Drishti IAS

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SOCIAL JUSTICE (SOCIAL ISSUES)

Contents

Note:

Women and Nutrition

As per multiple studies, adolescence is a nutritionally demanding phase of life. Even though both adolescent boys and girls face emotional changes during this period, girls face more physiological demands as compared to the boys and thus require a higher intake of macro and micronutrients.

However, in society, women are traditionally discriminated against and excluded from political and family-related decisions. Despite their daily contribution to support their families, their opinions are rarely acknowledged, and their rights are limited.

Society does indeed recognize many women's rights, including the rights to political involvement, family allowance, and setting up a business. Nevertheless, in rural areas, poverty and a lack of information represent real barriers to women's independence and empowerment.

What are the Various Issues Related to Women?

➢ **Female Infanticide and Foeticide:**
 ○ India has one of the **highest rates of female foeticide** in the world.
 ○ **Female foeticide** is due to strong son preference, the practice of dowry, and the patrilineal necessity of heir.
 ○ The census of 2011 has recorded the **lowest ever sex ratio** of 914 in the age group 0-6 years with 3 million missing girls; from 78.8 million in 2001 to 75.8 million in 2011.

➢ **Child Marriage:**
 ○ Each year, at least 1.5 million girls under 18 get married in India, which makes it home to the largest number of child brides in the world - **accounting for a third of the global total.** Nearly 16% of adolescent girls aged 15-19 are currently married.
 ○ While **child marriage** has declined, it has been marginal: from 27% in 2015-16 to 23% in 2019-20, according to **National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 5.**

➢ **Education:**
 ○ Girls are encouraged and **engaged more in household work** and drop out of school at an early age.
 ○ A study by the International Centre for Research on Women has found that girls out of school are 3.4 times **more likely to be married** or have their marriage already fixed than girls who are still in school.

➢ **Health and Mortality:**
 ○ Girls in India **face discrimination** both inside their homes and outside in their communities. Inequality in India means unequal opportunities for girls.
 ○ Under-five **mortality** for girls in India remains 8.3% higher than for boys. Globally this is 14% higher for boys.

➢ **Malnutrition:**
 ○ Both boys and girls are almost equally likely to be undernourished. For the girls, the nutritional intake is relatively inferior **both in terms of quality and quantity**. The health of the girls also suffers due to the additional burden from early and multiple pregnancies.
 ○ Due to a **patriarchal society**, boys are given relatively more nutritious food as they are deemed breadwinners of the family, especially if the family is poor and is not in a position to provide nutritious food to all the children.
 ○ The poor nutritional status of women during the reproductive period is responsible for the under-nutrition of children.

➢ **Domestic Violence:**
 ○ **Violence against women** continues to be **an obstacle** to achieving equality, development, and peace as well as to the fulfillment of women and girls' human rights.

➢ **Household Inequality:**
 ○ Household relations show **gender bias** in infinitesimally small but significant manners across the globe, more so, in India e.g., sharing the burden of housework, childcare and menial works by **so-called division of work**.

What is the Current Situation of Women's Health?

➢ **Growth in Risk of Anaemia:** The National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5 data (2019-20) show an **increase in anaemia** among adolescent girls by 5% when compared to NFHS-4.

➢ **Pre-Pandemic Outcomes: The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey** 2019 shows that even before the pandemic, consumption of diverse food groups among adolescents was low.

➢ **Post-Pandemic Outcomes:** The fallout of **Covid-19** has further worsened dietary diversity, especially among women, adolescents and children.

Note:

- According to a study by the Tata-Cornell Institute for Agriculture and Nutrition, **women's dietary diversity in India declined by 42% during Covid-19** lockdowns as they consumed fewer fruits, vegetables, and eggs.
- **Reduction in Supply of Nutrition Services:** The lockdowns also led to the loss of mid-day meals and interruptions in **Weekly Iron Folic Acid Supplementation** (WIFS) and nutrition education in schools for adolescent girls.
  - This was compounded by challenges in providing nutrition services to out-of-school adolescent girls which further increased their vulnerability to poor nutrition outcomes.
- **Need for Dietary Diversity:** Adolescence is the window of opportunity where practices of dietary diversity can be built to correct nutritional deficiencies and replenish the body with much-needed nutrients, especially for girls.
- **Micronutrient Deficiencies:** Currently, 80% of adolescents suffer **'hidden hunger'** due to micronutrient deficiencies. The trend is more prevalent in girls as they already suffer multiple nutritional deprivations.
  - It is **required to strengthen the initiatives** to address deficiencies of not just iron and folic acid, but also vitamin B12, vitamin D, and zinc.

What are the Women-Centric Findings of NFHS-5?

- **Underage Marriages:**
  - The national average of underage marriages has come down.
  - According to NFHS-5, 23.3% of women surveyed got married **before attaining the legal age of 18 years**, down from 26.8% reported in NFHS-4.
  - The figure for underage marriage among men is 17.7% (NFHS-5) and 20.3% (NFHS-4).
  - **Highest Surge:**
    - The rate has increased in **Punjab, West Bengal**, Manipur, Tripura and Assam.
    - **Tripura has seen the largest jump** in marriages for women from 33.1% (NHFS-4) to 40.1%, and from 16.2% to 20.4% among men.
  - **Highest Rate of Underage Marriages:**
    - West Bengal, along with Bihar, remains **one of the states with the highest rate of underage marriages**.

- **Lowest Rate of Underage Marriages:**
  - J&K, Lakshadweep, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Nagaland, Kerala, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu.
- **Teenage Pregnancies:** Teenage pregnancies are **down from 7.9% to 6.8%**.
- **Domestic Violence Against Women:**
  - **Overall:** Domestic violence has **come down marginally** from 31.2% in 2015-16 to 29.3% in 2019-21.
  - Highest and Lowest (States):
    - Domestic violence against women is **highest in Karnataka** at 48%, followed by Bihar, Telangana, Manipur and Tamil Nadu.
- **Women's Empowerment:** **Women's empowerment** indicators portray considerable improvement at all India level and across all the phase-II States/UTs.
  - **Significant progress has been recorded** between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 in regard to women operating bank accounts from 53% to 79% at all-India level.
  - More than 70% of women in every state and UTs in the second phase have operational bank accounts.
- **Anaemia:** The incidence of anaemia in women (53.1 to 57%) and men (22.7 to 25%) has worsened in all States of India (20%-40% incidence is considered moderate).
  - Barring Kerala (at 39.4%), **all States are in the "severe" category**.

What can be the Way Forward?

- **Integrated Efforts for Better Health Services:** The NFHS findings are a reminder of the urgent need to **close gaps in girls' education** and address the poor health status of women.
  - Current times require integrated and coordinated efforts from all health institutions, academia and other partners directly or indirectly associated with the health care services to make these **services accessible, affordable and acceptable**, especially for those who can't easily afford them.
- **Promoting Technology-Based Services among Women:** In the next few years, the combination of mobile technology, banking, education and women's economic empowerment will be significant drivers to address informal discriminatory norms.

Note:

- Although the **percentage of women using mobile, internet and banking facilities has increased**, this is still not at par with those of men.
- There should be sufficient stress on promoting and teaching the use of such facilities to women as availability and utilization of such resources is also a **n indicator of empowerment** among women.

➢ **Need to Resolve the Issues Together:** Crime against women **cannot be resolved in the court of law alone**. A comprehensive approach & changing the entire ecosystem is what is required.

- All the stakeholders need to get their act together, including Law makers, police officers, forensic dept, prosecutors, judiciary, medical & health dept, NGOs, and rehabilitation centers.

➢ **Addressing Discriminatory Social Norms:** To empower women and ensure gender justice, it is **imperative to address harmful practices**, such as child marriage and gender-biased sex selection.

- There is a need to enhance the value of women and girls by working on transforming unequal power relations, structural inequalities and discriminatory norms, attitudes and behaviours.
- Also, it is **important to engage with men and boys**, particularly in their formative years, to promote positive masculinity and gender-equal values.

➢ **Need Inclusion of Diverse Diet Sources & Nutrition Counselling:** Along with continued service delivery of WIFS, the **government's health and nutrition policies need to emphasise** on strong compliance to diverse diets and physical activities. This includes locally sourced fruits and vegetables, seasonal diets, and the inclusion of millets.

- This further needs to be supplemented by strengthened nutrition counselling for adolescent girls through community workers' home visits, by building a strong ecosystem in schools to promote healthy habits and diets, virtual counselling, and comprehensive nutrition counselling through community-based events and Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Days.

➢ **Improvisation of Policy Interventions:** An integrated approach is needed along with women-centric policymaking where women are not treated as passive beneficiaries but are seen as potential contributors to society.

- Reformative steps such as the recent **amendment of increasing the legal age of marriage** for women **from 18 years to 21 years**. An integrated approach is needed along with women-centric policymaking where women are not treated as passive beneficiaries but are seen as potential contributors to society.

Conclusion

Along with all the policies and interventions, it is equally crucial to ensure that girls remain in school or formal education, their safety is ensured, and their health and nutrition are prioritized. Only then can such measures provide opportunities for girls to improve their nutritional and health outcomes.

Food Security & Current Scenarios

The unexpected **Russia-Ukraine war** in Europe **disrupted all the supply chains** and sparked shortages of everything from wheat to barley, edible oils, and fertilisers. However, the more profound, **long-term concern is climate change** as well as the impacts that will affect crops and food self-sufficiency as the temperature rises.

The government also understands that in the wake of the **Covid-19 pandemic** people's spending power has fallen acutely and for some, hunger is an ever-growing distress. Hence, the government has also extended the **free-ration scheme** for six months till end-September 2022.

Looking at the larger canvas, India, as the **third-biggest greenhouse gas emitter** and one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, has a serious interest in making economic growth **less carbon intensive**.

How is Climate Change Related to Food Security?

➢ **Climate Change and Food System Interlinks:** The climate crisis impacts all parts of the global food system — from **production to consumption**.

- It **destroys land and crops, kills livestock, depletes fisheries**, and cuts off transport to markets which further impacts food production, availability, diversity, access, and safety.
  - At the same time, food systems also impact the environment and are a **driver of climate change**. Estimates show that the food sector emits around 30% of the world's greenhouse gases.

Note:

- **Global Issue:** Along with India and Pakistan many other countries are having extreme heat events. France experienced **record temperatures of 30-35°C** on several days in May 2022.
  - Also, rainfall was down by a third from normal and this would **impact winter cereals** like wheat and barley.
- **Decline in Grain Output:** Other parts of the world too, like Canada and the US, have experienced **unusually dry, warm weathe**r over the last two-three years.
  - The other big uncertainty is whether **La Nina** will go into the third year and further hit grain output in America.

What is the Current Situation of Climate Change & Food Security?

- **The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD):** It had declared March 2022 the hottest month since record-keeping began 122 years ago.
- **Consistently Above Average Temperature:** According to research, temperatures were consistently rising 3°C-8°C **above average**, breaking many decadal and some all-time records in several parts of the country.
  - India experienced **around 300 forest fires** near the month of April 2022.
  - It also offered some predictions about **the future heat waves** in the subcontinent.
- **Extreme Weather and Its Impact:** Extreme weather events that were once supposed to occur once-in-100 years, are now 30 times more likely than before (or between every three-to-five year).
  - Also, **March 2022 was one of the driest recorded months**, and 2022 April's rainfall was also way below normal in north India's crop-growing regions.
    - In parts of Kerala, unseasonal rains forced cultivators to wade through watery fields to harvest paddy which **results in low-quality crops**.
- **Overseas Sales Ban:** The extreme heat wave coupled with the extremely low rainfall affected the growth of wheat in much of India's grain basket of Punjab, Haryana, and Western Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.
  - Crop yields are down by 20% and that led to the **government withdrawing its offer to "feed the world"** as the spot prices for export wheat had risen as much as 60% month-on-month but eased after the **government's overseas sales ban of wheat**.

What is the Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on Food Security?

- **Price Inflation:** A crucial portion of the world's wheat, corn, and barley is trapped in Russia and Ukraine because of the war, while an even larger portion of the world's fertilisers is stuck in Russia and Belarus.
  - The result is that **global food and fertiliser prices are rising**. Since the invasion, wheat prices have increased by 21%, barley by 33%, and some fertilisers by 40%.
- **Impact on Fertiliser Markets:** Sanctions have also hit Russia's closest ally, Belarus, a leading producer of potash-based fertiliser, critical for many major crops, including soybeans and corn.
  - According to a report, the direct impact of the war on fertiliser markets will first be felt in the food-production seasons **in India and Brazil**.
- **Surge in Fuel Prices:** The Russia-Ukraine conflict is responsible for rising fuel prices because supply chains, particularly those of crude oil, have been disrupted which raises even more pressure on the already stressed global supplies and low storage levels around the world.

How can We Ensure Food Security Amid Changing Climate?

- **Technology Development:** Government can develop new seeds and improve the technology which will help to fix the problem of grain storage, improve irrigation coverage, make more effective use of fertiliser and manage soil better.
  - It's also required to **make agriculture economically viable and profitable**.
- **Building Resilience for the Poor:** Adaptation and resilience-building for poor and vulnerable communities are critical for food security.
  - Considering the fact that the adverse impacts of climate extremes on people and nature will continue to increase with rising temperatures, there is a **strong emphasis on the urgency of scaling up action and support** (finance, capacity-building, and technology transfer), to enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change in line with the best available science.

Note:

➢ **Sustainable Food Systems:** Sustainability has to be achieved in production, value chains, and consumption. **Climate-resilient cropping patterns have to be promoted.** Instead of giving input subsidies, cash transfers can be given to farmers for sustainable agriculture.

➢ **Multi-Pronged Approach for Tackling Climate-Hunger Crisis:** Creating resilient livelihoods and food security solutions by protecting and improving the livelihood of vulnerable communities.
  ❍ Promoting a resilient agriculture sector by creating sustainable opportunities, access to finance, and **innovation for small-holder farmers**, with climate information and preparedness.
  ❍ Building capacity and knowledge of civil society and governments for vulnerability analysis to increase food security by **addressing the link between food security and climate risk**.

➢ **Role of India:** India has a huge role to play with its ongoing and now substantial policy work at the national and state levels.
  ❍ It has to transform its food systems to make them **more inclusive and sustainable** for higher farm incomes and nutrition security.
  ❍ Diversification of cropping patterns towards millets, pulses, oilseeds, and horticulture is needed for **more equal distribution of water**, and sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture.

➢ **Adaptation Finance:** The recent pledges made by the developed countries on enhancing **climate finance** to support adaptation in developing countries is a welcome gesture.
  ❍ However, the current climate finance for adaptation and base of stakeholders remains insufficient to respond to worsening climate change impacts.
  ❍ Multilateral development banks, other financial institutions, and the private sector shall **enhance finance mobilization** to deliver the scale of resources needed to achieve climate plans, particularly for adaptation.

Conclusion

With progress made on renewable installations, the adoption of **Electric Vehicles (EVs)**, and turning India into a green energy powerhouse, the Indian Government is making a start. At the same time, it is also an urgent need to lift millions out of poverty and it is mandatory to address this situation now as declining agricultural productivity will result in higher food prices and will mean more economic hardships.

Providing A Safe Work Environment

With over six million deaths due to Covid-19 in the last two years, safety and health have become central to every local, national, and international discussion.

As accidents, injuries, and diseases are prevalent in many industries, all of which directly and indirectly affect workers' and their families' well-being, it makes **ensuring a preventative safety and health culture a critical component of any workplace.**

For the world of work to build forward from the pandemic in a more human-centred and resilient way, **Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) mechanisms** need to be strengthened to establish workplaces that are not hazardous for workers.

What is the Status of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)?

➢ Globally, an estimated **2.9 million deaths and 402 million non-fatal injuries** are attributed to occupational accidents and diseases.
  ❍ Occupational accidents and diseases cost **5.4% of the global GDP annually.**
  ❍ While less tangibly, they materialise as **presenteeism** (working with less effectiveness), **productivity losses** associated with **permanent impairment,** and **staff-turnover costs** (i.e., loss of skilled staff).

What is the Status of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in India?

➢ The available government statistics show a **decreasing trend** in occupational injuries in manufacturing and mining sectors.
  ❍ However, it needs to be noted that when interpreting the statistics of the **Labour Bureau**, the **unregistered factories and mines are not covered.**

➢ During 2011-16, the number of cases of occupational diseases reported to the government in India was only 562.
  ❍ In contrast, a scientific article published in the **National Medical Journal of India**, 2016, indicates prevalence of occupational diseases such as **silicosis** and **byssinosis**.
    ■ Byssinosis is a disease of the lungs **caused by breathing in cotton dust** or **dust from other vegetable fibres** such as flax, hemp, or sisal while at work.

Note:

- ➤ However, India has some good practices for extending OSH coverage as well.
  - ○ The **Government of Uttar Pradesh**, in cooperation with employers and workers, **carried out participatory OSH training workshops** for metal and garment home-based workers.
    - ■ **Most of these workers are in the** informal economy and remain unreachable by other occupational health and safety initiatives.
  - ○ The **Government of Kerala** applied the **ILO's participatory OSH training methodologies** and reached out to small construction sites for OSH improvements.
  - ○ The **Government of Rajasthan** generated **OSH awareness among workers** and employers **in stone processing units** for preventing occupational lung diseases.

What Initiatives have been Taken to Promote OSH?

- ➤ Since 2003, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has commemorated **April 28 as World Day for Safety and Health at Work** to stress the prevention of accidents and diseases at work by capitalising on our strength of tripartism and social dialogue.
  - ○ The theme for 2022 is **"Act together to build a positive safety and health culture".**
- ➤ India has ratified International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions, the **Labour Inspection Convention, 1947** and **Labour Statistics Convention, 1985.**
- ➤ The Government of India declared the **National Policy on Safety, Health and Environment at Workplace** in February 2009 and compiled the available OSH information as **National OSH Profile** in 2018.
  - ○ Another important step is launching a strategic **National OSH Programme.**
- ➤ The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 spells out duties of employers and employees, and **envisages safety standards for different sectors,** focusing on the health and working condition of workers, hours of work, leaves, etc.
  - ○ The code also **recognises the right of contractual workers.**
  - ○ The code **provides for statutory benefits like social security** and **wages to fixed-term employees** at par with their permanent counterparts.

What are the Issues Associated with Ensuring Safe Workplaces?

- ➤ **Underutilised Reporting Systems:** A reliable occupational accident and disease reporting system is vital for remedying victims and making effective prevention policies for safer and healthier workplaces.
  - ○ **While India has such a mechanism, it is underutilised,** with many injuries, **accidents, and diseases going unregistered.**
  - ○ Under-reporting is **more likely to be in case of non-fatal injuries** than fatal ones for obvious reasons.
    - ■ There is massive under-reporting of industrial injuries in small-scale industries.
- ➤ **Lack of Awareness of Occupational Diseases:** There is a lack of trained doctors on the various occupational diseases and workplace hazards and risks.
  - ○ The lack of awareness of health hazards at workplaces leads to **misdiagnosis by doctors.**
- ➤ **Limited Industries under the Ambit:** The Labour Bureau compiles and publishes **data on industrial injuries relating only to a few sectors,** viz. factories, mines, railways, docks and ports.
  - ○ The body has **not yet expanded the scope** of statistics on injuries by adding sectors such as plantations, construction, the service sector, etc.

What can be done to Ensure Occupational Safety and Health?

- ➤ **OSH - Committee, Compliance and Collection of Data:** Effective implementation of the code of OSH and working conditions of 2020 will **extend OSH protection to more sectors, especially to informal workers** who make up nearly 90% of India's workforce.
  - ○ The **code should also promote active workplace OSH committees** and **involve workers** for identifying hazards and improving OSH. Workers are in the frontline to notice OSH risks and implement solutions
  - ○ It is also critical that India **establishes efficient OSH data collection systems** to better understand the situation for effective interventions.
- ➤ **Public Awareness:** Public awareness for preventing work-related accidents and diseases and improving hazardous working environments should also be encouraged.
  - ○ India can **undertake stronger national campaigns** and **awareness raising activities** for workers and employers.

Note:

○ Young people are especially vulnerable to OSH risks and need to play an active role in finding OSH solutions.

➢ **Role of Governments:** At the **national level,** the government needs to **include all relevant ministries** to **ensure that workers' safety and health are prioritised** in the national agenda.

○ This requires **allocating adequate resources** to increase general awareness around OSH, knowledge of hazards and risks, and an understanding of their control and prevention measures.

○ **At the state level**, workers' and employers' organisations, by way of **bilateral discussions**, must **incorporate safety and health training at every level of their supply chains** to ensure protection from workplace injuries and diseases.

➢ **Social Dialogues:** Social dialogue is **essential for improving compliance** and plays a vital role in **building ownership and instilling commitment**, which paves the way for the rapid and effective implementation of OSH policies.

○ **Strong social dialogue mechanisms** for appropriately addressing occupational safety and health, by adequately investing in its prevention, will contribute to building a safe and healthy workforce and support productive enterprises, which form the bedrock of a sustainable economy.

Public Schools in India

After remaining shut for about two years due to **Covid-19 pandemic,** schools have gradually started re-opening and welcoming children back.

However, with almost two years of absence from school and students having spent most of their time at home with either semi-structured or no educational activity, **managing the school premises would be a bit of a challenge for the students.**

This calls for **urgent actions from schools for resuming structured educational activities** along with assuring **conducive classroom spaces** which are sensitive to the prolonged anxiety, stress and isolation that students face.

The question of school preparedness becomes even more pertinent in light of the **recent trend of** **increasing enrolment in government schools** in India.

What are the Recent Developments in the Enrolment Scenario?

➢ The **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Report 2021** for rural India notes that there has been a **shift in enrolment from private to government schools** between 2018 and 2021 **across all grades and among both boys and girls**.

○ The increase is most **striking among children enrolled in the lowest grades**.

○ For both girls and boys in **classes I and II**, enrolment in government schools **increased by 9 percentage points and 14.1 percentage points** respectively from **2018 to 2021**.

➢ Overall, a total of 17 states saw an **increase in enrolment in government schools.**

○ **Uttar Pradesh and Kerala topped the chart** and saw an increase of 13.2 and 11.9 percentage points respectively in enrolment in government schools in the given period.

○ The shift back to government schools **reverses a decade-long trend** where private school enrolment kept growing at the expense of government schools

➢ **Nagaland and Manipur** saw a **decrease of 11.4 and 13.4 percentage points in enrolment** levels in government schools over the period under review.

○ However, the shift has not been to private schools, but is reflected in much larger numbers of children who are currently **not enrolled** in these states—an increase from **1.1% to 15.5% in Manipur and 1.8% to 19.6% in Nagaland** from 2018 to 2021.

➢ On average in 2021, the proportion of children aged 6-14 currently not enrolled in school has **increased by 2.1 percentage points** compared to the 2018 level, with states like **Andhra Pradesh (7%)**, **Manipur (15.5%)**, **Nagaland (19.6%)** and **Telangana (11.8%)** showing a high **increment in their currently-not-enrolled levels** compared to 2018.

What Key Challenges Confront the Government Schools?

➢ **Learning Level Crisis:** The ASER presented its findings on **'Learning Levels' for West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka** which showed that there is a learning crisis in these states and the situation might be the same in other states and UTs.

○ In West Bengal, there is a **decline in the proportion of children** enrolled in Class I in government schools who can -

Note:

- **Read letters of the alphabet** (by **7 percentage points** since 2018 and now below 2014 levels)
- **Read single-digit numbers** (almost **10 percentage point** drop since 2018).

○ In Chhattisgarh for Class I, the proportion of children **who can read letters** has **decreased by 8.3 percentage points** since 2018 and there is a **10 percentage points drop** in that of government-school students of Class III **who can do subtraction** when 2021 levels are compared to 2018.

➢ **Poor Infrastructure of Schools:** As per data for 2019-20 from the **Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE)**, only **12% of all government schools had internet facilities** and only **30% had computers.**

○ About 42% of these schools were **without furniture,** 23% without **functional electricity**, 49% without hand-rails, 22% **without ramps for the physically disabled**, and 15% **without WASH facilities** (which include **drinking water, toilets and hand wash basins**).

○ The already poor state of school infrastructure might have further deteriorated in the past two years, during which government schools were either closed or used as makeshift wards for the isolation of covid-positive patients.

➢ **Insufficient Number of Teachers:** Pandemic disruptions drew attention to the challenges of teachers, who were offering educational and non-educational support to school students across India.

○ Even before the outbreak, the educational landscape of India was mired in a range of challenges - **recruitment and management of teachers**, inadequacy of **teacher training** and a **teacher shortage.**

➢ **Learning Loss due to Covid:** Due to the **Covid-19 pandemic**, schools were the ones to **remain shut for the longest period** and several students in government schools belonged to the families that **could not afford to receive online education.**

○ Consequently, when the schools reopened, **children were unable to catch up with their syllabus**. This posed the biggest challenge to teachers.

○ One-third of children in Classes I and II have not yet seen the inside of a physical classroom.

What can be the Way Forward?

➢ The rising enrolment levels in government schools offer a chance for the central as well as state governments to **ensure the retention of students.**

○ Schools should identify the children who are lagging behind and **run basic revision and bridge programmes** for them to consolidate their skills of reading, writing, numeracy and comprehension at their own pace.

- The **Nipun Bharat initiative** is a reassuring step in this direction.

➢ A revamp of school infrastructure is the need of the hour, with a **special focus on information and communication technology**, apart from **WASH facilities** (including Covid-19 prevention measures) necessitated by risks of the pandemic.

➢ India faces an acute scarcity of teachers in government schools. This gap needs to be filled to **maintain the stipulated pupil-teacher ratio** in these schools.

○ In the light of increased enrolments, it is pertinent to undertake a closer examination of our present teacher availability.

➢ **Flexible rescheduling the academic timetable** and exploring options in collaboration with schools, teachers, and parents for providing access to education to a larger section of students.

○ **Giving priority to the less advantaged students** who do not have access to **e-learning.**

➢ The shift to government schools in a time of crisis offers a clear indication of people's **expectations of the state's role in providing education** as a matter of right and not just another service.

○ Greater effort is required on the part of all governments in charge of education—at the state and central levels—to **improve the perceptions of various stakeholders** (especially parents and children) **vis-a-vis state-run schooling systems in India.**

Achieving Universal Health Care

The Covid-19 crisis has provided a good time to revive an issue that is, oddly, slow to come to life in India — **Universal Health Care (UHC)**.

Universal Health Care is seen as a route to building **robust, responsive and efficient health systems** capable of **addressing growing inequalities** in healthcare demands along with **shielding populations from spiralling healthcare and medicine costs.**

Note:

What is Universal Health Care (UHC)?

➤ The basic idea of UHC is that **no one should be deprived of quality health care for the lack of ability to pay.** UHC, in recent times, has become a **critical indicator for human equity, security and dignity.**

➤ UHC has become a well-accepted objective of public policy around the world. It has even been **largely realised in many countries**, not only the richer ones (except the US) but also a growing number of other countries such as Brazil, China, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

➤ The time has come for India (or some Indian States at least) to take the plunge.

What are the Routes to Achieve UHC?

➤ UHC typically relies on one or both of two basic approaches: **public service and social insurance**. In the first approach, **health care is provided as a free public service**, just like the services of a fire brigade or public library.

➤ The second approach (social insurance) allows **private as well as public provision of health care**, but the **costs are mostly borne by the social insurance fund(s),** not the patient,

○ Quite different from a private insurance market, it is the one where **insurance is compulsory and universal**, financed mainly from **general taxation**, and run by a single non-profit agency in the public interest.

○ The basic principle is that everyone should be covered and insurance should be **geared to the public interest rather than private profit.**

What are the Challenges to UHC?

➤ **Unavailability of Public Health Centres:** Even in a system based on social insurance, public service plays an essential role. The **absence of public health centres**, dedicated to primary health care and preventive work, create the **risks of patients rushing to expensive hospitals** every other day thus making the whole system wasteful and expensive.

➤ **Containing Costs:** Containing costs is a major challenge with social insurance, because patients and health-care providers have a **joint interest in expensive care — getting better healthcare** for one and **earning** for the other.

○ A possible remedy is to make the patient bear part of the costs but that **conflicts with the principle of UHC.**

○ Recent evidence suggests that even **small co-payments often exclude many poor patients** from quality health care.

➤ **Identifying Services under UHC:** Another big challenge remains in identifying **what services are to be universally provided** to begin with and what **level of financial protection** is considered acceptable.

○ Offering the same set of services to the entire population is **not economically feasible** and demands **huge resource mobilisation.**

➤ **Regulation of Private Sector:** Another challenge with social insurance is to regulate private health-care providers. A crucial distinction needs to be made between for-profit and nonprofit providers.

○ Non-profit health-care providers have done great work around the world

○ For-profit health care, however, is deeply problematic because of the **pervasive conflict between the profit motive and the well-being** of the patient.

What is the HOPS Framework and How will it Help Achieve UHC?

➤ **About:** It is possible to envisage a framework for UHC that would build primarily on health care as a public service. The framework might be called **"Healthcare As An Optional Public Service" (HOPS).**

○ Under HOPS, everyone would have a **legal right to receive free, quality health care** in a public institution if they wish.

■ It would not prevent anyone from seeking health care from the private sector at their own expense.

○ But the **public sector would guarantee decent health services** to everyone as a matter of right, free of cost.

➤ **Example:** Some Indian States are already doing so, such as in **Kerala and Tamil Nadu**, most illnesses can be satisfactorily treated in the public sector at little cost to the patient.

➤ **Significance:** If quality health care is available for free in the public sector, most patients will have **little reason to go to the private sector.**

○ Social insurance could also play a role in this framework by helping cover procedures that are not easily available in the public sector (e.g., high-end surgeries).

Note:

- Although HOPS would not be as egalitarian as the national health insurance model initially, it would still be a **big step toward UHC.**
  - Moreover, it will **become more egalitarian over time,** as the public sector provides a growing range of health services.

What can be the Way Forward?

- **Vibrant Health System:** A vibrant health system shall include not only **good management and adequate resources** but also a **sound work culture and professional ethics**.
  - A primary health centre can work wonders, but only if doctors and nurses are on the job and care for the patients.
- **Standards for UHC:** The main difficulty with the HOPS framework is to **specify the scope of the proposed health-care guarantee**, including quality standards. UHC does not mean unlimited health care: there are always limits to what can be guaranteed to everyone.
  - HOPS shall **lay down certain health-care standards** along with a **credible method to revise these standards** over time. Some useful elements are already available, such as the **Indian Public Health Standards.**
- **State Specific Legislation on Health:** Tamil Nadu is well placed to make HOPS a reality under its **proposed Right to Health Bill**. The state is already successful in providing most health services in the public sector with good effect.
  - A Right to Health Bill would be an invaluable **affirmation of the State's commitment to quality health care for all;** it would **empower patients and their families to demand quality services**, helping to improve the system further.
  - Tamil Nadu's initiative could be an **emulation for other states.**
- **Health Financing:** In order to achieve UHC, it is vital that governments intervene in their country's health financing system to support the poor and vulnerable.
  - This requires establishing **compulsory publicly governed health financing systems** with a strong **role for the state in raising funds fairly,** pooling resources and purchasing services to meet population needs.
  - Greater targeted financing for public health systems will help **tackle inherent weaknesses around quality of care and access**, reduce **out of pocket spending** on drugs and improve human resource and infrastructure shortfalls.

Supporting Migrants

In the wake of a **nationwide lockdown**, India was left shocked by the plight of **migrant workers** walking hundreds of kilometres, facing hunger, exhaustion and violence, to get to the safety of their home villages.

The dire circumstances of the migrants made them the focus of large-scale relief efforts by governments and civil society alike.

The ramping up of **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)** project and introduction of the **Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC)** scheme and **e-Shram portal** reflected a ray of hope. However, the story of migrants is still **a tale of distress** in India.

Migration and Migrants

What is its Significance?

- Migration **fills gaps in demand for and supply of labour,** efficiently allocates skilled labour, unskilled labour, and cheap labour.
- It **enhances the knowledge and skills of migrants** through **exposure and interaction** with the outside world.
- It also **enhances chances of employment** and economic prosperity which in turn improves quality of life.
- Economic well being of migrants provides **insurance against risks to households in the areas of origin**, increases consumer expenditure and **investment in health,** education and **assets formation.**

What is the Present Situation of Migrant Workers?

- Currently, **a third of the nation's workforce is mobile**. Migrant workers in India **fuel critical sectors such as manufacturing**, construction, hospitality, logistics and commercial agriculture.
- The Covid-19 Pandemic has **un-done the post-1991 poverty alleviation** of almost 300 million Indians, driven by migration out of farm work.
- Repeated surveys have found that the **incomes of migrant households continue to be lower than pre-pandemic levels**, even after returning to cities. Migrants are finding less work and their children eating less.

Note:

What about the Policy Scenario for Migrants?

➢ Despite clear economic and humanitarian reasoning to bring migrants back into the policy discourse, the **current policy scenario is at best fragmented** and at worst waning.

➢ Recently, **NITI Aayog**, along with a working subgroup of officials and members of civil society, has prepared a **draft National Migrant Labour policy**.

   ○ The draft recommends to **acknowledge migration as an integral part of development**, and that government policies should **not hinder but seek to** facilitate internal migration.

What Factors are Slowing the Migration Policy Momentum?

➢ **Politicisation of Migration:** Migration is a **highly politicised phenomenon in India;** states are highly influenced by the political economy of migration.

   ○ 'Destination States' experience a tension between **economic needs (which require migrant labour)** and **political needs (which promote nativist policies** of imposing domicile restrictions on employment and social security).

   ○ However, the 'sending States' are highly motivated to serve their "own people" because they vote in their source villages.

   ○ The **response to internal migration follows from State-specific calculations** on what political dividends might be reaped (or lost) by investing fiscal and administrative resources towards migrants.

➢ **Inaccurate Identification of Migrants:** Migrants are **located inside two larger categories** that have long troubled policymakers: the **unorganised worker** and the **urban poor.** Even the e-Shram portal has been **unable to accurately distinguish and target migrants.**

   ○ Policy interventions in major urban destinations continue to **conflate the urban poor with low-income migrants.**

   ○ Hence, **slum development continues as the primary medium for alleviating migrant concerns,** while in reality, most migrants live on worksites that are entirely out of the policy gaze.

➢ **Failure of Official Datasets for Migration:** Migration policy discourse is seemingly paralysed by the now well-acknowledged failure of official datasets to c**apture the actual scale and the frequency of internal migration** in India.

   ○ Data systems designed to periodically record only one spatial location have posed great challenges to welfare delivery for up to 500 million people who are part of multi-locational migrant households.

   ○ Covid-19 pandemic placed a sharp focus on problems such as educating and vaccinating those children who accompany their migrant parents, or ensuring that migrant women avail maternity benefits at multiple locations.

What Can Be The Way Forward?

➢ **Role of Centre:** Migrants would be well served if the Centre played a proactive role by **offering strategic policy guidance** and a **platform for inter-State coordination.**

   ○ State-level political economy constraints make the Centre's role particularly crucial in addressing issues of inter-State migrant workers at 'destination States'.

➢ **Bringing Migration Policy in Force:** At a time when economic recovery and inclusive growth are urgent policy goals, migration policy can hardly afford to be delayed.

