about six million RTI requests are filed in our country. Its the highest anywhere in the world. The law is used very vibrantly, not just to ensure accountability in the delivery of basic rights, but also to expose big ticket corruption. I can hardly remember any big scam that has got exposed in the country in the last 20 years where the RTI has not played a seminal role. Whether it is the Vyapam scam, the Adarsh Housing Society scam or the electoral bond scheme, the Act has been used. The Act has been very effective in exposing corruption and wrongdoing.

Unfortunately, we are also seeing how the CBI, the ED and the Lokpal have been completely compromised. Big-ticket corruption cases are just not being tackled.

Do weak institutions enable corruption, or does corruption weaken institutions?

SG: My submission is that we make great laws, but do not implement them. Unless there is punishment, corruption cannot be contained. Let me give you a bit of information. This was a study done by the Indian police general in 2008. A study observed the performance of the CBI's entire anti-corruption branch from 1980 to 1984. What was the outcome of that? About 280 people were accused of corruption in courts. 144 got convicted. The average time for investigation was 13.4 months, whereas the average time for the first trial was 88 months. In 2008, it was found that only four people had been in prison for more than 20 days – just four people.

Today, corruption is an 'all-profit, negligible-risk' activity. So long as this continues, there will be people who will take advantage of this. We make laws and we break laws. We should demand a road map for judicial delays to be less than one year. In less than one year over 90% cases should be decided; this is being done in various countries in the world.

Second, all Information Commissioners are appointed without any transparency. We expect people who are selected in a non-transparent manner to deliver transparency. How does this work? Lakhs of people were there on the roads of Delhi for the Lokpal. After the Lokpal was created, everybody lost interest. Nobody bothers whether they are delivering or not.

Thirdly, the RTI Act should be strengthened. The amendment by the DPDP Act should be taken back. Finally, the media should take it on itself to track 10-15 celebrity corruption cases, track them and see how they have progressed.

AB: In a democracy, it is important to ensure that institutions of accountability, which are the Executive, the Judiciary, and the Legislature, remain accountable to the people of India and function properly. Unfortunately, these institutions have been systematically weakened.

The government has understood that the best way to not be transparent is to continue to work behind a veil of secrecy. To do this, they need to subvert the Information Commissioners' functioning. A way to do this is to not make appointments to the Information Commissions. Since May 2014, when the BJP came to power, not a single Information Commissioner has been appointed to the central information commission till people approached the Supreme Court or the judiciary.

When the courts order an appointment, they are made in a completely non-transparent manner. We are also seeing that institutions like the ED, the CBI or the Lokpal, simply don't do the investigations that are required of them to hold those in power accountable. It's almost as if corruption is only being done by the Opposition.

Is corruption the biggest threat to the future?

AB: Well, yes, because corruption has a very real human cost. How can a country expect to be developed if corruption is not addressed? If there is massive corruption in the delivery of basic rights, like rations or healthcare or education, how can we hope to become a developed country? When there is corruption and crony capitalism, there is every incentive for those in power to subvert institutions.

SG: If India is at the 79th position in the rule of law index, we have no hope of being among the top nations of the world. We need to change that. We need to ensure that corruption cases are disposed of in less than a year.

To listen to the full interview **Scan the code or go to the link** www.thehindu.com

- **Key Terms and Concepts**
- **Petty vs. Grand Corruption:**
  - *Petty Corruption:* Micro-level, everyday bribery required by citizens to access basic administrative services or statutory entitlements (e.g., paying an illicit fee to obtain a caste certificate, ration card, or land record).
  - *Grand Corruption:* High-level distortion of public policy, procurement, or state resources by political elites and top bureaucrats for private enrichment or campaign financing (e.g., resource allocation scams, defense procurement kickbacks, or examination paper leaks).
- **Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005:**
  - A landmark legislative framework empowering citizens to request information from public authorities, promoting transparency and citizen-led administrative audits.
  - *Section 8(1)(j):* Exemption clause protecting "personal information" that bears no relationship to any public activity or interest, or which would cause an unwarranted invasion of individual privacy, unless larger public interest justifies disclosure.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023:**
  - A law enacted to protect personal digital data.
  - *Impact on Transparency:* Section 44(g) of the DPDP Act amended Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, removing the "public interest" proviso and creating a blanket exemption for any information classified as "personal," significantly narrowing the scope of RTI inquiries.
- **Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1988 (Amended 2018):**
  - The primary statutory law penalizing bribery and corrupt acts by public servants.
  - *Section 19:* Requires prior sanction from the competent government authority before a court can take cognizance of corruption charges against a public servant.
  - *Section 17A (2018 Amendment):* Introduces a mandatory requirement for police/investigative officers to seek prior approval from the government before initiating any inquiry or investigation into an offense alleged to have been committed by a public servant in the discharge of official functions.
- **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013:**
  - Establishes an independent statutory anti-corruption ombudsman at the Union level (Lokpal) and state levels (Lokayukta) to inquire into allegations of corruption against public functionaries, including high political offices.
- **Digital Divide and Intermediate Rent-Seeking:**
  - The socio-economic gap between populations with digital access/literacy and those without.
  - In governance, mandatory e-portals without adequate digital literacy can shift rent-seeking from state officials to informal private intermediaries (cyber-cafe operators, unauthorized agents) who charge fee-for-service access to government schemes.
- **Rule of Law Index:**
  - A quantitative assessment tool created by the World Justice Project (WJP) measuring how rule of law is experienced and perceived worldwide across factors such as constraints on government powers, absence of corruption, open government, and fundamental rights.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Core**
- **Digitalisation Is Not an Automated Cure**
- Digital governance simplifies service delivery, yet technology alone cannot eliminate systemic corruption without structural administrative reforms.
- **Creation of New Intermediaries:** For marginalized and digitally illiterate citizens, mandatory digital applications add operational barriers. Rent-seeking shifts to private kiosk operators, cyber cafes, or local middlemen charging fees to access public services.
- **Lack of Redressal Mechanics:** Without statutory, time-bound grievance redressal frameworks, digital portals often function as one-way submission platforms rather than accountable delivery systems.
- **Dilution of the Transparency Architecture**
- The framework established by the RTI Act, 2005 faces legislative and judicial friction.
- **Erasure of Public Interest Balancing:** The DPDP Act, 2023 removed the public interest balancing test from Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act. By classifying names, qualifications, and administrative decisions as "personal information," state bodies can withhold crucial governance data.
- **Judicial Expansion of Privacy Exceptions:** Landmark rulings (such as *Girish Ramchandra Deshpande*) expanded privacy exceptions to cover official conduct, asset declarations, and disciplinary records of public officials, eroding the principle of public scrutiny.
- **Statutory Shields and the Economics of Risk**
- Corruption in India functions as an "all-profit, low-risk" activity due to systemic procedural protections and judicial backlogs.
- **Investigative Barriers:** Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act acts as an executive filter, requiring government permission before an investigation can begin against an official. This creates conflict-of-interest risks when investigating senior leaders.
- **Judicial Delays:** Trial proceedings in anti-corruption cases routinely take years. Low conviction rates and protracted trials reduce the deterrent effect of legal penalties.
- **Institutional Inertia and Regulatory Capture**
- Anti-corruption and transparency oversight bodies face operational challenges that hinder their effectiveness.
- **Statutory Anti-Corruption Bodies:** Institutions like the Lokpal and state Lokayuktas carry significant operational budgets but face delays in prosecuting high-profile cases, leading to public skepticism.
- **Vacancies in Information Commissions:** Operational delays, unfulfilled vacancies, and non-transparent appointment processes in the Central and State Information Commissions lead to large case backlogs, diminishing the RTI's effectiveness as a timely remedy.

- **Historical Evolution of Anti-Corruption and Transparency**
- **Pre-Independence Era**
- **Indian Penal Code (1860):** Codified offenses related to bribery and public servants taking illegal gratification (Sections 161–165).
- **World War II and DSPE (1941–1946):** Rapid wartime procurement led to widespread corruption. The British administration established the Special Police Establishment (SPE) in 1941, later formalized under the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946—which remains the legal foundation for the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).
- **Post-Independence and Administrative Reforms (1947–1980s)**
- **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947:** Consolidated laws regarding corrupt practices among public officials.
- **Santhanam Committee (1962–1964):** Recommended establishing the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) in 1964 to oversee administrative integrity. It identified bureaucratic delays and discretionary powers as key drivers of corruption.
- **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988:** Expanded the definition of "public servant" and incorporated illicit enrichment and non-explained assets into the criminal framework.
- **The Era of Major Scams and Grassroots Mobilization (1990s–2000s)**
- **Judicial Intervention (*Vineet Narain Case, 1998*):** The Supreme Court issued directions to grant statutory status to the CVC and insulate the CBI from political executive interference.
- **Grassroots Transparency Movement:** Movements led by organizations like the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in Rajasthan demanded access to village expenditure records, establishing the link between information access, minimum wages, and fundamental survival rights.
- **Enactment of RTI Act (2005):** Replaced the Freedom of Information Act, 2002, creating an enforceable right for citizens to access state-held information.
- **Civil Society Agitation and Institutionalization (2011–Present)**
- **India Against Corruption Movement (2011–2012):** Mass public protests against high-level resource allocation scams (e.g., 2G Spectrum, Coal Block allocations) pushed for independent oversight mechanisms.
- **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act (2013):** Passed following public demand to establish an independent ombudsman framework.
- **Recent Statutory Changes (2018–2023):**
    - *2018 PC Act Amendment:* Introduced Section 17A (requiring prior approval to investigate public officials) while criminalizing bribe-giving.
    - *DPDP Act, 2023:* Restructured privacy exemptions under the RTI Act, reshaping the balance between personal privacy and administrative transparency.