   ○ NITI Aayog's Draft Policy on Migrant Workers is a positive step forward in articulating policy priorities and indicating suitable institutional frameworks, and **deserves a speedy release.**

   ○ Strategic initiatives to **provide migrants safety nets regardless of location** as well as **bolster their ability to migrate safely** and affordably must keep up the momentum towards migrant-supportive policy.

➢ **Recognition of Migrants:** Recognition of **circular migrants as part of India's urban population** might compel authorities to at least consider how proposed policies might impact these communities.

➢ **Women Migrants:** Special Measures should also **take into account particularly the situation of migrant women**, who are mainly involved in domestic work.

   ○ Although the new policy aims to be inclusive of all kinds of marginalised migrants, it could do more to explicitly mention the challenges faced by domestic workers.

   ○ It would be very easy for them to remain excluded as **India has not ratified the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers** and **The Domestic Workers Bill 2017 has not become law**.

Note:

Opportunities to Women Entrepreneurs

In this nation of a million possibilities and huge talent, the focus is shifting to **start-ups** and job creation from grabbing jobs. The phenomenal **growth of unicorns in India, led by young entrepreneurs**, is inspiring thousands of aspirational startups in the country.

However, entrepreneurship is **often seen as a male preserve**, with women given the cold shoulder.

For India to become a $5 trillion economy, **entrepreneurship by women must play a bigger role in its economic development**. India's gender balance is among the lowest in the world and improving it is **important not just for gender equality, but the entire economy.**

What is the Scenario of Startups in India?

➢ After the United States (US) and China, India has emerged as **the world's third largest startup ecosystem**

➢ In 2021, India **added three unicorns** (startup firms valuing more than $1 billion) **per month,** bringing the total to **51**, ahead of the United Kingdom (32) and Germany (32).

  ○ **Five among those 51 unicorns in India are led by women.**

➢ Data under MSME has shown that women have shown a surge in startups in the **domain of fashion, textiles, and homemade accessories.**

Why Should More Women Entrepreneurs Join the Startup Rally?

➢ **Growth in Market Capitalisation:** India is **predicted to remain the fastest-growing economy** in the years to come and India's **market capitalisation is growing even faster** than its nominal **Gross Domestic Product**.

  ○ Market segments such as **consumer** durables to **textiles**, **food** to **footwear**, **agro-products** to **automobiles**, all are **expected to have double-digit growth** as the economic recovery is gaining momentum.

➢ **More Ideas and Mentorships Available:** Given the market demand, startups need **three basic ingredients: Idea, mentorship and finance**. All three of them are available like never before to aspiring women entrepreneurs in India.

○ Most of the **colleges are offering mentorship programmes to women** to encourage startup ideas by female graduates.

○ Incubation and acceleration support is available through the **Women Entrepreneurship Programme (WEP)** offered by **NITI Aayog**.

○ Special category benefits are available under the **Pradhan Mantri Employment Generation (PMEG) programme** of the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME).

➢ **Opportunities for Financial Inclusivity:** The Government of India and many state governments are running schemes to improve financial inclusivity for women. **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana** is one such high-potential scheme for women because it **offers collateral free loans.**

○ The **Dena Shakti Scheme** provides loans up to ₹20 lakh for women entrepreneurs in **agriculture, manufacturing, micro-credit, retail stores, or small enterprises.**

  ■ The scheme also provides a **concession of 0.25%** on the rate of interest.

○ The Government of India also launched the **Stand Up India Scheme** to **leverage the institutional credit structure** to **reach out to the underserved sector** of people such as SCs, STs and **Women Entrepreneurs.**

○ **Stree Shakti Yojana** and **Orient Mahila Vikas Yojana** support women who have **majority of ownership** in the business.

○ Women who want to enrol themselves in **catering business** can attain loan via the **Annapurna Yojana**.

What Challenges do Women Entrepreneurs Face?

➢ **Lack of Female Mentors:** With fewer female business founders, the pool of **women who can mentor and advise fellow entrepreneurs** is consequently smaller.

○ One of the major barriers to women-owned-startups is the lack of role models for women which makes it **harder for enterprising women to learn from their peers** and tap the help of those who have 'been there, done that'.

○ It is also **harder for women to maximise the value of a business network,** because networking has traditionally been done in male- centric groups and organisations.

Note:

➤ **Biological Aspects Assessing Cerebral Capacities:** One long-standing perception has been that **men are wired to be more logical (hence more fit for risky ventures)** while women are more likely to be empathetic (hence, **fit for only a certain set of professions**).

  ❍ The argument makes little sense when it is used to bar women from entering certain fields based on average estimates drawn from psychological observations.

➤ **Patriarchal Construct and Familial Constraints:** Even though a lot of women have the potential as well as ambition to make it to the top in arenas that are usually **dictated by a stark male presence**, they are often denied their dreams by the patriarchal construct of society.

  ❍ When a woman says she wants to do business, the public, relatives and even parents say it's **not her field**. If she wants to do something, she can take up a job but **business is considered inappropriate for women to do.**

➤ **Raising Finance & Management:** Another lamentable difficulty is in raising finance and its management, because in most cases, women are **not considered credit-worthy.**

  ❍ [Venture capitalists](#),[angel investors](#) and bankers **do not usually trust them to repay their loans.**

    ■ Even if they get finance, women from a middle-class background find few avenues to turn to for its management, though they have been doing it so well on their own for years without knowing it.

  ❍ When it comes to **managing finances** for their businesses, they seem to be **less confident and most of the time they rely on others.**

How can Women Participation in Startups be Increased?

➤ **Increasing Risk Appetite:** Since women have several financial options to avail from, **it needs increased risk appetite in India's women** before they leave behind men in the startup race.

  ❍ Women in India should grab the golden opportunities arising out of this **Unicorn 'utsav'** to start their own business and lead the journey towards Atmanirbhar Bharat.

  ❍ It's time for society, financial institutions, angel investors and the government to understand that the **country cannot foster sustainable progress without the participation of women**, who can catalyse economic growth.

➤ **Bringing Women to Leadership:** The key drivers of women entrepreneurship are investment in infrastructure and education, which predict a higher proportion of businesses started by women in India.

  ❍ Efforts like **better education and health**, **reducing wage differentials** encourage more effort and result in better career-advancement practices, thus promoting talented women into leadership and managerial roles.

➤ **Women Role Models for Women: Higher female ownership of local businesses** in related industries predict greater relative female entry rates.

  ❍ **Existing women entrepreneurs shall actively reach out** to other aspiring female entrepreneurs, if not far than within their own industries or fields of work and provide them guidance.

  ❍ Organising **seminars or workshops specifically for women** aspiring to be the owners of local businesses is one of the fruitful ways to do it.

➤ **Encouraging Women Investors:** A majority of investor groups are composed of and are led by men, and investment committees are mostly male-dominated. **Only 2% of the angel investors are women.**

  ❍ To overcome such unconscious biases, at least one or **more women investors shall be included in the investment group.**

  ❍ If there is a **diversity of gender** in the decision-making group, there is a **likelihood that women seekers of funds will get a fairer hearing** and possibly receive more favourable decisions.

Old Age Care

As India becomes increasingly urbanised and families break up into smaller units, **homes for the [elderly](#) have sprung up, typically in the urban and semi-urban areas**. The care of elderly people is managed by a set of professionals or voluntary organisations with support from the government, or by local philanthropists.

However, the **absence of a regulatory oversight** for these homes, lack of clearly established standard operating procedures, and due to **informal referral paths to health care,** these homes may have significant impact on physical and mental health of their residents.

Note:

A **formal approach to homes for the elderly** shall now be an important policy and planning concern for India.

What is the Share of Elderly in the Population?

➤ The **UN World Population Ageing Report** notes that India's ageing population (those aged 60 and above) is **projected to increase to nearly 20% by 2050** from about 8% now.

➤ By 2050, the percentage of **elderly people will increase by 326%**, with those aged **80 years and above set to increase by 700%**, making them the **fastest-growing age group in India.**

○ A major reason for the steady growth of the elderly population has been the dramatic rise in life expectancy aided by sustained periods of economic growth and enhanced access to healthcare facilities.

➤ In a demographic where the growth rate of elders far exceeds that of the young, the **biggest challenge is to provide a range of quality, affordable, and accessible health and care services** to the elderly.

○ With this future in mind, it is essential that our policy framework and social responses are geared to meet this reality.

Why are Old Age Homes (OAHs) for the Elderly becoming a Norm?

➤ The OAHs are **a consequence of the emergence of the nuclear family system.** Factors such as **familial neglect**, **disintegration of families** necessitated by the migration of children and their **inability to keep pace with the new generation** in terms of education, technology etc pushes them towards these OAHs where they can live with people of their like.

➤ Even at times, elders feel comfortable in OAHs for the **freedom and friendly atmosphere with other elders** who keep them company, enjoying the time by interacting with each other.

○ They even show some detachment from family members and **feel more secure in OAHs.**

➤ These OAHs, however, **do not always provide good facilities;** not all elders are taken care of well by the management, some of them impose restrictions.

○ The food served is often reported to be of low quality and deficient in quantity in many of them. The bedrooms and toilets are often poorly maintained.

○ Some of the **managements do not utilise payments made to them by children** of these elderly people, leaving the helpless parents in the lurch.

○ Such abuse and misuse of OAHs come to the limelight often, but **seldom is action taken to rectify the situation.**

How is the Deterioration of the Physical Health of the Elderly Linked to their Mental Health?

➤ A recent study titled **Hyderabad Ocular Morbidity in Elderly Study (HOMES)** conducted by a Hyderabad based not-for-profit organisation reveals that about 30% of the residents who were part of the study (over 1,500 participants from 40 homes) had a vision impairment of some sort.

➤ The study found some **'unseen' effects of vision impairment**: many were prone to **depression**. In fact, those with both vision and hearing impairment had a **rate of depression that was five times higher** than those without.

➤ Our homes, buildings and social environment are not built keeping the elderly in mind. As people age, and their motor skills weaken, they are at a greater risk of falling down and hurting themselves**. Having an impairment increases this risk.**

○ **Instead of planning for accessible and elderly-friendly structures** that allow them to operate safely, there are **common incidents of reducing their mobility.**

➤ People with functional skills are asked to stay away from daily tasks like cooking, sewing, cleaning, or washing up. This reduces their sociability, their sense of independence and well-being — all **leading up to mental health issues** and depression.

What Steps Can Be Taken?

➤ **Basic Health Screening Facilities:** The state of homes for the elderly raises the need for **building formal pathways for basic health screening** between such homes and public health facilities.

○ This can include **screenings for blood sugar, blood pressure, periodic vision and hearing screening**, and a simple questionnaire to assess mental health.

○ Such interventions are inexpensive (such as a **motorcycle-operated screenings outside public grounds** for morning-walkers) and could go a long way in identifying health issues and offering support.

➤ **Role of Health Institutions:** The **next step would be to build formal pathways to address those health issues** that the screenings identify. Public, private and NGO-run hospitals have a major role to play in this aspect.

Note:

- Health institutions will also need to offer a **comprehensive set of packages that are tailored for the elderly** — not piecemeal solutions for just diabetes, cardiology or cancer.

➢ **Policy Interventions:** It is crucial to have a **robust public policy to support homes for the elderly**. These old age homes must be guided by policy interventions to **make their facilities, buildings and social environment elderly-friendly.**

- Design, architecture and civic facilities must be thought from the ground up — and these innovations must be available for all residents, not just those living in expensive ones.

➢ **Geriatric Healthcare Facilities:** According to a study by Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, there is **no specialised training in geriatrics in most medical schools.**

- Whatever little geriatric care is available, it is restricted to tertiary hospitals in urban areas and is prohibitively expensive. Geriatric health care services **must be made part of the primary health care services.**

- The **Centre must come up with a comprehensive preventive package,** which **provides awareness regarding common geriatric problems** with a focus on nutrition, exercise, and the promotion of mental well-being.

➢ **Building Elderly Inclusive Society:** One of the effective ways of ensuring proper health facilities to all the elderly in the OAHs is to **ensure a lesser number of the elderly people in these homes.**

- Elderly are an asset to the society and not a liability; the best way of taking advantage of this asset is by **assimilating them into the mainstream** population **rather than isolating them in old age homes.**

Rag-Pickers in India

For decades, rag-pickers, working in dangerous and unsanitary conditions, have picked up what we throw away. They **form the base of a pyramid that includes scrap dealers, aggregators and re-processors.**

Unfortunately, **most informal rag-pickers remain invisible.** Between 1.5 and 4 million rag-pickers in India **work without social security, health insurance, minimum wages or basic protective gear.**

As India progresses towards meeting the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, the plight of Safai Saathis makes a compelling case to intensify efforts to address the challenges faced by them.

What is the Scenario of rag-pickers in India?

➢ It is estimated that India generates 65 million tonnes of waste each year and is **home to more than 4 million rag-pickers.**

- **Predominantly women**, this army of rag-pickers or **Safai Saathis** is the backbone of traditional waste management in most Indian cities.

➢ There have been initiatives for the inclusion of rag-pickers such as:

- A 1995 report of the **High-Power Committee on Solid Waste Management** constituted by the Planning Commission called for **integration of rag-pickers into the system**.
  - In 1988, an Expert Group constituted by the Supreme Court echoed the same recommendation.

- The **Solid Waste Management Rules** and **Plastic Waste Management Rules**, 2016, also recognise the contribution of rag-pickers and hold that they be included in the solid waste management of local bodies.

- However, the rag-pickers have **not been included in any disaster management plan** of the administration.

➢ When the government announced **measures during the pandemic to support frontline workers**, the rag-picker community remained conspicuous by its absence.

➢ Their multiple vulnerabilities, including **low and uncertain incomes, limited access to government schemes, high health risks, and severe social exclusion**, have all been **exacerbated by Covid-19.**

What are the Roadblocks to their Upliftment?

➢ **Unavailability of Data:** In 2018, the **UNDP India started working with Safai Saathis** through its Plastic Waste Management programme. However, the **paucity of data on this community** led to **obstructions in devising programmes** and policies to support Safai Saathis.

- However, this led UNDP India to design and publish India's first large-scale analysis of the socio-economic conditions of Safai Saathis, based on a survey of over 9,000 workers across 14 Indian cities.

➢ **Lack of Formal Education:** The survey of the socio-economic conditions of Safai Saathis showed that they are **employed mainly on the margins of the urban informal sector.**

○ Their low incomes and job insecurity is compounded by the fact that nearly **70% come from socially backward groups** and over **60% have no formal education.**

➢ **Obstructions in Formalisation:** More than 90% of the workers reported owning an Aadhaar card - in line with broad national trends, but **only a tiny subset owned an income, caste, or occupation certificate.**

○ **This thwarts any attempts at formalising their work** and limits their access to government social security schemes.

➢ **No Health Insurance:** As per the UNDP survey, **less than 5%** of those surveyed had any **health insurance**, indicating very **high degrees of health-shock vulnerabilities.**

➢ **Not Connected to Government Welfare Schemes:** Out of the total Safai Saathis, surveyed, who had a bank account, **only 20% were linked to the Jan Dhan Yojana**— the government's flagship financial inclusion programme.

○ **Only half of the surveyed people reported owning and using a ration card** and this proportion was even smaller in cities where migrants formed a larger share among surveyed workers.

What Steps Can Be Taken?

➢ **Registration with ULBs:** An important starting point is the registration of Safai Saathis by **Urban Local Bodies**, and **providing ID cards that recognise them as municipal workers with a clear role.**

○ **Ensuring minimum pay** and enabling their **authorised access to waste** are essential next steps.

○ Diversified solid waste management-linked livelihoods like dry waste centre managers and machine operators can broaden employment horizons for these workers.

➢ **Ensuring Food-Security for Them:** With its focus on portability, the government's **One Nation One Ration Card scheme** has the potential to play a transformative role in **ensuring access to subsidised food grains for these workers.**

➢ **Economic and Social Upliftment:** The overall policy agenda for Safai Saathis must include a firm focus on building resilience against shocks, **expanding access to social protection**, and creating opportunities to **graduate towards safe, sustainable, and dignified livelihoods.**

➢ **Inclusion in Government Policies:** A welfare framework to design social protection schemes explicitly for Safai Saathis should be a policy priority.

○ Proactively reaching out to the workers for **enrolment in government schemes, minimising paperwork**, and a **greater awareness among Safai Saathis** about their entitlements are essential for linking them to government programmes.

■ rag-pickers' cooperatives shall also **strengthen Safai Saathis' collective bargaining power enabling higher prices** for what they collect.

➢ **Alternative, Better Employments:** India makes determined strides towards realising the Sustainable Development Goals, it must look at **exploring alternate, technology-led circular economy models** that eliminate the need for any person to do this hazardous work manually.

○ There is a clear need to create better, safer, decent jobs in the economy that informal workers like Safai Saathis can eventually move to, **supported by efforts to enhance their skills.**

The Link between Caste and Manual Scavenging

Since independence, India has undergone profound changes in power dynamics and political ideals that have also transformed individual lives as well as the idea of the collective. However, the modernising forces have been deeply biassed. **Caste is an overbearing reality** which is not simply a tag of identity but something that has been **dictating the way of lives.**

Caste continues to reinforce inequality as a basic value and the allocation of labour is one of its prime manifestations. **Caste hierarchy reinforces occupational hierarchy** and the idea of occupational purity and pollution are further embedded in the lives of individuals.

Manual Scavenging and Caste Based Prejudice

What is Manual Scavenging?

➢ **Manual scavenging** is defined as "the removal of human excrement from public streets and dry latrines, cleaning septic tanks, gutters and sewers w**ithout any safety gears and with bare hands".**

Note:

- Manual scavenging is **violative of [Article 21](#) of the Indian Constitution** that guarantees **'Right to live life with dignity'.**
- [The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation (Amendment) Bill, 2020](#) proposes to completely mechanise sewer cleaning, introduce ways for 'on-site' protection and provide compensation to manual scavengers in case of sewer deaths.
    - It is **still awaiting cabinet approval.**

How is Caste Division Linked to Manual Scavenging?

- Caste leads to the division of labour as well as labourers. Dalits often **face discrimination when seeking employment** in sectors that are considered "pure".
    - Manual scavenging or cleaning of dry latrines, for instance, is a job that the Dalit classes have been burdened with.
- They are expected to carry loads of human excrement, and clear sewage for little or no income. They are **trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion.**
- Although banned under the Prohibition of Employment of Manual Scavengers Act, 2013, the inhumane exercise still continues.
    - According to government data, **97% of manual scavengers are Dalits** - about 42,594 manual scavengers belong to SCs, 421 belong to STs and 431 belong to OBCs.
- The statistics are a **disturbing reminder of our collective failure to rise above caste lines** and provide dignity of labour to all.

What Efforts have been made to end Manual Scavenging?

- The **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013** supersede and goes beyond prohibitions on dry latrines, and outlaws all manual excrement cleaning of insanitary latrines, open drains, or pits.
- In 1989, the [Prevention of Atrocities Act](#)became an integrated guard for sanitation workers; more than 90% people employed as manual scavengers belonged to the Scheduled Caste.
    - This became an important landmark to free manual scavengers from designated traditional occupations.

- [Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge](#) was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on [World Toilet Day](#)for all states to make sewer-cleaning mechanised by April 2021.
    - **Safai Karmachari Andolan** was also a **movement for elimination of manual scavenging.**

What is the Current Scenario Despite the Efforts?

- Caste-based prejudice has been normalised to such an extent that the plight of manual scavengers **does not get the attention that it deserves.** The governments at central and state levels have been enshrouding the problem.
    - There has always been an **attempt to fudge the data**, and contradictions are found in government data itself.
- The government said that there is no report of people currently engaged in manual scavenging and no death has been reported due to the practice in five years (2013-2018).
    - However, according to the **National Convener of the Safai Karmachari Andolan**, **472 manual scavenging deaths** across the country were recorded between 2016 and 2020.
- According to some well-researched media reports, the **Indian Railways, the army, and urban municipalities** remain the **biggest bodies that still have workers engaged in manual scavenging.**
    - They either find ways to outsource such work to contractors so as not to be held directly accountable or liable or simply **misrepresent such workers as "sweepers".**

What Can Be The Way Forward?

- **Implementation of Existing Welfare Policies:** The government's response reflects a deep sense of apathy. It needs to realise that **denial only contributes to the delay** in solving the problem. Sewer deaths are still a reality.
    - India is still a long way from the rehabilitation of manual scavengers. The government scheme provides for **one-time cash assistance of Rs 40,000, skill development training, and capital subsidy** for self-employed projects.
    - Effective implementation of these schemes is needed.

Note:

- ➤ **Stringent and Integrated Laws:** If a law creates a **statutory obligation to provide sanitation services** on the part of state agencies, it will create a situation in which the rights of these workers will not hang in the air.
  - ○ As of now, the **provisions for punishment are both weak** and more importantly, as highlighted by activists, there have been **next to no serious legal proceedings** against people and organisations accused of engaging workers for manual scavenging.
  - ○ There are demands by activists that the **law needs to be read along with the SC & ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989** in order to strengthen it.
- ➤ **Behavioural Change:** To address the social sanction behind manual scavenging, it is required first to acknowledge and then understand how and why manual scavenging continues to be embedded in the caste system.
  - ○ It is important to understand that **manual scavenging is not just a problem of technology** or financial assistance **but also of social prejudice.**
  - ○ The state must accept the role of caste and should actively solve it. We must show impatience and a sense of urgency and should not make equality, justice and the dignity of labour wait any longer.
- ➤ **Social Awareness:** To end the problem of Manual Scavenging, it is obsessively necessary to work from the core of the problem. Lack of skills for doing another job and discrimination from the society itself are the reason they all are engaged in such kind of occupations.
  - ○ It is a **collective responsibility** of the governments at all levels, NGOs, health officers and social communities to **create awareness among the manual scavenger community** regarding health issues, hygiene practices, and sanitization processes.
  - ○ The **general public should also be made aware of legal implications** regarding employment of manual scavenging.

Conclusion

Work is fundamental to how we realise our destiny in this world; to provide economically for oneself and one's family is central to dignity — a lack of it leads to alienation and stunted human growth.

Occupational Safety and Health

India's record in promoting occupational and industrial safety remains weak even with years of robust economic growth. **Making work environments safer is a low priority**, although the productivity benefits of such investments have always been clear.

The consequences are frequently seen in the form of a **large number of fatalities and injuries**, but in a market that has a steady supply of labour, policymakers tend to ignore the wider impact of such losses.

Although **occupational safety and health (OSH) is an existential human and labour right,** it has not received the due attention from law-makers and even trade unions in India.

There is a need for **strong monitoring (inspections) and comprehensive databases** in all the states to frame corrective actions and policies to **ensure safe workplaces for all.**

Occupational Safety in India

What are the Provisions for Ensuring Occupational Safety?

- ➤ In India, the statistics concerning industrial accidents and eventually occupational safety are produced by the Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour and Employment.
- ➤ The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 spells out duties of employers and employees, and **envisages safety standards for different sectors,** focusing on the **health and working condition of workers, hours of work, leaves,** etc.
  - ○ The code also recognises the right of contractual workers.
  - ○ The code provides for **statutory benefits like social security and wages to fixed-term employees** at par with their permanent counterparts.
- ➤ The code also brings in gender equality and empowers the women workforce.
  - ○ Women will be entitled to be employed in all establishments for all types of work and, with consent, can work before 6 am and beyond 7 pm subject to such conditions relating to safety, holidays and working hours.

What are the Shortcomings of the Statistics Presented by the Labour Bureau?

- ➤ The available government statistics show a **decreasing trend in occupational injuries in manufacturing and mining sectors**. However, when interpreting the statistics, the **unregistered factories and mines are not covered.**

Note:

○ During 2011-16, the number of cases of **occupational diseases** reported to the government in India was only 562. In contrast, a scientific article published in the National Medical Journal of India, 2016, indicates **prevalence of occupational diseases such as [silicosis] and byssinosis.**

➤ The Labour Bureau compiles and publishes data on **industrial injuries relating only to a few sectors,** viz. factories, mines, railways, docks and ports.

○ The body has **not yet expanded the scope of statistics on injuries** by adding sectors such as plantations, construction, the service sector, etc.

➤ Also, the data produced is **not representative of the situation in India** as several major States default in the provision of data to the Labour Bureau.

○ For example, during 2013-14, several major States such as Delhi, Gujarat, Kerala, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal **defaulted**; then the all-India statistics was reduced to that extent.

➤ **Under-reporting** is another serious issue which is **morelikely to be in case of non-fatal injuries** than fatal ones for obvious reasons.

○ There is massive under-reporting of industrial injuries in small-scale industries.

What is the Status of Employing Factory Inspectors and Inspection Rates?

➤ According to the **Directorate General, Factory Advice and Labour Institutes (DGFASLI),** in 2019, the proportion of working in sanctioned posts for factory inspectors (employment rate) for India was **70.60%**.

○ However, major States such as Maharashtra (38.93%), Gujarat (57.52%), Tamil Nadu (58.33%), and Bihar (47.62%) had poor employment rates of inspectors.

○ In 2019, there was **only one inspector for every 487 registered factories** (one inspector for every 25,415 workers), thus revealing the heavy workload of inspectors.

➤ The **inspection rates for all-India declined** from 36.23% during 2008-11 to 34.65% during 2012-2015 and further to **24.76% in 2018-19.**

○ While Kerala and Tamil Nadu had higher inspection rates at 63%-66%, Gujarat and Maharashtra had lower rates at 26%-30% and **Haryana the lowest at 11.09%** during 2008-2019.

○ The decline over the three sub-periods noted above for Maharashtra (31% to 12%) and Haryana (14% to 7%) was much higher (50% and over) than for others.

■ The inspection rates fell in almost all the States over the last 12 years.

What Can Be The Way Forward?

➤ **Abiding by the Conventions:** India has ratified [International Labour Organization (ILO)] conventions, the **Labour Inspection Convention, 1947** and **Labour Statistics Convention, 1985**; and hence, it should take immediate and strict actions to prevent the violation of these conventions.

○ It is critical that India establishes efficient **Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) data collection systems** to better understand the situation for effective interventions.

➤ **Revisiting Existing Policies:** The labour codes, especially the OSH Code, the inspection and the labour statistical systems need to be reviewed as the Government is in the process of framing the **Vision@2047 document for the Labour Ministry.**

○ It is essential to formulate **policies that go through careful scrutiny by experienced parliamentarians**, aided by fresh **inputs from employees, employers and experts.**

○ Compromising on safety can lead to extreme consequences that go beyond factories, and leave something that is etched in the nation's memory as in the case of the **Bhopal gas disaster**.

➤ **Public Awareness:** Public awareness for **preventing work-related accidents and diseases** and improving hazardous working environments should also be encouraged.

○ India can **undertake stronger national campaigns** and awareness raising activities for workers and employers.

■ **Young people** are especially vulnerable to OSH risks and need to play an **active role in finding OSH solutions.**

○ The **mass media and journalists could highlight the safety and health challenges** of workers in various economic sectors and disseminate information on how to mitigate accidents and diseases.

➤ **OSH Committees:** At the workplace level, the first thing to do is to **establish OSH committees and involve workers** for identifying hazards and improving OSH.

Note:

○ Workers are in the frontline to notice OSH risks and implement solutions.

○ It has been well established that **a safe and healthy workplace is a productive and dynamic one**, leading to sustainable businesses.

Conclusion

The world of work is undergoing profound changes. It is important for governments, employers and workers, and other stakeholders to **seize the opportunities to create a safe and healthy future workplace** for all. Their day-to-day efforts to improve safety and health at work can directly contribute to the **sound socioeconomic development of India.**

State of Prisons in India

The clamour for decongesting prisons has been raging for a while now. The need became even more acute with the coronavirus pandemic.

The **Prisons Statistics of India (PSI) 2020**, released recently, provides a disappointing picture of the prisons in India suffering from overcrowding, delays in trials and unavailability of proper medical health facilities to the prison inmates.

As we stare at potential waves of Covid-19, there is a dire need for the justice system to look into the **risks it is subjecting prison populations to**, and urgently formulate the remedies. It is important to **decongest jails** and adopt **measures that protect the [right to life](#)** and **health of the prisoners.**

Prison Statistics of India (PSI) 2020

What does the PSI 2020 Present?

➢ The recently released Prisons Statistics of India (PSI) 2020 gives a glimpse of how successful the prison decongestion and medical safeguards have been.

○ The Prison Statistics India 2016, published by the [National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)](#).

○ The 2020 report does not contain any Covid-19 specific data.

➢ Between December 2019 and December 2020, prison occupancy **reduced marginally from 120% to 118%.**

○ The pandemic year (2020) **witnessed nearly 900,000 more arrests** than in 2019.

○ In absolute numbers, in December 2020, there were 7,124 more people in jail than in December 2019.

➢ The **increase in the share of under-trials** in prisons was at an all-time high. PSI 2020 puts the percentage at 76% in December 2020: An increase from the earlier 69% in December 2019.

○ The people who are **undertrials are those yet to be found guilty of the crimes** they have been accused of.

What is the State-wise Scenario of PSI 2020?

➢ In 17 states, on an average, prison populations rose by 23% from 2019 to 2021, as opposed to 2-4% in previous years.

➢ The appalling figurescome from states such as **Uttar Pradesh, Sikkim, and Uttarakhand,** which had **tragic occupancy rates** of 177%, 174%, and 169%, respectively (December 2020).

➢ Only **Kerala** (110% to 83%), **Punjab** (103% to 78%), **Haryana** (106% to 95%) **Karnataka** (101% to 98%), **Arunachal Pradesh** (106% to 76%) and **Mizoram** (106% to 65%) could **reduce their occupancy of prisons below 100%.**

To What Extent is the Video-Conferencing Facility Available for Trials and How Far is it Relevant?

➢ Video-conferencing(VC) promised some relief from court closures.currently, 69% of prisons have VC facilities, as opposed to 60% in 2019.

○ However, the facility is **not evenly distributed across the country**.

➢ Tamil Nadu, Manipur, West Bengal, Nagaland, A&N Islands, Rajasthan and Lakshadweep still have **VC facilities in less than 50% of their jails.**

➢ Tamil Nadu, which has more than 14,000 prisoners, has VC facilities in **only 14 of its 142 jails.**

➢ **Uttarakhand, which has VC facilities in all its jails**, continues to increase under-trial numbers and has an **occupancy rate of 169%.**

➢ It is important to keep in mind that the VC facilities only accomplish the necessity of law that a prisoner must be produced before a magistrate every two weeks. **Fulfilling this technicality does nothing for decongestion** or effectuating speedy justice.

Note:

Where does the Availability of Medical Staff in Prisons Stand?

➢ There remains a **huge shortage of medical staff** (resident medical officers/medical officers, pharmacists, and lab technicians/attendants), **leading to delays in attending to the needs of inmates.**

➢ **Goa has the highest vacancy (84.6%) of medical staff**, followed by Karnataka (67.1%), Ladakh (66.7%), Jharkhand (59.2%), Uttarakhand (57.6%) and Haryana (50.5%).

   ❍ While Goa has only two medical staff for over 500 inmates, Karnataka has 26 for 14,308 prisoners.

   ❍ With a vacancy of 90%, Uttarakhand has only one medical officer for 5,969 inmates. Jharkhand's vacancy levels are at 77.1%.

➢ In 15 states, the number of available medical staff was reduced in 2019-20; whereas the inmate population increased by nearly 10,000.

➢ Shortages in **medical officer vacancies average around 34% nationally**. Mizoram is reported to have no medical officer.

➢ **Only Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya meet the benchmark** of at least o**ne medical officer for every 300 prisoners**.

What can be the Way Forward?

➢ **Addressing Structural Deficiencies:** As much as the Supreme Court's directions and the efforts of the prison administration are appreciated, it is also important to address the structural deficiencies in prison otherwise the prisons will continue to remain the places where the innocent spend an unwarranted amount of time and face unfair and unacceptable health and safety risks.

➢ **Making Prisons Correctional Institutions:** The ideal policy prescription of **making prisons into places of rehabilitation** and "correctional institutions" will only be achieved when the issues of **unrealistically low budgetary allocation**, **high workloads** and the **unmindfulness of the police regarding procedural safeguards** are addressed.

➢ **Recommendation for Prison Reforms:** The Supreme Court appointed **Justice Amitava Roy (retd.) Committee** which gave the following recommendations to address the **overcrowding of prisons**:

   ❍ **Speedy trial** remains one of the best ways to remedy the unwarranted phenomenon of overcrowding.

   ❍ There should be **at least one lawyer for every 30 prisoners**, which is not the case at present.

   ❍ **Special fast-track courts** should be set up to deal exclusively with petty offences which have been pending for more than five years.

   ❍ An **adjournment should not be granted in cases where witnesses are present.**

     ■ The **concept of plea bargaining**, in which the accused admits guilt for a lesser sentence, should be promoted.

Killing Inequality

Recently, **Oxfam International** presented its annual global Inequality Report titled **Inequality Kills** which presented the **quantum growth in wealth of a minuscule few**, and the **simultaneous impoverishment of millions** of working people. The findings of the report remain dismal for India as well.

Inequality can be corrected by a **rights-based policy framework** to be followed by the Indian state to **protect the poor and the marginalized.**

One of the most important places to show commitment to equity, is the **Union Budget**; and inequality should perhaps be discussed in India before and after every Union and State Budget.

Inequality in India

➢ **Constitutional Provisions to Tackle Inequality:** There is a constitutional mandate in India to reduce inequality - Articles 38 and 39 of the **Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP)** mandate a policy path.

   ❍ **Article 38(1):** "The State shall strive to **promote the welfare of the people** by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which **justice, social, economic and political,** shall inform all the institutions of national life."

   ❍ **Article 39 (c):** The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards ensuring that the **operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth** and means of production to the common detriment.

➢ **India Specific Findings of Oxfam Report:**

   ❍ **Inequality of Wealth:** During the Covid-19 pandemic, the report reveals, **more than half the world's new poor are from India;** 84% Indian households have suffered a loss of income, with **4.6 crore people falling into extreme poverty**.