AXIA IAS ACADEMY

RISE ABOVE THE REST

COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS: UNPACKING PUBLIC INTEGRITY, CORRUPTION & GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

1. KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS

PETTY CORRUPTION vs GRAND CORRUPTION
Definition corruption vs membals corruption, relationshipson sacales and resource allocation

RTI ACT SECTION 8(1)(j) & PUBLIC INTEREST
Data shield of the patition conruption snows and balanced scalie ad anoroos & public interest

DPDP ACT IMPACT ON RTI
Dilution in previous/ampats of conruption corruption, calde/mord and public corruption

PREVENTION OF CORRUPTION ACT SEC 17A
Prior permission shield to be more corrmissing permason ancistor prior corruption

LOKPAL & LOKAYUKTA OMBUDSMAN
Independence in amharson's combulodan

DIGITAL DIVIDE & RENT-SEEKING
Internet access gap in ona internet access gap

2. EVOLUTION TIMELINE

3. LOGICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY
Breach of trust/ Public legitimacy

DETERRENCE THEORY
Certainty, celerity, Severity gaps

KAUTILYAN PRAGMATISM

RAWLSIAN JUSTICE
Fair opportunity erosion erosion in exams

AMARTYA SEN'S CAPABILITY APPROACH
Deprivation of marginalized

4. MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

PUBLIC INTEGRITY IN INDIA

SOCIAL
Truncates mobility, destroys public trust

POLITICAL
Threatens free & fair elections, crony capitalism nexus

LEGAL
Conflict between Privacy vs RTI, court backlogs

INTERNATIONAL
Index rankings, international treaty

LEGAIL
Decliorts capital allocations values, moral hazard

ETHICAL
Declining administra-ative values, zone, moral hazard

ECONOMIC
Distorts capital allocation, imposes systemic bribe tax

5. MAIN ARGUMENTS SUMMARY

- Digitalisation shifts rent-seeking to intermediaries
- RTI has been murdered by judgments/bureaucracy
- Prosecution is an ali-profit, negligible-risk activity

6. LINKAGES WITH NCERTs

Class 8 Civics:
Confronting Marginalisation, Public Facilities
Chapter: RTI movement history, public integrity

Class 11 Political Theory:
Freedom, Citizenship
Chapter: RTI movement history, public integrity

Class 12 Pol Science:
Politics in India Since Independence
Chapter: RTI movement history, public integrity

7. LINKAGES WITH UPSC SYLLABUS

GS Paper 1-4	GS Paper 1-3	GS Paper 1-4	GS Paper 1-4
Societal Impact	**Governance & RTI**	**Inclusive Growth**	**Probity in Governance**
• CVC/CBI/ Lokpal autonomy • E-goncept monihers admnistrative ethics	• CVC/ CBI • E-governance • Administrative ethics	• E-governanive ethics • Administrative ethics	• CVC • Administrative ethics

APSC GS Paper 2 / Polity
Lokayukta Assam

8. WAY FORWARD

Balanced, practical solutions:

- Revisit Sec 17A
- Fast-track courts for anti-corruption
- Transparent appointments to Commissions
- Statuary grievance redressal legislation
- Community digital access points

9. ALL PREVIOUS YEARS' UPSC & APSC QUESTIONS

Summary question summaries concise

2021 GS2 RTI Recent Amendments & Accountability	**2019 GS2** Sec 17A pouornment prior government sanction	**2022 GS2** Scatuary prastented in Institutations Integrity
2019 GS2 Sec 17A prior government sanction	**2018 GS2** Auroora local and Evonnomis integrity	**2022 GS4** Institutiont digital neuvont Integrity
2018 GS2 Digital Divide	**2022 GS4** Institutional Integrity	**APSC examples** Summary questions concises

- **Logical and Philosophical Foundations**
- **Social Contract Theory and Public Trust**
- Under classical social contract theory (John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau), citizens surrender certain freedoms to the state in exchange for the protection of rights and impartial governance.
- **Breach of Trust:** Corruption violates this contract by converting public authority into private rent-seeking.
- **Erosion of Democratic Legitimacy:** When state allocation of resources (e.g., public exams, welfare benefits) is perceived as corrupt, citizen compliance with state authority declines.
- **Kautilyan Pragmatism and Bureaucratic Discretion**
- In the *Arthashastra*, Kautilya observed that just as it is impossible not to taste honey placed on the tongue, it is difficult for administrative agents handling state resources to avoid extracting private gain.
- **Institutional Auditing:** Kautilya argued that institutional integrity cannot rely solely on individual morality; it requires administrative oversight, undercover checks, and strict auditing mechanisms.
- **Classical Deterrence Theory**
- Jeremy Bentham and Cesare Beccaria posited that human actions are guided by a calculation of pleasure versus pain. For a legal prohibition to deter crime, punishment must feature three elements: **Certainty, Severity, and Celerity (speed).**
- **Systemic Failure in Prosecution:** When investigations face statutory delays (e.g., Section 17A prior approval) and judicial trials take years, the *certainty* and *celerity* of punishment drop significantly.
- **Inverted Incentive Structures:** If the expected financial or political gain from corruption outweighs the low probability of prompt conviction, corruption remains a rational, high-return strategy for bad actors.
- **Rawlslian Justice and Sen’s Capability Approach**
- **Rawls’ Principle of Fair Equality of Opportunity:** Systemic leaks and paper corruptions (such as examination leaks) violate John Rawls' principle of fair opportunity by substituting merit and open competition with financial capability.
- **Amartya Sen's Capability Approach:** Amartya Sen highlights that poverty is a deprivation of basic capabilities, not merely low income. Petty corruption in public distribution systems or health services strips the marginalized of their baseline capabilities, perpetuating multi-dimensional inequality.

- **Multidimensional Analysis**
- **Social Dimension**
- **Erosion of Meritocracy:** Leaks in national competitive examinations undermine public faith in higher education and social mobility.
- **Impact on Vulnerable Groups:** Lower-income populations bear a larger financial burden from petty corruption relative to their income, forcing them to pay bribes for basic rights like health, housing, and food rations.
- **Political Dimension**
- **Crony Capitalism and Electoral Integrity:** High election costs can create dependencies between political parties and corporate donors, shifting policy incentives toward campaign contributors.
- **Institutional Asymmetry:** Selective enforcement of anti-corruption measures against opposition figures weakens democratic checks and balances, transforming oversight bodies into political tools.
- **Legal and Judicial Dimension**
- **Jurisprudential Tension:** The conflict between the Right to Information (Article 19(1)(a)) and the Right to Privacy (Article 21, *KS Puttaswamy*) requires a clear balance so data protection rules do not shield corrupt acts.
- **Procedural Delay:** Protracted trials and high vacancies across the judiciary create procedural delays that undermine deterrence.
- **Ethical Dimension**
- **Decline in Administrative Ethics:** A shift from Max Weber's ideal of neutral public service toward personal enrichment distorts bureaucratic culture.
- **Moral Hazard:** When senior leaders face few consequences for unethical actions, lower-level staff are more likely to normalize corrupt behavior.
- **International Dimension**
- **Global Perceptions and Competitiveness:** Low rankings on indices like Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI) or the *Rule of Law Index* affect foreign direct investment (FDI) and international trade standing.
- **International Obligations:** India is a signatory to the *United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)*, which requires robust transparency standards, independent oversight bodies, and protection for whistleblowers.
- **Economic Dimension**
- **Distortion of Free Market Competition:** Corruption rewards rent-seekers over efficient, innovative businesses, reducing market efficiency.
- **Bribe Tax and Investment Barriers:** Systemic corruption acts as an unpredictable tax on business enterprise, discouraging capital investment and adding operational costs to infrastructure projects.

Linkages with NCERT Textbooks

Class & Subject	Book Title	Relevant Chapter	Core Linkage & Relevance
Class 8 Civics	*Social and Political Life - III*	**Chapter 8:** Confronting Marginalisation **Chapter 9:** Public Facilities	Explores how corruption in public facility delivery (water, sanitation, healthcare) disproportionately harms marginalized communities, reducing their access to basic constitutional rights.
Class 11 Political Science	*Indian Constitution at Work*	**Chapter 7:** Executive **Chapter 10:** The Philosophy of the Constitution	Examines bureaucratic accountability, public service neutrality, and the executive's duty to uphold transparency and administrative ethics.
Class 11 Political Science	*Political Theory*	**Chapter 2:** Freedom **Chapter 8:** Citizenship	Analyzes the fundamental link between access to public information, freedom of expression, and meaningful civic participation in a constitutional democracy.
Class 12 Political Science	*Politics in India Since Independence*	**Chapter 7:** Rise of Popular Movements	Traces grassroots movements like the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), showing how civil society campaigns led to statutory frameworks like the RTI Act.

- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **GS Paper 1: Indian Society**
- **Social Empowerment and Development:** How systemic corruption restricts social mobility for disadvantaged groups and worsens inequality.
- **GS Paper 2: Governance, Polity, and Social Justice**
- **Important Aspects of Governance:** Transparency, accountability, e-governance applications, limitations, and models.
- **Right to Information (RTI):** Legal framework, structural challenges, and statutory modifications (DPDP Act, 2023).
- **Role of Civil Services in a Democracy:** Administrative ethics, bureaucratic neutrality, and institutional accountability.
- **Statutory, Regulatory, and Quasi-Judicial Bodies:** Functioning, autonomy, and challenges facing the CVC, CBI, Lokpal, Lokayuktas, and Central/State Information Commissions.
- **GS Paper 3: Economic Development and Security**
- **Effects of Liberalization and Growth:** Crony capitalism, procurement fraud, market distortions, and their impact on investment.
- **Institutional Integrity and Internal Security:** Corruption risks in public infrastructure projects, regulatory oversight, and administrative compliance.
- **GS Paper 4: Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude**
- **Probity in Governance:** Philosophical bases of governance, transparency, and public integrity.
- **Codes of Conduct and Citizen's Charters:** Institutional mechanisms designed to reduce administrative discretion and eliminate petty corruption.
- **Challenges of Corruption:** Ethical dilemmas faced by public officials, whistleblowing protections, and moral decision-making models.
- **Optional Subjects**
- **Public Administration:** Paper I (Administrative Theory, Accountability and Control, Administrative Law) & Paper II (Executive Framework, Civil Services, Financial Management).
- **Political Science & International Relations (PSIR):** Paper I (Political Theory, Democracy, Justice) & Paper II (State and Governance in India, Electoral Dynamics).

- **Way Forward and Policy Recommendations**
- **Legislative and Statutory Reforms**
- **Revisit Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act:** Amend Section 17A to require an independent panel—rather than the political executive—to review investigation requests against public servants, preventing conflict-of-interest delays.
- **Re-Harmonize RTI and DPDP Act:** Introduce clear legislative amendments establishing that data privacy exemptions under Section 8(1)(j) cannot override public interest disclosures regarding governance and administration.
- **Judicial and Prosecutorial Fast-Tracking**
- **Time-Bound Corruption Trials:** Establish dedicated fast-track courts specifically for anti-corruption cases, with statutory mandates to complete trials within 12 months.
- **Independent Prosecutorial Directorates:** Separate investigative agencies (such as the CBI and State Anti-Corruption Bureaus) from executive oversight by granting them independent cadre allocation and operational budgets.
- **Institutional Strengthening**
- **Transparent Appointments:** Introduce transparent selection processes for Information Commissioners and Lokpal members, involving bipartisan legislative panels, senior judicial representatives, and civil society observers.
- **Mandatory Vacancy Closures:** Implement automatic nomination procedures to fill vacancies in Information Commissions before terms end, preventing backlogs.
- **Enacting a Universal Right to Service Framework**
- **Statutory Grievance Redressal Legislation:** Pass a national Grievance Redressal Act mandating clear delivery timelines for public services, with explicit financial penalties levied on administrative departments for unexcused delays.
- **Community Digital Access Points:** Fund civic-run digital access centers to help citizens navigate e-governance portals without paying high fees to private intermediaries.

UPSC CSE Prelims Practice Questions

Question 1 (RTI Act Provisions)

Q. With reference to the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, consider the following statements:

1.Information Commissioners are eligible for reappointment to the same office after completing their term.

2.The RTI Act applies to public authorities established by or under the Constitution or any law made by Parliament or State Legislatures.

3.Information can be denied under Section 8 of the Act if it involves unwarranted invasion of the privacy of an individual, unless larger public interest justifies its disclosure.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

•(a) 1 and 2 only

•(b) 2 and 3 only

•(c) 1 and 3 only

•(d) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: (b)

•*Explanation:* Statement 1 is incorrect: Under the RTI Act, Information Commissioners are not eligible for reappointment to the same office. Statements 2 and 3 are correct descriptions of the Act's scope and Section 8(1)(j) provisions.

Question 2 (Anti-Corruption Institutional Framework)

Q. Consider the following statutory bodies in India:

1.Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)

2.Lokpal and Lokayuktas

3.National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC)

4.Central Information Commission (CIC)

Which of the above are explicitly mandated to inquire into allegations of corruption against public servants at the Union level?

•(a) 1 and 2 only

•(b) 2 and 4 only

•(c) 1, 2, and 4 only

•(d) 1, 2, 3, and 4

Correct Answer: (a)

•*Explanation:* The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and the Lokpal are the primary bodies tasked with investigating anti-corruption complaints against Union public servants. The CIC focuses on transparency compliance, while the NCDRC handles consumer disputes.

The coming of age of India's industrial policy

After locking in on a "one value-chain" approach, the country now needs to confront the ownership question to ensure that a substantial part of the value doesn't flow out as licence fees and royalties. The answer lies not in autarky, but in ownership in chosen layers

India is beginning its next chapter with factories, export lines, trained workers, supplier networks, and a record of execution. SHUTTERSTOCK

Amitabh Kant

In 2025, India's smartphone exports crossed a threshold that should change how India thinks about industrial policy. With exports of about ₹2.6 lakh crore, the smartphone became the country's largest exported product category, ahead of diesel fuel and cut diamonds. A decade earlier, India was overwhelmingly an importer of handsets. Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the ₹62,000-crore Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme, and Semicon 2.0 with an outlay of ₹1.3 lakh crore. The two initiatives demonstrate the next stage of a deliberate climb, from assembly to component manufacturing, design, intellectual and property creation, resulting in globally competitive Indian firms.

The mobile-phone experience shows what disciplined policy can achieve. India's electronics production reached ₹13 lakh crore in 2025-26, while exports touched ₹4 lakh crore. Domestic value addition has risen from about 15% to 23%. The mobile ecosystem supports roughly 12 lakh direct and indirect jobs, and women constitute nearly 70% of its direct workforce. This is more than an export success. It is industrial policy creating formal work and confidence that India can execute at global scale.

For years, the Western world, through the Washington Consensus, advocated a free-market regime where hyperglobalisation helped them maintain dominance. The government was asked to stay away from picking industrial winners. However, that view has not survived geopolitics. The US, EU, Japan, South Korea and China now treat semiconductors, batteries, clean technology and advanced manufacturing as strategic infrastructure. Supply chains determine not only competitiveness, but national resilience. India's approach is, therefore, not a retreat from reform. It is an attempt to update reform for a world in which technology, trade, and security have converged.

Semicon 2.0 is the upstream counterpart to India's Electronic Manufacturing stack. Under the first Semicon mission, 12 manufacturing projects with investment exceeding ₹1.64 lakh crore were approved, and Micron, Kaynes, and CG Semi have begun commercial production. The second phase broadens the agenda beyond fabs to six connected pillars: chip design, machines and materials, additional fabrication capacity, advanced packaging, research and talent. This is the right architecture because semiconductor sovereignty is not achieved by building one expensive factory. It comes from dense networks of designers, equipment specialists, chemical suppliers, cleanroom technicians, research institutions, and customers.

The strategic logic is strongest when the schemes are seen as a "one value-chain" policy. The Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme is intended to localise printed circuit boards, camera modules, passive components, sub-assemblies and capital goods. Semicon 2.0 pushes further upstream, while the new mobile scheme pulls downstream firms towards design and brands. Each layer improves the business case for the next.

Now, India must confront the ownership question. A chip may be designed in Bengaluru and packaged in Gujarat or Assam, yet a large part of its value can still flow offshore through licence fees and recurring royalties on foreign intellectual property. PwC estimates that such payments can absorb 25-35% of the budget of an industry-leading chip-design project. Processor cores, interface blocks, verification IP, and design tools are indispensable, but as sales rise, per-unit royalties rise with them. India could build the factories, employ the engineers, and export the products while overseas owners of foundational IP capture much of the economic rent.

The answer is not autarky; it is ownership in chosen layers. India should accelerate sovereign processor cores, artificial intelligence (AI) accelerators, secure interconnects, indigenous electronic-design-automation capability and foundational patents in advanced packaging. Open architectures can reduce royalty exposure where commercially sensible. This is also the hardware foundation of sovereign AI. Sovereign AI must include Indian-owned compute IP, not merely locally hosted models.

Capital policy must reinforce that ambition. India has roughly a fifth of the world's semiconductor design talent, but much of it works inside foreign captive centres. The government has indicated that it will co-invest with venture funds in eligible chip-design start-ups, take minority equity without operational control, and exit after firms' scale. This is precisely the vote of confidence deep-tech founders need. Patient domestic risk capital can keep intellectual property, holding companies, and engineers in India instead of pushing them overseas in search of finance.

Equity support should be matched by equity-linked employee rewards and expedited listing options. The Securities and Exchange Board of India and the exchanges should strengthen the Innovators Growth Platform into a fast, disclosure-rigorous route for qualified semiconductor and strategic deep-tech ventures. Chip-design firms face long development cycles, heavy R&D spending, and delayed revenues that conventional listing expectations do not always accommodate. Founders, employees, investors and policymakers need credible routes to liquidity. Without them, India may fund invention but lose ownership just before commercial scale.

Foreign investment must similarly become embedded capability rather than an archipelago of facilities. The expansion of Applied Materials, AMD, Lam Research, KLA and Microchip, and the Tata Electronics-ASML partnership should move from investment to co-development, local supplier qualification, equipment servicing and selected subsystem assembly. These investments complement semiconductor partnerships with the US, the EU, Japan, Singapore, the Netherlands and Germany. India's design infrastructure already gives 105 start-ups and MSMEs access to advanced tools; its reach should grow ten-fold, with multi-project wafer access and university-industry research. Strategic procurement in telecom, defence, mobility and energy can give Indian chips their first customers.

India is beginning its next chapter with factories, export lines, trained workers, supplier networks, and a record of execution. The smartphone changed India's export basket. The next decade must ensure that chips and the AI they power change something more fundamental — who owns the technology and who captures the value.

The smartphone was the proof of concept. The chip, and the intelligence it powers, is the larger industrial thesis.

Amitabh Kant is chairperson, Fairfax Centre for Free Enterprise, chancellor, NIIT University, former G20 Sherpa, and ex-CEO, NITI Aayog.
The views expressed are personal

WHO SHOULD GOVERN TEMPLES?