Note:

- In this period, the richest 142 people have more than doubled their wealth to more than ₹53 lakh-crore.
  - **Decline in Social Security Expenditure:** As Covid continued to ravage India, the **country's healthcare budget saw a 10% decline from RE** (Revised Estimates) of 2020-21.
    - The budgetary allocation for social security schemes declined from 1.5% of the total Union budget to 0.6%.
  - **Increasing Fiscal Deficit:** Lowering **corporate taxes from 30% to 22%** to attract investment last year (2020) resulted in a loss of Rs 1.5 lakh crore, which contributed to the increase in India's **fiscal deficit.**
- **Factors of Inequality:**
  - **Budgetary Decline:** India is one of the few countries in the world where **during the Covid pandemic the health Budget has declined** — and that too **by a huge 10%** in 2021.
    - **Social security expenditure has declined** from an already low 1.5% in 2020-21 to 0.6% of the Union Budget in 2021-22.
    - It is at this end of Budget allocations where **people are deprived of the most basic services** and entitlements and are unable to survive.
    - Even after increasing allocations in the first phase of the pandemic, **allocations were frozen, and budgets were slashed** in Budget 2021-22.
  - **Inequality in Salaries and Allowances:** Social security pensions, for the elderly, for the disabled, and widows have been **frozen at ₹200-₹300 a month for almost 15 years.**
    - However, in contrast, there has been an increment in the salaries and pensions of the policymakers.
    - The increase for one crore central government employees and pensioners has cost the exchequer more than the total social security pension budget for 3.3 crore beneficiaries.
  - **Unavailability of Subsidized Foodgrain:** The **priority list of households** under the **National Food Security Act (NFSA)** has been **frozen in absolute numbers**, based on a percentage **determined from the 2011 Census.**
    - In the last 11 years, population increases amounting to approximately **10 crore eligible beneficiaries have been kept out.**

- Therefore, approximately 12% legally entitled people — even children of existing "priority households" — cannot get subsidized foodgrain.
  - **Unequal Access to Education:** The pandemic has also produced a generation of children who have forgotten what formal education is. **Many teenagers from poor households have already joined the workforce.**
    - In this period, there has been a **6% cut in the education Budget.** Relying on online teaching, accompanied by Budget cuts, amounts to the **institutionalization of endemic multidimensional poverty.**

Way Forward

- **Multi-Pronged Approach to Tackle Inequality:** Programs such as the National Food Security Act must receive the quantum of allocations needed. Also, the **People's Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG)** has estimated that **approximately ₹2,64,000 crore will be needed to guarantee 100 days work for currently active job cards.**
  - The social security pensioners need to be protected from hunger, sickness and poverty. The **election season offers an opportunity** to fetch the basic rights of the unorganized and vulnerable people.
- **Gains from Tax:** All the governments should immediately **tax the gains made by the super-rich** during this pandemic period.
  - Jan Sarokar, a network of more than 30 social sector movements, has suggested that a **2% wealth tax, and a 33% inheritance tax** on the top 1% of our population **will fetch an estimated ₹11 lakh crore per annum**, to support basic social sector entitlements.
- **Increasing the Reach of Basic Necessities:** Given the growing inequality in India, the direction that public policy should now take is evident; there is a **need to spread health and education far more widely** amidst the population.
  - By ensuring **universal access to public funded high quality services** like **Public health and education**, social security benefits, **employment guarantee schemes**, inequality can be reduced to a great extent.
- **Employment Generation:** The **labor-intensive manufacturing sector** of India has the **potential to absorb millions of people** who are leaving farming while the service sector tends to benefit the urban middle class.

Note:

○ The **International Labor Organization (ILO)** also recommends that a **minimum wage floor should be set** in a manner that balances the needs of workers and their families with broader economic factors.

Migrant Workers and Urban Housing

Urbanisation and the growth of cities in India have been accompanied by **pressure on basic infrastructure and services like housing**, sanitation and health. The worst sufferers of unavailability of these basic needs are the **migrant workers**.

The **Covid-19 pandemic** has further aggravated the poor housing conditions of the urban poors/migrant workers.

All these challenges point directly to the need of a sound policy framework that must also be viewed from the **lens of human rights, property rights and socio-economic development.**

These policy initiatives must be **in sync with the Sustainable Development Goal** (SDG) 8.8 which stands for providing a safe and secure working environment for all workers, **particularly migrants.**

Urban Housing and Migrant Workers

➢ **Homeless Urban Families:** The **2011 Census of India** reveals that the urban population of the country stood at 31.16% where there are about **4.5 lakh homeless families** and a total population of **17.73 lakh is living without any roof over their heads.**
  ○ **Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh** are the two states with an **acute housing crisis.**
➢ **Migrants and Urban Housing:** A vast majority of urban population, especially migrants, live under conditions of **poor shelter and in highly congested spaces.**
  ○ In India, more than half of the urban households occupy a single room, with an **average occupancy per room of 4.4 persons.**
  ○ In the case of migrants working in small units, hotels and homes, their **workplace is also their place of lodging.**
    ■ Such places are often unhygienic and poorly ventilated.
  ○ Most construction workers stay in makeshift arrangements. **Casual workers sleep under bridges** and on pavements, often living as a group in unhygienic surroundings.

➢ **Impact of Pandemic on Migrants' Housing:** Due to the **pandemic induced nationwide lockdown**, most workers rushed back home leaving behind their temporary abodes and those **who were left behind lost their shelter** because workplaces were shut.
  ○ Migrants who lived in rented apartments **could not maintain social distancing.**
  ○ In suburban regions with a sizable number of migrants, the local population **insisted on them to vacate houses** citing the unhygienic conditions in the dwellings.
  ○ Even though most state governments appealed to house owners to waive two months' rent, the migrant workerscontinued to face **pressures for paying the rent.**
➢ **Initiatives for Urban Housing:**
  ○ **Smart Cities Mission:** The **Smart Cities Mission** identified 100 cities, covering 21% of India's urban population, for a transformation in four rounds starting January 2016.
    ■ Some of the core infrastructure elements in a smart city include **proper water supply, assured electricity supply, sanitation, and affordable housing** especially for the poor.
  ○ **AMRUT Mission:** Efforts like the **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)** launched in 2005 are intended to make the process of urbanisation smooth.
    ■ It aimed to ensure that every household has **access to a tap** with the **assured supply of water and a sewerage connection.**
    ■ The mission has now entered its second phase to make cities water-secure and provide better amenities for the marginalised.
  ○ **ARHCs Envisaged in Atma Nirbhar Bharat Package:** The Rs 20 lakh crore **Atma Nirbhar Bharat package** announced by the government in May 2020 included the provision of **Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC)**for migrant workers/urban poor.
    ■ The plan was to convert government-funded housing in the cities into **ARHCs through Public-Private Partnerships**, and provide incentives to various stakeholders to develop ARHCs on their private land and operate them.

Issues in Affordable Housing for Migrants

➢ **Ineffective Implementation of Housing Schemes:** The Government data shows that **49% of 5,196 projects**

Note:

of the Smart Cities Mission for which work orders were issued across 100 smart cities in India **remain unfinished.**

❍ This lag in implementation raises questions about the efficacy of innovative policy prescriptions.

➢ **Absence of WASH Facilities:** According to a 2020 **International Labour Organisation (ILO)** report on internal labour migrants, the **absence of dignified housing** is aggravated by a **lack of adequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities**.

➢ **Inadequate Public Toilets:** Even though there has been an installation of public toilets through **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**, their **availability is not adequate in migrant-dense clusters.**

➢ **Sudden Increase in Rents:** Migrant workers find housing in slums, which is often subject to a **sudden increase in rent**, and have access only to the **poorest infrastructure and services.**

Way Forward

➢ **Policymaking For Housing Sector:** The existing housing conditions indicate the necessity of **coordinated efforts of the state and the contractors** to address housing issues. It calls for long-term policymaking and analysis of the housing sector along with **necessitating more transparency in the case of contracts.**

❍ Instead of an extreme condition where the owner suddenly increases a rent, the state can look into the matter to **ensure an optimal condition where the rent evolves for a competitive market** for houses.

➢ **Reducing Owner-Tenant Conflicts:** While developing social rental housing, the state should ensure that the location has **proper access to transport networks, education and healthcare.**

❍ The working group by **NITI Aayog** constituted to study internal labour has recommended that rental housing in the public sector could be expanded through the provision of **dormitory accommodation.**

■ This would make public housing affordable and **reduce the conflict between owners and tenants.**

❍ Action-oriented policies alone can improve the lives of labouring migrants.

➢ **Redeveloping Small and Medium Cities:** There is no denying that even our non-megacities have inadequate planning, non-scalable infrastructure, unaffordable housing, and poor public transport.

❍ In order to ensure **good urbanisation**, it is important toequally focus on the **small and medium cities** and **address the issues of inadequate housing and lack of basic facilities in these cities too.**

Raising Legal Age for Marriage

The Union Cabinet's Proposal for bringing **uniformity in the marriageable age of men and women** is certainly a progressive step to realise **Goal 5 of the SDGs**which asks nation-states to formulate policies to achieve gender equality.

However, good intent does not guarantee favourable outcomes. Coercive laws without wide societal support often fail to deliver even when their statement of objects and reasons aims for the larger public good.

India and Minimum Marriageable Age

➢ **The Current Laws:** For Hindus, **The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955**, sets 18 years as the minimum age of marriage for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom.

❍ In Islam, the marriage of a minor who has attained puberty is considered valid.

❍ The **Special Marriage Act, 1954** and the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** also prescribe 18 and 21 years as the minimum age of consent for marriage for women and men respectively.

➢ **India's Efforts for Reducing Gender Gap:** India had ratified the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1993**.

❍ Article 16 of this Convention strictly forbids child marriage and asks governments to identify and enforce the minimum marriage age for women.

❍ Since 1998, India has had **national legislation exclusively on human rights protections** drafted in consonance with international instruments such as the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.**

➢ **Reasons behind the Minimum Age:** The law prescribes a minimum age of marriage to essentially **outlaw child marriages and prevent the abuse of minors**.

❍ Child marriages **expose women to early pregnancy, malnutrition, and violence** (mental, emotional, and physical).

❍ Early pregnancy is associated with **increased child mortality rates** and affects the health of the mother.

Note:

Arguments for Increasing Legal Marriageable Age

➢ **Protection of Basic Rights:** Protection of women against early and child marriage is a protection of their basic rights and this monumental step will lead to changes in related legislative frameworks to provide a **comprehensive rights-based framework for the aadhi aabadi.**

➢ **Bringing Gender Parity:** Section 2(a) of the Special Marriage Act declares legal marriageable age women as 18 while for men this age is 21; the **difference seems to have no justifiable logic.**

  ❍ The age of voting can be equal for men and women, the age to consensually, wilfully, and validly enter into a contract is the same for men and women, then why not instill equality in the age requirements for marriage.

➢ **Equal Laws Emanate Equality:** Equality emanates from equal laws and social transformations are both the precursors of laws and a consequence of them.

  ❍ **A change in law is also more likely to bring changes in social perceptions** in progressive societies.

➢ **Facilitating Women Empowerment:** There are various indicators of growth in women specially in enrolment of female students in higher education.

  ❍ Moreover, schemes like **UJJAWALA**, **Mudra Yojana** and **Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana** have shown women as the largest section of beneficiaries of government schemes.

  ❍ **Women's empowerment will get a further fillip with equality in marriage age.**

Arguments Against Increasing Legal Marriageable Age

➢ **Unlikely to Benefit Financially Dependent Women:** Though the objective looks good on paper, merely raising the age of marriage without creating social awareness and improving access to health care is **unlikely to benefit the community it wants to serve: young women not yet financially independent**, who are unable to exercise their rights and freedoms while still under the yoke of familial and societal pressures.

➢ **High Prevalence of Child Marriage Despite Stringent Laws:** The law prohibiting marriage below the age of 18 has been in effect in some form since the 1900s, yet child marriage has persisted virtually undeterred until 2005 when almost half of all women aged 20-24 had married below the legal minimum age.

➢ **No Criminal Records for Early Marriages:** Even though more than one in five marriages took place below age 18, **hardly any violations of the Act appear in the criminal records of the country.**

➢ **No Assurance for Eliminating Child Marriages:** The magnitude of the population of women of marriageable age who will be affected is immense, with **over 60% marrying before 21.**

  ❍ Incapability to eliminate marriages of women before 18 **provides no evidence that it would be eliminated by increasing this age to 21.**

➢ **Misuse of Laws by Parents:** Women's rights activists point out that **parents often use this Act to punish their daughters who marry against their wishes** or elope to evade forced marriages, domestic abuse, and lack of education facilities.

  ❍ Hence, within a patriarchal setting, it is more likely that the change in the age limit **will increase parents' authority over young adults.**

Way Forward

➢ **Ensuring Objective Equality:** Any justification — biological, social, or data and research-based — cannot justify the inequality in age between men and women to enter into a valid marriage.

  ❍ India decided in 1954 with the Special Marriage Act that age must be one of the basic requisites of a valid marriage. The only flaw was not having equality in this regard which is now being corrected by amending the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006.

➢ **Empowering Disadvantaged Women:** What is required to empower disadvantaged women is to **respect their reproductive rights** and in **ensuring more investments in reversing the fundamental structural disadvantages** that women who marry early face.

  ❍ The government must **invest far more in addressing issues of equity** — measures that will enable the disadvantaged to complete their **education**, **provide career counselling** and **encourage skilling and job placement.**

    ■ The **safety issues** also need to be addressed in public places including public transportation.

  ❍ **Behavioural change in parents** is also necessary as they ultimately make marriage related decisions for a majority of women.

Note:

➢ **Increasing Awareness among Women:** A good, but not easy, way to achieve the stated objective is to take steps to **counsel girls on early pregnancies**, and provide them the network to improve their health.

○ The focus must be on **creating social awareness about women's sexual and reproductive health and rights**, and ensuring girls are not forced to drop out of school or college.

NFHS 5: A Women-Centric Analysis

The **National Family Health Survey (NFHS 5)**, which presents a **bird's eye view of the state of the nation's health**, has **provided encouraging outcomes** on several fronts: **stabilizing population growth**, improved family planning services and better delivery of health systems.

However, it also **highlights the need for further improvement to address gender-based violence** and **harmful practices against women and girls**, such as **child marriage** and gender-biased sex selection.

These have been exacerbated by discriminatory social norms and practices hindering the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 Agenda** and India's development goals.

Women-Specific Findings of NFHS 5: The Positive Side

➢ **TFR Below Replacement Level:** India's population growth appears to be stabilising.

○ The **Total Fertility Rate (TFR)**, which is the average number of children born per woman, has **declined from 2.2 to 2.0 at the national level.**

○ A total of 31 States and Union Territories (constituting **69.7% of the country's population**) have achieved fertility rates below the replacement level of 2.1.

➢ **Better Family Planning:** The main reasons for decline in fertility is an **increase in adoption of modern family planning methods** (from 47.8% in 2015-16 to 56.5% in 2019-21) and a **reduction in unmet need for family planning by 4% points** over the same period.

➢ **Improvements in Female Literacy:** Significant **improvements in female literacy** have been witnessed with **41% women having received 10 or more years of schooling** (compared to 36% in 2015-16).

○ Girls who study longer have fewer children, and are also more likely to delay marriage and find employment.

➢ **Improved Maternal Health Delivery:** **Maternal health services** are steadily improving.

○ **Antenatal care** in the first trimester has **increased by 11.4% points** (from 2015-16 to 2019-21) to reach 70%

■ The recommended four antenatal care check-ups have increased by 7% points to reach 58.1%

■ **Postnatal care** visits have **gone up by 15.6% points** to reach 78%.

○ **Institutional births** were **accessed by 88.6% of women in 2019-21**, marking an increase of 9.8% points from 2015-16.

■ There has also been an **increase in institutional deliveries in public health facilities** (52.1% to 61.9%).

➢ **Better Menstrual Health and Bodily Autonomy:** Evidence indicates significant **progress where women have the right to bodily autonomy and integrity** and the ability to take decisions about their lives.

○ The proportion of women (aged 15-24 years) who use **menstrual hygiene** products has also increased by almost 20% points between 2015-16 and 2019-21 and currently stands at 77.3%.

➢ **Technology and Banking Related Progress:** The proportion of women who have their **own bank accounts has gone up by 25.6% points** over the same time period to reach 78.6%.

○ Around **54% of women have their own mobile phones** and about **one in three women have used the Internet.**

EXCERPTS FROM NFHS SURVEY

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT (WOMEN AGE 15-49 YEARS)

	2020-21	2015-16
Participation of married women in household decisions	92%	73.8%
Women who worked in last 12 months and paid in cash	24.9%	21.1%
Women owning a house and/or land (alone or jointly)	22.7%	34.9%
Women having a bank or savings account that they use	72.5%	64.5%
Women having a mobile phone that they themselves use	73.8%	66.6%

NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF ADULTS (AGE 15-49 YEARS)

	2020-21	2015-16
Women whose Body Mass Index (BMI) is below normal	10%	14.9%
Men whose Body Mass Index (BMI) is below normal	9.1%	17.7%
Women who are overweight or obese	41.3%	33.5%
Men who are overweight or obese	38%	24.6%
Average out-of-pocket expenditure per delivery in a public health facility (in Rs)	2,548	8,518
Women who have ever used the internet	63.8%	NA
Men who have ever used the internet	85.2%	NA
Households with any usual member covered under a health insurance/financing scheme	25%	15.7%

Note:

Downside of the Survey

➢ **Lesser Institutional Delivery in Certain States:** The survey indicates a worrisome figure of **11% of pregnant women** who were still either **unreached by a skilled birth attendant** or not accessing institutional facilities.

  ○ Further analysis reveals the **institutional delivery rate of under 70% in 49 districts of India** over two-thirds (69%) of which are from five States (**Nagaland, Bihar, Meghalaya, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh**).

➢ **Teenage Pregnancy:** [Teenage pregnancy](#) has **declined only marginally by 1% point** and 7.9% of women in the age group of 15-19 years were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey.

➢ **Low Access of Reproductive Health Services:** A very small segment of the population is currently accessing the full range of [sexual and reproductive health](#) services such as **screening tests for** [cervical cancer](#) **(1.9%)** and **breast examinations (0.9%).**

➢ **Negligible Decline in Child Marriage:** The prevalence of child marriage has **gone down but only marginally** from 26.8% in 2015-16 to 23.3% in 2019-21. One in three women continue to face [violence from their spouse](#).

➢ **Low Economic Contribution:** Women's participation in the economy continues to remain low (**only 25.6% women engaged in paid work**, a meagre increase of 0.8% point).

  ○ Women still bear a **disproportionate burden of** [unpaid domestic and care work](#), hindering their ability to access gainful employment.

Way Forward

➢ **Encouraging Comprehensive Sexuality Education:** The above issues highlight the need to **invest in comprehensive sexuality education as a key component of life-skills education** for both in school and out-of-school adolescents, and **ensuring access to quality sexual and reproductive health services** for them.

  ○ While **expanding the basket of reproductive health services**, the services like screening tests and breast examinations should also be included.

➢ **Addressing Discriminatory Social Norms:** To empower women and ensure gender justice, it is **imperative to address harmful practices, such as child marriage** and gender-biased sex selection.

  ○ There is a need to enhance the value of women and girls by working on **transforming unequal power relations**, structural inequalities and discriminatory norms, attitudes and behaviours.

  ○ Also, it is important to **engage with men and boys**, particularly in their formative years, to **promote positive masculinity and gender-equal values.**

➢ **Promoting Technology Based Services among Women:** In the next few years, the combination of mobile technology, banking, education and women's economic empowerment will be **significant drivers to address informal discriminatory norms.**

  ○ Although the percentage of women using mobile, internet and banking facilities have increased, this is still not at par with those of men.

  ○ There should be **sufficient stress on promoting and teaching the use of such facilities to women** as availability and utilisation of such resources is also an indicator of empowerment among women.

➢ **Integrated Efforts for Better Health Services:** The NFHS findings are a reminder of the **urgent need to close gaps in girls' education** and **address the poor health status** of women.

  ○ Current times require **integrated and coordinated efforts from all health institutions,** academia and other partners directly or indirectly associated with the health care services to **make these services accessible, affordable and acceptable,** especially for those who can't easily afford it.

Conclusion

Convergence among multiple stakeholders is critical to bring about the desired change. The discriminatory social norms that drive gender-based violence and harmful practices must be addressed strictly and jointly and women must be empowered to exercise agency and autonomy in all spheres of life.

Building An Elderly-Inclusive Society

India's progress in improving the lives of its citizens can be seen in a single statistic, namely, the increase in life expectancy at birth. As per [UNDESA](#), by 2010-15, **life expectancy in India (67.5 years) had almost caught up with the global average** of 70.5 years.

Note:

As a result of the increase in life expectancy, the number of <u>elderly people in India</u> is expected to rise to 300 million (~20% of total population) by 2050.

However, the challenges of an ageing population are already besetting Indiaeven while it is yet to adequately address other development challenges. In this context, **India has a lot to do to catch up economically as well as socially.**

Elderly in India

➤ **Implications of Increase in Life Expectancy:** Life expectancy in India has risen from 50 (1970-75) to almost 70 years (2014-18); as a result, the number of elders (>60 years of age) is already 137 million, and **expected to increase by 40% to 195 million in 2031, and 300 million by 2050.**

➤ **Elderly, A Fast-Growing but Underutilised Resource:** While one perspective looks at them as dependents, a rather different view would look at them as a **potential asset: a massive resource of experienced, knowledgeable people.**

○ Integrating the elderly into the lives of communities can make a substantial contribution to improving social conditions.

➤ **Elderly and Economy:** Elderly people **carry immense experience of their personal and professional life** which the society, at large, needs to channelise for a better tomorrow.

○ **Including elderly people as active contributors** in the economy will prepare India for the future when a major portion of its population will be aged.

➤ **Increasing Significance of Silver Economy:** <u>Silver economy</u> is the system of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services aimed at using the purchasing potential of older and ageing people and satisfying their consumption, living and health needs.

○ The <u>SAGE initiative</u> and the <u>SACRED portal</u> are some of the initiatives launched specifically to promote the silver economy.

Challenges to Socio-Economic Upliftment of the Elderly

➤ **Changing Healthcare Needs:** In a demographic where the growth rate of elders far exceeds that of the young, the biggest challenge is to **provide a range of quality, affordable, and accessible health** and care services to the elderly.

○ They require an array of **specialised medical services at home including tele or home consultations, physiotherapy** and **rehabilitation services,** mental health counselling and treatment, as well as pharmaceutical and diagnostic services.

➤ **Low HAQ Score of India:** As per the<u>2016 Healthcare Access and Quality Index</u>, India (at **41.2**) is still **significantly below the global average of 54 points**, ranking 145 out of 195 countries.

○ The low HAQ **worsens even further in smaller cities and rural areas** where basic quality health-care services are very inadequate.

➤ **Social Issues:** Factors such as **familial neglect, low education levels, socio-cultural beliefs and stigma**, low trust on institutionalised health-care services etc. exacerbate the situation for the elders.

○ Inequity in access to facilities compounds the problems for the elderly, who are already, physically, financially and at times psychologically restricted in understanding, and availing such facilities. Consequently, **most of them live their years in neglect.**

➤ **Vicious Cycle of Health, Economy and Unproductivity:** An overwhelming proportion of the elders are from the lower socio-economic strata.

○ The vicious cycle of poor health and unaffordable health costs is further accelerated by their inability to earn a livelihood.

○ As a result, not only are they economically unproductive **but it also adds to their mental and emotional problems.**

➤ **Inadequate Welfare Schemes:** Despite <u>Ayushman Bharat</u> and public health insurance schemes, a <u>NITI Aayog</u>report indicates that 400 million Indians do not have any financial cover for health expenses.

○ Despite the presence of pension schemes at centre and state level, a mere **pittance as low as ₹350 to ₹400 a month is provided** in some states which too is **not universal.**

➤ **Challenges to Inclusion of Elderly in the Economy:** In order to include the elderly as active participants in the economy, they need to be reskilled and taught about the latest technologies to bring them at par with the current 'tech-savvy' generation.

○ Ensuring proper technology, human resource and other facilities for **reskilling the elderly population at a large scale is a challenge.**

Note:

Way Forward

➢ **Health Related 'Elderly-First' Approach:** In the **Covid-19 vaccination strategy**, the seniors-first approach led to over 73% of elderly population receiving at least one dose and around 40% being doubly vaccinated by October 2021.

  ❍ Considering the demographic trends, India should **reimagine its entire health-care policy** for the next few decades, **with an elderly prioritised approach.**

  ❍ As senior citizens require the most diverse array of health-care services, the creation of adequate services for them will benefit all other age-groups.

➢ **Role of Government:** India needs to rapidly **increase its public health-care spending**, and invest heavily in the **creation of well-equipped and staffed medical care facilities** and **home health-care** and rehabilitation services.

  ❍ It needs to accelerate implementation of programmes such as the **National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE).**

  ❍ The Ayushman Bharat and **PM-JAY ecosystems need to be further expanded** and similar, special health-care coverage schemes and services need to be created for senior citizens from the lower economic strata.

➢ **Socio-Economic Inclusion of Elderly:** Similar to countries like in Europe which have small communities to take care of the elderly and provide them related facilities, **India can build such a type of youth army to help elderly in the far away areas.**

  ❍ The best way of taking the best economic and social advantage of the elderly is not to treat them separately from the rest of the population and rather **assimilate them into the mainstream population.**

  ❍ **Elderly-inclusive policies** which bring the larger segment of the elderly within the ambit of the welfare schemes shall be formulated ensuring the coverage upto the last mile.

➢ **Special Focus on Elderly Women:** Elderly women in particular shall be specifically looked after in the context of socio-economic upliftment, as the **longevity for women is much longer than men.**

  ❍ Inaccessibility of opportunities to elderly women will make them dependent on others, exposing their survival to several vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

Proof of a truly developed country lies in the way it not only nurtures its young but also cares for its elders, equally. Certain essential steps must be taken to convert elders into a massive resource for socio-cultural and economic development, giving an altogether different perspective to "demographic dividend".

Female Entrepreneurs in India

Women have been at the receiving end of several atrocities since the beginning of time. The fight for gender equality is not new and even though the movement has been gaining momentum in most corners of the world.

Undeniably, women have come a long way since when the movements began and have proven themselves in all fields, including those heavily dominated by men.

However, even today, women can rarely achieve victory without facing numerous challenges of gender-based and other related social biases.

In this context, the society, the government and the women themselves have a major role to play in enabling women to opt the leadership and entrepreneurial roles in the society.

Entrepreneurship and Women in India

➢ **Under-Represented Women Entrepreneurs:** Despite India's rapid economic growth in recent decades, India still has very few women entrepreneurs, **well below several Sub-Saharan African countries** on some average measures.

  ❍ In India, **only 20% of the enterprises are women-owned** (providing direct employment to 22 to 27 million people) and the **covid pandemic** has added fuel to the fire by impacting women disproportionately more.

➢ **Women's Representation in Startups:** Women are **founders of only 6% of the Indian startups.**

  ❍ Startups with at least one woman co-founder raised only **5% of the total funding** raised by startups between 2018-2020, and this further shrunk to only **1.43% of the total investor funding** in the startup ecosystem, when only women founders were considered.

➢ **Sector-Wise Representation:** In terms of ownership of equity, business stakes held by women are **highest in India's manufacturing sector** (mainly related to paper and tobacco products) even exceeding 50%.

Note:

- ○ However, women-held shares of **2% or even less are seen in industries related to computers**, motor vehicles, fabricated metal products and machinery and equipment.
- ➤ **India's Initiatives:** The Government of India has taken various steps towards women's economic empowerment by way of initiatives like **Stree Shakti package**, **Udyogini scheme**, **Mahila Udyam Nidhi scheme**, **Stand Up India Scheme**, **Mahila e-haat**, **Mahila Bank**, **Mahila Coir Yojana** and **Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP).**

Challenges Faced By Women Entrepreneurs

- ➤ **Stereotypes on Capabilities:** Women have historically been **viewed as the "weaker sex" - people in need of protection,** as opposed to men who have traditionally been characterized as protectors and defenders.
  - ○ While it cannot be denied that men and women are physiologically different, and even if an average man is physically stronger than an average woman, it **does not justify assuming every woman is physically fragile.**
- ➤ **Using Biological Aspects to Assess Cerebral Capacities:** One long-standing perception has been that **men are wired to be more logical**, while **women are more likely to be empathetic**, which is touted as justification for women being seen as 'fit' for a certain set of professions limited by that understanding.
  - ○ While this argument may seem smart to some on the surface, it makes little sense when it is **used to bar women from entering certain fields** based on average estimates drawn from psychological observations.
- ➤ **Patriarchal Construct and Familial Constraints:** Even though a lot of women have the potential as well as ambition to make it to the top in arenas that are usually dictated by a stark male presence, they are often **denied their dreams by the patriarchal construct of society.**
  - ○ The underlying biases and concerns of **how their daughters would sustain themselves in an acutely male-inclined field** have been known to cloud the judgement of families.
  - ○ This phenomenon, in turn, **spells a feminine drought** in many such domains, which only worsens gender imbalances.
- ➤ **Constraints Related to Funds:** It is not unheard of for women entrepreneurs to be **denied basic enablers such as easy access to funds** and sponsorships.

- ○ A lot of people have reservations about women's capabilities in the field of finance as **it is traditionally a male-dominated area**, given its 'logical' basis.
- ➤ **Lack of Female Mentors:** With fewer female business founders, the pool of women who can mentor and advise fellow entrepreneurs is consequently smaller.
  - ○ One of the major barriers to women-owned-startups is the **lack of role models for women** which makes it **harder for enterprising women to learn from their peers** and tap the help of those who have 'been there, done that'.
  - ○ It is also **harder for women to maximize the value of a business network,** because networking has traditionally been done in male- centric groups and organizations.

Way Forward

- ➤ **Providing Facilities that Encourage Women into Leadership:** Empowering half the country's potential workforce offers significant economic benefits beyond promoting gender equality.
  - ○ The key drivers of women entrepreneurship are **investment in infrastructure and education**, which predict a higher proportion of businesses started by women in India.
  - ○ Better education and health that **increase female labour-force participation,** reduced discrimination and **wage differentials that encourage more effort,** and **improved career-advancement practices** that **promote talented women into leadership** and managerial roles.
- ➤ **Promoting Women to Encourage Women:** Gender networks undoubtedly matter for entrepreneurship. Higher female ownership of local businesses in related industries predict greater relative female entry rates.
  - ○ Here, **existing women entrepreneurs have an important role to play** as they can **reach out to other aspiring female entrepreneurs**, not far away but within their own districts, industries or fields of work and provide them guidance.
  - ○ They might **also organise seminars or workshops specifically for women** aspiring to be the owners of local businesses.
- ➤ **Encouraging Women Investors:** A majority of investor groups are composed of and are led by men, and investment committees are mostly male-dominated. **Only 2% of the angel investors are women.**

Note:

○ To overcome such unconscious biases, **at least one or more women investors can be included in the investment group**.

○ If there is a diversity of gender in the decision-making group, there is a likelihood that **women seekers of funds will get a fairer hearing** and possibly receive more favourable decisions.

➤ **Role of Government:** Most of the women entrepreneurs are of the opinion that because of lack of training, they are not able to survive in the market. The **government should conduct frequent training programmes** for new production techniques, sales techniques, etc. and make it compulsory for women entrepreneurs.

○ The government can also **provide interest-free loans to encourage women** entrepreneurs, **increase the subsidy for loans** and make **provisions of microcredit system & enterprise credit system** to the women entrepreneurs at the local level.

Conclusion

➤ Even after centuries of struggle marked by gains made in terms of empowerment, women continue to face undeniably taxing struggles in all fields of life and work and the **patriarchy is far from over.**

➤ For India to become a $5 trillion economy, **entrepreneurship by women must play a bigger role in its economic development**. India's gender balance is among the lowest in the world and improving it is important not just for gender equality, but the entire economy.

Socio-Economic Inequality in India

That India is a highly unequal economy is beyond contestation. India's household surveys tend to massively underreport consumption, income and wealth.

Moreover, it's hard to dispute the notion that **Covid-19 has deepened existing faultlines,** exacerbating entrenched inequalities.

The rise in the fortunes of the very rich during this period, when juxtaposed against the misery of the millions of **migrant workers** who had to walk back to their villages, is a stark reminder of the extent of economic disparities.

In this context, the latest edition of the **World Inequality Report (2022)** serves as a useful reminder of the concentration of income at the very top of the pyramid.

Socio-Economic Inequality in India

➤ **Areas of Inequality:** By and large, the discourse on inequality in India tends to centre around **disparities in consumption, income, and wealth.**

○ However, the country is also marked by high levels of **inequalities in "opportunities".**

➤ **Factors Affecting Inequality in Opportunities:** An individual's **class of origin,** his/her **household of birth**, who his/her **parents** are, tend to have a significant bearing on his/her educational attainment, employment and income prospects, and as a consequence, his/her class of destination.

○ Characterised by low levels of social mobility across generations, children born in disadvantaged households have a lower chance of moving up the income ladder.

➤ India-Specific-Findings of World Inequality Report:

○ According to the report, **India is now among the most unequal countries** in the world.

○ In India, the **top 10% of the population earns 57% of the national income.**

■ Within the top 10%, the very elite top 1% earns 22%.

■ In comparison, the share of the bottom 50% in national income has declined to 13%.

○ The **female labour income share is equal to 18%** which is significantly lower than the average in Asia [21%, excluding China].

➤ **Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic:** Covid has led to a **worsening of education** inequalities, **induced labour market scarring**, and **exacerbated income inequality** which in turn, is quite likely to depress social mobility.

○ **Impact on Education:** The **ASER 2021** attests the fact that extended closure of schools and the **shift to online modes of education has widened the learning gaps** between children from poor and affluent households.

■ **Younger children from low-income households** were more deprived of mediums of learning such as smartphones, tablets, internet etc.

■ Moreover, over a fourth of children in households with a smartphone could not access it.

Note:

- **Impact on Jobs:** Since the onset of the pandemic, there has been a decline in labour force participation in India, **specially among the women labour-force.**
  - In the same period, the **unemployment rate has risen from 7.5% to 8.6%** which implies that among those looking for jobs, those **unable to find jobs, perhaps even at lower wages**, have risen.
  - Among the people with jobs, **more are increasingly being employed as casual wage labour.**
  - The growing "casualisation" or "contractualisation" of the workforce implies an **absence of well-paying, productive jobs.**

Way Forward

- **Nordic Economic Model:** To make the current redistribution of wealth more equitable, the current neo-liberal model can be replaced by the 'Nordic Economic Model.'
  - This Model consists of **effective welfare safety nets for all, corruption-free governance, the fundamental right to quality education & healthcare, high taxes for the rich**, etc.
- **Political Empowerment:** It is the first key ingredient of poverty removal. People with political agency will demand and obtain better education and healthcare.
  - It will also **erode the structural inequality and sectarian divides** in society.
- **Redistribution of Wealth:** The World Inequality Report, 2022 suggests **levying a modest progressive wealth tax on multimillionaires.**
  - Given the large volume of wealth concentration, modest progressive taxes can generate significant revenues for governments.
  - A global effective wealth tax rate of 1.2% for wealth over $1 million could **generate revenues of 2.1% of global income.**
- **Increasing the Reach of Basic Necessities:** Given the growing inequality in India, the direction that public policy should now take is evident; there is a need to spread health and education far more widely amidst the population.
  - By **ensuring universal access to public funded high quality services** like Public health and education, social security benefits, employment guarantee schemes; inequality can be reduced to a great extent.

- **Employment Generation:** The hindrance in the growth of manufacturing sectors like Textile, Clothing, automobiles, consumer goods etc. is an important reason for rising inequalities.
  - **Labor-intensive manufacturing has the potential to absorb millions of people** who are leaving farming while the service sector tends to benefit the urban middle class.
- **Mitigating Wage Inequalities:** The [International Labour Organisation (ILO)](#) recommends that a minimum wage floor should be set in a manner that balances the needs of workers and their families with broader economic factors.
- **Promoting Civil Society:** Providing a **greater voice to traditionally oppressed and suppressed groups**, including by enabling civil society groups like unions and association within these groups.
  - Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes should be motivated to become entrepreneurs, **schemes like [Stand up India](#) need to be expanded** to widen its reach by increasing funding.
- **Imbibing Gender Equality:** There is a need to remove barriers to women's full inclusion in the economy, including through **access to the labor market, property rights and targeted credit and investments.**
  - Encouraging more women to become entrepreneurs will provide a long-term solution.
  - By creating jobs and furthering investment in health and education, **entrepreneurship among women could transform India's economy and society.**

Conclusion

- It is clear that Covid-19 pandemic has more severely affected the vulnerable section of the society, especially in terms of employment and education. Concerted efforts are required, for ensuring enabling conditions for these sections to be educated and employed along with social security provisions, to provide them a level playing field in the labour market.
- Moreover, wealth taxes on the super-rich and a robust redistribution regime could arrest, if not reverse, the current trend of rising inequality.

Climate Change and Food Insecurity

The world is on the cusp of transformation to make the **world free of hunger by 2030** and deliver promises

for **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, with strong cooperation and partnership between governments, citizens and the private sector.

Governments at the **UNFCCC COP26 Summit** also put forth a sum of U.S.$356 million in new support from contributing national and regional governments to protect the most vulnerable.

As much as all these efforts are appreciated, the plight of food security in the world is still prevalent and is further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic as well.

Ensuring global **food security** requires **reimagining the food system** towards balancing growth and sustainability, Mitigating climate change, ensuring healthy, safe and affordable food and investments for the same from governments and the private sector.

Climate Crisis and Hunger

➢ **Climate Change and Food System Interkink:** The climate crisis impacts all parts of the global food system — from production to consumption.

  ❍ It **destroys land and crops, kills livestock, depletes fisheries,** and cuts off transport to markets which further impacts food production, availability, diversity, access, and safety.

    ■ At the same time, food systems also impact the environment and are a driver of climate change. Estimates show that the food sector emits around 30% of the world's greenhouse gases.

  ❍ The COP26 came after the pioneering **UN Food Systems Summit** which was a wake-up call that **food systems are unequal and broken** as 811 million people are going to bed hungry.

➢ **Climate-Hunger Crisis Current Scenario:** The agenda of ending world hunger and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030 is facing formidable challenges as the climate crisis worsen.

  ❍ This has been **exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic** that has doubled the population under chronic hunger from 130 million to 270 million.

  ❍ The **UN World Food Programme (WFP)** shows that a **2°C rise in average global temperature** from pre-industrial levels **will see a staggering 189 million additional people** in the grip of hunger.

  ❍ As per the **latest IPCC Report**, the climate crisis will not only impact food production and livelihoods but also threaten nutrition through multi-breadbasket failures.

➢ **Vulnerable, Least Emitter but Worst Sufferer:** Vulnerable communities, a vast majority of whom rely on subsistence agriculture, fishing, and livestock and, who contribute the least to the climate crisis, will continue to bear the brunt of the impacts with limited means to cushion the blow.

  ❍ The top 10 most food-insecure countries contribute 0.08% of global carbon emissions.

    ■ Crop failures, water scarcity, and declining nutrition threaten millions who rely on agriculture, fishing, and livestock.

  ❍ The **absence of social protection measures** such as food safety nets forces the food insecure to depend on humanitarian aid for survival.

➢ **WFP's Initiative for Climate Crisis and Food Security:** The WFP is working with communities to adapt to the changing climate that threatens their ability to grow food, secure incomes, and withstand shocks. It has supported 39 governments, helping them realise their national climate ambitions.

  ❍ In 2020, the **WFP implemented climate risk management solutions** in 28 countries, which benefited more than six million people so that they are better prepared for climate shocks and stresses and can recover faster.

  ❍ **In India**, the WFP and the Environment Ministry are also **planning to develop a best practice model on adaptation and mitigation** with potential support from the Adaptation Fund

Way Forward

➢ **Building Resilience for the Poor:** Adaptation and resilience-building for poor and vulnerable communities are critical for food security.

  ❍ Considering the fact that the adverse impacts of climate extremes on people and nature will continue to increase with rising temperatures, there is a **strong emphasis on the urgency of scaling up action and support** (finance, capacity-building, and technology transfer), to **enhance adaptive capacity**, strengthen resilience and **reduce vulnerability to climate change** in line with the best available science, and **considering the priorities and needs of developing country parties.**

➢ **Role of India: India has a huge role to play** with its ongoing and now substantial policy work at the national and State levels.

Note:

- It has to transform its food systems making it more inclusive and sustainable for higher farm incomes and nutrition security.
- **Diversification of cropping patterns** towards **millets**, **pulses**, **oilseeds**, **horticulture** is needed for more equal distribution of water, sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture.

- **Adaptation Finance:** The recent pledges made by the developed countries on enhancing **climate finance** to support adaptation in developing countries is a welcome gesture.
  - However, the **current climate finance** for adaptation and base of stakeholders **remain insufficient** to respond to worsening climate change impacts.
  - Multilateral development banks, other financial institutions, and the private sector shall **enhance finance mobilization to deliver the scale of resourcesneeded** to achieve climate plans, particularly for adaptation.
  - The country parties shall also continue to **explore innovative approaches** and instruments for mobilizing finance for adaptation from private sources.

- **Multi-Pronged Approach for Tackling Climate-Hunger Crisis:** Creating **resilient livelihoods and food security solutions** by protecting and improving the livelihood of vulnerable communities.
  - The **adaptation of climate-resilient food crops**, such as **millets**, for nutritional security.
  - **Enabling women's control and ownership** of production processes and assets and increased value addition and local solutions.
  - Promoting a resilient agriculture sector by **creating sustainable opportunities, access to finance**, and **innovation for small-holder farmers,** with climate information and preparedness.
  - **Building capacity and knowledge of civil society** and governments for vulnerability analysis to increase food security by addressing the link between food security and climate risk.

- **Sustainable Food Systems:** Sustainability has to be achieved in production, value chains and consumption. Climate-resilient cropping patterns have to be promoted. Instead of giving input subsidies, cash transfers can be given for farmers for sustainable agriculture.

- **Role of Non-Agriculture Sector:** Labour-intensive manufacturing and services can reduce pressure on agriculture.

- Income from agriculture is not sufficient for small holders and informal workers.
- Strengthening rural MSMEs and food processing sector is part of the solution.

Conclusion

Reimagining food systems requires looking at food systems through the prism of climate change adaptation and mitigation, which must also entail making them resilient to climate change and pandemics while making them green and sustainable.

Women Workforce and Crime Against Women

Women's education has increased over the last two decades and **fertility rates have fallen** — both have contributed to increasing participation of women in the paid labour force elsewhere in the world. However, this is not the case in India.

India's **Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR)** has fallen from 31.2% in 2011-12 to 24.5% in 2018-19.

Among several other factors including domestic responsibilities, societal norms, limited opportunities and lack of supportive infrastructure, a major explanation for women dropping out of the labour force is the fear of sexual violence (broadly categorising crime against women).

The Plight of Female Labour Force Participation in India

- **Declining FLFPR:** India's female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) is a puzzling feature of its economy.
  - Though output has more than doubled and the number of working-age women has grown by a quarter over the last two decades, the **number of women in jobs has declinedby 10 million.**

- **Data Presented by Gender Parity Indices:** Global indices and gender empowerment measures also paint a dismal picture.
  - The **Global Gender Gap Index, 2021** revealed that **India ranks 140th of 156** countries, compared to its 98th position in 2006.
  - India's FLFPR (24.5% in 2018-19) has also been **declining** and is **well below the global average of 45%.**

Note:

- ➢ **Current Education and Employment Scenario:** India neared [gender equality at the primary level](#) about a decade after the enactment of the [Right to Education Act, 2009](#). Between 2011 and 2019, there has been an increase in the rate of women enrolling in [higher education](#).
  - ○ With more women pursuing higher education, a larger number of women is also expected to enter the job market. However, the actual situation is contradictory.
  - ○ India's FLFPR has suffered since the start of the 2000s; the unemployment rate of women in the country has rapidly been increasing.
  - ○ Notwithstanding the higher number of women being educated, they are less likely to join the workforce.
- ➢ **Factors Impeding Women's Labour Market Choices:** Evidence shows strong correlations between a declining FLFPR and barriers that impede women's labour-market choices. These barriers include:
  - ○ **Domestic responsibilities** and the burden of unpaid care
  - ○ Occupational segregation and **limited opportunities to enter non-traditional sectors**
  - ○ **Inadequate supportive infrastructure** such as creches or piped water and cooking fuel
  - ○ **Lack of safety** and mobility options
  - ○ The interplay of **social norms** and identities
  - ○ **Crimes against women and girls (CaW&G)**; it is arguably the most prevalent barrier to women's equal participation in and contribution to society.

Crime Against Women Affecting FLFPR

- ➢ **An NCRB Report based Study:** A study analysed data from [Crime in India](#) published by the [National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)](#) and assessed crimes that deter women from stepping out to work and raise perceptions of lack of safety.
  - ○ It found out that while the all-India **FLFPR saw an 8 percentage-point decline**, the rate of **CaW&G more than tripled** to 57.9% between 2011-17.
  - ○ The rates of **K&A (Kidnapping and Abduction)** and sexual harassment **increased by more than three times**, and the rates of rape and molestation about doubled.

- ➢ **FLFPR Inversely Proportional to Rise in CaW&G:** The same study found that there is a **negative correlation** between the **FLFPR and rate of CaW&G** and the **FLFPR and K&A rate.**
  - ○ The two can be considered a strong factor that can influence women's willingness and ability to step out for work.
    - ■ It **discourages women** from participating in the workforce.
  - ○ This **strengthens the hypothesis** that CaW&G leads to the **regressive societal norm** of why women should not step out of their homes.
- ➢ **State Related Data on FLFPR and CaW&G:** The states of Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Chhattisgarh and Sikkim **maintain a high FLFPR against a lower rate of crime** in comparison with other states and Union territories.
  - ○ The states which had the lowest FLFPR, Bihar, Delhi, Assam and Tripura, also had among the highest crime rates.
    - ■ **Bihar's** rate of **CaW&G approximately tripled while FLFPR nearly halved** in the time period of 2011-17. It had the lowest FLFPR in India.
    - ■ **Tripura** also saw the **biggest decline (by 24% points) in FLFPR along with a rise in CaW&G** by 51% (in 2017).
    - ■ **Delhi's rate of CaW&G rose** by more than four times from 31% to 133% as its **FLFPR declined marginally.**
    - ■ In **Assam**, the **rate of CaW&G quadrupled and its FLFPR declined.**

Way Forward

- ➢ **The SAFETY Approach:** While violence against women and girls is one among several barriers that restrict their mobility and reduces the likelihood of their labour force participation, a **comprehensive mechanism** is needed **that involves the state, institutions, communities and households** to address this challenge.
  - ○ Adopting a **'SAFETY'** framework that focuses on **Services**, **Attitudes**, **Focus** on community, **Empowerment** of women, **Transport** and other infrastructure, and **Youth** interventions can be a **critical element in framing policies** and interventions to stop crimes against women and girls.

➢ **Breaking the Restrictive Societal Norms of Keeping Women Indoors:** The public focus on external violence is not only misplaced in the context of women's employment, but the consequent push to keep women indoors also completely masks the fact that the bulk of violence against women is perpetrated by those known to them — husband, partner, family, friends.
  ○ Keeping women locked indoors is absolutely the wrong policy for multiple reasons; most of all it **fails in its stated objective**, **i.e. to protect them from violence.**
  ○ Staying indoors is not what the women need, but a **better policy approach and access to job opportunities and self-reliance** is required to keep them safe inside and outside the house.

➢ **Realising the Significance of Women Participation:** Achieving gender equality could annually add $770 billion to India's GDP by 2025. This opportunity predominantly hinges on women participating in the labour force in greater numbers.
  ○ The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** estimates that **India's GDP would be 27% greater if women participated in economic activities** in numbers equal to those of men.
  ○ There are no quick fixes to addressing gender inequality; this requires a **substantial transformation of gender norms in India.**

Conclusion

Increase in the number of women in higher education does not automatically imply an increase in the female labour force participation. Restrictive societal norms, lack of opportunities and the fear of becoming victims of sexual crimes are still major hurdles in their path to become an active participant in the country's economy. **Education and economic independence are the only solution for women's empowerment.**

NFHS-5: A Closer Look

The **National Family Health Survey (NFHS)** is a large-scale, multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India.

The key results from the second phase of the **latest NFHS (NFHS-5, 2019-21)** have been released which comes out as a mixed verdict, containing both cheer and alarm in abundant measure.

These results, in particular, are of great significance and must be given appropriate attention as it is not a hastily put together state-of-health index but a detailed, comprehensive, multi-dimensional report card on the state of India's demographic and health trajectory.

Key Findings of the Survey

➢ **NFHS 4 & 5, a Comparison:** There are many pluses in the report card of NFHS-5.
  ○ **Improvements have been witnessed in several dimensions** such as educational attainment, institutional deliveries, vaccinations, infant mortality etc.
  ○ Irrespective of the pace, the progress shall be appreciated especially given the abysmal state of India's health infrastructure which has been tragically apparent since the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

➢ **Decline in TFR, a Major Positive:** The **Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has been falling** over time and has **now reached (at 2.0)** just below the replacement rate of 2.1.
  ○ This is true across all States of India which means that the total population has stabilised.

➢ **Difference in Sex Ratio at Birth and at Adulthood:** For the first time in India, between 2019-21, there were **1,020 adult women per 1,000 men.**
  ○ However, the data shall not undermine the fact that India still has a **sex ratio at birth (SRB) more skewed towards boys than the natural SRB** (which is 952 girls per 1000 boys).
  ○ Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Bihar, Delhi, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Maharashtra are the major states with low SRB.

➢ **Poor Performance in Dealing with Anaemia:** The incidence of anaemia in under-5 children (from 58.6 to 67%), **women** (53.1 to 57%) and men (22.7 to 25%) has **worsened in all States of India** (20%-40% incidence is considered moderate).
  ○ Barring Kerala (at 39.4%), all States are in the "severe" category.

➢ **Performance of Malnutrition Indicators:** The three indicators of **malnutrition**; stunting (low height-for-age), wasting (low weight-for-height) and underweight (low weight-for-age), **show an overall improvement.**
  ○ However, this overall improvement creates an anomaly as in Phase 1 of the NFHS-5, several States

revealed a worsening in one or more of these indicators, whereas in Phase 2, none of the States showed a worsening.

- It might be possible that the covid-19 affected the survey in Phase 2, leading to **undercounting of incidences.**

○ Additionally, an **increase is witnessed in the proportion of overweight** children, women and men which also reflects malnutrition leading to serious health consequences in the form of **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)**.

Issues Associated

➢ **Non-Inclusion of Micronutrients:** In addition to anthropometric measures, **lack of adequate nutrition is also measured by micronutrient deficiencies,** i.e. lack of vitamins and minerals that are essential for body functions such as producing enzymes, hormones and other substances needed for growth and development.

○ The **NFHS does not have data on micronutrients.**

➢ **'One Size Fits All' Approach for Monitoring Dietary Intake:** Indian diets display a rich diversity. Many traditional diets reflect both local climatic conditions as well as a multiplicity of sources of essential nutrients, such as proteins, fats etc.

○ Policing of diets, by **imposing an unnatural uniformity,** and preventing access to animal protein for large sections of Indians that are not traditionally vegetarian is likely to **reduce micronutrient diversity and contribute to poor health outcomes.**

➢ **Covid-19 Blame Game:** The poor health outcomes have been **argued to reflect the effect of Covid-19** as the data for the Phase-2 of NFHS-5 have been, to a large extent, collected during the highly unusual conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

○ However, the deterioration in public health indicators **cannot be attributed entirely to the pandemic.**

○ The Pandemic might have added fuel to the fire of poor public health, but it did not cause the fire.

➢ **Unethical Delivery Practices Affecting Women Health:** The survey focuses on women's empowerment, autonomy and mobility indicators and shines a spotlight on women's reproductive health.

○ However, as per data, cesarean births have increased dramatically; **in private health facilities, 47.5% births are by C-section** (14.3% in public health facilities).

○ These figures are highly unnatural and **call into question unethical practices of private health providerswho prioritise monetary gain** over women's health.

➢ **Limited Male Engagement in Family Planning: Female sterilisation** continues to **dominate as the modern method of contraceptives** in States like Andhra Pradesh (98%), Telangana (93%), Kerala (88%), Karnataka (84%), Bihar (78%) and Maharashtra (77%).

○ Male engagement in family planning continues to be limited as seen by the low uptake of condoms and male sterilisation across the States.

Way Forward

➢ **Policy Interventions to Address Health Concerns:** The survey highlights deep inequalities in health outcomes.The overall evidence is compelling that health ought to be a matter of concern for the governments at national and state level.

○ **An action plan to improve India's health needs** is required **which also needs to be inclusive**, firm in its commitment, and backed by solid resources.

➢ **Lessons to be Taken from NFHS:** The NFHS findings are a **reminder of the urgent need to close gaps in girls' education** and **address the pathetic nutritional status** of women and children.

○ The impact of the pandemic may also be noted; the **disruption it caused to services such as balanced nutrition for children must be acknowledged**.

○ Such scenarios underscore the **need for building resilient and fortified systems** capable of delivering in the most trying circumstances.

➢ **Collaboration in Health Sector:** Current times require **integrated and coordinated efforts from all health institutions,** academia and other partners directly or indirectly associated with the health care services **to make the basic as well as advanced health services accessible**, affordable and acceptable to all.

➢ **Behaviour-Change Communication Strategy:** The Government must adopt a targeted social and behaviour-change communication strategy to **ensure that men also take responsibility for family planning.**

Conclusion

➢ The NFHS is second only to the exhaustive data that the decennial population census provides. It ought to be treated as an important turning point for policy-making in India.

Note:

➢ The greater idea for the states as well as the centre is to recognise it as a matrix to work on and improve the development indicators further.

Menace of Girl-Child Marriage in India

Child marriage is a global issue fuelled by gender inequality, poverty, social norms and insecurity, and has devastating consequences all over the world. High levels of child marriage reflect discrimination and lack of opportunities for women and girls in society.

Despite various statutory provisions in India and initiatives like **Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes**, the progress is not very impressive. **Nationwide Covid-19 Lockdown** further deteriorated the scenario.

Child Marriage in India

➢ **Prevalence:United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** estimates suggest that each year, at least 1.5 million girls under 18 get married in India, which makes it home to the largest number of child brides in the world - accounting for a third of the global total.

➢ **Root Causes of Girl Child Marriage:** Child marriages happen within a social and economic context, embedded in a **set of beliefs about the status of women and girls, and their role as wives** and mothers.

  ○ Associated with these are the reality of domestic labour and care work performed by women; a **belief that girls need to marry early for safety and protection;** and **apprehensions about the risk to family honour** or economic burden.

  ○ Another cause include the **preference for sons which result in more than the preferred number of daughters.**

    ▪ The problem is not much prevalent in rich families who can afford to raise more children.

    ▪ However, for poorer families, one solution is to marry these daughters off prematurely, thus creating a supply of child, even prepubescent, brides.

  ○ Some parents consider the **age period of 15-18 as unproductive**, especially for girls, so they start finding a match for their child during this age period.

    ▪ Underaged girls are more prone to child marriage than boys.

    ▪ Moreover, the **Right To Education Act** makes education free and compulsory up to the age of 14 only.

➢ **NFHS Findings about Child Marriage:** Data from the fourth round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS4) in 2015-16 shows that pre-Covid, one in four girls in India was being married before 18.

  ○ Around 8% of women aged 15-19 years were mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey.

    ▪ As per reports, **more child marriages have been noticed during the Covid pandemic.**

  ○ The first phase findings of **NFHS5** (2019-20) also **do not show any substantial improvements towards ending child marriage.**

Child Marriage - Associated Issues

➢ **Human Rights Violation:** Child marriage violates girls' human rights and makes them almost invisible to policy.

  ○ Some of the basic rights include the **Right to Education**, **Right to Rest and Leisure**, **Right to Protection from Mental or Physical Abuse** including Rape and Sexual Exploitation.

➢ **Disempowerment of Women:** Since child brides are not able to complete their education, they **remain dependent and underpowered** which acts as a big hurdle towards achieving gender equality.

➢ **Associated Health Issues:** The costs of child marriage include **teenage pregnancy and child stunting, population growth, poor learning outcomes** for children and the **loss of women's participation in the workforce.**

  ○ The low domestic status of teenage wives typically condemns them to long hours of domestic labour; **poor nutrition and anaemia; social isolation;domestic violence** and lesser decision-making powers within the home.

  ○ Poor education, **malnutrition**, and early pregnancy also lead to low birth weight of babies, perpetuating the **intergenerational cycle of malnutrition**.

➢ **Inefficiency of CCTs in Ending Child Marriage:** Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes give money to households on the condition that they comply with certain predefined requirements.

  ○ CCTs have been the main policy instrument introduced by most states in the last two decades to end child marriage.

Note:

○ However, they **alone cannot change social norms.** With one-size-fits-all conditions, that **may not always be responsive to the lived realities of teenage girls.**

Way Forward

➢ **Policy Interventions:** Legislation is one important part of the approach towards eliminating girl-child marriage from India.

○ Karnataka amended the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act** in 2017, **declaring every child marriage** *void ab initio*, making it a cognisable offence, and introducing a minimum period of rigorous imprisonment for all who enable a child marriage. **Similar can be done at the central level.**

➢ **Governmental Action for Social Change:** Field bureaucrats across multiple departments, including teachers, anganwadi supervisors, panchayat and revenue staff, all of whom interact with rural communities, **should be notified as child marriage prohibition officers.**

○ Moreover, **decentralising birth and marriage registration to gram panchayats** will protect women and girls with essential age and marriage documents, thus better enabling them to claim their rights.

➢ **Drivers of Social Change to Play a Fundamental Role:** These include expansion of secondary education, access to safe and affordable public transport, and support for young women to apply their education to earn a livelihood.

○ **Expansion of education goes far beyond mere access to it.** Girls must be able to attend school regularly, remain there, and achieve.

■ **States can leverage their network** of residential schools, girls' hostels, and public transport, especially in **underserved areas**, to ensure that teenage girls do not get pushed out of education.

○ Regular **gender equality conversations** need to be held with high school girls and boys to shape progressive attitudes that will sustain into adulthood.

➢ **Empowerment Measures:** Empowerment measures, too, are required to end child marriage, such as **community engagement through programmes** like Mahila Samakhya.

○ **Children's village assemblies** in the gram panchayats across India can provide a **platform for children to voice their concerns.**

➢ **Economic Growth, Essential for Prevention of Child Marriage:** Ensuring later marriage for girls requires **India to evolve not only culturally but also economically.**

○ Some of this has happened, as Indians have become more prosperous, and as extreme poverty levels have declined, decline in child brides has been witnessed.

○ **Economic growth will save Indian girls from child marriage**. Combined with educational and **cultural awareness against a sex preference,** which no doubt will take longer; economic success a lasting solution.

Conclusion

➢ Drivers for social change like education, legal provisions and initiatives for creating awareness have still a lot to cover with respect to eliminiating girl child marriage. Moreover, it is a change that has to come from within.

MGNREGA Delay in Payments

The **People's Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG)** recently released a tracker with important metrics on **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** implementation. It showed that funds allocation this financial year (FY 2021) is 34% lower than the revised budget allocation of last year. And this year's funds have been exhausted.

Moreover, there is a pending arrears of Rs. 17,543 crore from previous years. In a welcome move since the media reports, the Chief Ministers of Odisha and Tamil Nadu wrote to the Prime Minister seeking additional funds for MGNREGA.

In the light of this, there is a need to review the working of MGNREGA and analyse the issues associated with its implementation.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

➢ MGNREGA is one of the largest work guarantee programmes in the world.

➢ **Objective:** The primary objective of the scheme is to guarantee 100 days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work.

➢ **Legal Right to Work:** Unlike earlier employment guarantee schemes, the act aims at addressing the causes of chronic poverty through a rights-based framework.

Note:

- ❍ At least one-third of beneficiaries have to be women.
- ❍ Wages must be paid according to the statutory minimum wages specified for agricultural labourers in the state under the **Minimum Wages Act, 1948**.
- ➢ **Demand-Driven Scheme**: The most important part of MGNREGA's design is its legally-backed guarantee for any rural adult to get work within 15 days of demanding it, failing which an 'unemployment allowance' must be given.
  - ❍ This demand-driven scheme enables the self-selection of workers.
- ➢ **Decentralised planning:** There is an emphasis on strengthening the process of decentralisation by giving a significant role in **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)** in planning and implementing these works.
  - ❍ The act mandates Gram sabhas to recommend the works that are to be undertaken and at least 50% of the works must be executed by them.

Issues Associated With Implementation of Scheme

- ➢ **Delay and Insufficiency in Funds Dispersal**: Most states have failed to disburse wages within 15 days as mandated by MGNREGA. In addition, workers are not compensated for a delay in payment of wages.
  - ❍ This has turned the scheme into a supply-based programme and subsequently, workers had begun to lose interest in working under it.
  - ❍ There is ample evidence by now, including an admission by the Ministry of Finance, that delays in wage payments are a consequence of insufficient funds.
- ➢ **Caste Based Segregation:** There were significant variations in delays by caste. While 46% of payments to SC workers and 37% for ST workers were completed in the mandated seven-day period, it was a dismal 26% for non-SC/ST workers.
  - ❍ The negative impact of caste-based segregation was felt acutely in poorer States such as Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal.
- ➢ **Ridiculously Low Wage Rate:** Currently, the MNREGA wage rates of at least 17 of the 21 major states are even lower than the state minimum wage for agriculture. The shortfall is in the range of 2-33% of the minimum wage.
- ➢ **Ineffective Role of PRI:** With very little autonomy, gram panchayats are not able to implement this act in an effective and efficient manner.

- ➢ **Large Number of Incomplete works:** There has been a delay in the completion of works under MGNREGA and inspection of projects has been irregular. Also, there is an issue of quality of work and asset creation under MGNREGA.
- ➢ **Fabrication of Job cards:** There are several issues related to the existence of fake job cards, the inclusion of fictitious names, missing entries and delays in making entries in job cards.

Way Forward

- ➢ **Strengthening the Scheme:**
  - ❍ There is a need for better coordination between various government departments and the mechanism to allot and measure the work.
  - ❍ This is one of the best welfare schemes in recent years and it has helped the rural poor. However, government officials must take the initiative to implement the scheme and must not block the work.
- ➢ **Gender Wage Gap:** Some discrepancies in the payouts need to be addressed, too. Women in the sector, on an average, earn 22.24% less than their male counterparts.
- ➢ **Short-Term Measures:**
  - ❍ State governments must ensure that public work gets started in every village. Workers turning up at the worksite should be provided work immediately, without much delay.
  - ❍ Local bodies must proactively reach out to returned and quarantined migrant workers and help those in need to get job cards.
  - ❍ Adequate facilities such as soap, water, and masks for workers must be provided free of cost, at the worksite.
  - ❍ At this time, there is a need to speed up the payments to MGNREGA workers. Preferably, cash needs to reach the workers easily and efficiently.
- ➢ **Long-Term Measures:**
  - ❍ The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of decentralised governance.
    - ■ **Gram panchayats** need to be provided with adequate resources, powers, and responsibilities to sanction works, provide work on demand, and authorise wage payments to ensure there are no delays in payments.

Note:

- ❍ MGNREGA should be converged with other schemes of the government. For example, **Green India initiative**, <u>Swachh Bharat Abhiyan</u> etc.
- ❍ **Social Auditing** creates accountability of performance, especially towards immediate stakeholders.
  - ■ Hence, there is a need to create awareness regarding government policies and measures in rural areas.

Policy Action Against Drug Abuse

The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has proposed certain changes to some provisions of the **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985**. The recommendations have assumed importance in the backdrop of some high-profile drug cases including the recent arrest of Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan.

One of the recommendations of the Ministry is to <u>decriminalise the possession of narcotic drugs in smaller quantities</u> for personal purposes. Another suggestion is that persons using drugs in smaller quantities be treated as victims.

However, there is a need to understand the underlying reasons for widespread drug abuse in India and then take comprehensive actions.

Causes of Drug Addiction in India

- ➤ **Socioeconomic Status:** Low income, unemployment, income inequality, lower educational levels, limited opportunities for advancement and lack of health services.
- ➤ **Social Capital**: Low social support and reduced community involvement.
- ➤ **Environmental Events:** Natural disasters, war, conflict, climate change, environmental degradation and migration.
- ➤ **Social change which are** associated with changes in income, urbanization and environmental degradation.
- ➤ **Stress Buster**: Sometimes students tend to get into drugs because of their studies or work pressure. Also, students coming from other states find it difficult to cope up in metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Delhi.
  - ❍ It is generally seen that an unemployed youth, out of frustration, ends up in taking drugs.

- ➤ **Peer pressure** and other psychological factors can cause teens to engage in risky behaviours, leading to substance abuse.
  - ❍ Youth can get attracted to the glamour attached to drug taking.
  - ❍ Sometimes also, out of fun or in order to experiment, a youth ends up in taking drugs.
- ➤ **Suffering and deprivation**: People in the lower income group who cannot have an adequate amount of food, take drugs to sleep or relax.
- ➤ **Flaws in the legal system:**
  - ❍ The cause behind drug menace is the drug cartels, crime syndicates and ultimately the ISI which is the biggest supplier of drugs.
    - ■ Rave parties have been reported in the country where intake of narcotic substances is observed.
    - ■ These parties are orchestrated by the drug syndicates who have their own vested interests.
    - ■ Social media plays an important role in organising these parties.
    - ■ The police have not been able to control such parties.
  - ❍ <u>Smuggling of drugs</u> through the states like Punjab, Assam and Uttar Pradesh which share the border with neighbouring countries.
  - ❍ Normal food products like noodles, pan masala and gutka laced with drugs are sold to school and college students.
  - ❍ The African as well as the Southasian route being misused to bring drugs into the country.

Impacts of Drug Addiction

- ➤ Higher risk of unintentional injuries, accidents, <u>domestic violence incidents</u>, medical problems, and death.
- ➤ Economic potential gets wasted as the youth is indulged in drug abuse and <u>demographic dividend</u> suffers.
- ➤ Affects relationships with family, friends creating emotional and social problems
- ➤ Increases financial burden due to diversion of funding and resources to other areas such as police patrolling and rehabilitation centres.
- ➤ Drug abuse seriously affects our health, security, peace and development.
  - ❍ Increase in diseases like <u>Hepatitis B</u>and <u>C</u>, <u>Tuberculosis</u>
- ➤ Drug dependence, low self esteem, hopelessness can lead to criminal action and even suicidal tendencies.

Note:

Challenges to Curb the Drug Menace

➢ **Legally Available Drugs:** Such as **tobacco**is a huge problem which is usually seen as a gateway drug which children take just to experiment with.

➢ **Lack of Availability of Rehabilitation Centres:** There is a lack of rehabilitation centres. Also, NGOs operating de-addiction centres in the country, have failed to provide the required kind of treatment and therapy.

➢ **Smuggling of Drugs:** Smuggling of drugs through the states like Punjab, Assam and Uttar Pradesh which share the border with neighbouring countries.

➢ **Lack of availability of rehabilitation centres** in the country is a big issue. Also, NGOs operating de-addiction centres in the country, have failed to provide the required kind of treatment and therapy.

The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act

➢ India is a **signatory to the UN Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs 1961**, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971 and the Convention on Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988 which prescribe various forms of control aimed to achieve the dual objective of limiting the use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes as well as preventing the abuse of the same.

➢ The administrative and legislative setup in the field of Narcotics has been put in place in the country in accordance with the spirit of the UN Conventions. The basic legislative instrument of the Government of India in this regard is the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.

➢ The Act provides stringent provisions for the control and regulation of operations relating to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

➢ It also provides for forfeiture of property derived from, or used in, illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

➢ It also provides for death penalty in some cases where a person is a repeat offender.

Way Forward

➢ **Scientific evidence-based treatment** needs to be made available for people with Substance use disorders – at an adequate scale.

➢ **Evidence-based substance use prevention programmes** are needed to protect the young people.

○ Prevention programmes must address the risk and protective factors aimed at not just preventing substance use but ensuring that young people grow and stay healthy into adulthood, enabling them to realize their potential and become productive members of their community and society

➢ A **conducive legal and policy environment** is needed to help control drug problems.

○ It is important that laws and policies are aimed at providing health and welfare services to people affected by substance use rather than subjecting them to the criminal justice system.

○ There needs to be efficient coordination between the drug supply control sector as well as the entities involved in drug demand reduction and harm reduction.

➢ The approach of **generating and utilizing scientific evidence** must continue.

○ Every piece of the data would serve to incrementally inform evidence-based policies and programmes to protect and promote the health and welfare of Indian society

Conclusion

The action plan aims at addiction-free India by countering the growing menace especially across colleges and universities. However, there is a need to design a more targeted campaign against drugs and substance abuse.

Addiction should not be seen as a character flaw, but as an ailment that any other person could be struggling with. Therefore, the stigma associated with drug taking needs to be reduced through social awareness and voluntary processes like medical help by psychologists, as well as strong support from family.

Social Media and Youth

Recently, **Instagram and its parent company, facebook** faced public backlash after Reports suggesting their usage has a negative impact on youth. Facebook whistleblower, Frances Haugen also revealed that for the big social media companies, profit is a higher priority than youth's mental health. This has brought forth the **impact such social media apps and websites have on the youth**.

Note:

Positive Impact of Social Media

➢ **Connection:** Platforms like Facebook and Twitter give teens and young adults a **sense of belonging and acceptance**. This is particularly true for those who feel isolated or marginalized, such as **LGBTQ youth**.
  ○ Its allround effect was clear **during the pandemic,** when it connected people and loved ones living in isolation.

➢ **Positive Inspiration:** Social networks can create **peer motivation** and inspire young people to develop new and healthy habits. Teens can also find **positive role models** online.

➢ **Identify Formation:** Adolescent years are a time when youth are attempting to master their identities and finding their place in society. Social media provides a **forum for teens to practice skills** related to identity development.
  ○ **A study has shown** that young people who express their opinions on social media experience increased well-being.

➢ **Research: Mental health**experts and researchers can use it to **collect data** that subsequently informs research. In addition, **therapists and other professionals can network with each other** within online communities, thereby **expanding their knowledge and reach.**

➢ **Giving Voice:** Social media has allowed teens to develop **a voice of advocacy.** This can be **a very positive influence when exposed to the right outlets**.

➢ **Gateway to Talent: Social media outlets** provide students with **a platform to share their creativity and their ideas** with a neutral audience and get an honest response. The response becomes a guide for them to better shape their skills if they are looking to pursue that skill professionally.
  ○ For example, a photographer or videographer starts by posting their shots on Instagram. Many youngsters are already **making a career** out of it.

➢ **Boost to creativity:** Social media can help youth to **enhance their confidence and creativity**. It connects young people with a world of ideas and a world of possibilities. These platforms encourage students to exercise their creative skills in terms of engaging with their friends and their general audience.

➢ **Digital activism and social change:** Social media can be a **vehicle for making an impact in the community**. It exposes them to essential issues not only in their community but all over the world as well. **Greta Thunberg** is one such example of youth activism.

Negative Impact of Social Media

➢ **Mental Health problems:** Studies have found **close links between social media usage and teen depression**. As per a study, youth with moderate to severe depressive symptoms were **nearly twice** as likely to use social media almost constantly.Teenagers on social media spend much of their time observing the lives and images of their peers. This leads to constant comparisons, which can damage self-esteem and body image, exacerbating depression and anxiety among adolescents.