Key Terms and Concepts

Term / Concept	Conceptual Definition & Structural Role	Real-World / Practical Example
Washington Consensus	A set of free-market economic policy recommendations promoted since the late 20th century by Washington-based institutions (IMF, World Bank). It advocates minimal state intervention, deregulation, trade liberalization, and letting market forces pick "winners."	In the 1990s, developing nations were advised to cut electronics subsidies and import handsets freely, relying on comparative advantage rather than building state-funded chip factories.
Strategic Industrial Policy	Deliberate, targeted state intervention using subsidies, infrastructure, and capital co-investment to build domestic capacity in strategic sectors like chips, clean tech, and defense.	The ₹1.3 lakh crore **Semicon 2.0** initiative and the **PLI (Production Linked Incentive)** schemes, where the government directly supports manufacturing units.
Domestic Value Addition (DVA)	The percentage of a final product's monetary value created within the host country's borders, calculated by subtracting imported component costs from the final export price.	Moving from simple assembly (screwing together imported screens and batteries with 15% DVA) to soldering locally made Printed Circuit Boards (PCBs) and camera modules (pushing DVA to 23%+).
Upstream vs. Downstream Integration	**Upstream** refers to foundational inputs (R&D, chip design, silicon wafer fabrication, raw materials). **Downstream** refers to final assembly, branding, distribution, and end-user products.	**Upstream:** Designing a 4nm processor core or manufacturing ultra-pure chemical gases.**Downstream:** Assembling a finished smartphone inside a factory and selling it to consumers.
Intellectual Property (IP) Rent & Royalties	Recurring licensing fees paid to foreign owners of foundational technological IP (such as processor architectures or software algorithms) for every unit produced or designed.	Paying ARM or Qualcomm a 2–5% royalty fee on every smartphone chip designed in Bengaluru, which siphons off 25–35% of a design startup's overall budget to overseas IP holders.
Sovereign AI & Compute IP	A nation’s independent capability to build, own, and control the entire Artificial Intelligence stack—from indigenous physical silicon processor cores (compute IP) to localized algorithms and data centers.	Using locally designed **DIR-V (Digital India RISC-V)** open-standard processor cores to power national supercomputers, ensuring core infrastructure cannot be disabled by foreign sanctions.
Electronic Design Automation (EDA)	Specialized software tools used by microelectronics engineers to design, simulate, verify, and layout complex integrated circuits (ICs) before sending them to a fab.	Software programs from companies like Cadence or Synopsys that allow engineers to map billions of transistors onto a thumbnail-sized silicon die without manual wiring.

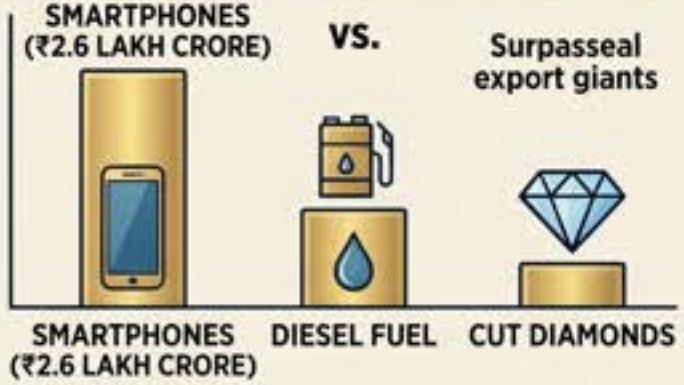
- **Main Arguments & Core Analysis**
- **1. The Smartphone Revolution as a Proof of Concept**
- India’s industrial transition in electronics has reached a structural inflection point. By registering roughly **₹2.6 lakh crore in exports in 2025**, smartphones have emerged as the nation's largest single exported product category, outstripping traditional export giants like refined diesel and cut diamonds.
- This success demonstrates three key shifts:
- **Scale and Execution:** Overall electronics production touching **₹13 lakh crore** (with **₹4 lakh crore** in total exports) proves that Indian manufacturing can execute at global scale and meet stringent quality benchmarks.
- **Formal Labor Creation:** The mobile manufacturing ecosystem directly and indirectly supports nearly **12 lakh formal jobs**.
- **Gender-Inclusive Industrialization:** Women constitute almost **70% of the direct manufacturing workforce** in assembly lines, driving financial inclusion and higher household savings in semi-urban hubs.
- **2. Death of the Washington Consensus & Rise of Strategic Intervention**
- The conventional free-market dogma—which warned governments against "picking industrial winners"—has broken down under geopolitical realities.
- **Weaponized Interdependence:** Advanced economies (US, EU, Japan, South Korea, China) now classify semiconductors, advanced batteries, and clean technologies as *critical national infrastructure* rather than simple market commodities.
- **Redefining Reform:** India's aggressive state funding—evidenced by the **₹62,000-crore Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme** and the **₹1.3 lakh crore Semicon 2.0** outlay—is not a return to License-Raj protectionism. Instead, it is a pragmatic update to market reforms, aligning national security, global trade competitiveness, and technological resilience.
- **3. Architecture of Semicon 2.0 & "One Value-Chain" Integration**
- Semicon 2.0 acts as the upstream complement to downstream electronic assembly, adopting a holistic "one value-chain" framework across six interconnected pillars:
- By connecting the **Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme** (localizing PCBs, camera modules, and capital goods) with upstream chip fabrication and downstream mobile branding, each layer improves the commercial viability of the adjacent layer.
- **4. The Ownership Bottleneck: The IP Royalty Trap**
- A major structural challenge in the high-tech value chain is the leakage of economic value to foreign intellectual property holders.
- Without domestic ownership of foundational IP (processor cores, interconnects, EDA tools), foreign firms will continue to capture the vast majority of economic rent, leaving India with narrow assembly margins.
- **5. Sovereign AI and Domestic Capital Reform**
- True technological sovereignty requires moving beyond hosting foreign AI models locally to owning the underlying hardware and compute IP.
- **Capital Policy Intervention:** Though India holds ~20% of the world’s semiconductor design talent, most engineers work inside foreign captive R&D centers. To counter this, state co-investment via venture capital funds (taking minority equity without operational interference) offers patient risk capital.
- **Capital Market Liquidity:** Traditional listing rules penalize deep-tech ventures due to long gestation periods and delayed profitability. Modernizing platforms like SEBI's **Innovators Growth Platform (IGP)** provides clear exit routes, enabling Indian founders to scale locally rather than relocating abroad for funding.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **1. The Early Phase & The Mohali Setback (1980s–1990s)**
- In 1984, India established **Semiconductor Complex Limited (SCL)** in Mohali, Punjab, aiming to build a state-led microelectronics base. At the time, India's chip fabrication capabilities were only a few years behind South Korea and Taiwan. However, a catastrophic fire at the SCL facility in 1989, combined with the 1991 economic crisis, halted state funding for hardware. Post-1991 reforms favored software development and services, leaving hardware manufacturing to lag behind.
- **2. ITA-1 Era & The Captive Design Hub Phase (1997–2014)**
- In 1997, India signed the WTO's **Information Technology Agreement (ITA-1)**, committing to zero-duty imports on IT hardware products.
- **The Negative Impact:** Zero import tariffs made local manufacturing commercially unviable compared to cheap imports from East Asia, turning India into a net importer of electronics.
- **The Silver Lining:** Global semiconductor multinationals (Intel, Texas Instruments, Qualcomm) established offshore R&D centers in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Noida. While India cultivated a large pool of chip design engineers, the intellectual property generated belonged entirely to foreign parent corporations.
- **3. Assembly-Led Growth via PMP & Make in India (2014–2020)**
- Recognizing that electronics imports threatened the Current Account Deficit (CAD), the government launched **Make in India (2014)** and the **Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP)**. By applying differential tariffs on imported finished phones while keeping knocked-down components tax-free, global brands set up local assembly plants. Cell phone assembly units grew from a handful in 2014 to over 200 by 2020. However, domestic value addition remained capped at 10–15% due to a lack of local component manufacturing.
- **4. PLI Schemes & ISM Phase 1 (2020–2024)**
- To transition from assembly to component manufacturing, the government launched the **Production Linked Incentive (PLI)** schemes for Large-Scale Electronics Manufacturing and the **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM Phase 1)** with an outlay of ₹76,000 crore. This phase secured major industrial commitments:
- Micron set up a $2.75 billion OSAT (Assembly & Testing) facility in Gujarat.
- Tata Electronics partnered with Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC) to build India's first commercial semiconductor fab in Dholera, along with an OSAT facility in Morigaon, Assam.
- **5. Deep-Tech Sovereignty & Semicon 2.0 (2025–Present)**
- Having established scale in smartphone assembly, policy focus shifted to upstream technological control. **Semicon 2.0** expanded funding to chip design, indigenous EDA tools, equipment manufacturing, and domestic IP creation. This marked a shift in national ambition: moving from being an assembly plant for foreign technology to owning foundational hardware IP for sovereign AI.

AXIA IAS ACADEMY
RISE ABOVE THE REST

INDIA'S SMARTPHONE EXPORT TRIUMPH & THE NEW INDUSTRIAL FRONTIER

1. KEY EXPORT OUTCOMES (2025)



Surpassed traditional export giants.
From Importer to Net Exporter in a Decade.

2. POLICY ARCHITECTURE

₹62,000 Cr MOBILE PHONE SCHEME **vs.** **₹1.3 Lakh Cr** SEMICON 2.0 MISSION

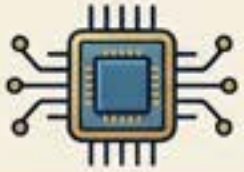
- Deliberate climb: Assembly to Design, Component Mfg & IP Creation.

3. ECOSYSTEM IMPACT (2025-26)

ELECTRONICS PRODUCTION: ₹13 LAKH CR

ELECTRONICS EXPORTS: ₹4 LAKH CR

DVA (DOMESTIC VALUE ADDITION): 15% → 23%



JOB CREATION: ~12 LAKH

70% WOMEN Direct Workforce

4. THE 'IP RENT' CHALLENGE

Overseas IP owners capture economic rent, despite Indian engineers.

5. WAY FORWARD: SOVEREIGN OWNERSHIP

- **SOVEREIGN CORES & AI ACCELERATORS:** Build Indian-Owned Compute IP.
- **CAPITAL POLICY:** Co-investment with Venture Funds in Chip-Design Start-ups (Minority Equity).
- **INNOVATORS GROWTH PLATFORM (SEBI):** Special listings for Deep-Tech (Delayed Revenues).
- **EMBEDDED FOREIGN INVESTMENT:** Partner for co-development, not just facility archipelagos.
- **STRATEGIC PUBLIC PROCUREMENT:** Give Indian chips first customers in Defence, Telecom.