➢ **Physical Health problems:** Over usage of social media has resulted in less time being spent on doing healthy, real-world activities. **sleep deprivation** due to staying up late to continue scrolling through their social media feeds, a habit known as **vamping**.

➢ **Social Relations:** Adolescence is a key time for developing social skills. However, as teens spend less time with their friends face-to-face, they have fewer opportunities to practise them.

➢ **Tech Addiction:** Scientists have found that teen social media overuse creates a **stimulation pattern similar to the pattern created by other addictive behaviors**.

➢ **Reinforcing Prejudices:** Social media allows r**eaffirmation of prejudices and stereotypes** they have about others. This is exacerbated by meeting like-minded people online, giving them a sense of community. For eg. **Flat Earth Theory.**

➢ **Cyberbullying or Trolling:** It has posed serious problems and has even led to cases of teenage suicides. Moreover, even teens who commit acts of cyberbullying are more likely to report substance use, aggression, and delinquent behaviors.
  ○ **Online Child Sex Abuse and Exploitation:** A study in USA found that nearly **half of all American children** surveyed indicate that they have been **made to feel uncomfortable, been bullied, or had an interaction of a sexual nature while online.** In another study, it was found that over **50 percent of the victims of online sexual exploitation are between the ages of 12 and 15.**

Way Forward

➢ **A dedicated Social Media Policy:** A **holistic policy to regulate social media** by creating **accountability of social media platforms** to not target youth as **consumers or future consumers**. This will make the algorithms more attuned towards adults rather than youth.

Note:

➢ **Safeguards for inappropriate content:** Platforms should be **prohibited from recommending or amplifying certain content** involving sexual, violent, or other adult material, including gambling or other dangerous, abusive, exploitative, or wholly commercial content.

○ **Standards of Ethical Design:** These standards will set forth **principles for tech companies to prevent, avoid, and discourage digital distraction** and prioritize ethical human learning.

➢ **Digital Literacy:** It is important to not lose sight of the [digital divide](#) prevailing in India, esp. in the education sector. A policy decision in the name of protecting youth should not result in youth of underprivileged background to lose out on opportunities of the future.

➢ **Governance and Regulation:** Government regulation in form of **greater accountability of platforms for their content,** [Data Localization](#), **third party digital audits, strong** [Data Protection Laws](#) **etc.**

➢ **Role of Social Media Platforms:** Banning certain features like **"auto-play" sessions**, **push alerts** and more importantly to create products which do not target youth.

➢ **Role of Social Agencies:** Parents, Educational Institutions **and the society** as a whole have the important role to control the correct and limit the use of social media. This can be done by using **Parental control, limits to screen time, constant communication with kids, and promoting outdoor activities.**

Conclusion

The effects of digital technology on youth is important because these **effects will colour their adult behaviour** and the way future societies will behave. It is interesting that tech titans like **Bill Gates and Steve Jobs** severely restricted their youth's access to technology.

All technologies have obvious benefits and potential harmful effects. As in mostly everything in life, the **key could lie in moderate use of social media.**

Reimagining Global Food Systems

Recently, the first and historic **United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) 2021** concluded after an intense **'bottom-up' process** conceived in 2019 by the UN Secretary-General to find solutions and **'catalyse momentum'** to transform the way the world produces, consumes, and thinks about food and help address rising hunger.

In terms of larger goals, the food system transformation is considered essential in achieving the **sustainable development agenda 2030**. This makes strong sense as 11 [Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)](#) out of 17 are directly related to the food system.

In this context, it is imperative that the developing countries learn from the success of Indian food security.

Role Model For Other Countries

➢ **Lessons From India' Tryst With Food Insecurity:** The long journey from **chronic food shortage to surplus food producer** offers several interesting lessons for other developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the area of land reforms, public investments, institutional infrastructure, new regulatory systems, public support, and intervention in agri markets and prices and agri research and extension.

➢ **Diversification of Agriculture**: The period between 1991 to 2015, saw the diversification of agriculture beyond field crops and brought **greater focus on the horticulture, dairy, animal husbandry, and fishery sectors**.

○ The learnings encompassed elements of nutritional health, food safety and standards, sustainability, deployment of space technology, and the like.

➢ **Equitable Distribution of Food:** One of India's greatest contributions to equity in food is its **National Food Security Act 2013** that anchors the [Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)](#), the [Mid-Day meals (MDM)](#), and the [Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)](#).

○ Today, India's food safety nets collectively reach over a billion people.

➢ **Food Distribution:** Food safety nets and inclusion are linked with public procurement and buffer stock policy.

○ This was visible during the global food crises 2008-2012 and more recently during the COVID-19 pandemic fallout, whereby vulnerable and marginalised families in India continued to be buffered against the food crisis by its robust TPDS and buffer stock of food grains.

Challenges in Achieving Food Security

➢ **Climate Change and Unsustainable Agriculture:** Climate change and unsustainable use of land and water resources are the most formidable challenges food systems face today.

Note:

- ❍ The latest **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** report has set the alarm bells ringing, highlighting the urgency to act now.
- ➢ **Dietary diversity, nutrition, and related health outcomes** are another area of concern as a focus on rice and wheat has created nutritional challenges of its own.
  - ❍ India has taken a bold decision to fortify rice supplied through the **Public Distribution System with iron**.
  - ❍ Agricultural research institutes are about to release varieties of many crops having much higher nutrition as a long-term solution for undernutrition and malnutrition.
- ➢ **Prevalence of Undernourishment:** It is ironic that despite being a net exporter and food surplus country at the aggregate level, India has a 50% higher prevalence of undernutrition compared to the world average.
  - ❍ The high prevalence of undernutrition in the country does not seem to be due to food shortage or the low availability of food.
  - ❍ The Government of India and States are seriously concerned about this paradoxical situation of being food surplus and at the same time, having 15% of the population undernourished.
    - ■ They are trying to address other possible reasons for low nutrition through several nutritional interventions. As announced recently, the supply of **fortified rice in PDS** and **Poshan Abhiyan** are the two steps among many to address the challenge of undernutrition and malnutrition.
- ➢ **Reducing food wastage or loss of food** is a mammoth challenge and is linked to the efficiency of the food supply chain.
  - ❍ Food wastage in India exceeds Rs. 1-lakh crore.

Way Forward

- ➢ **Sustainable Approaches:** We must collaborate to invest, innovate, and create lasting solutions in sustainable agriculture contribution to equitable livelihood, food security, and nutrition.
  - ❍ This surely requires reimagining the food system towards the goal of balancing growth and sustainability, mitigating climate change, ensuring healthy, safe, quality, and affordable food, maintaining biodiversity, improving resilience, and offering an attractive income and work environment to smallholders and youth.

- ➢ **Crop Diversification:** Diversification of cropping patterns towards millets, pulses, oilseeds, horticulture is needed for more equal distribution of water, sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture.
- ➢ **Institutional Changes in Agri-Sector**: **Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)** should help get better prices for inputs and outputs for small holders.
  - ■ **E-Choupal** is an example of technology benefiting small farmers.
  - ❍ Women's empowerment is important particularly for raising incomes and nutrition.
    - ■ Women's cooperatives and groups like **Kudumbashree** in Kerala would be helpful.
- ➢ **Sustainable Food Systems:** Estimates show that the food sector emits around 30% of the world's **greenhouse gases.**
  - ❍ Sustainability has to be achieved in production, value chains and consumption.
- ➢ **Non-Agriculture Sector:** The role of non-agriculture is equally important for sustainable food systems. Labour-intensive manufacturing and services can reduce pressure on agriculture as income from agriculture is not sufficient for small holders and informal workers.
  - ❍ Therefore strengthening rural **Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs)** and food processing is part of the solution.

Conclusion

It is important to reiterate that hunger and food insecurity are key drivers of conflict and instability across the world. 'Food is peace', is a catchphrase often used to highlight how hunger and conflict feed on each other.

Disease Surveillance System

Surveillance is the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of outcome specific data for use in planning, implementing and evaluating public health policies and practices.

A disease surveillance system serves two key functions; **early warning of potential threats to public health** and **programme monitoring functions** which may be disease specific or multi-disease in nature.

In the second half of Twentieth century, as part of the global efforts for smallpox eradication and then to tackle many emerging and re-emerging diseases, many countries recognised the importance and started to invest

Note:

in and strengthen the disease surveillance system. These efforts received further boost with the emergence of **Avian flu** in 1997 and the **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)** outbreak in 2002-04.

Disease Surveillance System in India

➢ A major cholera outbreak in Delhi in 1988 and the Surat plague outbreak of 1994, nudged the Government of India to launch the **National Surveillance Programme for Communicable Diseases in 1997**.

➢ However, this initiative remained rudimentary till, in wake of the **SARS outbreak**, in 2004, India launched the **Integrated Disease Surveillance Project (IDSP)**.

➢ The focus under the IDSP was **to increase government funding for disease surveillance**, **strengthen laboratory capacity**, **train the health workforce** and have at least one trained epidemiologist in every district of India.

➢ With that, between 2004 and 2019, nearly every passing year, more outbreaks were detected and investigated than the previous year.

Epidemiology

➢ Epidemiology is the study and analysis of the distribution, patterns and determinants of health and disease conditions in defined populations.

➢ It is a cornerstone of public health, and shapes policy decisions and evidence-based practice by identifying risk factors for disease and targets for pre

➢ It is to initiate action to either prevent or stop further spread, a process termed as disease surveillance.

Need For Surveillance System

➢ **Better Management of Health Care System:** When diseases are predictable, theoretically, health systems can be designed to manage them.

  ○ For example, if hospitals know the seasonality of influenza, pneumonia or diarrhoea, they can plan for the surge in admissions, ensuring that beds and staff are available when needed.

➢ **Increased Threats From India's Diverse Nature:** In a country with 1.3 billion people, with a marked inequity in health care, dense urban populations, multiple contact with domestic and wild animals, frequent internal migration, a large diaspora, international air links and a warm climate, we are uniquely positioned to be most at threat from indigenous and imported infectious diseases.

➢ **Illness Identified at the Earliest:** In a well-functioning disease surveillance system, an increase in cases of any illness would be identified very quickly.

  ○ An example is Kerala, one of the best performing disease surveillance states in India, as it is picking the maximum Covid-19 cases; it could pick the first case of the Nipah virus in early September 2021.

  ○ On the contrary, cases of dengue, malaria, leptospirosis and scrub typhus received attention only when more than three dozen deaths were reported in multiple districts of Uttar Pradesh.

Way Forward

➢ **Increase the Funding:** The government resources allocated to preventive and promotive health services and disease surveillance need to be increased by the Union and State governments.

➢ **Train the Workforce:** The workforce in the primary health-care system in both rural and urban areas needs to be **retrained in disease surveillance** and public health actions.

  ○ The vacancies of surveillance staff at all levels need to be urgently filled in.

➢ **Capacity Building**: The laboratory capacity for **Covid-19**, developed in the last 18 months, needs to be planned and repurposed to increase the ability to conduct testing for other public health challenges and infections.

  ○ This should be linked to create a system in which samples collected are quickly transported and tested and the reports are available in real time.

➢ **Adopting 'One Health' Approach:** The emerging outbreaks of zoonotic diseases, be it the Nipah virus in Kerala or avian flu in other States as well as scrub typhus in Uttar Pradesh, are a reminder of the interconnectedness of human and animal health.

  ○ Thus, the **'One Health' approach** has to be promoted beyond policy discourses and made functional on the ground.

➢ **Strengthening the Registration System:** There has to be a dedicated focus on strengthening the **civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS)** systems and **medical certification of cause of deaths (MCCD)**.

  ○ These are complementary to disease surveillance systems and often where one is weak, the other is also functioning sub-optimally.

Note:

- ➤ **Need For Coordinated Action:** It is also time to ensure coordinated actions between the State government and municipal corporation to develop joint action plans and assume responsibility for public health and disease surveillance.
  - ❍ The allocation made by the **15th [Finance Commission](#)** to corporations for health should be used to activate this process.

Conclusion

The emergence and re-emergence of new and old diseases and an increase in cases of endemic diseases are partly unavoidable. We cannot prevent every single outbreak but with a well-functioning disease surveillance system and with application of principles of epidemiology, we can reduce their impact.

Indian States urgently need to do everything to start detecting diseases, which will prepare the country for all future outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics. This is amongst the first things, which Indian health policy makers should pay attention to.

'Good' Urbanisation

Cities are a technology for poverty reduction; New York City's GDP equals that of Russia with 6% of the people and 0.00005% of the land.

Covid-19 has catalysed a naive or hypocritical romanticism of villages that believes cities are undesirable technology because of their hostility to migrants, infection hotspot tendency, and diminished centrality to the future of work due to digitisation.

However, Covid-19 can be seen as an opportunity to catalyse **good urbanisation** by **empowering our cities with more power and funds**.

Debate — The Wizard vs The Prophet

- ➤ The post-Covid debate of **cities as "desirable or undesirable" technology** mirrors a 1960s debate about food chronicled in the wonderful book -**The Wizard and the Prophet by Charles Mann**.
- ➤ **Norman Borlaug — the wizard** — is a Nobel-winning scientist who believed science and technology will overcome challenges and he kickstarted the agricultural **[Green Revolution](#)**.
- ➤ **William Vogt — the prophet** — believed that prosperity would lead humans to ruin without cutting back and he kickstarted the environment movement.

- ➤ One says innovate; the other says retreat.

Is Urbanisation a Solution or Problem

- ➤ Urbanization yields several positive effects if it happens within the appropriate limits. Some of the positive implications of urbanization, therefore, include the **creation of employment opportunities**, **technological and infrastructural advancements**, improved **transportation and communication**, quality **educational and medical facilities**, and **improved standards of living**.
- ➤ However, extensive urbanization mostly results in adverse effects.
  - ❍ Urbanization attracts people to cities and towns which leads to a high population increase. With the increase in the number of people living in urban centers, there is a continued **scarcity of houses**.
  - ❍ The megacities — 10 million-plus populations — are **unpleasant places to live** for people who are not rich or powerful.
  - ❍ The **problem of joblessness** is highest in urban areas and it is even higher among educated people. It is estimated that more than half of unemployed youths around the globe live in metropolitan cities.
  - ❍ The cost of living in urban areas is very high. When this is combined with random and unexpected growth as well as unemployment, there is the spread of **unlawful resident settlements** represented by **slums and squatters**.
- ➤ Twenty-six of the world's 33 megacities are in developing countries because their rural areas lack rule of law, infrastructure and productive commerce.
  - ❍ Also there is no denying that even our non-megacities have inadequate planning, non-scalable infrastructure, unaffordable housing, and poor public transport.
- ➤ However, Megacities are not always cursed. Tokyo has a third of Japan's population but planning and investments have ensured that essential workers like teachers, nurses, and policemen rarely commute two hours.
  - ❍ The most insightful metric for city quality came from Italian physicist Cesare Marchetti who suggests that **30 minutes has been the most acceptable** — or shall we say civilised — commute through history (even as the method changed from walking to horses to bicycles to trains to cars).
  - ❍ The Marchetti constant is **almost impossible in Bengaluru** where taxi and auto speeds average 8 km/hour.

Note:

Major Issue of Urbanisation in India: Weak Local Urban Bodies

➢ The annual spend of the central government is about Rs 34 lakh crore and of 28 state governments is about Rs 40 lakh crore. But the **15th Finance Commission** estimates 2.5 lakh plus local government bodies only **spend Rs 3.7 lakh crore annually**.

➢ This apartheid has many reasons.

○ **Power:** Local government is curtailed by state government departments in water, power, schools, healthcare, etc (property tax collection would be 100% if municipal bodies supplied water).

○ I**ndependence:** Only 13% and 44% of the budget of rural and urban bodies was raised by themselves.

○ **Structure:** A Union ministry controlling finance and governance of the states would be unacceptable by the States but the Department of Local Self Government in the states has almost unlimited powers (suspension/removal of mayors and other elected representatives or supersession of elected local bodies is almost routine in most states).

○ Having separate central rural and urban ministries distorts policy.

○ **Lack of Good Leadership:** The lack of power and resources sets off a vicious cycle of decline because ambitious and talented individuals aren't attracted to city leadership.

Way Forward — Need For Good Urbanisation

➢ **For Socio- Economic Justice:** Good urbanisation is crucial to delivering **economic justice for women, children and other vulnerable sections of the society.**

○ Poor quality urbanisation has meant men-only migration, leaving the women with all the hard labour of farm work, raising the children, and looking after in-laws, while having virtually no recourse to health services, or to even emotional support of the spouse.

○ Village children going to abysmal-quality government schools without bilingual possibilities places them at a disadvantage in English-dominated entrance tests for professional courses and civil services.

○ Though not great by any standards, the quality of both healthcare and education in cities remains better than villages by miles.

➢ **Redeveloping Small and Medium Cities:** There is no denying that even our non-megacities have inadequate planning, non-scalable infrastructure, unaffordable housing, and poor public transport.

○ Thus it is impossible to have good urbanisation without focussing on the small and medium cities.

➢ **Getting Power and Funds to Cities:** Good urbanisation needs chief ministers to sacrifice self-interest. Their reward will be the hopes of millions waiting for high-quality jobs and opportunities.

○ India is lucky that Norman Borlaug prevailed over William Vogt in the food technology debate.

○ As the post-Covid urbanisation debate gains momentum, we hope the wizards will again prevail over the prophets.

e-Shram Portal: Scope of Improvement

Recently, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) launched the e-Shram portal for creating a National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW).

The portal came into being after the Supreme Court **directed the Government to complete the registration process of unorganized workers**.

This much needed step, considering the enactment of **Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008** is however, about a decade late to come into existence.

As much as appreciable the step is towards addressing the issues of the informal sector, the portal also raises concerns over issues like workers' data protection, digital illiteracy etc.

Unorganised Sector and e-Shram

➢ **Total Share:** According to the **Periodic Labour Force Survey** (PLFS 2018-19), **90% of workers were in the informal sector**, which is 419 million of the 465 million workers.

➢ **Impact of Pandemic:** Informal workers in rural and urban areas have been hit the most due to the pandemic, because of the seasonality of their employment and lack of formal employee-employer relationship.

➢ **e-Shram Portal:** It seeks to register an estimated 398-400 million unorganised workers and to issue an E-Shram card containing a 12 digit unique number.

Note:

- **Significance:**
  - **Accidental Coverage:** Each individual registering at the portal is eligible for an accidental cover of Rs 2 lakh for a year which is provided yearly under the **Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY)**.
  - **Integrating Welfare Schemes:** The portal seeks to integrate all the social welfare schemes available for the benefit of unorganised workers.
  - **Beneficial for Inter-state Migrants:** The portal helps the inter-state migrant workers avail the **benefit of the welfare schemes regardless of their location.**
  - **Social Security Benefits:** The unorganised workers will be able to receive social security benefits such as insurance coverage, maternity benefits, pensions, educational benefits, provident fund benefits, housing schemes etc.

Issues Associated

- **Lower Teledensity and Digital Literacy:** India still witnesses a significant digital divide, as per the **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India**, as of 30th June, 2021, the **rural teledensity** (number of telephone connections per 100 people in a specified geographic area) **stands at 60.10% against the overall teledensity is 88.07%.**
  - This is compounded by the low levels of **digital literacy.**
- **Aadhaar Related Issues:** Imposing the condition of **Aadhaar** would exclude workers without Aadhaar cards from the process.
  - Many unorganised workers have to change mobile numbers frequently and may **not always be able to access the Aadhaar-linked mobile.**
    - Aadhaar-seeding is a controversial issue in the **North-eastern regions.**
  - Moreover, the Aadhaar verification system has **suffered technology failures many times** that have led to serious issues of exclusion for welfare benefits.
- **Data-Security Related Issues:** In the **absence of a stringent data protection law**, one of the vital concerns of the portal is **data security and its potential abuse** considering it is a mega-sized database.
  - The central government would have to share data with State governments whose data security capacities vary.

- **Non-Inclusive Coverage of Workers:** By excluding workers covered by **EPF and ESI**, lakhs of **contract workers will be excluded from the ambit of unorganised workers.**
  - Moreover, the portal is open to unorganised workers aged between 16 and 59 only, the NDUW **excludes a large number of workers aged over 59** from its ambit, which constitutes age discrimination.
- **Ambiguity regarding Gig Workers:** Even though the MoLE includes gig workers in this process, the other three **Labour Codes** do not include them as workers, neither does the **Social Security Code** specifically include them, unless they are declared 'self-employed' or 'wage workers'.

Way Forward

- **Allowing Multiple Mediums for Identification:** The mandatory usage of Aadhaar for registration is unconstitutional and exclusionary. Other government provided ID cards should be allowed for authenticating a worker's identity.
  - Triple linkage for efficient and leakage-less delivery of all kinds of benefits to workers viz. **One-Nation-One-Ration Card (ONORC)**, **E-Shram Card** and the **Election Commission Card** can be done.
  - Also, the workers must be provided the flexibility to use different numbers as it would increase the portal's registration intake.
- **Offline Registrations:** Arrangements for offline registration are needed, given that all workers will not be able to access the online portal.
  - To this extent, **Common Service Centres** **can be leveraged to hold 'registration camps'** for those who wish to register offline.
- **Adopting Multi-Pronged Approach:** The success of the project depends on the involvement of a variety of stakeholders. It also includes:
  - Massive and innovative dissemination exercises involving multiple media outlets of various languages.
  - The holding of camps on demand by the stakeholders by the Government.
  - Efficiency of the resolution of grievance redress mechanisms.
  - Micro-level operations.
- **Surveys and Surveillance:** The Government must **publish statistics at the national and the regional levels** of the registrations to assess the registration system's efficiency.

Note:

○ There is also the concern of corruption as middle-service agencies such as Internet providers might charge exorbitant charges to register and print the E-Shram cards.

■ Therefore, the **involvement of surveillance agencies is crucial.**

Conclusion

➢ The Covid-19 crisis has taught us the importance of building safety nets and raised the need to formulate robust social security mechanisms for the unorganised sector in India.

➢ E-Shram is a vital system to provide hitherto invisible workers much-needed visibility. It will provide the Labour Market Citizenship Document to them.

○ It must be ensured that registrations are not a source of exclusion of a person from receiving social assistance and benefits.

Recalibrating the Affirmative Action

Recently, the government has been lauded for introducing reservations for **Other Backward Classes (OBCs)** in the **National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET)** examinations and the decision has renewed debate on caste census and again brought the debate on affirmative action in the limelight.

The **affirmative action programme** that was envisaged during the founding moments of the republic is indeed one of the remarkable provisions to have been worked out by our Constitution makers. It has been historically significant in enunciating the principle of justice in a deeply unequal and oppressive social order such as ours.

While it is undeniable that reservation provisions have been one of the protagonists of Indian democracy's success stories, these have also accumulated a fair share of problems and call for immediate policy attention and debate.

Need For Reservation

➢ To correct the **historical injustice** faced by backward castes in the country.

➢ To provide a **level playing field** for backward sections as they can not compete with those who have had the access of resources and means for centuries.

➢ To ensure **adequate representation** of backward classes in the services under the State.

➢ For **advancement of backward classes**.

➢ To **ensure equality** as the basis of meritocracy i.e all people must be brought to the same level before judging them on the basis of merit.

Problems With Current Policy

➢ **No Equity:** Through reservation of seats in political and public institutions of the state, it was thought that the hitherto marginalised groups — which have suffered generations of oppression and humiliation — would, finally, be able to find place in the power sharing and decision-making processes.

○ However, this strategy of removal of disabilities has not translated into an equalisation of life chances for many groups in our heterogeneous society.

➢ **Problem of Reification:** The current system suffers from the problem of reification (fallacy of ambiguity) is a reality in the present situation.

○ The data released by the **Justice G. Rohini Commission's report** on the **sub-categorisation of OBCs** gives a good synoptic view to understand this.

○ Based on the last five years' data on appointments in central government jobs and OBC admissions to central higher education institutions, the commission concluded that 97% of central OBC quota benefits go to just under 25% of its castes.

○ As many as 983 OBC communities — 37% of the total — have zero representation in both central government jobs and admissions to central universities.

○ Also, the report states that just 10% of the OBC communities have accrued 24.95% of jobs and admissions.

➢ **Lack of Data:** It is important to note that the Rohini Commission's data are based just on the institutions that come under the purview of the central government.

○ There is lack of any legible data on the socio-economic conditions of varied social groups at more local levels of State and society.

➢ **Caste Still Attached to Income Level:** Even in the phase of liberation castes have remained tied to more traditional sources of income and were incapable of realising the new opportunities provided by the opening of the economy.

○ In the wake of the lack of social security net on the ground, the marginal majority still dwells in

Note:

- the waiting room of history, waiting to see the light of the policy grid of the state.
- Many suggestions were made in the recommendations that the expert committee for an **Equal Opportunities Commission (2008)** made in its comprehensive report that it submitted to the Ministry of Minority Affairs.
  - However, little policy progress has been made in this regard. Successive governments have been reluctant to engage with such radical policy options, almost always caving in to immediate and myopic political gains.
- **Demands From the Marginalised Section:** There is now a strong demand from those who have not been able to accrue the benefits of reservations from within the marginalised sections, to devise some policy option which may be able to supplement the existing system of reservation.
- **Asymmetrical Distribution:** Asymmetrical distribution of reservation has even deterred the solidarity among the lower caste groups.

Way Forward

- **Recalibrating Affirmative Action:** It is required that benefits of affirmative action are shared by the poorest of poor sections of any caste.
  - A mechanism is required that can address this lacuna in the present implementation of affirmative action and make the system more accountable and sensitive to intra-group demands.
- **Need For Evidence-based Policy**: There is an urgent need to develop a wide variety of context-sensitive, evidence-based policy options that can be tailored to meet specific requirements of specific groups.
- **Institutional Setup:** There is a need for an institution like the Equal Opportunities Commission of the United States or the United Kingdom which can undertake two important but interrelated things:
  - **Make a deprivation index** correlating data from the socio-economic-based census of different communities including caste, gender, religion, and other group inequalities and rank them to make tailor made policies.
  - **Undertake an audit** on performance of employers and educational institutions on non-discrimination and equal opportunity and issue **codes of good practice** in different sectors.
    - This will make the formulation of policy and its monitoring simpler at an institutional level.

- **Need For Comprehensive Caste-based Census:** A socio-economic caste-based census becomes a necessary precondition to initiate any meaningful reform in the affirmative action regime in India.
  - Thus it is the need of the hour to include caste census with the general census.
- **Strong Political Will:** A strong political will is indispensable to find an equilibrium between justice to the backwards, equity for the forwards and efficiency for the entire system.

Conclusion

Thus, it is necessary to place the issue of reservation in a new framework that takes due care of the changes taking place in Indian society and economy. This framework should help in perfectly balancing quality and equality

Marital Rape: An Indignity to Women

A recent case in Chhattisgarh High Court has reignited the debate about non-criminalisation of marital rape. Even though many legal amendments have been done in criminal law for the protection of the women, the non-criminalization of marital rape in India undermines the dignity and human rights of women.

Recent Case

- The High Court of Chhattisgarh recently decided on a criminal revision petition challenging the charges framed against the applicant husband.
- Based on the allegations of his wife, charges were framed by a trial court under Section 376 (rape), Section 377 (carnal intercourse against the order of nature) and Section 498A (cruelty towards wife by husband or his relatives) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
- The High Court upheld charges under Sections 498A and 377 but **discharged the husband** under Section 376 on the ground that **by virtue of Exception 2 to Section 375 (the definition of rape)**, **sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife (provided she is over the age of 18) would not amount to the offence of rape**.
- Since the High Court was bound by the law, which exempts husbands from being tried or punished for raping their wives by creating the legal fiction that all sex within marriage is consensual, no other conclusion was open to the Court.

Note:

Notwithstanding this, the discrepancies and failings of Indian criminal law, highlighted by the judgment, deserve scrutiny.

Issues With Marital Rape Exception

➢ **Inconsistent Provision:** A husband may be tried for offences such as sexual harassment, molestation, voyeurism, and forcible disrobing in the same way as any other man.

  ○ Moreover, husband separated from his wife may even be tried for rape (**Section 376B**).

  ○ However, the marital rape exception is inconsistent with other sexual offences.

➢ **Patriarchal Beliefs:** The marital rape exception is an **insult to the constitutional goals** of individual autonomy, dignity and of gender equality enshrined in fundamental rights such as [Article 21 (the right to life)](#) and **Article 14 (the right to equality)**.

  ○ In **Joseph Shine v. Union of India (2018)**, the Supreme Court held that the offence of adultery was unconstitutional because it was founded on the principle that a woman is her husband's property after marriage.

  ○ The marital rape exception betrays a similar patriarchal belief: that upon marriage, a wife's right to personal and sexual autonomy, bodily integrity and human dignity are surrendered.

➢ **Destroy the Institution of Marriage:** A commonly cited rationale even by the government for preserving the marital rape exemption is that recognising marital rape as a criminal offence would **'destroy the institution of marriage'.**

➢ **Doctrine of Coverture**: Non-Criminalised nature of Marital rape emanates from the British era. The Marital rape is largely influenced by and derived from this doctrine of merging the woman's identity with that of her husband.

  ○ At the time the IPC was drafted in the 1860s, a married woman was not considered an independent legal entity.

  ○ The marital exception to the IPC's definition of rape was drafted on the basis of Victorian patriarchal norms that did not recognize men and women as equals, did not allow married women to own property, and merged the identities of husband and wife under the "**Doctrine of Coverture**."

➢ **Against International Obligation:** Antithetical to the liberal and progressive values of our Constitution, and violative of India's international obligations under instruments such as the Convention on the **Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**, the provision underlines women's subordination to men, especially within marriage.

  ○ In 2017, the Supreme Court had read down the exception so that husbands who raped their minor wives could no longer hide behind it.

  ○ It is high time adult women are afforded the same protection and dignity in marriage.

Impacts of Marital Rape on Women

➢ **Mental health impacts** associated with marital rape and other forms of abuse by partners include **depression, anxiety, emotional distress and suicidal thoughts**.

➢ Marital rape and violence also **undermine children's health and well-being**, both through the **psychological impacts** of witnessing violence and because it can undermine the ability of mothers to care for themselves and their children.

➢ Marital rape victims are more likely than stranger and acquaintance rape victims to experience multiple rape incidents. Marital rape victims suffer long-lasting physical injuries that are as severe or more severe than victims of stranger rape experience.

➢ Victims of marital rape may remain in the marriage for a variety of reasons. These include: fear of more violence, loss of financial security, a low sense of self-worth, and false hope that their partner will change.

Way Forward

➢ **Not Against Institution of Marriage:** The government defended exception to marital rape in **Independent Thought v. Union of India (2017)** saying it against the institution of marriage.

  ○ However, rejecting this claim, the Supreme Court observed, **"Marriage is not institutional but personal** – nothing can destroy the 'institution' of marriage except a statute that makes marriage illegal and punishable."

  ○ In this context, marital rape can be taken out of the exception.

Note:

➢ **Criminalise the Marital Rape:** The [United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#) defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."

   ○ In 2013, the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) recommended that the Indian government should criminalize marital rape.

➢ **Justice Verma Committee Report:** The [JS Verma committee](#) set up in the aftermath of nationwide protests over the December 16, 2012 gang rape case had also recommended the criminalisation of the marital rape.

   ○ By removing this law, women will be safer from abusive spouses, can receive the help needed to recover from marital rape and can save themselves from domestic violence and sexual abuse.

➢ **Women's Rights Awareness Programme**: Awareness campaign based in Kenya can provide shelter, counselling, practical and legal advice and other services to survivors of gender-based violence.

   ○ Educational and prevention programs on local, state, and national levels can be initiated for spreading awareness.

Conclusion

Indian law now affords husbands and wives separate and independent legal identities, and much jurisprudence in the modern era is explicitly concerned with the protection of women.

Therefore, it is high time that the legislature should take cognisance of this legal infirmity and bring marital rape within the purview of rape laws by eliminating Section 375 (Exception 2) of IPC.

Nutritional Security Through Food Fortification

The Prime Minister emphasised the need to ensure "poshan" (nutrition) to the country's women and children. He announced that, by 2024, rice provided to the poor under any government scheme — **PDS, mid-day-meal, anganwadi**— will be fortified.

Leveraging science to attack the complex challenge of malnutrition, particularly for low-income and vulnerable sections of the society, who cannot afford balanced diversified diets, can be a good intervention. This step can have its own challenges.

Advantages of Food Fortification

➢ **Increase in Nutritional Value:** The biofortified crops have 1.5 to 3 times higher levels of protein, vitamins, minerals and amino acids compared to the traditional varieties.

➢ **Safer Method of Fortification:** It is worth noting that these varieties are not genetically modified — they have been developed through conventional crop breeding techniques by the scientists.

   ○ Moreover, the addition of micronutrients to food does not pose a health risk to people. The quantity added is so small and so well regulated as per prescribed standards that likelihood of an overdose of nutrients is unlikely.

➢ **Nutritional Security at Large:** Since the nutrients are added to staple foods that are widely consumed, this is an excellent method to **improve the health of a large section of the population, all at once**.

➢ **Does Not Require Behaviour Change:** It does not require any changes in food habits and patterns of people. It is a socio-culturally acceptable way to deliver nutrients to people.

➢ It **does not alter the characteristics of the food**—the taste, the feel, the look.

➢ **Quick Results:** It can be implemented quickly as well as show results in improvement of health in a relatively short period of time.

➢ **Cost Effective:** This method is cost-effective especially if advantage is taken of the existing technology and delivery platforms.

   ○ The **Copenhagen Consensus** estimates that every **1 Rupee spent on fortification results in 9 Rupees** in benefits to the economy.

   ○ It requires an initial investment to purchase both the equipment and the vitamin and mineral premix, but overall costs of fortification are extremely low. Even when all program costs are passed on to consumers, the price increase is approximately 1-2%, less than normal price variation. Thus it has a high benefit-to-cost ratio.

Note:

Indian Scenario

➤ Currently, 15.3% of the country's population is undernourished, and India has the highest proportion of "stunted" (30%) and "wasted" children (17.3%) below five years of age, as per the FAO's recent report, **'The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2021'.**

  ○ These figures indicate that India is at a critical juncture with respect to nutritional security and will not be able to achieve the UN's **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)** of eliminating all forms of malnutrition by 2030 in the business-as-usual scenario.

➤ **Factors for Nutritional Insecurity: Access to nutritious food** is only one of the determinants of nutrition. Other factors like poor access to safe drinking water and sanitation (especially toilets), low levels of immunisation and education, especially of women, contribute equally to this dismal situation.

➤ As per the **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)** website, **21 varieties of biofortified staples** including wheat, rice, maize, millets, mustard, groundnut had been developed by 2019-20.

➤ A research team at the **National Agri-Food Biotechnology Institute** in Mohali has also developed **biofortified coloured wheat (black, blue, purple)** that is rich in zinc and anthocyanins.

  ○ Farmers from Punjab and Haryana have been roped in to multiply the production of this wheat variety. This points towards the beginning of a new journey, from food security to nutritional security.

Adverse Impacts of Food Fortification

➤ **Not a Substitute of Good Nutrition:** While fortified foods contain increased amounts of selected micronutrients, they are not a substitute for a good quality diet that supplies adequate amounts of energy, protein, essential fats and other food constituents required for optimal health.

➤ **Fails to Cater to the Poorest Segment of the Population:** Poorest segments of the general population have restricted access to fortified foods in the open markets due to low purchasing power and an underdeveloped distribution channel.

➤ **Inconclusive Evidence:**

  ○ Evidence supporting fortification is inconclusive and certainly not adequate before major national policies are rolled out.

  ○ Many of the studies which FSSAI relies on to promote fortification are sponsored by food companies who would benefit from it, leading to conflicts of interest.

➤ **Can Have Detrimental Effects:** Adding one or two synthetic chemical vitamins and minerals will not solve the larger problem, and in undernourished populations can lead to many detrimental effects like toxicity.

  ○ A study showed **iron fortification causing gut inflammation** and pathogenic gut microbiota profile in undernourished children.

➤ **Decrease Value of Natural Food:** Once iron-fortified rice is sold as the remedy to anaemia, the value and the choice of naturally iron-rich foods like millets, varieties of green leafy vegetables, flesh foods, liver, to name a few, will have been suppressed by a policy of silence.

Way Forward

➤ **Increasing Women's Nutritional Literacy:** There is a direct correlation between mothers' education and the wellbeing of children. Children with mothers who have no education have the least diversified diets and suffer from stunting and wasting and are anaemic.

  ○ Hence, programmes for improving the educational status of girls and reducing the school dropout rates, particularly at the secondary and higher educational levels, need to be promoted.

  ○ The **Global Nutrition Report (2014)** estimates that **every dollar invested** in a proven nutrition programme offers **benefits worth 16 dollars**.

➤ **Increasing Expenditure on Agri-R&D:** Innovations in biofortified food can alleviate malnutrition only when they are scaled up with supporting policies.

  ○ This would require increasing expenditure on agri-R&D and incentivising farmers by linking their produce to lucrative markets through sustainable value chains and distribution channels.

➤ **Private Investment:** The government can also rope in the private sector to create a market segment for premium-quality biofortified foods to cater to high-end consumers.

  ○ For instance, trusts run by the **TATA group are supporting different states** to initiate fortification of milk with Vitamin A and D.

Note:

○ Other private dairies should also be encouraged to scale up milk fortification across the country.

➢ **National Level Programme:** A national awareness drive on the lines of the "**Salt Iodisation Programme**" launched by the government in 1962 to replace ordinary salt with iodised salt, can play an important role at the individual and community levels to achieve the desired goals of poshan for all.

➢ **Branding, awareness campaigns, social and behavioural change** initiatives, such as community-level counselling, dialogue, media engagement and advocacy, especially amongst marginalised communities, can promote consumption of locally-available, nutrient-dense affordable foods among the poor and children.

➢ **Need For Multi-pronged Approach:** It must be recognised that in the long run, India needs a multi-pronged approach(access to basic infrastructure (electricity, drinking water and sanitation)) to eliminate the root cause of this complex problem. That approach should include the following initiatives.

Keeping Girls In School

For the past few decades, Indian women have taken a great stride in all fields of activity. Yet, a lot remains to be achieved. Indian women excelled in the Olympic Games for India. There is no reason for it to be otherwise in any other field, especially education, given the right support.

As a nation, we can not afford to ignore half the potential workforce if we aspire to be an economic powerhouse. As a society, women can be the pivot to bring about critical and lasting social transformation. As individuals, they deserve a shot at being the very best they can.

In this context there is a need to relook into various issues related to women's education especially higher education.

State of Girls Dropping Out

➢ **Reasons For Girls Dropping Out:** The reasons for girls dropping out in India are varied. The primary ones are obvious: Girls drop out of school because,

○ Engaged in domestic activities (31.9%)

○ Have financial constraints (18.4%),

○ Not interested in education (15.3%), and

○ Get married (12.4%).

➢ **Gender Biases and Social Norms**: The problem is not only rooted in poverty and poor quality of school education, but also gender biases and outdated social norms.

○ The states having the highest rate of secondary school drop-outs among girls are also the ones where a significant percentage of girls get married before the age of 18 years.

➢ **Low Expenditure on Girls Education:** Deep-rooted gender biases are also reflected in the choice of schools, access to private tuitions and the choice of discipline in higher education.

○ The average annual household expenditure on girls at this level is Rs 2,860 less than that on boys.

○ In India, the average annual cost for professional courses is much higher compared to that of simple graduation programmes (Rs 50,000 vs Rs 8,000).

○ Of the girls who do manage to enrol in a tertiary degree, a smaller proportion go on to pursue professional courses such as engineering (28.5%), while many more take courses such as **pharmacy (58.7%)** or opt for "**normal graduation**" **(52%)** as per **AISHE 2019-20**.

○ Their representation is lowest in institutions of national importance, followed by deemed and private universities.

Girls Drop Out- Data

➢ It is estimated that over 2.4 crore girls globally are on the verge of dropping out of schools due to the **Covid-19 pandemic**.

○ Pandemic-induced **school closures and economic hardships** have significantly exacerbated many vectors that influence the problem of women in education.

➢ In the Indian context before the pandemic, there was a welcome trend in the gradual increase in the **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** for women in higher education — from 19.8% in 2012-13 to 27.3% in 2019-20.

○ That said, a more nuanced picture of the problem of women and higher education can be seen. Lately, it has been affected badly by the pandemic induced lockdowns.

○ It is estimated that **over one crore girls** are on the verge of dropping out of schools due to the pandemic alone.

Importance of Education: Social Development of the Women

➢ **Higher Social Return:** The global average for the private rate of return (the increase in an individual's earnings) with just one extra year of schooling is about 9%, while the social returns of an extra year of school are even higher — above 10% at the secondary and higher education levels as per a decennial **World Bank** review.

➢ **Positive Impact of Higher Education:** Interestingly, the private returns for women in higher education are much higher than for men — 11 to 17% as per different estimates.

  ○ This has clear policy implications. For their own empowerment, as well as for society at large, we must bring more and more women within the ambit of higher education.

➢ **Women Can Play Leadership Roles:** Healthy, educated girls with equal access to opportunities can grow into strong, smart women who can take on leadership roles in their countries. This will help in having a better view of women's perspective in the government policies.

➢ **Poverty Alleviation:** Women constitute almost half of the country's population, therefore improving their condition in the country can immensely contribute to poverty alleviation.

  ○ Women's empowerment plays a catalytic role towards the achievement of transformational economic, political and social changes required for sustainable development.

Way Forward

➢ To overcome these systemic challenges, the government has taken a number of initiatives in the past such as the **National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE)**, supernumerary seats in all IITs and the **PRAGATI Scholarship scheme** for girls in technical education.

  ○ However, in these unprecedented times, we need unprecedented measures to address the issue of girl child school drop-outs and bring more girls in professionally and monetarily rewarding fields of higher education.

➢ **Community Learning Programme**: As an immediate step, in every locality, a mohalla school or a community learning programme should be started with appropriate Covid norms.

○ **NITI Aayog**, with the help of civil society organisations, had started a community programme led by volunteers called **"Saksham Bitiya"** in 28 aspirational districts where more than 1.87 lakh girl students were trained in socio-emotional and ethical learning.

○ Such initiatives should be replicated to ensure more girls do not drop out of schools during the pandemic.

➢ **Gender Atlas/Dropout Mapping:** To predict likely drop-outs, a gender atlas comprising indicators that are mapped to key reasons for school drop-outs should be developed.

  ○ Teachers should also be trained in all the scholarships and schemes available that provide economic support to girls and their families for continuing their education.

➢ There is a **need to revise the National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education** in areas or states with high prevalence of drop-outs and early child marriages.

  ○ The scholarship amount may be increased and tied to the completion of graduation, with yearly scholarships paid to students upon successful completion of each year of their undergraduate degree.

➢ **Special Education Zones For Backward Districts in Education:** Every panchayat showing a consistent trend in girl child drop-outs should have composite schools till higher secondary (classes I-XII).

  ○ **The National Education Policy 2020** provides for a **gender inclusion fund**. This fund should be utilised to support **STEM education** in these schools as well as in all Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas.

  ○ State governments need to leverage existing schemes to design interventions to promote women in higher education.

➢ **Behavioural Nudges in Tackling Social Prejudices:** Social prejudice and orthodox cultural norms prevent girls from achieving their innate potential.

  ○ **Behavioural Insights Units (BIU)** may be established across states to tackle social issues with the help of ultra-local NGOs/CSOs to reach the last mile.

  ○ NITI Aayog has taken a leap forward in this direction by establishing a BIU to tackle nutrition and health challenges in aspirational districts.

Conclusion

The **Covid-19 pandemic** has brought unprecedented challenges for all including educators and students,

Note:

especially for those on the margins, including girls. However, with recent experiments and learning experience, informed targeting of ample resources and an agile policy environment, this challenge could well prove to be an opportunity. Given the right enabling environment, educational outcomes can be improved.

Addressing gender bias in education requires providing social, financial and emotional support to the girl child.

Need For Caste Census

The caste system is India's nemesis and has severely restricted the country's ability to realise its immense potential and become a great nation in science, technology, knowledge, art, sport and economic prosperity.

Studies suggest that **94% of marriages are endogamous**; **90% of menial jobs are performed by the deprived castes**, whereas this figure is reversed in white-collar jobs. This abysmal lack of caste diversity, especially at the decision-making levels in various sectors — the media, the judiciary, higher education, bureaucracy or the corporate sector — is weakening these institutions and their performance.

It is indeed strange that while caste plays such a dominant role in our social, economic and political life, no credible and comprehensive caste data exists for more than half the population of our country.

Need For Caste Census

➤ **Benefit in Policy Making:** The purpose of a caste census is not merely geared to the reservation issue; a caste census would actually bring to the fore the large number of issues that any democratic country needs to attend to, particularly the number of people who are at the margins, or who are deprived, or the kind of occupations they pursue.

  ❍ A caste census, which will generate exhaustive data will **allow policymakers to develop better policies, implementation strategies**, and will also enable a more rational debate on sensitive issues.

➤ **Also Reveal Privileged Section of Society:** Caste is not only a source of disadvantage; it is also a very important source of privilege and advantage in our society.

  ❍ We have to stop thinking of caste as being applicable to only disadvantaged people, poor people, people who are somehow lacking.

  ❍ The opposite is even more true: caste has produced advantages for certain communities, and these also need to be recorded.

➤ **Caste Has Important Position in Indian Society:** While census data has been captured for **Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes**, religions and linguistic profiles, there has been no profiling of all castes in India since 1931.

  ❍ Since then, caste has assumed an increasingly important position in our lives, and our reliance on inadequate data has also increased.

➤ **To Address Prevalent Inequalities:** Unequal distribution of wealth, resources and education has meant an acute shortage of purchasing power among the majority of Indians.

  ❍ As a democratic nation, **we cannot forcibly overthrow the system**, but we need to address it in a democratic, scientific and objective manner.

➤ **Constitutional Mandate:** Our Constitution too favours conducting a caste census. **Article 340** mandates the appointment of a commission to investigate the conditions of **socially and educationally backward classes** and make recommendations as to the steps that should be taken by governments.

➤ **To Burst the Myths:** There are a lot of myths which actually deprive a large number of people, particularly on the margins.

  ❍ Let's take the case of Karnataka. For a long time, there were claims that among the castes, the Lingayats are the most numerous.

  ❍ But a lot of other studies have brought out that this may not be true, and these kinds of myths lead to the argument that given that this is a caste which is numerous, it has to be constantly placated. These myths can be debunked through a caste census.

➤ **Reduce Inclusion and Exclusion Errors:** With accurate data of castes, most backward castes can be identified.

  ❍ Some have benefited so much across the years, while there are people in this country who have not benefited at all.

➤ The **Supreme court has time and again asked governments** to provide the data related to castes; however, this has not been possible due to the non-availability of such data.

  ❍ As a result, our national life suffers from mutual mistrust and misconceptions among different castes.

Note:

○ All such commissions have had to rely on data from the last caste census (1931).

Associated Challenges With Caste Census

➢ **Repercussions of a Caste Census**: Caste has an emotive element and thus there exist the political and social repercussions of a caste census.

   ○ There have been concerns that counting caste may help solidify or harden identities.

   ○ Due to these repercussions, nearly a decade after the SECC, a sizable amount of its data remains unreleased or released only in parts.

➢ **Caste Is Context-specific:** Caste has never been a proxy for class or deprivation in India; it constitutes a distinct kind of embedded discrimination that often transcends class. For example:

   ○ People with Dalit last names are less likely to be called for job interviews even when their qualifications are better than that of an upper-caste candidate.

   ○ They are also less likely to be accepted as tenants by landlords. Thus difficult to measure.

   ○ Marriage to a well- educated, well-off Dalit man still sparks violent reprisals among the families of upper-caste women every day across the country.

Way Forward

➢ India needs to be **bold and decisive** in tackling caste questions through data and statistics in the **way the United States (US) does to tackle race issues**, by collecting data around race, class, language, inter-race marriages, among other metrics.

   ○ This data provides a mirror to the State and society of the US in which they can see themselves and take decisions to do course corrections.

➢ **Creation of National Data Bank:** The **Sachar Committee Report** recommended setting up a national data bank.

   ○ The **Justice Rohini committee** was appointed in 2017 to look into the **sub-categorisation of the OBC communities**; however, in the absence of data, there can be no data-bank or any proper sub-categorisation.

Conclusion

With every passing day and increasing social awareness, the urgency to do away with the caste system is being sharply felt. Dr. BR Ambedkar stated that if India had to attain a place of pride among the comity of nations, caste would have to be annihilated first.

The 21st century is the right time to solve India's caste question, which would otherwise extract a heavy price, not just sociologically, but also politically and economically, and make us fall behind in the development index.

Localising SDGs

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global effort that has one major objective — achieving a better future for all. To achieve these global and national targets, localisation is a crucial lever.
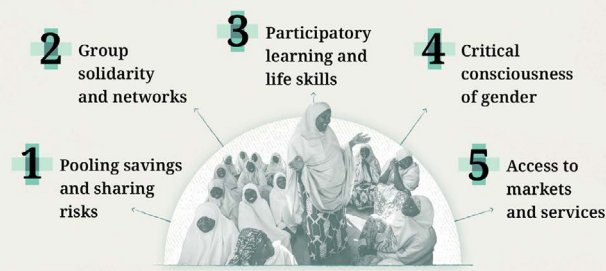
It correlates how local and State governments can support the accomplishments of the SDGs through bottom-up action, and how the SDGs can provide a framework for local policy.

If India is to achieve its goals by 2030, it must build a mechanism for effectively localising the SDGs — one that leverages and integrates the **social capital** that exists in **women's collectives and with the local self-governance of the Panchayati Raj system.**

Women Collectives

➢ By the simplest definition, a women's collective is a group of women who meet regularly to achieve a shared purpose. But these groups take many forms across the world, with women coming together for different economic, legal, health, and cultural reasons.

➢ In India's rural areas, SHGs are an example of women collectives.

The five key elements of women's collectives

1 Pooling savings and sharing risks

2 Group solidarity and networks

3 Participatory learning and life skills

4 Critical consciousness of gender

5 Access to markets and services

Significance of Women Collectives

➢ **Overcome Social Inequalities:** Women collectives have successfully **overcome the deep-rooted bias** of caste, patriarchy, and wealth by challenging norms and unequal social relations.

Note:

○ They encourage collective efforts for combating practices like dowry, alcoholism etc.

➢ **Paving Way For Gram Swaraj:** Women collectives have created conditions for **social equality** and ultimately, paving the way for Gram Swaraj.

    ○ The women of **Kudumbashree** in Kerala exemplify this.

    ○ By articulating the aspirations of the local community, the women were able to engage elected representatives in a two-way process — complementing their efforts while also holding them accountable.

➢ **Gender Equity:** Women collectives empower women and inculcates leadership skills among them. Empowered women participate more actively in developmental processes, gram sabha and elections.

    ○ There is evidence that formation of Self-Help Groups has a multiplier effect in improving women's status in society as well as in the family leading to improvement in their socio-economic condition and also enhances their self-esteem.

➢ **Financial Inclusion:** Women collectives reach to the poorest of the poor section of society further financial inclusion.

    ○ The financial inclusion attained leads to reduced **child mortality**, improved maternal health and the ability of the poor to combat disease through better nutrition, housing and health – especially among women and children.

Challenges

➢ **Challenges of LImited Resources:** Undoubtedly, there are inherent challenges associated with involving community institutions like SHGs in developing the **Gram Panchayat Development Plan**, including **human resources, capacities,** and disaggregating department **budgets**.

➢ **Lack of knowledge** and proper orientation among SHG-members to take up suitable and profitable livelihood options.

➢ **Patriarchal Mindset:** Primitive thinking and social obligations discourage women from participating in women collectives (SHGs) thus limiting their economic avenues.

➢ **Lack of Rural Banking Facilities:** Many public sector banks and **micro-finance institutions** are unwilling to provide financial services to the poor as the cost of servicing remains high.

➢ **Sustainability and the quality of operations** of the SHGs have been a matter of considerable debate.

Way Forward

➢ **Leverage the Strength of Women Collectives**: Today, 76 million women have been mobilised into SHGs under the **National Rural Livelihoods Mission** and there are 3.1 million elected **panchayat representatives**.

    ○ For localisation of SDGs to truly work, there is a need to leverage the strength of both (PRIs & SHGs) these institutions through a partnership.

➢ **Reinforcing the Panchayat:** To truly localise the SDGs, the route ought to be taken within the framework of the Constitution.

    ○ Any action should not form a parallel track, but become a way of **reinforcing the institutional capacity of panchayats**.

➢ **Learning From the Experience:** The five southern States — Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana — have done better than the others when it comes to poverty reduction.

    ○ There are five things that these States did that seem to have played a significant role in curbing poverty.

      ■ The participation of adolescent **girls in secondary, higher secondary**, and higher education.

      ■ The **decline in fertility** has a far greater correlation to the participation of adolescent girls in secondary, higher secondary education than any healthcare and family welfare services.

      ■ **The formation of collectives:** when women came together to form SHGs it created an identity outside of the house.

      ■ Since these women over time had had basic secondary level education, their collectives or SHGs could leverage skills and diverse livelihood opportunities better than others.

      ■ The decision that permitted lending of up to Rs. 10 lakh without collateral for women SHGs, has recently been raised by the RBI to ₹20 lakh.

➢ **More Responsibility For PRIs:** The 73rd Constitution Amendment transferred 29 subjects to PRIs. For successful localisation of development, PRIs need not only emphasise their governance role but also focus on their **developmental role**.

Note:

- ○ The entire discourse should focus on how to enable PRIs to focus on their leadership role in achieving the SDGs.
- ○ This would need work on many leadership traits — visioning, mobilising and seeking partnerships, among others.
- ➤ **Leveraging Social Capital:** There are not many conversations about social capital being a strong foundation for economic activity. Ultimately, localisation efforts should lead to transformation not in social relationships alone, but also the level of economic activity in villages.

Conclusion

Localising the SDGs at the rural level will not only challenge existing unequal relations but also provide an institutional framework that is in sync with national and global priorities.

Not enough time is spent on understanding how a poor household can leverage systems or institutions to move up faster. There's a need to look at these small collectives as the root of more shared growth.

Need For Urban Social Safety

During the pandemic, governments all over the world faced the difficult choice of **saving lives versus protecting livelihoods**. According to the World Economic Outlook report of April, 2021 of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), almost all countries, except China, experienced economic contraction last year. The global GDP shrunk by 3.3%.

India's GDP fell by 8%. As per the **Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy'**s estimates, the unemployment rate in India peaked at 23.5% in April 2020 before falling to 6.9% in February 2021.

In the wake of economic deceleration, the challenge is to minimise livelihood losses. Traditionally, governments have addressed this issue from a sectoral viewpoint given the contemporary realities, the need is to **approach this from a rural-urban perspective.**

Social Security Issues Faced By Urban India

- ➤ **Spread of Infection:** In the **Covid-19** outbreak in India, big cities such as– Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai – were the main urban epicentres of the disease.
- ➤ **Rural-Urban Livelihood Security Divide:** Though the Indian government operates the **National Urban**

Livelihoods Mission (NULM), which is focused on self-employment through skill up-gradation and credit linkages through banks, the scheme does not have guaranteed wage employment provisions akin to what **MGNREGA** provides.

- ○ During the lockdown last year, the migrant labourers moved in large numbers from the urban to rural areas, which is symptomatic of the rural-urban livelihood security divide.
- ○ This **migration tragedy and the economic slowdown** have highlighted the need for a similar livelihood safety net in urban India.
- ➤ **Economic Effect:** The economic crisis in urban areas is deepening as people who lost their jobs are yet to find replacements and little has been accomplished after the lockdown for the revival of livelihoods in the informal sector in the Indian urban area.
- ➤ **Public Distribution System & Social Sector Scheme Coverage:** A larger proportion of households in urban areas did not have access to ration cards.
- ○ The social security schemes also had relatively better coverage among the rural poor as rural areas had better access to PDS rations.
- ➤ **Nutrition and Hunger:** A decline in nutritional quality and quantity was more among the urban residents, as was the need to borrow money for buying food.

The Need to Focus on Urban Areas

- ➤ **Major Contributor to Economy:** Urban areas are an integral part of the development process of the country. As in most countries, India's urban areas make a major contribution to the country's economy.
- ○ Indian cities contribute to about **two-third of the economic output**, host a growing share of the population and are the main recipients of **FDI** and the originators of innovation and technology.
- ➤ **Magnet For Businesses:** The cities are a collective magnet for a great diversity of economic activities.
- ○ The cities attract business and people, as a result of scale and agglomeration advantages (supply of educational facilities, presence of suppliers, etc).
- ➤ **Hotbed of Social Capital:** The cities are a hotbed of social capital or as a 'melting pot' of culturally or socially diversified groups.
- ➤ **Cities are Power Centres:** The city is an ever-expanding power-block, which reinforces its position to the detriment of towns and villages in its hinterland.

Note:

Way Forward

➢ **Provision of Social Security:** There is a need to provide livelihood safety access to urban areas.

  ❍ The livelihood safety net must have comprehensive coverage. Such a net, provided by the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**, exists only in rural areas

➢ **Promote Cooperation:** An urban livelihood scheme can be launched within the existing fiscal space.

  ❍ If not, the Union and States can provide resources together and empower the urban local bodies.

  ❍ **State Interventions:**

   ▪ Himachal Pradesh has launched the **Mukhya Mantri Shahri Ajeevika Guarantee Yojana (MMSAGY)** with the objective of enhancing livelihood security in urban areas by providing 120 days of guaranteed wage employment to every household at minimum wages in FY 2020-21.

➢ **MInimum Wages For Urban Workers:** Setting a separate minimum wage for rural and urban areas does not cause migration to urban areas since the higher cost of living in urban areas has an offsetting effect.

➢ **Focus on Service Delivery**: The focus must shift from **asset creation to service delivery**. Restricting it to asset creation or wage-material ratios may be suboptimal in urban settings.

  ❍ The focus should be on enhancing the **quality of municipal services**.

Conclusion

India's future urban strategy should improve urban governance, livelihood security of the urban poor, delivery of public services, inter-government transfers and capacity building.

India and Food Insecurity

India was home to the largest number of undernourished people in the world even before the **Covid-19 pandemic**. However, the irony is that the government had an unprecedented 100 million tonnes of food grains in its godowns — larger than the food stocks of any country.

The **latest edition of the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report (2021)**, released jointly by five UN organisations, reveals that the pandemic and failure on the part of the state to combat its effects, has led to a significant increase in the prevalence of hunger and food insecurity in the country.

India, as a country with the largest food stock in the world (as of July, 2021), there is no need for the government to ensure additional food stocks but an effective implementation of the already existing policies that facilitate food distribution among the needy ones.

India's Food Insecurity as per SOFI

➢ **SOFI Report 2021:** According to the data presented in the report, the prevalence of **moderate to severe food insecurity in India rose by about 6.8 percentage points** in 2018-20.

  ❍ **Increase in Food Security:** In absolute terms, the number of persons facing moderate to severe food insecurity has increased by about 9.7 crore since the outbreak of Covid.

  ❍ **Parameters of Estimation:** Estimates on food insecurity presented in the SOFI report are based on two globally-accepted indicators of food insecurity:

   ▪ **Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU)**

   ▪ **Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Food Insecurity (PMSFI)**

➢ **India and Food Insecurity:** India, the country with the largest stock of grain in the world; 120 million tonnes (as of July 1, 2021) **accounts for a quarter of the world's food-insecure population.**

  ❍ Estimates show that, in 2020, over 237 crore people were grappling with food insecurity globally, an increase of about 32 crore from 2019.

  ❍ South Asia alone accounts for 36% of global food insecurity.

Food Insecurity and Associated Issues

➢ **Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU):** The Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) estimates are based on national consumption surveys of the countries showing per-capita supply of food.

  ❍ However, these consumption surveys are not available every year and updated only once in a few years.

  ❍ Hence, PoU is not sensitive enough to adequately capture recent disruptions such as those caused by the pandemic.

➢ **No Recent Consumption Surveys by India** The overall food supply was resilient despite the pandemic, hence, consumption surveys were not conducted by most countries.

Note:

- ❍ Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Indian government has not undertaken any official assessment of food insecurity in the country.
- ❍ The increase in prevalence of hunger captured by PoU from 14% in 2019 to 15.3% in 2020 for India is likely to be an underestimate.
- ❍ In this situation, the PMFSI estimates are the only national-level valid and reliable estimates available on the impact of the pandemic on food insecurity in India.
- ➢ **Denial of Situation by the Government:** The Government of India has not only avoided its own assessment of consumption/ food security surveys, but also it does not approve the publication of results based on the Gallup World Poll.
- ➢ **Socio-Economic Distress:** Despite being self-sufficient in the production of major food commodities, problems of hunger and food insecurity are grave in India because of widespread economic distress, high unemployment and high levels of inequality.
  - ❍ A large proportion of the poor is dependent on the informal economy in which incomes are too low and uncertain.
    - ■ Unemployment rates have also risen sharply over the last few years.
  - ❍ High (and fluctuating) food prices, shrinking public investment and the economic slowdown have compounded the distress among working classes and the peasantry.
    - ■ With low and uncertain incomes, families dependent on the informal economy do not have assured access to adequate and nutritious food.
- ➢ **Impact of Pandemic:** PMSFI estimates thus derived show that there were about 43 crore of moderate to severe food-insecure people in India in 2019 which increase to 52 crore by 2020 as a result of the pandemic-related disruptions
  - ❍ In terms of prevalence rates, this food insecurity increased from about 31.6% in 2019 to 38.4% in 2021.
  - ❍ The long standing problems of unemployment, inflation, informal sector employment and economic slowdown were aggravated in 2020 due to lack of preparation to deal with the pandemic.
- ➢ **Inadequate Distribution of Food through PDS:** Deserving beneficiaries of the subsidy are excluded on the basis of non-ownership of below poverty line (BPL) status, as the criterion for identifying a household as BPL is arbitrary and varies from state to state.

Way Forward

- ➢ **Regular Monitoring of Food Security:** The sharp increase in food insecurity points to an urgent need for the government to establish systems for regular monitoring of the food security situation in the country.
- ➢ **Enlarging the Scope of Food Security Schemes:** Universalising the access to the **Public Distribution System** and **One Nation One Ration Card scheme (ONORC)**, at least during the pandemic.
  - ❍ The PDS should be strengthened and the food basket can be enlarged to include millets, pulses and oil.
    - ■ This may certainly help in addressing the issue of hidden hunger.
  - ❍ Everyone, irrespective of whether they have a ration card or not, should be allowed to take subsidised grain from ration shops.
    - ■ With almost 120 million tonnes of grain currently lying with the government, it requires almost no additional resources but better implementation of schemes.
- ➢ **Bringing Development and Humanitarian Policies Together:** Integrating humanitarian, development and peacebuilding policies in required areas to prevent families from selling meagre assets in exchange for food.
- ➢ **Lowering the Cost of Nutritious Food:** Intervening along supply chains to lower the cost of nutritious foods such as by encouraging the production of **biofortified crops** or making it easier for fruit and vegetable growers to access markets.

Conclusion

- ➢ Right to food is not only a statutory right but also a human right. As a state party to the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, India has the obligation to ensure the right to be free from hunger and the right to adequate food for all of its citizens.
- ➢ Due to the disruption caused by Covid-19, there is a need to incorporate a broader definition of food security.
  - ❍ The resources to end or at least minimise food insecurity, exist with the government already. All that is needed is to utilise them up to their maximum advantage.

Note:

Digital Challenge For Civil Society

Covid-19 **pandemic** has exposed the deep fault lines that have created challenges for India's transition towards a more digitally enabled society.

During the pandemic, several essential services, ranging from access to healthcare services – including vaccines – to education, livelihoods, and rations — have felt the effects of unequal distribution of technology in the country.

Thus, with increasing inequalities and the burden on systems, the need for digitally driven programmes is now more urgent than ever before.

In this context, even the **development sector (NGOs, Civil Society Organisation(CSOs))** cannot remain aloof to new technologies. They must strive for digital transition so that it can be helpful in resolving various digital challenges.

Digital Challenge

➢ **Digitally Inaccessible Remote Communities:** The first wave of Covid-19 brought with it an immediate and urgent need for the development sector to shift towards technology, when faced by the inability to access communities remotely.
  - ○ A survey in June 2020 indicated that only about half of the respondents were aware of online classes being held in their communities.
  - ○ The consequences of these gaps are likely dire – an estimated 10 million girls could drop out of school.

➢ **Unserved Remote Areas:** With digital services not being uniformly distributed, communities in remote areas often require on-ground staff to deploy and supplement digital tools.
  - ○ They may also face significant barriers in accessing funding for innovative and infrastructural digital solutions. This, in turn, poses challenges for Civil Society Organisations(CSOs).

➢ **Digital Divide:** During the second wave, urban Indians have consistently relied on social media platforms to seek life-saving medical supplies but rural Indian could not utilise it to the fullest.
  - ○ Unequal access to the internet has also made accessing and registering for Covid-19 vaccines in India a challenge, leaving millions of Indians unable to even register for them.

➢ **Digital Illiteracy:** It's apparent that a majority of Indian citizens lack **digital literacy** and online safety is an alien concept to many who may have digital literacy.
  - ○ Language and accessibility barriers and limited data and infrastructural systems further compound the scenario.

➢ **Social barriers and systemic inequality** also play a large role in this — even today, mobile ownership among women is significantly lower than their male counterparts.
  - ○ Moreover, communities continue to remain averse to mobile devices in the hands of young people, especially young women, to prevent them from disrupting existing patriarchal systems.

Way Forward

➢ **Need For Technology Enabled Development Sector:** It is time for the development sector (NGOs/CSOs) to shift towards technology-driven ecosystems, to enable a more systematic and concerted effort to bridge the present digital divide and help access remote communities digitally.

➢ **Technological Intervention:** The process of creating and implementing digital solutions is multi-layered and complex. According to many CSOs, the first step is to **address the demands posed by technological interventions across a programme life cycle.**
  - ○ This calls for customised digital interventions. The issue gets complicated because CSOs need to work with local communities who face digital challenges themselves.
  - ○ Digital interventions have to factor in these imperatives.

➢ **Feedback from People:** The success of technology-based programmes is ultimately contingent on the support for it on the ground, and community feedback is critical to driving successful and sustainable programmes.
  - ○ Programmes, therefore, need to integrate and account for interpersonal mediation and the last-mile "human touch".

➢ **Partnership with Stakeholders:** To enable them to incorporate technology at scale, CSOs require more systematic partnerships with stakeholders across the development ecosystem.
  - ○ Collaboration with the government, funders, and other civil society partners is vital to normalising the use of technology-based interventions at scale.

Note:

❍ For example, the government and private sector service providers need to prioritise the availability of digital infrastructure and connectivity while civil society integrates programmatic responses into government priorities.

➢ **Documenting the Learnings**: There are no blanket solutions to the critical challenges that come with embracing technology in framing programmes for the development sector.

❍ Documenting their learnings is an important first step in pushing for more open conversations with regard to digital interventions in India.

Conclusion

Recognising the essential role that digital tools, access and literacy will play in the months and years to come, Civil societies and NGOs should strive to bring technological revolution in their working.

Registration of Migrant Workers

According to the latest government data on migration from the **2011 Census**, India had 45.6 crore migrants in 2011 (38% of the population) compared to 31.5 crore migrants in 2001 (31% of the population).

The migrant workers are the worst sufferers due to the **Covid-19 pandemic**as they could not access the government schemes benefits due to the status of statelessness. Thus, the workers in the **unorganised sector (around 93%**, including most migrants in lower-end jobs) need to be able to access numerous welfare schemes in existence.

However, the recent **Supreme Court (SC) judgment** on the problems and miseries of migrant workers will go down in history as a radical judgment to reduce human suffering in the wake of the **Covid-19 pandemic**.

The order explicitly recognises the critical contribution of migrant workers to the economy, even though they are often employed in precarious jobs. However, the judgement has its own challenges in the smooth implementation.

Significance of SC Order

➢ **Accept Self-declaration:** In a significant break with convention, the order declared that **authorities shall not insist on an ID card and accept "self-declaration"** from workers to access welfare programmes (a similar provision was made in the 2008 **Social Security Act**).

❍ In a country where documents determine access to state resources and who is or is not granted citizenship, it is nothing short of revolutionary to issue orders to do away with paperwork.

➢ **Universalise the Access to Welfare Scheme:** The order also says that the lack of documentation cannot be used as an excuse by the state to abdicate its responsibility, especially during the pandemic.

❍ However, the long-term goal is to get all migrant workers registered so that access to welfare schemes reaches to all.

➢ **Inspires Confidence in Socialist agenda**: The SC orders inspires confidence in India's original socialist agenda at a time when neoliberal policies have challenged measures to protect the dignity and rights of the weakest in society and when industries are engaged in a nasty "race to the bottom" on labour standards to cut costs and stay competitive.

➢ The order is a welcome indicator that the highest court is still looking out for the **most vulnerable sections** of society.

Issues of Migrants

➢ **Delay in Registering Workers:** The main barrier preventing access is the delay in registering workers on the **national database** of the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

➢ **Issues in the Labour Department:** There are numerous barriers within the labour department, including a lack of guidelines on procedures related to registration, and delays in uploading data submitted in hard copy on the portal as it cannot be directly updated by others.

➢ **Administrative Issues:** Migrants experienced a variety of problems with registration ranging from digital illiteracy, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency and the requirement of multiple documents (even where only Aadhaar would suffice).

➢ **Exclusion of Vulnerables:** Exclusion was markedly worse among the vulaneables such as Muslims, lower castes owing to discrimination in the society. The tasks set out in the SC order challenge entrenched patterns of labour recruitment and employment that have taken root in the current neoliberal context.

Way Forward

➢ **Fast Forward Registration Process:** Without registration, none of the welfare schemes in existence can be accessed. Thus, the process should be fast-forwarded to register all the migrant workers.