Logical and Philosophical Foundations

1. Realpolitik & Neo-Mercantilism in High-Tech Trade

The underlying logic of India's mobile and semiconductor strategy breaks from orthodox neoliberal economics (the Washington Consensus), which argues that market efficiency is maximized when states do not intervene.

Instead, it draws on **Neo-Mercantilist Realpolitik**: in critical technology, market forces alone cannot safeguard national interests when foreign rivals subsidize their own industries. State intervention is therefore necessary to build domestic capacity, protecting national sovereignty against geopolitical disruptions and supply-chain pressures.

2. Techno-Nationalism & Strategic Autonomy

Techno-nationalism posits that a nation's security, economic independence, and international standing depend directly on its control over core technologies.

If a country relies on foreign suppliers for its silicon chips, telecom switches, and AI processors, its strategic decisions remain vulnerable to external influence. True non-alignment in the 21st century requires **technological self-reliance**—ensuring the hardware that powers critical infrastructure cannot be disabled by foreign sanctions or trade disputes.

3. Ricardian Rent & Structural Dependency Theory

From an economic standpoint, the strategy addresses the imbalance described by **Dependency Theory**:

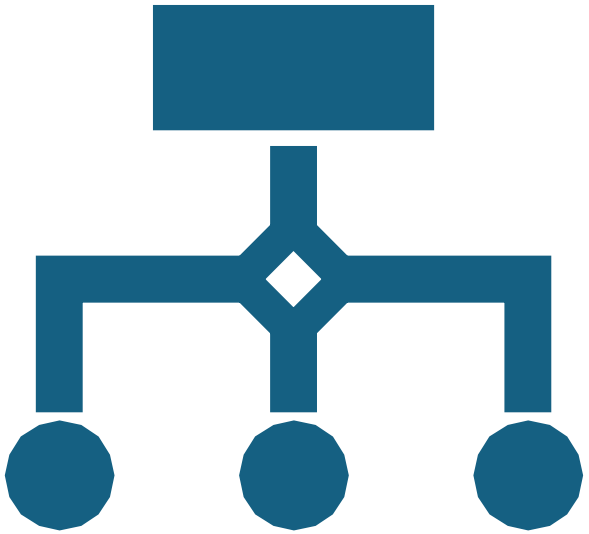
$$\text{Global Value Creation} = \underbrace{\text{Peripheral Assembly (Low Margin)}}_{\text{Labor-Intensive, Captures } 10-15\%} + \underbrace{\text{Core IP Ownership (High Rent)}}_{\text{Knowledge-Intensive, Captures } 80-90\%}$$

Under classical rent theory, ownership of scarce, non-replicable assets—such as foundational semiconductor patents—yields economic rent. Assembly lines create formal jobs, but the vast majority of profit flows to foreign IP owners. Shifting policy focus to indigenous IP creation disrupts this dynamic, helping the country climb up the global value chain.

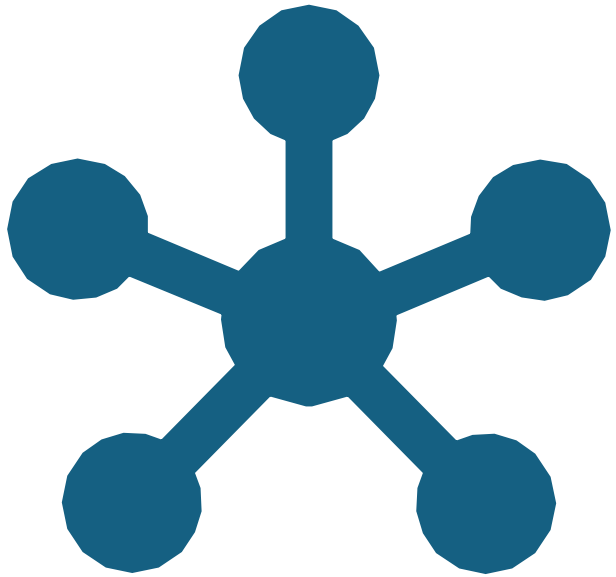
- **Multidimensional Analysis**
- **1. Social Dimension: Gender Inclusion & Labor Formalization**
- **Female Empowerment:** Modern electronics assembly plants preferentially employ women due to the precision required for micro-assembly. With women making up nearly **70% of the direct workforce**, these schemes increase Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP), providing formal wages, healthcare, and financial independence.
- **Skill Upgrading:** The shift from basic assembly to component manufacturing and chip testing upgrades local skill sets, creating a new class of specialized technicians, clean-room operators, and micro-fabrication engineers.
- **Regional Diversification:** Industrial projects in regions like Assam (Morigaon OSAT plant) and Gujarat help balance economic development beyond traditional industrial hubs in South and West India.
- **2. Political & National Security Dimension**
- **Mitigating Supply Chain Vulnerabilities:** Relying on imported chips for critical sectors—such as defense radar, telecommunications, power grids, and medical devices—leaves vital infrastructure exposed to foreign coercion or blockade risks during international crises.
- **Hardening National Infrastructure:** Securing indigenous control over compute hardware ensures that defense equipment and communication networks are free from hardcoded backdoors, foreign spyware, or remote kill-switches.
- **3. Legal and Regulatory Dimension**
- **Capital Market Reform:** Traditional SEBI regulations require companies to show track records of profitability before listing on stock exchanges. Modernizing the **Innovators Growth Platform (IGP)** addresses this by accommodating deep-tech ventures with long R&D cycles and delayed revenues.
- **Intellectual Property Frameworks:** Transitioning from an IP-consuming economy to an IP-generating one requires stronger domestic patent enforcement, faster patent examination procedures, and clear guidelines on employee-inventor royalty sharing.
- **4. Ethical Dimension**
- **Resource Allocation vs. Environmental Impact:** Semiconductor fabs require millions of liters of ultra-pure water daily alongside uninterrupted electrical power. Balancing these resource demands against local agricultural and domestic needs presents a major environmental management challenge.
- **Fair Workplaces in High-Volume Manufacturing:** High-speed assembly lines demand strict oversight to ensure fair working conditions, prevent worker fatigue, maintain ergonomic standards, and protect labor union rights.
- **5. International & Geopolitical Dimension**
- **Friendshoring Alliances:** Strategic technology partnerships with the US, EU, Japan, Singapore, the Netherlands, and Germany integrate domestic units into resilient, trusted supply chains outside single-source monopolies.
- **Strategic Autonomy in Multilateral Trade:** By developing indigenous technology while maintaining open trade policy, the nation retains diplomatic flexibility, avoiding total dependence on any single geopolitical bloc.
- **6. Economic Dimension**
- **CAD Hedging & Fiscal Stability:** Electronics imports historically posed a structural risk to the Current Account Deficit, second only to crude oil imports. Scaling electronics exports to **₹4 lakh crore** stabilizes foreign exchange reserves and protects trade balances.
- **Overcoming the Middle-Income Trap:** Assembling imported components yields thin profit margins (10-15% DVA). Capturing upstream value—through design, IP royalties, and specialized machinery—allows the economy to escape low-cost assembly dependency and move toward high-income industrial growth.

- **Linkages with NCERT Textbooks**
- **1. Class 11 Economics: *Indian Economic Development***
- **Chapter 3: Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG):** Helps students analyze how signing the 1997 WTO ITA-1 agreement opened domestic markets to zero-tariff electronics imports, undercutting early domestic hardware efforts. It provides historical context for today's state-supported tariff structures and PLI schemes.
- **Chapter 7: Employment: Growth, Informalisation and Related Issues:** Contextualizes how electronics assembly formalizes informal labor markets, specifically bringing non-working semi-urban women into organized industrial employment.
- **2. Class 12 Geography: *India - People and Economy***
- **Chapter 8: Manufacturing Industries:** Connects directly to discussions on high-tech industries, footloose industries, and industrial location factors. It explains why chip design clusters form in talent-rich cities like Bengaluru and Hyderabad, while fabs require land, water, and power access in states like Gujarat and Assam.
- **Chapter 10: Transport, Communication and International Trade:** Illustrates structural shifts in foreign trade profiles—tracing the evolution from exporting low-value raw commodities to shipping high-value manufactured products like smartphones and semiconductors.
- **3. Class 12 Political Science: *Contemporary World Politics***
- **Chapter 3: Globalisation:** Explains the transition from pure neoliberal free-market globalization toward strategic economic intervention, demonstrating how state policy adapts to geopolitical pressures.
- **Chapter 6: Security in the Contemporary World:** Connects non-traditional security threats—such as cyber warfare, supply-chain choke points, and critical infrastructure vulnerabilities—to the need for domestic technology ownership.

- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **1. General Studies Paper 1 (Geography & Society)**
- **Distribution of Key Industries:** Geographical distribution and siting requirements for semiconductor foundries, packaging facilities, and R&D design hubs across India.
- **Social Empowerment:** Direct employment impact on female social mobility, rural-to-urban industrial workforce shifts, and regional economic diversification.
- **2. General Studies Paper 2 (Governance & International Relations)**
- **Government Intervention Policies:** Critical evaluation of state-led industrial policies (**PLI**, **Semicon 2.0**, **SPECS**) aimed at strengthening manufacturing infrastructure.
- **Bilateral & Multilateral Groupings:** Supply chain resilience initiatives through the Quad, iCET (US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology), and EU-India Trade and Technology Council agreements.
- **3. General Studies Paper 3 (Economy, Science & Technology)**
- **Industrial Growth & Structural Changes:** Transitioning from a services-heavy GDP model toward high-tech manufacturing, boosting domestic value addition, and narrowing trade deficits.
- **Indigenization of Technology:** Developing sovereign processor architectures (RISC-V/DIR-V), indigenous EDA software tools, and domestic chip design IP.
- **Employment Generation:** Creating formal jobs and supporting technical education systems to match industry requirements.
- **4. General Studies Paper 4 & Essay Paper**
- **Ethics in Technology & Resource Distribution:** Balancing resource allocation (water, land, power) for mega-fabs against local community needs.
- **Potential Essay Topics:**
    - *"From Assembly Line to IP Creation: The Next Frontier of Indian Industrialization."*
    - *"Technological Autonomy as the Core of Modern Non-Alignment."*
    - *"Make in India vs. Own in India: Redefining Economic Sovereignty."*



- **Strategic Way Forward**
- **1. Scale Sovereign Processor Cores & EDA Capability**
- **Accelerate Open Architectures:** Support national projects built on open-standard architectures like **DIR-V (Digital India RISC-V)**. Royalty-free open instruction sets reduce dependence on expensive foreign licenses from firms like ARM or x86 holders.
- **Incentivize Indigenous EDA Development:** Fund domestic software firms and academic research centers to build home-grown Electronic Design Automation tools, systematically lowering recurring design costs for local startups.
- **2. Mobilize Patient Domestic Capital & Regulatory Reforms**
- **Co-Investment Venture Funds:** Expand state equity matching programs with private venture capital funds. By providing long-term equity support, domestic deep-tech startups can maintain local holding structures rather than reincorporating overseas to secure capital.
- **Streamline the SEBI IGP Framework:** Overhaul the Innovators Growth Platform by relaxing revenue requirements, adjusting holding period rules, and introducing specialized market-making mechanisms for deep-tech firms.
- **3. Transition Foreign Captive Hubs to Co-Development**
- **Local Supplier Integration:** Encourage foreign technology firms expanding operations in India to partner with local component suppliers, train domestic engineers on advanced sub-assembly systems, and share intellectual property rights.
- **Industry-Academia Co-Innovation:** Link corporate R&D expenditures directly with domestic university engineering programs, accelerating the translation of academic research into commercially viable chip designs.
- **4. Democratize Infrastructure Access for Startups & MSMEs**
- **Expand Multi-Project Wafer (MPW) Access:** Increase government subsidies for test-wafer access by ten-fold. Providing young startups and academic institutions with affordable prototyping facilities lowers the barrier to entry for commercializing chip designs.
- **Shared Testing and Characterization Labs:** Establish open-access, state-of-the-art testing and packaging centers across industrial corridors, allowing small enterprises to validate new chip designs without heavy capital outlays.
- **5. Leverage Strategic Public Procurement**
- **Guaranteed Initial Demand:** Use government purchasing power across defense systems, 5G/6G telecom expansion, smart power grids, railways, and public electric mobility initiatives to guarantee steady, long-term order volumes for indigenously designed silicon chips.
- **Quality Standards & Certifications:** Establish streamlined national testing frameworks to verify locally manufactured microelectronics, speeding up commercial adoption across both public and private sectors.



- **UPSC CSE Prelims Practice & Past Questions**
- **Question 1 (Targeted Concept: Semiconductor & IP Infrastructure)**
- With reference to the **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)** and **Semicon 2.0**, consider the following statements:
- 1. It aims to build an end-to-end semiconductor ecosystem covering chip design, fabrication, advanced packaging, and equipment manufacturing.
- 2. The term "RISC-V" refers to a proprietary, closed-source chip architecture that requires license payments for domestic deployment.
- 3. Domestic Value Addition (DVA) in high-tech manufacturing increases as production moves from final assembly to component fabrication and IP creation.
- Which of the statements given above are correct?
- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, and 3
- **Correct Answer: (c)**
- *Explanation:* Statement 1 is correct (Semicon 2.0 covers design, fabs, OSAT, equipment, and R&D). Statement 2 is incorrect because RISC-V is an **open-source, royalty-free** instruction set architecture. Statement 3 is correct (shifting upstream to components and IP increases domestic value addition).
- **Question 2 (UPSC CSE Prelims 2023 - Adapted Theme)**
- Consider the following statements regarding the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Large-Scale Electronics Manufacturing:
- 1. It provides financial incentives on incremental sales of goods manufactured in domestic units.
- 2. Foreign companies are completely excluded from applying under the scheme to protect domestic MSMEs.
- 3. It has contributed directly to making smartphones one of India's largest export categories.
- Which of the statements given above are correct?
- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, and 3
- **Correct Answer: (b)**
- *Explanation:* Statement 2 is incorrect; foreign multinationals (such as Foxconn, Pegatron, and Wistron/Tata) actively participate in and benefit from the PLI scheme.

| GAUTAM BHATIA | LAWYER

Constitutional need for regulation of temples

One of the longest-standing debates in Indian constitutional law and politics has been around whether and to what extent the State should control the affairs of religious and charitable institutions. From before Independence and after, Hindu religious institutions, for example, have been subject to a complex and layered regulatory mechanism. At present, this takes the form of umbrella enactments called The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act, which are enacted by different states.

Opponents of this regulatory framework gather under the banner of "free the temples," and question why the State needs to be involved in questions of faith, and of the administration of the institutions of faith. At first blush, this is a fair question. An element of contemporary secularism is a separation of the State and religion.

In other countries, the relationship between the State and religious institutions is much more light-touch and is limited to overarching questions of tax law and jurisdiction in case of offences.

Religious institutional autonomy, in other words, is given far greater importance.

To understand why the situation in India is different, one must go back to the Constituent Assembly Debates.

When the religious freedom clauses of the Constitution were being debated, Ambedkar observed that the conception of religion in India was much wider than its counterpart in the west. From birth to death, religion claimed a vast domain of an individual's life, including conditions and obligations of marriage, inheritance, and so on.

Consequently, Ambedkar noted, unless constitutional protection was limited to that which was "essentially religious", a vast swathe of the State's social reform agenda risked being declared unconstitutional, and citizens' civil rights left to the mercy of the diktats of religious institutions.

Ambedkar's concern was born out of personal experience. As a Dalit leader, he — alongside others — had fought many a battle against social discrimination cloaked in the garb of religious diktat.

Two battles, in particular, stood out: for the right to drink from the public wells (which were often attached to temples), and indeed, for the right to enter temples on a non-discriminatory basis.

The colonial court had denied him and others relief, and the Constituent Assembly was determined that the new constitutional order would not replicate and re-entrench the same hierarchies that had existed in the times to come.

Consequently, Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution — which deal with religious freedom and State control — are very carefully worded. They guarantee a zone of freedom for individual religious conscience, but also permit the State to enact laws with the aim of social reform; they limit the rights of religious denominations strictly to matters of religion.

Indeed, the foresight of this constitutional framework was demonstrated in the early years of the Constitution, when temples that wished to continue discriminatory practice regarding the right of entry, attempted to invoke their freedom as "religious denominations" to do so. These arguments were repelled by the Supreme Court, invoking the social reform clause, as well as overarching constitutional principles.

One other factor weighed with the early legislatures. Over the years, temples and religious and charitable endowments had acquired vast amounts of wealth, which took them outside the domain of strictly private bodies, lending them a quasi-public character, and thus within the regulatory domain.

It would be incumbent upon the State to ensure that there was no misappropriation or misuse of funds by those who controlled these establishments.

It is obvious that these conditions continue to prevail, even today. For this reason, Ambedkar's observation in the Constituent Assembly has aged well, and demonstrates why institutional autonomy in this regard must be subject to constitutional norms and principles.

Of course, that does not mean that the laws in question are beyond cavil. Many of the state laws set up a dense web of bureaucracy and control that, as a matter of policy, is questionable; at the end of the day, what is important is that basic constitutional norms are complied with, and that the community of believers is not swindled.

The minutiae of these laws, thus, can be debated from the perspective of whether or not they adequately serve those purposes. This, however, is a question about the wisdom of policy; the constitutional need for regulations remains.

Gautam Bhatia, a Delhi-based advocate, is the author of Offend, Shock or Disturb: Free Speech Under the Indian Constitution.
The views expressed are personal

| SHUBHRASTHA | AUTHOR

Temples need to be freed of State control

Before India called itself secular, it had already learnt how to keep the sacred and the political apart. For nearly 25 years after Independence, the Constitution did not contain the word secular. Articles 25 and 26 guaranteed religious freedom and the right of every denomination to manage its own affairs. When the 42nd Amendment inserted the word during Emergency, it turned an existing constitutional philosophy, not a licence for governments to become custodians of religious institutions. Somewhere along the way, that distinction blurred. Regulation became administration. The State ceased merely to uphold the law and began to act as manager.

A thousand years before India debated secularism, Tamil temple walls already recorded a different constitutional imagination. Chola inscriptions documented elections to temple committees, guild grants, irrigation accounts, endowments for schools, and penalties for misusing public funds.

The temple was never simply a place of worship. It was a civic institution — a treasury, granary, school, and the moral centre of its settlement. Kings endowed and protected them, but did not manage their daily affairs. The sacred and the political met without merging.

That distinction is a modern casualty. The first attempt to place temples under bureaucratic administration came from the East India Company. Regulation VII of 1817 brought major temple endowments under government supervision to prevent apparent mismanagement. Independent India dismantled colonial rule but kept much of this architecture. Across several states today, temples remain governed under Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments laws that permit significant executive involvement in their administration — an entanglement no statute imposes on mosques or churches.

Other religious institutions remain subject to law, taxation and criminal investigation, but that is not routine executive management. The Supreme Court recognised that distinction early, in the landmark *Shirur Mutt* judgment. The State may regulate secular administration of religious property, but administration itself rests with the denomination. Regulation safeguards legality but it does not authorise the executive to permanently displace the community. A constitutional State is defined not only by the powers it exercises but also by the powers it consciously declines to exercise. Constitutional restraint is no less an expression of sovereignty than constitutional authority.

Every allegation of financial irregularity revives calls for tighter government control. Donation discrepancies at the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust in Ayodhya point to failures of governance — opaque accounting, convoluted responsibilities and audit indiscipline. This is not an endorsement of an argument that the State must become the permanent manager of religious institutions. Corruption calls for demanding stronger accountability, not deeper bureaucracy. No institution becomes honest merely because an official sits within its management. Integrity comes from independent audits, digital accounting, disclosed finances and swift punishment for fraud — safeguards that strengthen institutions without requiring the State to administer them.