Note:

- ➢ **Implementation of Existing Laws:** Workers must be registered under the three laws that are in place to protect labour and migrant workers, namely, the **1979 Interstate Migrant Workmen Act**, the **1996 Building and Other Construction Workers Act** and the **2008 Unorganised Sector Social Security Act.**
- ➢ **Earliest Rollout of ONORC Scheme:**
  - ❍ The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution should allocate additional food grains to the states for disbursement to migrant workers under the **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme** under the **National Food Security Act**.
  - ❍ The rollout of this system requires beneficiaries to possess a ration card, an Aadhaar number, and electronic points of sale (ePoS) in ration shops.
- ➢ **Reform Labour Departments:** The labour departments are seriously short of staff and capacity to carry out the Supreme Court order.
  - ❍ Steps must be taken to bring organisational transformation in the departments.

Conclusion

- ➢ Social security measures should cover all the unorganized workers to bring overall development in our country.
- ➢ Thus, the supreme court's recent order regarding registration of migrant workers stands up for the rights of the weakest and recognises their critical contribution to the economy.

Renewed Healthcare System

The **Covid-19 pandemic** reiterates the importance of Public Health systems. The private health sector which accounts for 70% of healthcare services in India, is playing only a supporting role.

There is a need to address the constraints and revamp of the public health system in India which would not only enable improved handling of Covid-19, but would also have widespread positive impacts extending much beyond the Covid-19 situation.

Covid-19 And Significance of Public Health Care

- ➢ For Indian population, the availability of functional public health systems is literally a question of life and death.
- ➢ A robust government health-care service is translated into a more effective outreach, timely testing, early

case detection and more rational treatment for Covid patients. This is evident by comparing two States—Maharashtra and Kerala.
  - ❍ Their per capita gross **State domestic product (GSDP) i**s similar. However, their Covid-19 case fatality rates are hugely different — this being 0.48% for Kerala and 2.04% for Maharashtra.
- ➢ A major reason for such critical divergence is likely to be the huge differences in the effectiveness of public health systems.
  - ❍ Kerala has **per capita two and a half times more government doctors**, and an equally **higher proportion of government hospital beds** when compared to Maharashtra, while allocating per capita over one and half times **higher funds on public health** every year.
- ➢ Despite Maharashtra having a large private health-care sector, its weak public health system has proved to be a critical deficiency.

Issues With Current Healthcare System

- ➢ **Lack of Primary Healthcare Services:** The existing public primary health care model in the country is limited in scope.
  - ❍ Even where there is a well-functioning public primary health centre, only services related to pregnancy care, limited childcare and certain services related to national health programmes are provided.
- ➢ **Supply-Side Deficiencies:** Poor health management skills and lack of appropriate training and supportive supervision for health workers prevent delivery of the desired quality of health services.
- ➢ **Inadequate Funding:** Expenditure on public health funding has been consistently low in India (approximately 1.3% of GDP). As per OECD, India's total out-of-pocket expenditure is around 2.3 % of GDP.
- ➢ **Sub-optimal Public Health System:** Due to this, it is challenging to tackle **Non-communicable Diseases**, which is all about prevention and early detection.
  - ❍ It diminishes preparedness and effective management for new and emerging threats such as pandemic like Covid-19.

Way Forward

- ➢ **Focus On Public Health:**
  - ❍ Need for a larger programme which requires the immediate attention is the **National Health Mission (NHM);** since 2017-18, Union government allocations

for the NHM have declined in real terms, resulting in inadequate support to States for core activities such as immunisation, while systemic gaps affect the delivery of Covid-19 vaccination.

○ The condition of the **National Urban Health Mission (NUHM)** also remains pathetic.

■ This year's Central allocation for the NUHM is ₹1,000 crore, which amounts to less than ₹2 per month per urban Indian.

➢ **Private Sector Regulation:**

○ Another clear priority that has been highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic is the need to regulate rates and standards of care in the private sector.

○ Massive hospital bills have caused untold distress even among the middle class.

○ Although various determinants have contributed to the Mucormycosis outbreak, irrational use of steroids in Covid-19 patients, especially diabetics, appears to be an important factor.

○ The central government should take necessary steps to promote the implementation of the **Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act (CEA)**.

■ Passed in 2010 and presently applicable to 11 States across India, this Act is not effectively implemented due to a major delay in notification of central minimum standards, and failure to develop the central framework for regulation of rates.

➢ **NITI Aayog Prescriptions:**

○ NITI Aayog has recently published the document, **'Investment Opportunities in India's Healthcare Sector'**.

○ The document states that 'in the hospital segment, the **expansion of private players to Tier 2 and Tier 3** locations, beyond metropolitan cities, offers an attractive investment opportunity'.

○ **Manufacturing of medical devices and equipment,** expansion of diagnostic and pathology centres and miniaturized diagnostics have high growth potential.

○ Technology advancements such as **Artificial Intelligence, wearables and other mobile tech**, along with the Internet of Things, also offer numerous avenues for investment.

Conclusion

Existing evidence from the Covid-19 pandemic provides a clear message that a neglect of public health systems can mean large-scale, avoidable losses of lives; hence, public health services must be upgraded rapidly and massively as a topmost priority

One Nation One Ration Card Scheme

Covid-19 pandemic has created a dilemma of lives vs livelihood for almost every sector of the economy. However, the migrant workers are one the most vulnerable sections of the society, which got impacted by the pandemic.

Food and income security is the main concern of the jobless migrants after the two deadly waves of Covid-19 pandemic.

In order to tackle the problem of food security, the government of India introduced the One Nation One Ration Card scheme (ONORC). ONORC allows a beneficiary to access his food entitlements from anywhere in India irrespective of the place where the ration card is registered.

Status of ONORC Scheme

➢ Presently, thirty-two States and Union territories have already completed the formalities of the scheme, which include linking beneficiaries' ration cards with their Aadhaar numbers and installing e-Point of Sale (e-POS) machines in each FPS.

➢ The full mobility of food subsidy under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 relies on digitisation of the public distribution system (PDS), a network of over 5,00,000 fair-price shops (FPS).

○ This would be ensured on the basis of Aadhaar authentication and validated data.

➢ The Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IMPDS) portal records all purchases made under ONORC.

Benefits of ONORC

➢ **Enabling Right To Food:** Previously, ration cardholders can avail their entitlement of subsidised food grains under the National Food Security Act, only from the designated Fair price shop (FPS) within the concerned state.

○ However, if a beneficiary were to shift to another state, he/she would need to apply for a new ration card in the second state.

Note:

- ❍ Thus, ONORC envisages removing the geographical hindrance to social justice and enabling the right to food.
- ➢ **Supporting One-Third of Population:** Nearly, 37% of the population is that of migrant labourers. The scheme is therefore important for anyone who is going to move from one place to the other.
- ➢ **Reducing Leakages:** The ONORC can reduce leakages, because the fundamental prerequisite of this scheme is deduplication.
  - ❍ This will ensure that the same person does not figure as a beneficiary in two different locations of the country.
  - ❍ Further, the scheme is linked with Aadhaar and biometrics, this removes most possibilities of corruption.
- ➢ **Reducing Social Discrimination:** ONORC will be particularly beneficial for women and other disadvantaged groups, given how social identity (caste, class and gender) and other contextual factors (including power relations) provide a strong backdrop in accessing PDS.

Associated Challenges

- ➢ **Exclusion Error:** The digitisation of this PDS process, through Aadhaar-linked ration cards and smart cards, has been pushed in an effort to reduce leakages. However, there has been a rise of exclusion errors in post-Aadhaar seeding.
  - ❍ There are many sections of society who still don't have Aadhar Cards, thereby depriving them of food security.
- ➢ **Domicile-Based Social Sector Schemes**: Not only PDS, most of the anti-poverty, rural employment, welfare and food security schemes were historically based on domicile-based access and restricted people to access government social security, welfare and food entitlements at their place of origin.
- ➢ **Disrupting Supplies At FPS:** An FPS receives the monthly quota of products strictly in accordance with the number of people assigned to it.
  - ❍ The ONORC, when fully operational, would disrupt this practice, as some FPSs may have to cater to more numbers of cards even as others cater to less, owing to migration of people.

Way Forward

- ➢ **Opening up Alternate Delivery Centres:** If emergencies continue to hamper uptake at ration shops, alternate delivery channels can be considered for delivering food grains to vulnerable groups.
- ➢ **Focusing on Nutritional Security:** Food security should be seen from a broader framework of nutritional security. Therefore, ONORC must allow the portability of Integrated Child Development Services, Mid-Day Meals, immunisation, health care and other facilities.
- ➢ **Replacing PDS With Food Coupons:** In the longer run, the PDS system may be replaced by a fool-proof food coupon system or direct benefit transfer.
  - ❍ Wherein, a Below Poverty Line family can buy rice, pulses, sugar and oil from any Kirana store at the market price, by either paying fully through the coupon or by cash.

Conclusion

ONORC is the far-reaching reform of the public distribution ecosystem since the Food Security Act. It will provide food security to jobless migrants andwill help achieve the target set under SDG 2: Ending hunger by 2030.

Dowry System in India

Dowry is a social evil in society that has caused unimaginable tortures and crimes towards women and polluted the Indian marital system. Dowry is payment made in cash or kind to a bride's in-laws at the time of her marriage.

Today the government has come up with many laws (The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961) and reforms, not only to eradicate the dowry system, but also to uplift the status of the girl child by bringing in many schemes.

However, owing to the social nature of this problem, the legislation has failed to produce the desired results in our society.

In order to get rid of this problem, appealing to the social and moral consciousness of the people, providing education and economic independence for women, and effective enforcement of legislation against the dowry system, can help.

Impact of Dowry System

➢ **Gender Discrimnation:** Due to the dowry system, many a times it has been seen that women are seen as a liability and are often subjected to subjugation and are given second hand treatment may it be in education or other amenities.

➢ **Affecting Career of Women:** The larger context for the practice of dowry is the poor presence of women in the workforce, and their consequent lack of financial independence.

  ○ The Poorer sections of society who send their daughters out to work and earn some money, to help them save up for her dowry.

  ○ The regular middle and upper class backgrounds do send their daughters to school, but don't emphasize career options.

➢ **Many Women End Up Being Unmarried:** An uncountable number of girls in the country, despite being educated and professionally competent, remain endlessly unmarried because their parents cannot fulfil the demand for pre-marriage dowry.

➢ **Objectification of Women:** Contemporary dowry is more like an investment by the bride's family for plugging into powerful connections and money making opportunities.

  ○ This renders women as merely articles of commerce.

➢ **Crime Against Women:** In some cases, the dowry system leads to crime against women, ranging from emotional abuse and injury to even deaths.

Way Forward

➢ **Recognizing Limitations of Political Solution to Social Problem:** No law can be enforced without the wholehearted cooperation of the people.

  ○ Enacting a law no doubt sets a pattern of behaviour, activates social conscience and renders some assistance towards the efforts of social reformers in getting it abolished.

  ○ However, social evil like dowry cannot eradicate itself unless the people carry the philosophy behind the law much further.

➢ **Educating Girls:** Education and independence is one powerful and valuable gift that parents can give to their daughter.

  ○ This will in turn help her to be financially sound and be a contributing member of the family, giving her respect and right status in the family.

  ○ So providing the daughters with a solid education, and encouraging her to pursue a career of her choice is the best dowry any parent can ever give their daughter.

➢ **Creating Social Stigma Around Dowry:** Accepting dowry should be made a social stigma, and all generations should be addressed. For this, social consciousness about the ill effects of the dowry system needs to be aroused. In this context:

  ○ The Union and State governments must take effective steps for stepping up 'anti-dowry literacy' among people through Lok Adalats, radio broadcasts, television and newspapers on a 'continuing' basis.

  ○ Youths are the only ray of hope to effectively combat the menace of the dowry system. They must be given moral value based education to broaden their minds and widen their outlook.

➢ **Multi Stakeholder Approach: :** Dowry is not a standalone problem, thus society should take every step to bring gender parity. In this context,

  ○ States should look at gender-disaggregated data across the life cycle – birth, early childhood, education, nutrition, livelihood, access to healthcare, etc – to address gender inequality.

  ○ There is a need to expand childcare and safe public transport, reduce discrimination in hiring, and create affirming workplace environments.

  ○ At home, men should share domestic work and care responsibilities.

Conclusion

The practice of dowry is not only illegal but also unethical. Therefore, the conscience of society needs to be fully awakened to the evils of the dowry system so that the demand for dowry itself should lead to 'loss of face' in society for those who demand it.

Controlling Population: A Double Edged Sword

Recently, two Indian state governments – Uttar Pradesh and Assam – have advocated aggressive population control measures. This proposal pertains to pursuing a two-child policy for entitlement to state government benefits.

Note:

With ongoing trends, India will overtake China as the most populous country by 2025 or perhaps sooner. The overwhelming population burden is causing a resource crunch on resources like hospitals, food grains, houses, or employment.

However, population control, grounded in classic economic theories, has been a double-edged sword. It has both advantages and costs.

> **Status of Population Growth in the India & World**
> ➢ In over half of the world's nations, the rate of population growth is falling behind replacement rates, and, perhaps for the first time, the growth rate in the world's population is projected to be zero by the end of the century, according to United Nations (UN) data.
> ➢ Further, the Covid-19 pandemic may have fast-tracked the oncoming peak of a global population decline by at least a decade, according to a recent Bloomberg report.
> ❍ The pandemic has slowed the already slowing global birth rates, from the United States (US) to China, experts estimate.
> ➢ According to the United Nations population projections, India's population will increase by a multiple of 1.09 between 2021 and 2031.
> ❍ From 2060 onwards, India's population will start falling, which happens when fertility rate falls below replacement levels.

Population Control Theories

➢ **Malthusian Theory:** Malthus in his work, Principle of Population (1798) had predicted that the world's population would grow at a faster rate than the rate of food production.
  ❍ According to him, the population tends to grow exponentially (geometric growth), he argued, but food supply grew in a slower arithmetic ratio.
  ❍ However, Malthus was ultimately proved wrong as breakthroughs in agricultural technology made countries, such as India, net food surplus.

➢ **Big-Push Theory:** Harvard economist Harvey Leibenstein has demonstrated how population growth tends to erode incomes.
  ❍ The main economic argument behind this theory was that if per capita income is low, then people are too poor to save.

❍ Since investment is taken to be equal to savings, low savings would mean the economy doesn't grow.

Associated Issues With Population Control In India

While these theories increased our understanding of population economics, many of these theories were later found to have many flaws. This can be reflected in the following arguments.

➢ **High Population is Not Always Bad Economics:** A high population is not necessarily a bad thing for the economy. Population controlling measures will result in:
  ❍ There would simply not be enough people to work for the economy,
  ❍ A large non-productive aging population to support and the government may not have enough resources to support pensions
  ❍ This would lead to de-industrialisation.

➢ **Distributional Aspects of Population: In** 1937, John Maynard Keynes gave a lecture on "Some Economic Consequences of a Declining Population".
  ❍ His key worry was poor demand for investment in places where companies encounter a falling population of consumers.

➢ **China's Model:** China enforced a one-child norm in the 1980s, but with an increasing share of older people in its population (due to one-child policy), China abandoned the old policy and encouraged couples to have more children.

➢ **Religious Factor in India:** What makes population control an even more vexed issue in India is the religious polarisation around it.
  ❍ The bogey of population explosion is often used (directly or indirectly) to target a particular minority in India. The population controlling measure will impact social harmony.

➢ **Impacting the Poor:** Total fertility rates (TFR) are higher among the poor and they come down as incomes increase.
  ❍ Thus, entitlement based population control policy will end up hurting the poor, who need such help the most.

➢ **Patriarchy:** Patriarchy driven preference for a male child is an important driver of higher fertility rates.
  ❍ Restricting to two child policy, is believed to have had an adverse effect on the sex ratio of the population through practices such as female foeticide etc.

Note:

Way Forward

- **Focus on Demographic Dividend:** India needs to focus on exploiting its demographic dividend rather than worry about it.
  - India is poised at a unique moment in history, where it can exploit its demographic advantage to realise its economic goals.
  - According to the government's population projections, 53.6% of India's population in 2021 is under the age of 29. More than a quarter of India's population is 14 years or younger.
  - Our policy makers will do well to focus on exploiting India's demographic dividend rather than worrying about it

- **Upgrading the Skill Set:** Presently, India is nowhere close to guaranteeing the best possible opportunities to young Indians.
  - For Instance, according to All India Survey on Higher Education data found that India's higher education sector is mired in deep structural inequalities.
  - This young population can become extremely productive or unproductive depending on the skill sets it acquires.

- **Focusing on Women:** Education of women also plays a role, both in case of fertility rates as well as age of mother at the time of birth of first child. Education helps in bringing down fertility and early birth among women

Conclusion

India is at a stage of demographic transition where mortality rates are declining and fertility rates would decline in the next two to three decades or so. This leads to a scope to cut population growth because India still has a positive growth rate, but our population policy should keep in mind the larger consequences of zero population growth.

Marginalisation of Sexual Minorities

During 1970s homosexuality was treated as a mental disorder. But, after the 1970s, with the efforts of several activists like Dr. Frank Kameny, the global LGBTQ+ community marched ahead for their rights and equal status.

However, in India, the queer community is still a stigmatised and invisible minority. Further, whatever gains that the queer community won have been granted by the judiciary; not by legislatures.

Despite judicial verdicts, India's sexual minorities face discrimination in employment, health issues and personal rights. This makes it incompatible with the country's living, liberal and inclusive Constitution.

Role of Judiciary in Welfare of LGBTQ+

In the tug of war between the demands of the traditional conception of society and the rights of individuals to their identity and dignity, the higher judiciary has come down firmly in favour of individuals. This can be depicted in following examples:

- **Naz Foundation vs Government of NCT of Delhi Case 2009:** The Delhi High Court's verdict held that Section 377 of Indian Penal Code (IPC) offended the guarantee of equality enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution, because it creates an unreasonable classification and targets homosexuals as a class.
- **National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India Case 2014:** In this case, the Supreme Court of India declared transgender people to be a 'third gender'.
- **Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. vs Union of India Case 2018:** The Supreme Court of India's ruling in thi scase held that, the criminalization of consensual homosexual behaviour between adults (under Section 377 of the IPC), was "unconstitutional, irrational, indefensible and manifestly arbitrary".
  - This judgment has provided a launch pad for the LGBTQ+ jurisprudence and queer liberation movement in India.

Discrimination Faced By LGBTQ+

- **Full Equality is Still a Pie in the Sky:** Despite the various judgments of the higher judiciary, the queer community in India still faces discrimination in matters of employment, health and personal relationship.
- **Legal Sanction Opposed:** The Union of India has recently opposed any move to accord legal sanction to same-sex marriages in India.
  - The government stated that the decriminalisation of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code does not automatically translate into a fundamental right for same sex couples to marry.
- **Heteronormativity:** Heteronormativity is the root cause of hetero-sexism and homophobia.

Note:

- ❍ Heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexuality is the default, preferred, or normal mode of sexual orientation.
- ❍ It assumes the gender binary (i.e., that there are only two distinct, opposite genders) and that sexual and marital relations are most fitting between people of opposite sex.
- ➤ **Issues With the Transgender Act:** The Parliament has passed the [Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019,](#) which had been framed for the welfare of transgender persons.
  - ❍ However, the LGBTQ+ community protested against the act on account issues like one-size fits all approach, absence of reservation, etc.

Way Forward

- ➤ **Marriage, A Human Right:** Justice Anthony Kennedy of the U.S. Supreme Court, in Obergefell vs Hodges (2015) underscored the emotional and social value of the institution of marriage.
  - ❍ He asserted that the universal human right of marriage should not be denied to a same-sex couple.
  - ❍ As of 2021, same-sex marriage is legally performed and recognised in 29 countries.
  - ❍ Thus, Indian society and the state should synchronise themselves with changing trends.
- ➤ **Amending Article 15:** Article 15 is the cornerstone of the concept that equality is the antithesis of discrimination.
  - ❍ It secures the citizens from every sort of discrimination by the state, on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth or any of them.
  - ❍ In order tp prevent discrimination against sexual minorities, the grounds of non-discrimination should be expanded by including gender and sexual orientation.
- ➤ **Inducing Behavioural Change:** Justice Rohinton F. Nariman had directed in Navtej Singh Johar case, the Government to sensitise the general public and officials, including police officials, to reduce and finally eliminate the stigma associated with LGBTQ+ community through the mass media and the official channel.
  - ❍ School and university students too should be sensitised about the diversity of sexuality to deconstruct the myth of heteronormativity.

Conclusion

The Constitution was conceived by India's founding fathers as a beacon of fundamental rights. However, LGBTQ+ is still one of the most marginalised segments of the citizenry.

Therefore, it is time for change; but the burden should not be left to the powers that be. The onus remains with the civil society, the citizenry concerned and the LGBTQ+ community itself.

Role of Religion & Patriarchy

At Durga temple Madurai, a woman staked her claim to be the full-time pujari (priest-a hereditary position at that temple) in 2006. Agreeing with her claim, the Madras high court has recently ruled that "the altars of the God must be free from gender bias."

After the [Sabarimala judgment,](#) this judgment can be seen as a positive step towards the furtherance of gender equality.

In many religions all across the world, patriarchal notions have seeped into religion which prohibit women into some religious activities. For example, prohibitions on women were based during their menstruation.

Therefore, in order to ensure opportunities for women to participate in every sphere of life, whether spiritual or material, the link between religion and patriarchy needs to be thoroughly discussed.

Linkage Between Religion & Patriarchy

There are several ways in which religion can promote patriarchy:

- ➤ **Through Religious Scripture / Teachings:** In many religious teachings across a wide range of religions, women are given the role of nurturing, caring and giving birth.
  - ❍ While these roles are presented positively and as essential, they reinforce the gender norms in society and the patriarchal power structures.
  - ❍ If women choose not to conform to gender stereotypes, they are not only deviating from gender norms and family expectations, but deviating from God's will too.
  - ❍ Men have been dominant as recipients, interpreters and transmitters of divine messages, while women have largely remained passive receivers of teachings and ardent practitioners of religious rituals.

➢ **Through Religious Practices:** In many religions both menstruation and pregnancy are treated as impure or ungodly.

  ❍ For example, in Islam women who are menstruating are not allowed to touch the Koran. Similarly, in Hinduism, menstruating women are not allowed to enter temples.

  ❍ The practice of Sati, or self-immolation by widows on the funeral-pyres of their husbands, thrived for centuries because it was rooted in the belief of the futility of a woman's existence without her husband.

➢ **Through the Structure of Religious Organisations:** Although some religious organisations do have women in senior positions, they are certainly the exception rather than the rule.

  ❍ This exclusion of women from the priesthood or leader of a religious group exemplified women's marginalisation in religious and social life.

➢ **Through Monothestic Religions:** The development of monotheistic religions, with their all-powerful male Gods (such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism) which imbued religion with a patriarchal and sexist core.

Patriarchy & Religion and Its Impact on Women

➢ **Acting as Cause & Effect:** If patriarchy is the social normal, it is largely because it derives its legitimacy from religion, the most important rule book pertaining to societal do's-and-don'ts in any community.

➢ **Women as Inferior Being:** Due to patriarchal notions in religion, women are painted as physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually inferior to men.

➢ **Impacting Men As It Hurts Women:** Patriarchy penetrates into every single sphere of a person's life, and it hurts men as much as it impacts women.

➢ **Politics & Religion:** Politics uses religion as a tool to manipulate the masses, women bear the brunt of the consequences of cultural attitudes.

Way Forward

➢ **Demystifying True Essence of Religion:** Many religions in the world don't explicitly suppress the role of women in religion. Thus, there is a need to unravel the true essence of religion.

  ❍ For example, the Rig-Veda expounded the idea of feminine energy behind the creation of the universe.

➢ **Implementing Uniform Civil Code:** Article 44 of the Constitution lays down that the state shall endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) for the citizens throughout the territory of India.

  ❍ Implementing UCC will be a step in the right direction in extending the narrative of gender equality.

➢ **Codification of Personal Laws:** Need of the hour is the codification of all personal laws so that prejudices and stereotypes in every one of them would come to light and can be tested on the anvil of fundamental rights of the Constitution.

Conclusion

The Durga temple example is not just a social engineering experiment, there are also good religious grounds for opening all ritual functions to women.

Child Labour In India

With increased economic insecurity, lack of social protection and reduced household income, the Covid-19 pandemic is pushing the children from poor households to contribute to the family income with the risk of exposure to exploitative work.

Subsequent lockdowns have worsened the situation, posing a real risk of backtracking the gains made in eliminating child labour.

The true extent of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on child labour is yet to be measured but all indications show that it would be significant as children are unable to attend school and parents are unable to find work.

However, not all the factors that contribute to child labour were created by the pandemic; most of them were pre-existing and have been exposed or amplified by it. Though the pandemic has amplified its contributing factors, policy and programmatic interventions can save children.

Status of Child Labour in India

➢ Child labour refers to the employment of children in any work that deprives them of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular school, and that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful.

Note:

➤ The Census of India 2011 reports 10.1 million working children in the age group of 5-14 years, out of whom 8.1 million are in rural areas mainly engaged as cultivators (26%) and agricultural labourers (32.9%).

➤ The side-effects of working at a young age are:
  ○ Risks of contracting occupational diseases like skin diseases, diseases of the lungs, weak eyesight, TB etc.;
  ○ Vulnerability to sexual exploitation at the workplace;
  ○ Deprived of education.
  ○ They grow up unable to avail development opportunities and end up as unskilled workers for the rest of their lives.

Child Labour: Constitutional And Legal Provsions
➤ According to Article 23 of the Indian Constitution any type of forced labour is prohibited.
➤ Article 24 states that a child under 14 years cannot be employed to perform any hazardous work.
➤ Article 39 states that "the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused".
➤ In the same manner, Child Labour Act (Prohibition and Regulation) 1986 prohibits children under the age of 14 years to be working in hazardous industries and processes.
➤ Policy interventions such as MGNREGA 2005, the Right to Education Act 2009 and the Mid Day Meal Scheme have paved the way for children to be in schools along with guaranteed wage employment (unskilled) for rural families.
➤ Further, with the ratification International Labour Organization Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 in 2017, the Indian government have demonstrated its commitment to the elimination of child labour including those engaged in hazardous occupations.

Associated Issues With the Child Labour

➤ **Cause & Effect Relationship:** Child labour and exploitation are the result of many factors, including poverty, social norms condoning them, lack of decent work opportunities for adults and adolescents, migration and emergencies.
  ○ These factors are not only the cause but also a consequence of social inequities reinforced by discrimination.

➤ **Threat to National Eonomy:** The continuing persistence of child labour and exploitation poses a threat to national economies and has severe negative short and long-term consequences for children such as denial of education and undermining physical and mental health.

➤ **Child Labour in Informal Sector:** Though child labour is banned the law, across India child labourers can be found in a variety of informal industries like in brick kilns, carpet weaving, garment making, agriculture, fisheries, etc.

➤ **Disguised Child Labour:** Despite rates of child labour declining over the last few years, children are still being used in disguised form of child labour like domestic help.
  ○ Work performed may not appear to be immediately dangerous, but it may produce long-term and devastating consequences for their education, their skills acquisition.
  ○ Hence their future possibilities to overcome the vicious circle of poverty, incomplete education and poor quality jobs.

➤ **Linkage With Child Trafficking:** Child trafficking is also linked to child labour and it always results in child abuse.
  ○ Trafficked children are subjected to prostitution, forced into marriage or illegally adopted; they provide cheap or unpaid labour, are forced to work as house servants or beggars and may be recruited into armed groups.

Way Forward

➤ **Role of Panchayat:** As nearly 80% of child labour in India emanates from rural areas, the Panchayat can play a dominant role in mitigating child labour.In this context, panchayat should:
  ○ Generate awareness about the ill-effects of child abour,
  ○ Encourage parents to send their children to school,
  ○ Create an environment where children stop working and get enrolled in schools instead,
  ○ Ensure that children have sufficient facilities available in schools,
  ○ Inform industry owners about the laws prohibiting child labour and the penalties for violating these laws,

Note:

- Activate Balwadis and Aanganwadis in the village so that working mothers do not leave the responsibility of younger children on their older siblings.
- Motivate Village Education Committees (VECs) to improve the conditions of schools.

➢ **Integrated Approach:** Child labour and other forms of exploitation are preventable through integrated approaches that strengthen child protection systems as well as simultaneously addressing poverty and inequity, improve access to and quality of education and mobilize public support for respecting children's rights.

➢ **Treating Children as Active Stakeholder:** Children have the power to play a significant role in preventing and responding to child labour.

- They are key actors in child protection and can give valuable insights into how they perceive their involvement and what they expect from the government and other stakeholders.

Conclusion

Children belong in schools not workplaces. Child labour deprives children of their right to go to school and reinforces intergenerational cycles of poverty. Child labour acts as a major barrier to education, affecting both attendance and performance in school.

Inequalities in Digital World

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased economic inequality. This can be attributed by the fact that the super-rich have even become richer and millions of people are facing job losses and income shocks.

As a response against the pandemic, there has been an accelerated use of digital technologies in India. Essential services such as health and education are at the forefront of this drive.

Though these digital initiatives are helping in mitigating the disruption caused by pandemic, these are causing digital divide as education and health are getting re-organised in ways that make access more inequitable in an already unequal society.

Digital Inequalities

The digital technologies and automated decision-making tools exacerbated inequalities, especially by raising the barrier for people to receive services they are entitled to. This can be majorly reflected in main pillars of social infrastructure i.e. Education & Health.

➢ **Digital Inequalities in Education**: Online education kept a semblance of uninterrupted education, but the fact is that the privileged are getting ahead not necessarily because they are smarter, but because of the privileges they enjoy.

- Surveys by the NCERT, the Azim Premji Foundation, ASER and Oxfam suggest that between 27% and 60% could not access online classes for a range of reasons: lack of devices, shared devices, inability to buy "data packs", etc.
- Besides this, many lack a learning environment at home: a quiet space to study is a luxury for many.
- For girls, there is the additional expectation that they will contribute to domestic chores if they are at home.
- Many students have been robbed of peer learning opportunities due to online education.
- Equality of Opportunity is one of the basic principles of the Indian Constitution. Shifting to a system that benefits only a section of people and leaves behind the neediest is in violation of constitutional ethos.

➢ **Digital Inequalities in Health:** Like Education something similar is happening with health care. Moreover, the private health sector in India is poorly regulated in practice. Both put the poor at a disadvantage in accessing good health care.

- As there is a shortage of essentials: drugs, hospital beds, oxygen, vaccines, patients are being charged whatever hospitals like, and a black market has developed for scarce services (such as oxygen).
- In order to deal with these issues, developing an app is being seen as a solution for allocation of various health services. However, it creates many issues.
- For instance, digital solutions create additional bureaucracy for all sick persons in search of these services without disciplining the culprits.
- Platform- and app-based solutions can exclude the poor entirely, or squeeze their access to scarce health services further. Like the use of CoWIN to book a slot makes it that much harder for those without phones, computers and the Internet.

Note:

❍ The digital health ID project is being pushed during the pandemic. However, given that we lack a data privacy law in India, it is very likely that our health records will end up with private entities without our consent, even weaponised against us (e.g., private insurance companies may use it to deny poor people an insurance policy or charge a higher premium).

Way Forward

➢ **A Multi-Pronged Approach for Education:** Flexible rescheduling the academic timetable and exploring options in collaboration with schools, teachers, and parents for providing access to education to a larger section of students.

    ❍ Giving priority to the less advantaged students who do not have access to e-learning.

    ❍ Genuine efforts must be invested to ensure every child gets good quality equitable education as a fundamental right.

➢ **A Multi-Pronged Approach for Health:** Unless health expenditure on basic health services (ward staff, nurses, doctors, laboratory technicians, medicines, beds, oxygen, ventilators) is increased, apps such as Aarogya Setu, Aadhaar and digital health IDs can improve little.

    ❍ Further, unless laws against medical malpractices are enforced strictly, digital solutions will obfuscate and distract us from the real problem.

    ❍ Thus, there is a need to do systemic reforms in the healthcare sector.

Conclusion

Surely, technology has emerged as a saviour, but there is another side of the coin too which sometimes fall disproportionately on the vulnerable. Hopefully, the pandemic will teach us to be more discerning about which digital technologies we embrace.

One Health Concept

The father of modern pathology, **Rudolf Virchow**, emphasised in 1856 that there are essentially no dividing lines between animal and human medicine.This concept is ever more relevant as the world is facing a second wave of Covid-19 pandemic.

This approach is referred to as "**One Health**", focuses on acknowledging the interconnectedness of animals, humans, and the environment. It involves a multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral approach to address potential or existing risks that originate at the animal-human-ecosystems interface.

To achieve the 'One Health' vision, challenges pertaining to veterinary manpower shortages, the lack of information sharing between human and animal health institutions, and inadequate coordination on food safety at slaughter, distribution, and retail facilities and others must be addressed.

What is One Health Concept?

➢ 'One Health' vision derives its blueprint from the agreement between the tripartite-plus alliance comprising the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

➢ The overarching purpose is to encourage collaborations in research and sharing of knowledge at multiple levels across various disciplines like human health, animal health, plants, soil, environmental and ecosystem health in ways that improve, protect and defend the health of all species.

➢ The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) introduced the term "**One World-One Health**" in 2007 along with 12 recommendations (the Manhattan Principles) that focused on establishing a more holistic approach to preventing epidemic disease and maintaining ecosystem integrity.

Need for One Health Concept

➢ Scientists have observed that there are more than 1.7 million viruses circulating in wildlife, and many of them are likely to be zoonotic.

    ❍ This implies that unless there is timely detection, India risks facing many more pandemics in times to come.

➢ Another category of diseases, "anthropozoonotic" infections, gets transferred from humans to animals.

➢ The transboundary impact of viral outbreaks in recent years such as the Nipah virus, Ebola, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Avian Influenza has further reinforced the need for us to consistently document the linkages between the environment, animals, and human health.

Note:

India's One Health Framework:

➤ In keeping with the long-term objectives, India established a National Standing Committee on Zoonoses as far back as the 1980s.

➤ Further, the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD) has launched several schemes to mitigate the prevalence of animal diseases.

  ❍ In addition, DAHD will soon establish a 'One Health' unit within the Ministry.

➤ Additionally, the government is working to revamp programmes that focus on capacity building for veterinarians and upgrading the animal health diagnostic system such as Assistance to States for Control of Animal Diseases (ASCAD).

  ❍ Recently, funds were sanctioned for setting up a 'Centre for One Health' at Nagpur.

Way Forward

➤ **Consolidating Disease Surveillance:** There is a need for consolidating existing animal health and disease surveillance systems — e.g., the Information Network for Animal Productivity and Health, and the National Animal Disease Reporting System.

➤ **Developing Guidelines:** Developing best-practice guidelines for informal market and slaughterhouse operation (e.g., inspections, disease prevalence assessments), and creating mechanisms to operationalise 'One Health' at every stage down to the village level.

➤ **Holistic Collaboration:** One Health initiatives, by their multidisciplinary nature, entail working across ministries and navigating tacit institutional hierarchies and allocating leadership roles.

  ❍ Therefore, One Health consortia requires the cooperation and active engagement of individuals, communities and society are needed.

  ❍ Further, there is a need to cultivate champions in different sectors who can agree on common objectives. This will promote innovation, adaptation and flexibility in terms of political, financial and administrative accountability.