Nor is the answer to romanticise the past. Historical temple assemblies often reflected social hierarchies that have no place in a constitutional democracy. What deserves revival is their architecture: community stewardship, fixed tenures, rotation, and public accountability. Temple management should be elected by the devotee community through transparent, competence-based standards in finance, law and administration, open to all irrespective of caste, gender or lineage. Ritual authority should remain with trained priests irrespective of caste and community barriers. Financial and administrative authority should rest with accountable bodies answerable to devotees, the law and public scrutiny — not a government secretariat.

The purpose of a secular State is not to administer faith but to restrain itself before it by enforcing law, punishing fraud and adjudicating disputes. It is not to manage prayer or supervise the everyday life of religious institutions. Equal respect for all faiths cannot coexist with unequal executive involvement in their internal affairs. If genuine equidistance is not the constitutional practice, the honest course is to acknowledge that reality than invoke the language of secularism selectively.

India did not inherit temples from the State. It inherited the colonial State's claim over temples. What the East India Company introduced as an instrument of imperial administration survived the Empire itself and found an afterlife in independent India. That is the distinction we must recover. Let the State regulate where the Constitution permits. Let communities govern where the Constitution promises. Civilisations endure because they know where power must stop.

Shubhrastha teaches electoral arena-making at the School of Global Leadership, Gurugram.
The views expressed are personal

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Doctrine**
- A judicial framework developed by the Supreme Court of India to determine which aspects of a religion are core to its faith and protected under Article 25 and 26, versus those that are secular, administrative, or commercial activities that the State can regulate.
- **Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) Acts**
- State-level legislation that empowers government departments to supervise, regulate, and in many instances directly manage the administrative and financial affairs of Hindu temples and endowments.
- **Religious Denomination**
- A distinct sub-group or sect within a religion that possesses a common faith, a distinct name, and an organizational structure, granting it specific rights under Article 26 of the Constitution.
- **Example:** The Ramakrishna Mission or the followers of the Shirur Mutt are recognized as religious denominations with specific rights to manage their internal affairs.
- **Principled Distance Secularism**
- The Indian model of secularism, distinct from the Western model of strict separation. Instead of completely isolating the State from religion, the State maintains an equal distance from all religions while retaining the power to intervene for social reform, equity, and public welfare.
- **Example:** The State passing laws to abolish untouchability, open temples to all castes, or regulate temple funds, while simultaneously recognizing religious holidays across all faiths.
- **Quasi-Public Assets**
- Private or denominational properties and funds that, over time, acquire a public character due to their vast scale, deep community involvement, and social influence, thereby justifying regulatory oversight by the State.
- **Example:** A historic temple holding thousands of acres of land donated by centuries of devotees and receiving millions in public donations is treated as a quasi-public entity rather than a strictly private home.
- **Executive Entanglement**
- A situation where the executive branch of the government moves beyond neutral legal regulation and becomes deeply involved in the day-to-day administrative and operational management of a religious institution.
- **Example:** A government-appointed officer sitting in a temple administrative office to handle daily staff recruitment, vendor contracts, and routine operational decisions.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- **The Constitutional and Social Case for State Regulation**
- **Social Reform and Anti-Discrimination:** Historically, religious authority in India was often used to enforce caste hierarchies, deny temple entry to lower castes, and restrict access to public resources like wells. The Constitution deliberately empowered the State under Article 25(2)(b) to enact social reform laws, ensuring religious traditions do not override fundamental civil rights and equality.
- **Public Trust and Wealth Protection:** Temples and endowments hold thousands of acres of public land, ancient heritage artifacts, and billions in public donations. Because these are quasi-public assets created by the broader community, the State has a fiduciary responsibility to prevent financial fraud, land encroachment, and internal mismanagement.
- **Pervasive Scope of Traditional Practices:** As Dr. B.R. Ambedkar pointed out during the Constituent Assembly Debates, traditional religious norms in India extended far into secular domains such as inheritance, marriage, and civil rights. Without clear State power to carve out secular aspects from religion, broad social reform would be legally blocked.
- **The Case for Autonomy and De-bureaucratization**
- **Shift from Regulation to Permanent Management:** The original constitutional vision permitted the State to regulate secular activities to ensure legal compliance. Over decades, this power transformed into permanent state administration, placing government bureaucrats in charge of daily temple operations, which distorts the idea of state neutrality.
- **Selective Application across Faiths:** While Hindu temples are governed by extensive, state-level HR&CE acts with direct executive administration, other religious institutions (such as Mosques and Churches) operate under self-governing boards or specific central statutes like the Wakf Act, which focus more on regulatory oversight rather than daily government run management. This asymmetry raises questions regarding equal treatment.
- **Inefficiency of Bureaucratic Control:** Government management does not automatically guarantee honesty or administrative efficiency. Opaque accounting, land loss, and bureaucratic delays often persist under government oversight. True transparency relies on independent audits, digital record-keeping, and public accountability rather than bureaucratic control.
- **The Shirur Mutt Principle:** In the historic 1954 *Shirur Mutt* case, the Supreme Court clarified that the State could regulate the legal and financial boundaries of religious property, but the actual administration must remain with the religious denomination or community itself.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Pre-Colonial Epoch: Temples as Autonomous Civic Hubs**
- In ancient and medieval India, particularly during the Chola dynasty, temples were multi-functional civic institutions. They served as local treasuries, granaries, educational centers, and cultural hubs.
- Chola temple inscriptions (such as those at Uttiramerur) detail local assemblies, democratically elected temple committees (*variyams*), public financial records, and strict penalties for misusing public funds. Kings granted land and provided protection, but they did not run the daily administrative affairs of these institutions.
- **Colonial Era (1817–1947): The Birth of State Bureaucracy**
- The East India Company introduced systematic state control through enactments like the Bengal Regulation XIX of 1810 and the Madras Regulation VII of 1817. The British sought to monitor vast temple revenues and lands to secure public order and colonial revenue interests.
- Although the British later claimed a policy of religious neutrality through the Religious Endowments Act of 1863, local legislative councils eventually passed the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act in 1927, setting up a state board to manage temple assets.
- **Constituent Assembly Debates (1946–1949): Crafting the Balance**
- During the framing of the Constitution, members debated the boundaries of religious freedom. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar advocated strongly for state intervention to support social reform and civil rights.
- He argued that if religion were defined too broadly, it would shield oppressive social customs from statutory reform. This vision shaped the wording of Articles 25 and 26, creating a clear division between protected religious practice and state-regulated secular activities.
- **Post-Independence Judicial and Legislative Phase (1950s–1970s)**
- Independent Indian states expanded colonial-era frameworks into modern HR&CE statutes. In response, religious institutions challenged state overreach in the courts.
- In the *Seven-Judge Bench Shirur Mutt Judgment (1954)*, the Supreme Court established the "Essential Religious Practices" doctrine, ruling that while the state can regulate secular administrative tasks, it cannot strip a religious denomination of its basic administrative identity. The insertion of the word "Secular" into the Preamble via the 42nd Amendment in 1976 reinforced India's model of state-guided social reform.
- **Contemporary Era: The "Free the Temples" Debate**
- In recent decades, public debate has intensified around de-bureaucratizing religious spaces. Citizens, legal scholars, and community groups have questioned why state governments manage daily operations at temples while encouraging private management across other sectors.
- Litigation concerning historic sites—such as the Chidambaram Nataraja Temple and the Padmanabhaswamy Temple—has repeatedly brought the boundary between state oversight and community administration back before the Supreme Court.

COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS: STATE CONTROL OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

1 THE CORE DEBATE

STATE CONTROL (HR&CE Acts)

- Umbrella Acts
- Complex Regulation
- Prevent Mismanagement
- Preserve Quasi-Public Assets

Indian Context vs. Western Models

COMMUNITY AUTONOMY ("Free the Temples")

- Separation of Faith & Admin
- Institutional Autonomy
- Greater Freedom in other Nations

2 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

Pre-Independence (Pre-Colonial)

- Temples as Civic Hubs
- Community Stewardship
- Kings Endowed, Did Not Manage

Colonial Era (British Control)

- East India Co. Reg VII (1817)
- Prevent Mismanagement
- First Bureaucratic Admin

Post-Independence (Independent India)

- Retained Colonial Architecture
- Significant Executive Involvement

Post-Independence (Independent India)

- Retained Colonial Architecture
- State HR&CE Laws
- Significant Executive Involvement

3 CONSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS

Constituent Assembly Wisdom

Wide Concept of Religion

- From Birth to Death
- Condition of Marriage, Inheritance
- Social Norms in Faith Garb

Ambedkar's Vision of Reform

- Personal Experience of Discrimination
- Right to Enter Temples
- Ensure Social Reform Laws (e.g., against Untouchability)

Articles 25 & 26 Balance

- Zones of Freedom (Conscience)
- Permit State Laws (Social Reform)
- Strictly Limit Rights to Religion

4 MULTIDIMENSIONAL ISSUES TODAY

LEGAL: Shirur Mutt Principle

- Regulation vs. Permanent Management
- Regulation Safeguards Legality, Not Permanent Executive Rule

POLITICAL: Selective Secularism?

- Equal Distance vs. Unequal Executive Involve
- Equality not Consistent with Selective Application

ETHICAL: Management Failures

- Donation Discrepancies (e.g., Ram Janmabhoomi)
- Opaque Accounting
- Failure of Internal Governance

ADMINISTRATIVE: Bureaucracy vs. Honesty

- Demanding Accountability, Not Deeper Bureaucracy
- Corruption Calls for Transparency

5 THE WAY FORWARD & SOLUTIONS

PROPOSED ARCHITECTURE

State Role & Limits

- Regulatory, Not Administrative
- Independent Audits & Public Scrutiny
- Digital Accounting
- Enforce Law, Punish Fraud, Adjudicate Disputes
- NOT Manage Prayer or Everyday Life

Community Stewardship

- Elected Management Boards
- Devotee Trustees
- Open to All Castes & Genders
- Competence-Based Standards

Civilisations Endure Because They Know Where Power Must Stop.

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**
- **Principled Distance vs. Strict Separation**
- Western secularism, shaped by European history, emphasizes a strict "wall of separation" between the Church and the State. Under this model, the State avoids interfering in religious matters, and religious bodies operate outside state administration.
- In contrast, Indian secularism relies on "principled distance." Because traditional social structures in India were historically entangled with religious practices, total non-interference would allow caste-based exclusion and social inequality to persist. The Indian Constitution empowers the State to intervene whenever religious practices violate basic human rights, equal access, or public order.
- **Constitutional Morality over Feudal Tradition**
- The philosophical foundation of Indian constitutionalism prioritizes constitutional morality—centered on individual dignity, equality, and liberty—over caste norms and traditional hierarchies.
- When traditional practices clash with constitutional rights, constitutional morality must prevail. Therefore, the State's right to enforce temple entry laws and bar discriminatory practices stems directly from its duty to dismantle feudal structures.
- **The Limits of State Sovereignty and Civil Society Autonomy**
- A democratic State is defined as much by the powers it chooses to restrain as by those it actively exercises. While the State has the sovereign authority to enforce criminal law, collect taxes, and prevent fraud, transforming state departments into permanent administrative bodies for religious spaces runs counter to democratic principles.
- In a mature democracy, civil society and faith communities should retain autonomy over their internal administration, provided they operate within the law and maintain full public accountability.

- **Multidimensional Analysis**
- **Social Dimension**
- **Inclusion and Equality:** State oversight helped dismantle caste-based temple entry restrictions, enabling lower-caste individuals to enter spaces historically denied to them. State-run academies have also trained priests from all caste backgrounds.
- **Community Ownership:** Excess bureaucratic control can distance local communities from their heritage. When citizens feel like passive observers rather than active stewards, community-led cultural preservation can weaken.
- **Political Dimension**
- **Asymmetry and Perception:** The contrast between state management of Hindu temples and non-interference in other religious institutions creates political friction and allegations of selective secularism.
- **Executive Overreach:** Controlling large religious institutions offers political executives influence over land leases, employment appointments, and significant financial reserves, creating potential conflicts of interest.
- **Legal Dimension**
- **Article 25(2)(a) vs. Article 26(b):** Legal disputes center on the tension between Article 25(2)(a)—which permits the State to regulate financial, economic, and secular activities—and Article 26(b)—which guarantees every religious denomination the right to manage its own internal affairs.
- **Judicial Subjectivity in ERP:** The Supreme Court's reliance on the Essential Religious Practices doctrine sometimes requires judges to interpret theological texts, raising questions about whether courts are best suited to decide matters of religious canon.
- **Ethical Dimension**
- **Fiduciary Responsibility:** Handling devotional offerings creates a moral obligation to ensure funds are spent purely on public welfare, education, medical aid, and temple maintenance.
- **State Neutrality:** Ethically, a secular democratic government should act as an impartial referee rather than a trustee or manager of religious faith.
- **International Dimension**
- **Comparative Charity Models:** In democracies like the United Kingdom and the United States, the state regulates faith-based charities through general tax and charity laws (e.g., the UK Charity Commission). The government audits finances and investigates fraud without managing daily operations.
- **Global Human Rights Standards:** International human rights agreements, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), protect freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, favoring minimal state interference in religious organizational structures.
- **Economic Dimension**
- **Asset Monetization and Protection:** Temple trusts hold extensive land bank assets and historic artifacts. Ineffective management can result in land encroachments, under-market lease rates, and loss of revenue that could otherwise fund public infrastructure and heritage conservation.
- **Local Heritage Economies:** Historic temples often drive regional economies through tourism, local markets, transport, and artisanal crafts. Transparent management supports local economic stability and preserves cultural heritage sites.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Class 11 Political Science: *Indian Constitution at Work***
- **Chapter 2: Rights in the Indian Constitution:** Directly linked to the delicate balance between Article 25 (Individual Freedom of Religion) and Article 26 (Denominational Rights), along with state powers of social reform under Article 25(2)(b).
- **Chapter 8: Secularism:** Explains the conceptual difference between the Western "water-tight separation" model and the Indian "principled distance" model, highlighting why the Indian State intervenes in social practices.
- **Class 11 Political Science: *Political Theory***
- **Chapter 8: Secularism:** Discusses intra-religious domination (such as caste discrimination) and inter-religious equality, providing a theoretical foundation for understanding why state intervention was deemed necessary in India.
- **Class 12 History: *Themes in Indian History (Part II)***
- **Chapter 6 & 7 (Bhakti-Sufi Traditions & Vijayanagara/Imperial Capitals):** Illustrates the historical role of temples as dynamic social, economic, and civic institutions that anchored agrarian economies, urbanization, and public administration in pre-modern India.
- **Class 8 Social and Political Life: *Unit 1 - The Indian Constitution and Secularism***
- **Chapter 2 (Understanding Secularism):** Introduces fundamental concepts regarding why the Indian State interacts with religious communities to uphold constitutional values and prevent social exclusion.

- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **General Studies Paper 1: Indian Society and Culture**
- **Salient Features of Indian Society & Diversity:** Examining how social reform movements and state policies have challenged caste-based exclusion in religious institutions.
- **Indian Philosophy and Architecture:** Understanding the historical evolution of Indian temples as civic centers, architectural treasures, and socio-economic hubs.
- **General Studies Paper 2: Polity, Governance, and Constitution**
- **Constitutional Framework (Articles 14, 15, 25, 26):** Resolving the friction between individual rights to equality and collective denominational autonomy.
- **Separation of Powers & Executive Overreach:** Analyzing the legal boundaries between neutral legal regulation and active executive management.
- **Comparison of Constitutional Schemes:** Comparing the Indian model of principled distance secularism with Western models of strict separation.
- **General Studies Paper 3: Economic Development and Resource Management**
- **Mobilization of Public Resources:** Effective, transparent management of public assets, historic land endowments, and heritage-driven local tourism economies.
- **General Studies Paper 4: Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude**
- **Public Service Values and Ethics:** Fiduciary integrity, ethical management of public funds, and maintaining public trust in quasi-public institutions.
- **Constitutional Morality:** Prioritizing democratic values, social equity, and human dignity over exclusionary traditional practices.
- **Essay Topics**
- *"Secularism in India: Principled Distance or Administrative Overreach?"*
- *"Constitutional Morality as a Compass for Social Reform."*
- *"State Power and Civil Society Autonomy: Defining the Boundaries."*

- **Way Forward**
- **Shift from Direct Management to Independent Regulatory Oversight**
- The State should transition out of daily temple administration and adopt an independent regulatory role. India could establish an autonomous **Charities and Endowments Commission** (similar to the UK Charity Commission model). This body would focus on external financial audits, land registry checks, and legal compliance, leaving internal management to community trustees.
- **Empower Inclusive, Devotee-Led Management Boards**
- Temple management should be restored to devotee-led trusts and local community councils. These boards should operate under clear, statutory guidelines:
- **Democratization:** Trustee positions should be filled through transparent selection processes open to qualified candidates regardless of caste, gender, or lineage.
- **Separation of Duties:** Ritual duties must remain under the authority of traditionally trained priests (appointed without caste discrimination), while financial and administrative duties are managed by certified professional trustees.
- **Mandate Digital Accounting and Public Financial Disclosure**
- To eliminate corruption and restore public trust without relying on government bureaucracy, religious institutions holding public assets should adopt modern transparency standards:
- **Public Financial Portals:** Digital tracking and real-time public dashboards for all donations, income, and expenditures.
- **Mandatory Independent Audits:** Annual financial audits conducted by certified external auditors, published openly for public review.
- **GIS Mapping of Endowment Lands:** Digital mapping and public registration of all temple-owned real estate to prevent unlawful encroachments and ensure fair market leasing.
- **Establish Uniform Regulatory Principles Across All Endowments**
- To uphold principled distance secularism and eliminate perceptions of selective treatment, regulatory standards for asset protection, financial reporting, and audit compliance should apply equally to all public religious and charitable trusts—regardless of faith—without the State directly administering any of them.
- **Refine Judicial Interpretation of Essential Religious Practices**
- The Supreme Court could establish clearer, objective criteria for applying the Essential Religious Practices doctrine. By consistently distinguishing between protected spiritual rituals and secular administrative activities, courts can provide long-term legal clarity and reduce ongoing litigation.

UPSC CSE Prelims Questions

Question 1 (2020)

Which one of the following categories of Fundamental Rights incorporates protection against untouchability as a form of discrimination?

(a) Right against Exploitation
(b) Right to Freedom
(c) Right to Constitutional Remedies
(d) Right to Equality

•**Answer:** (d)

•**Relevance:** Article 17 (Abolition of Untouchability) directly informs Article 25(2)(b) regarding temple entry and social reform.

Question 2 (2019)

Which one of the following statements correctly describes the meaning of 'Secular' in the Indian context?

(a) Religion is considered a private affair of the individual and no discrimination is made by the State.
(b) The State has no official religion and maintains a principled distance from all religions.
(c) The State intervenes in religious affairs to bring about social reform.
(d) All of the above.

•**Answer:** (d)

•**Relevance:** Highlights the multifaceted nature of Indian secularism and principled intervention.

Question 3 (2017)

Which of the following are envisaged by the Right against Exploitation in the Constitution of India?

1.Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour
2.Abolition of untouchability
3.Protection of the interests of minorities
4.Prohibition of employment of children in factories and mines

5.Select the correct answer using the code given below:

6.(a) 1, 2 and 4 only
7.(b) 2, 3 and 4 only
8.(c) 1 and 4 only
9.(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

•**Answer:** (c)

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