➤ **Establishing Institutional Mechanism:** There are already several cross-cutting efforts operating in India to develop protocols for a database of research into zoonotic diseases.

  ❍ However, there is no single agency or framework that embraces all interdisciplinary sectorial players under a single umbrella to carry forward the 'One Health' agenda.

  ❍ Thus, a proper institutional mechanism must be set up to implement One Health concept.

Conclusion

As India battles yet another wave of a deadly zoonotic disease (Covid-19), awareness generation, and increased investments toward meeting 'One Health' targets is the need of the hour.

Food Wastage Issue

Despite adequate food production, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation has reported that about 190 million Indians remain undernourished. Moreover, it states that every third malnourished child is Indian.

Ironically, the same report highlights that around 40% of the food produced in India is either lost or wasted. It is further estimated that the value of food wastage in India is around ₹92,000 crores per annum.

This food wastage, however, isn't limited to one level alone but perforates through every stage; from harvesting, processing, packaging, and transporting to the end stage of consumption.

Though food wastage is a global problem, India stands a chance to convert this into an opportunity, if it can address it properly.

Case Study: SAFAL Outlet

➤ On average, 18.7 kgs of food was disposed off by one Safal outlet daily.

➤ This suggests that an estimated 7.5 tonnes of food are discarded daily across the 400 Safal outlets in Delhi.

➤ Approximately 84.7% of the total food waste recorded was thrown in the bin, while the rest was either fed to the poor or some animals.

➤ A significant portion of the food waste bin was still in edible condition.

➤ If the edible food waste generated by Safal is diverted, an estimated 2000 people could be fed daily.

Challenge of Food Wastage

➤ **Pre-Consumption Losses:** Nearly 40% of the food produced in India is wasted every year due to fragmented food systems and inefficient supply chains.

Note:

❍ This is the loss that occurs even before the food reaches the consumer.

➢ **Food Wastage At Households:** There is also a significant amount of food waste generated in our homes. As per the Food Waste Index Report 2021, a staggering 50 kg of food is thrown away per person every year in Indian homes.

➢ **Greenhouse Gases Emission:** This excess food waste usually ends up in landfills, creating potent greenhouse gases which have dire environmental implications.

➢ **Impact of The Pandemic:** The Covid-19 pandemic not only exposed the problems of food waste but also compounded them.

❍ In the wake of the lockdown imposed last year, surplus stocks of grain — pegged at 65 lakh tonnes in the first four months of 2020 — continued to rot in godowns across India.

❍ Access to food became extremely scarce for the poor, especially daily-wage laborers.

➢ **Supply-Chain Management Issues:** Some problems in the Indian food supply chain include inefficiency of government programs, lack of transparency in revenue generation, insufficient storage facilities, and lack of comprehensive and accurate inventories.

Way Forward

➢ **Behavioral Change:** According to various reports food waste attributed to households and their irresponsible consumption patterns means that change needs to begin in our own homes.

❍ Calculated purchasing when buying groceries, minimizing single-use packaging wherever possible, ordering consciously from restaurants, and reconsidering extravagant buffet spreads at weddings can go a long way.

➢ **Food Bank Concept:** Edible food should be made available every day, for free, at the latest in the last opening hour, so it can be picked up and consumed by those in need.

❍ The option of distribution through food banks can also be explored, as can tie-ups with private actors so that food can reach hunger hotspots.

❍ At the community level, one can identify and get involved with organizations such as Coimbatore-based No Food Waste which aims to redistribute excess food to feed the needy and hungry.

➢ **International Precedents**: We can look to best practices and laws in countries like France, Norway, Denmark, UK, etc., in order to check spoilage and destruction of edible food waste in India.

❍ For example, in France, supermarkets prioritize the reduction, reuse, and recycling of extra food.

➢ **Technological Investment:** It is important that technology is adopted at every stage of the supply chain to overcome this problem.

❍ Planning in the supply chain can improve with technology, reducing transit time in shipping and logistics. In addition, multiple government initiatives are also assisting in building infrastructure for the food industry.

❍ Investments in the vibrant start-up ecosystem in India can also aid in addressing all the hindrances in the system with the support of the latest logistics and supply chain technologies, blockchain, artificial intelligence, data monitoring, storage, and packaging solutions

Conclusion

Early awareness about our duty to minimize food waste is critical in changing the way our society addresses hunger and food scarcity. Thus everyone must join hands if we are to work towards a truly sustainable India that does not have millions undernourished despite having adequate food production.

Universal Social Welfare

India is one of the largest welfare states in the world and yet, with atrocities caused by Covid-19, the state failed to provide social welfare to most of its vulnerable citizens. Presently owing to the pandemic, India is witnessing multiple crises: a crumbling health infrastructure, mass inter- and intra-migration and food insecurity.

Moreover, the extenuating circumstances brought by the second wave of the pandemic has pushed an estimated 75 million people into poverty and brought even the middle and upper-class citizens to their knees.

The pandemic has thus revealed that leveraging our existing schemes and providing universal social security is of utmost importance. This will help absorb the impact of external shocks on our vulnerable populations.

Note:

What is the Social Security/Welfare System?

➢ According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Social Security is a comprehensive approach designed to prevent deprivation, give assurance to the individual of a basic minimum income for himself and his dependents and to protect the individual from any uncertainties.

➢ It is also comprised of two elements, namely:
  ○ Right to a Standard of Living adequate for the health and well-being, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.
  ○ Right to Income Security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond any person's control.

Need For Universal Social Welfare

➢ **Majority of Workforce is in Unorganised Sector:** The organised sector workers constitute less than 10% of all workers in India.
  ○ This leaves more than 90% of the workforce without job security, labour rights and post-retirement provisions.
  ○ Also, in a dynamic market-economy, workers will lose jobs at a faster pace with technological changes. Thus, workers need to keep learning to stay productively employed.
  ○ However, in spite of great attention given to skills development in the last 15 years, the results are not very encouraging.

➢ **Illness Is Universal, But Healthcare Is Not:** Economic capital, in the absence of social capital, has proven to be insufficient in accessing healthcare facilities.
  ○ Further, Out-of-pocket health expenses create barriers to seeking healthcare and can push marginal households into poverty, form as much as nearly 90% of private expenditure on health.
  ○ Also Covid-19 has highlighted the urgency for providing universal free health care. It has demonstrated that private health care can be afforded only by the wealthy.

➢ **Inadequate Expenditure on Social Security:** India has a broad aim of social protection programs, but the overall public expenditure on social protection (excluding public healthcare) is only approx. 1.5% of the GDP, lower than many middle-income countries across the world.

○ Further, the country has over 500 direct benefit transfer schemes for which various Central, State, and Line departments are responsible. However, these schemes have not reached those in need.

○ Moreover, existing schemes are fractionalised across various departments and sub-schemes. This causes problems beginning with data collection to last-mile delivery.

➢ **Intended Benefits:** Having a universal system would improve the ease of application by consolidating the data of all eligible beneficiaries under one database.

  ○ For instance, the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) is one scheme that can be strengthened into universal social security.
    ■ It already consolidates the public distribution system (PDS), the provision of gas cylinders, and wages for the MGNREGS.

  ○ Having a universal scheme would take away this access/exclusion barrier.
    ■ For example, PDS can be linked to a universal identification card such as the Aadhaar or voter card, in the absence of a ration card.
    ■ Making other schemes/welfare provisions like education, maternity benefits, disability benefits etc. also universal would ensure a better standard of living for the people.

Case Study: Universal Social Welfare Model

➢ An example of such a social protection scheme is the Poor Law System in Ireland.

➢ In the 19th century, Ireland, a country that was staggering under the weight of poverty and famine, introduced the Poor Law System to provide relief that was financed by local property taxes.

➢ These laws were notable for not only providing timely assistance but maintaining the dignity and respectability of the poor while doing so.

➢ They were not designed as hand-outs but as necessary responses to a time of economic crisis.

➢ Today, the social welfare system in Ireland has evolved into a four-fold apparatus that promises social insurance, social assistance, universal schemes, and extra benefits/supplements.

Note:

Way Forward

➢ **Emulating Pulse Polio Universal Immunisation Programme:** We have seen an example of a universal healthcare programme that India ran successfully — the Pulse Polio Universal Immunisation Programme.

❍ In 2014, India was declared polio-free. It took a dedicated effort over a number of years.

❍ With the advancements in knowledge and technology, a universal coverage of social welfare is possible in a shorter time frame.

❍ The implementation can be eased through a focus on data digitisation, data-driven decision-making and collaboration across government departments.

➢ **Building on Existing Systems:** The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) is one scheme that can be strengthened into universal social security.

❍ It already consolidates the public distribution system (PDS), the provision of gas cylinders, and wages for the MGNREGS.

➢ **Urban MGNREGA:** MGNREGA has proved its utility by providing employment to millions of workers who have reverse migrated.

❍ Thus, there is a case for extending this programme to urban areas with municipal bodies being given the responsibility for providing a fixed no of days work to all those seeking it.

❍ Municipal bodies have a range of work to get done, such as improving sanitation, minor repairs, in which they could productively use labour.

➢ **Providing Universal Health Coverage:** There is a need to establish the Ayushman Bharat-National Health Agency at all levels of governance for management of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (PM-JAY).

❍ Further, there is a need to review and iron out the challenges with the business model of Jan Aushadhi stores to ensure that they can function as self-sustaining entities and scale up rapidly across the country.

Conclusion

International experience also emphasizes the need to move away from a one-size-fits-all model by allowing sub-national governments greater flexibility as political economy, labor markets, demographic attributes and risk profiles vary by location.

Hence, or establishing an universal social protection architecture, India should enable local governments to design, plan and deliver a core basket of benefits within a nationally defined policy framework and budget.

Ramani Judgment

Recently, the Delhi High court in MJ Akbar vs Priya Ramani case gave an empowering judgment that can act as a landmark in India's #MeToo movement and women's rights. The court acquitted journalist Priya Ramani in a criminal defamation case brought against her by former Union minister and editor M J Akbar.

Men from privileged classes, when accused of sexual violence, are quick to accuse women of injuring their reputation and status. This makes sexual harassment invisible, and silences and discredits women's voices.

In this context, the court held that the right of reputation cannot be protected at the cost of the right of life and dignity of a woman. Further, the judgment highlighted many other points that can treat the asymmetry of patriarchal power in society.

Significance of Judgement

Women speaking up against sexual harassment are often disbelieved, often asked questions that intend to silence the women and undermine their dignity. The verdict tries to answer these types of questions.

➢ **Why did not speak up immediately after it happened?:** The verdict urged society to "understand that sometimes a victim may for years not speak up due to mental trauma," and underlined that a woman has a right to speak up about the abuse, even after decades.

❍ It pointed out that a woman's right to speak up about her violations was not restricted by the passage of time.

➢ **Why took media or social media, instead of filing a criminal case?:** The verdict reasoned that the Institutional mechanisms have systematically failed to protect women or provide justice

❍ Therefore, survivors are justified in sharing their testimonies on media or social media platforms as a form of self-defense.

➢ **What is the proof?:** It pointed out that since sexual harassment typically takes place in private, women's testimonies cannot be dismissed as untrue or defamatory simply because they are unable to provide other witnesses to back their allegations.

Note:

- ➤ **What about the man's reputation?:** When women professionals seek justice against powerful men, generally there is the cry of outrage and injures the reputations of such men.
  - ○ The Ramani verdict notes that a woman cannot be punished for raising voice against sex abuse on the pretext of criminal complaint of defamation as the right of reputation cannot be protected at the cost of the right of life and dignity as guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Will the Judgement Be Able To Make An Impact?

The Ramani verdict is a huge moral victory of the #MeToo movement, and will, hopefully, serve to deter powerful men from using the defamation law to silence survivors. However, sexual harassment at the workplace is a **problem of institutions rather than of individuals alone.**

- ➤ **Sexual Harassment a Means To Control Women:** The world over, employers deploy sexual harassment as a means to control women workers. According to many reports, in India and Bangladesh, at least 60% of garment factory workers experience harassment at work.
  - ○ In India, it has been much harder to call impunity to account. In the entertainment industry, women have faced a backlash for speaking up, while men accused of grievous abuse have been reinstated.
- ➤ **Vulnerable Section Are Voiceless:** For factory workers, domestic workers, street vendors, sanitation and waste workers, construction workers, sex workers, labour laws or laws against sexual harassment exist only on paper.
  - ○ Calling out their boss as a perpetrator means an instant loss of job and pay.
- ➤ **New Difficulty to Unionize:** Under the new Labour Codes, the government envisages improving ease of doing business. In this context, the new labour codes now discourage workers to unionize.
  - ○ Thereby, women workers fighting sexual harassment, who stand to be silenced by these codes, need more support and attention.

Conclusion

The Ramani verdict is a huge moral vindication of the #MeToo movement, and will, hopefully, serve to deter powerful men from using the defamation law to silence survivors. However, sexual harassment at the workplace is more of a social problem whose roots lie in the patriarchal mindset of society.

Therefore, apart from judgment like this, society needs a cultural revolution where women are treated with equality, equity, and respect.

Human Development Index

The Human Development Index (HDI), which combines indicators of **life expectancy, education or access to knowledge and income** or standard of living, captures the level and changes to the quality of life.

The index is the making of two acclaimed economists from Pakistan and India, namely Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen. It was initially launched as an alternative measure to the gross domestic product, as it stresses the centrality of human development in the growth process.

India has done a seemingly great job in multiplying it's economy many folds, but progress on the HDI front has not been very appealing. The last three decades HDI's data indicate that India has raised its **HDI score at an annual average rate of mere 1.42%.**

Therefore, if India has to realise it's the aspiration of becoming a superpower, it must invest to reduce the burden of social and economic disadvantage to vulnerable sections of its population.

Progress Made by India

- ➤ As the **UNDP's HDR Report 2019** notes, India's **gross national income per capita has more than doubled** since 2005, and the number of "multidimensionally poor" people fell by more than 271 million in the decade since 2005-06.
- ➤ Additionally, inequalities in "basic areas" of human development have reduced. For instance, historically marginalised groups are catching up with the rest of the population in terms of educational attainment.

Reasons For India's Underperformance on HDI

The 2019 HDI ranks India with a per capita income of $6,681 in the 131st position, which is a notch lower than its 130th rank in 2018. The malefic effects of deep-rooted societal and economic disadvantages account for a low rank for an economy that is in the global top 6 by size. Following factors can be dubbed as reasons for India's dismal performance in HDI:

- ➤ **Increasing Income Inequalities:** Income inequalities amplify failings on other HDI indices of human development. Intergenerational income mobility is lower in countries with high-income inequality.

○ It manifests at birth and determines access to quality healthcare, education, and opportunities.

○ Further, there is an increasing trend in income inequality. In India, the income growth of the bottom 40% between 2000 and 2018 (58%) was significantly below the average income growth for the entire population (122%).

➢ **Gender Inequality:** Numbers show female per capita income in India was only 21.8% of that of males, while it was more than double at 49% in other developing countries.

○ The meagre per capita income of females in India is mainly because of their exclusion from the labour force.

○ Only 20.5% of the women in the working-age group were in the labour force, pointing to its dismal Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR).

➢ **Cumulative Impact:** The cumulative impact of these factors spills over across generations. It is this intergenerational cycle which denies opportunities to those at the bottom of the pyramid.

Way Forward

➢ **Fair Income Distribution:** While the size of economic resources is a key factor affecting human development, the **distribution and allocation** of these resources also play a major role in determining the level of human development.

○ Many global case studies show that high growth accompanied by more effective income distribution can help enhance human development, even with moderate social expenditures.

○ For Example, South Korea and Taiwan improved income distribution through early land reforms.

➢ **Investing in Social Infrastructure:** Universalisation of education and health care could have pulled deprived sections out of the poverty trap.

○ Sustaining and improving the quality of life will also depend on policies crafted to handle major emerging challenges such as urbanisation, the housing deficit, access to power, water, education and health care.

➢ **Streamlining of the Finances:** Streamlining the traditional approach of generating new sources of revenue generation, steps like rationalised targeting of subsidies, judicious use of revenues meant for social sector development etc will probably meet the financial requirements needed for improving HDI.

➢ **Good Governance Reforms:** Effective performance evaluation of the projects and activities engaged in the social sector development through innovative methods like outcome budgeting, social auditing and participatory democracy has been known to yield positive results.

➢ **Gender Empowerment:** Government should invest in Gender equality and women's empowerment, as they are integral to human development.

Conclusion

India's HDI scores can be substantially enhanced if a politically committed government rolls out inclusive policies that strengthen public health, education and nutrition, and end gender discrimination to usher in a more egalitarian order.

Water, Sanitation & Women's Rights

The right to water and sanitation is recognised as fundamental to attaining all other human rights. However, globally, 2.1 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water at home, and 2.3 billion do not have basic sanitation and 1 billion still practice open defecation.

Amongst this, women are the most vulnerable section. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to essential water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

Women are largely responsible for household water, sanitation and hygiene management; they bear a disproportionate burden when these basic services are lacking, and face health, security and psychological vulnerabilities due to inadequate access and decision-making control.

Therefore, access to water and sanitation, if delivered well, empowers women economically and socially. Done poorly, it may undermine women's position at home and in the community.

Interconnection: Water, Sanitation & Hygiene With Women's Rights

➢ **Women's Water-Fetching Responsibility:** Women and girls are responsible for fetching water in most households where a drinking water source is off premises.

Note:

○ This practice has implications for women's health, workloads, and caloric expenditure.

○ When girls carry water over long distances, the time available to them to pursue education is reduced.

○ Water-fetching responsibilities also add to the burden of **unpaid domestic work**, decrease time towards other income-generating activities, and affect leisure and nonessential activities.

➤ **Sanitation Access and Gender-Based Violence:** There is enough evidence of sanitation-related gender-based violence, highlighting a range of vulnerabilities women and girls face who are forced to defecate openly.

○ This leads to the fear of sexual violence that can restrict freedom of movement and affect equal opportunities.

➤ **Women's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Needs:** Women have an increased need for water for hydration, sanitation and hygiene during menstruation, pregnancy, the postnatal period, and caring for sick family members or young children.

○ When these basic needs are not met, women and girls are unable to participate equally in society.

➤ **Linkage With SDGs:** The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) make an essential initial step in connecting water, sanitation and hygiene (SDG 6) and gender equality and empowerment (SDG 5) through target 6.2.

○ Target 6.2 of SDG emphasises **'access to equitable sanitation and hygiene and women and girls'** needs.

○ Further, SDG 10 aims to **reduce inequalities within and between countries.** Equal access to clean water and sanitation is critical to reducing overall disparities.

Associated Challenges

➤ **Lack of Women's Participation in Decision-making:** The central role of women and girls in the procurement and management of water, sanitation and hygiene at the household level is recognised.

○ However, women's water, sanitation & hygiene governance and household decision-making control over such resources are scarce.

○ For example, women not being consulted in decisions taken on sanitation-related matters such as the building and using toilets. It also fails to take into account the prevalent socio-cultural norms.

➤ **Lack of Data:** Measurement of the burden placed on women and girls, the opportunity costs of these burdens, and female empowerment related to water, sanitation and hygiene decision-making and autonomy are limited.

➤ **Lack of Adequate Infrastructure:** In many parts of India (especially in rural India) water, sanitation and hygiene in health-care facilities are far from adequate.

○ In schools, the lack of necessary infrastructure, privacy, spaces, materials and guidance to manage menstruation has been associated with harassment, sexual exploitation, psychosocial impacts, decreased school attendance rates and drop-out for girls.

Way Forward

➤ **Gender-Neutral Approach:** There is a need for the political imperative to recognise that both women and men's involvement are integral to sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene management.

➤ **Policy Framework for Women Leadership:** Women's leadership and decision making power in water and sanitation is critical.Therefore, enabling policy frameworks backed by resources, training and political will, are vital to developing and sustaining women's leadership in the water sector at the local, national and global level.

○ In this context, there is a need to invest in developing the next generation of water, sanitation and hygiene leaders, by collaborating with colleges, water utilities and districts, using experiential learning, internships and interacting with experts.

➤ **Sustained Focus on Swachh Bharat Mission:**The rallying call of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) campaign of "Satyagraha se Swachhagraha" has led to the significant change in sanitation habits in India.

○ The next SBM phase should envisage finding solutions for sustained behaviour change, addressing women and their hygiene needs.

➤ **Role of Society:** As the women already spend 2.6 times more hours than men on unpaid activitie6s, including caregiving and domestic work.

Note:

- ❍ Citizenry as a part of society to ensure their involvement in water and sanitation services does not further contribute to the burden of unpaid work, or decrease the ability to earn an income.
- ➢ **Role of SHGs:** There are rapidly increasing examples throughout the country, with women being able to push through reforms through the help of support groups or community-led efforts.
  - ❍ Therefore, women SHG should be promoted to take up the cause of water, sanitation and Hygiene.
  - ❍ In this context, Jharkhand's example is worth emulating. Trained women masons built over 15 lakh toilets in one year and the state was declared open defecation free (rural) much ahead of the national cut-off date of October 2, 2019.

Conclusion

As countries work to achieve SDG 10, access to clean water and sanitation can be a game-changer for prosperity and transformation. Policies on water and sanitation need to keep women centre-stage needs and enable them to be agents of change.

This is the time for governments, businesses, NGOs and academic institutions to look at how they are investing in women's leadership in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector, from local committees to the international stage.

Human Migration: Reasons & Impact

Why in News

Human migration and mobility is an age-old phenomena touching almost every society around the world. However things have changed over time in various ways.

Key Points

- ➢ **About Migration:** The **International Organization for Migration** (The **United Nations** Migration Agency) defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a state away from his/her habitual place of residence.
  - ❍ Examining the shifts in scale, direction, demography and frequency can help understand how migration is evolving. It can further lead to effective policies, programmes and operational responses on the ground.

- ➢ **Factors Determining Migration:** A broad range of factors determine the movement of people. It can be **either voluntary or forced movements** as a consequence of the increased magnitude or frequency of disasters, economic challenges and extreme poverty or conflict situations.
  - ❍ In more recent years, the **Covid-19 pandemic** is also one of the major causes of Migration.
- ➢ **Push and Pull Factors of Migration**: Push factors are those that compel a person to leave a place of origin (out-migration) and migrate to some other place such as - **economic reasons, social reasons, lack of development of a particular place.**
  - ❍ Pull factors indicate the factors which attract migrants (in-migration) to an area (destination) such as **job opportunities, better living conditions, availability of basic or high level facilities etc.**
- ➢ **Gradual Increase in Migration:** From an economic perspective, migration over the last several years is seen due to **change in the paradigm of production processes,** services rendered and due to **increase in demand and opportunities** in different economic jurisdictions.
  - ❍ Migration has **evidently increased since the 1980s** because of the new paradigm of production processes and the evolution of skill sets has facilitated this process.

Migration and India

- ➢ **Migration at Global Level and Related Initiatives:** As of 2020, approximately **281 million people were international migrants**, representing **3.6%** of the total global population.
  - ❍ The **International Migrants Day** is celebrated annually by the UN on **18th December** to raise awareness about the challenges and difficulties of international migration.
    - ■ The theme for the **International Migrants Day 2021** was **'Harnessing the potential of Human Mobility'.**
  - ❍ The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** recognizes for the first time the contribution of migration to sustainable development.
    - ■ 11 out of the 17 SDGs contain targets and indicators relevant to migration or mobility.

Note:

- ➢ **India and Inter-Country Migration:** India is the **largest migrating country** and has been supplying a highly skilled labourforce in many countries. By 2018, people from India **migrated to about 193 countries.**
  - ○ The Indian diaspora outside India is supposed to be the most vibrant. It contributes to the local communities' economies in many ways and also **repatriates the funds.**
    - Indian migrants to other countries, in this way, **create a win-win situation** for both India and the country where they migrate.
  - ○ Although slowed down by the Covid-19 pandemic, repatriated funds from inter-country migration has made a **remarkable contribution to India's GDP.**
- ➢ **Contributions of Indian Diaspora:** Indians have played a major role in **providing assistance in countries like Kenya or Uganda** where there have been disturbances conflicts.
  - ○ Indian businessmen, though in a small number, are **generating local jobs contributing to the local economy** as well as serving them beyond providing jobs.
  - ○ Organizations led by the Indian diaspora in various countries, during the Covid-19 pandemic, also **served by distributing oxygen concentrators** or **providing free services like food kits.**

Significance of Migration

- ➢ **Labour Demand and Supply:** Migration **fills gaps in demand for and supply of labor,** efficiently allocates skilled labor, unskilled labor, and cheap labor.
- ➢ **Skill Development:** Migration enhances the knowledge and skills of migrants through **exposure and interaction with the outside world.**
- ➢ **Quality of Life:** Migration **enhances chances of employment** and economic prosperity which in turn improves quality of life.
  - ○ The migrants also send extra income and remittance back home, thereby **positively impacting their native place.**
- ➢ **Economic Remittances:** Economic well being of migrants provides **insurance against risks to households in the areas of origin,** increases consumer expenditure and investment in health, education and assets formation.

- ➢ **Social Remittances:** Migration helps to improve the social life of migrants, as they **learn about new cultures, customs, and languages** which helps to **improve brotherhood among people** and ensures **greater equality** and tolerance.

Challenges Related to Migration

- ➢ **Issues faced by Marginalised Sections**: The people who are economically rich and sociologically accepted widely (such as upper caste in India or white in the Western countries) find it quite easier to move and get easily accepted into other societies.
  - ○ Whereas the people who are poor or belong to a **marginalised section do not find it as easy to get into many of these countries** and even if they get, they might not be able to mix up.
- ➢ **Socio- and Psycho-logical Aspects:** Many times, the host countries **do not easily accept the migrants** and they always **remain as a second class citizen**. So, the confidence level of interaction is also affected.
  - ○ Any person migrating to a new country faces **multiple challenges, from cultural adaptation and language barriers** to homesickness and loneliness.
- ➢ **Exclusion from Political Rights and Social Benefits:** Migrant workers are deprived of many opportunities to exercise their political rights like the **right to vote.**
  - ○ Moreover, the need to provide **proof of address, ration cards, Voter IDs and Aadhaar cards**, which is difficult due to the fluidity of their lives, deprive them from accessing welfare schemes and policies.

Way Forward

- ➢ **Migration-Centric Policies:** Migration is integral to the process of human development and plays a very important role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals, thereby **preventing migration could even be counterproductive.**
  - ○ India needs to formulate **migration centric policies, strategi**es, and institutional mechanisms in order to ensure inclusive growth and development and **reduce distress induced migration,** thereby increasing India's prospects for poverty reduction.
- ➢ **Role of State Government:** The **India Center for Migration,** a research think-tank to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) can play a major role in finding out the ways to train and orient the people who are willing to migrate inter-country.

Note:

- ❍ Also it shall be the responsibility of the state governments (as Employment is a subject under the State List of Indian Constitution) to monitor that the **international migrants are smoothly working in other countries.**
- ❍ The Central Government shall also assist the former to play a rather proactive role in training and orienting the people from employment perspective.
- ➢ **Bringing Behavioural Changes:** There is a need to have more fluidity in the immigration and immigration policies that allow for easier transfer of human capital.
  - ❍ Moreover, it is time to move away from the old paradigms in which migration and immigration is primarily thought of as some sort of refuge and realise that migration is vital to human development.

Conclusion

- ➢ There are various factors responsible for migration and most prominent amongst them are socio-political, economical and environmental.
- ➢ It is important to understand how this process of migration is beneficial to both the origin country as well as the destination country and that's where comes the need for having a **more inclusive policy vis-a-vis migration.**

Silver Economy

Why in News

- ➢ India's **elderly population** is on the rise. As per surveys, the share of elders, as a percentage of the total population in the country, is expected to increase from around 8.6% in 2011 to almost 12.5% by 2036, and surpass 19.5% by 2050.
  - ❍ Given the predicted sharp rise in elderly population, there is an **urgent need to create a more robust eldercare ecosystem** in India, especially in the post-**Covid** phase.

Key Points

- ➢ **Elderly as a Resource:** The **National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP), 1999 s**ays that the elderly are the resource that should be a part of the economic development.
  - ❍ **Silver economy** shall be more about **integrating these people into the economy as active participants** rather than just as passive recipients.
- ➢ **Silver Economy**: It is the system of production,

distribution and consumption of goods and services **aimed at using the purchasing potential of older and ageing people** and satisfying their consumption, living and health needs.
  - ❍ Initial estimations suggest that at present the **Silver Economy is worth approximately 73,082 crore rupees.**
- ➢ **Initiatives for Silver Economy:** The government is exploring various ways to promote the idea of a silver economy.
  - ❍ Based on the recommendations of the **Expert Group on Silver Economy,** the **SAGE initiative** has been launched to promote private enterprises that **bring out innovation in products** and processes for the **benefit of the elders.**
  - ❍ The **SACRED portal** was also recently launched by Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu **to connect the senior citizens with job providers** in the private sector.

Elderly in India

- ➢ **Constitutional Provision: Article 41** of the Constitution states that the State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, **old age,** sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want.
- ➢ **Population Statistics:** In the 2011 census, the 60+ population accounted for 8.6% of India's population.
  - ❍ **Growing at around 3% annually,** the number of elderly people will rise to 319 million (~20% of total population) in 2050.
- ➢ **Elderly Women**: Elderly women in particular shall be specifically looked after in this aspect, as the **longevity for women is much longer** than men.
  - ❍ Inaccessibility of these opportunities to elderly women will make her dependent on others exposing her survival to several vulnerabilities.
- ➢ **Reforms in Recent Past**: In the recent past, more and more elderly people are living alone thus giving rise to the need for **senior-citizen housing** and **development of security gadgets** and health devices for them. All of these initiatives are coming from the startup sector.
  - ❍ However there is a large segment of the elderly population that lies in the poor category and is most likely left out of the ambit of these facilities.
- ➢ **Centre of Focus for Including Elderly in Economy:**

Note:

- ○ **Reskilling**: The generation that is getting older needs to be reskilled as what is learned in early ages needs to be recalled again in order to make them contribute up to their maximum potential in the silver era.
- ○ **Behavioural Change towards Working-Age Population**: In India, the age of 58 is considered old and appropriate for retiring and not working.
  - However, in western countries like the US, there is no maximum age for retirement.
  - Behavioural change needs to occur to ensure that the elderly are contributing towards the country as active participants.
- ➢ **Initiatives for Elderly in India:**
  - ○ **SACRED Portal**
  - ○ **SAGE (Seniorcare Aging Growth Engine)**
  - ○ **Elder Line**
  - ○ **Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP)**
  - ○ **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY)**
  - ○ **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)**
  - ○ **The Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana**
  - ○ **Vayoshreshtha Samman**
  - ○ **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (MWPSC) Act, 2007**

Significance of Including Elderly in the Economy

- ➢ **Social and Professional Experience:** Elderly people carry immense experience of their personal and professional life. The society at large needs to channelise those experiences for a better tomorrow.
  - ○ They can **provide a vital generational link for upcoming generations**. It provides support and stability to families and society at large.
- ➢ **Inculcate Moral Values:** Grandparents in joint families **provide a crucial link for transferring values and morals** to the younger generation in their initial years, thereby contributing towards the upbringing of better human beings and responsible citizens.
- ➢ **Unified Society**: Acknowledging seniors' contributions would help to make ours society a **more age-inclusive society** that does not pit one generation against the other.

- ➢ **Prepare India for Future:** India needs to prepare for the year 2050 onwards when the elderly population will be the largest segment of the Indian population.
  - ○ Including elderly people as active contributors in the economy will prepare India for the future when a major portion of its population will be aged.

Challenges Associated

- ➢ **Elderly in Unorganised Areas Remain Left-outs:** The SAGE initiative talks about the organised economy and not at all about the unorganised sector which leaves a large number of elderly people out of the purview of the benefits.
  - ○ Those who are not connected to the market are not able to access the products, either due to **lack of money** or due to **lack of access to the technology**.
- ➢ **Issues against Reskilling**: Ensuring proper technology, facilities etc for **reskilling the elderly population at a large scale** is a challenge.
  - ○ For instance, armies have an excellently systematised way to integrate the retired officers into the civilian setup.
  - ○ However, reskilling as a part of the system is quite a large task and is possible only in a few areas.
- ➢ **Issues Against No-Retirement:** Removing the retirement age **creates a problem for an economy that is still dealing with the demographic dividend** like India.
  - ○ The question arises is will the elderly be skilled in the same job or in some job that they have never done before and need to be encouraged to opt for such a job.
- ➢ **Digital as the Only Medium of Access**: Providing each and every facility via digital medium that too as the only source of access is not a wise choice considering India's current scenario, alternate options shall also be available.

Way Forward

- ➢ **Community Based Approach:** Countries like in Europe have small communities where care for the elderly and related facilities are available in the community; the volunteers of the community are the helpers of the elderly.
  - ○ India needs to build such a type of **youth army to help elderly in the far away areas.**
  - ○ Also, It is more important for the elderly to have these **products and services made available within**

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their communities rather than just on digital platforms.

➢ **Integrating Elderly in Mainstream Population**: Creating a whole new ecosystem only for the elderly like new housing systems or communities is not a reliable solution. The **elderly should not be made to suffer any isolation complexes.**

  ❍ The best way of taking the best economic and social advantage of the elderly is not to treat them separately from the rest of the population and rather **assimilate them into the mainstream population.**

  ❍ **Following the path of US and European countries** and segregating the elderly from the population **might not be the best approach for a country like India** where grandparents play a significant role in imparting values in the children of the family.

➢ **Making Welfare Schemes Elderly-Inclusive:** Bringing the larger segment of the elderly within the ambit of the welfare schemes.

  ❍ The perspective needs to be broader than just selling them products and services and **must include the ways of including them in the economy as the producers.**

  ❍ While building an eledelry-favourable ecosystem, it should be made sure that the coverage is upto the last mile.

Women Led Development Model

Why in News?

In charting a new growth story India is transitioning from women's development to 'women-led development'.

Key Points

➢ **Women as Architects:** In this vision, the women have been reimagined as **architects of India's progress and development,** rather than being passive recipients of the fruits of development.

➢ **Schemes Empowering Women Indirectly:** Besides various women-centered schemes, other schemes such as **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana** are also empowering women as the house is given in the name of Woman of the Household.

  ❍ A house in the name of a woman means the ownership of her in an asset which makes a woman economically empowered.

  ❍ Also, during the **covid-19 pandemic**, under the **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)**, an amount of Rs. 500/- per month for three months (April' 20 to June' 20), was credited to the accounts of women account holders.

Women at Work

Present Scenario

➢ **UNDP Findings: The UNDP in its latest report for Gender Inequality** has noted the following:

  ❍ **Unpaid Labour:** On an average, women spend 2.4 more hours per day than men on unpaid care and domestic work.

    ▪ Among people who participate in the paid economy, women spend an average of four hours more per day than men on paid and unpaid work combined.

  ❍ **Effect of Covid:** Women have been hit harder than men by the **pandemic**, losing income and leaving the labour market at a greater rate.

    ▪ Women are 25% more likely than men to live in extreme poverty.

    ▪ The global female employment is 19% more at risk than male employment (ILO estimates).

➢ **WEF Findings for India:** The **Global Gender Gap Report 2021** by **World Economic Forum (WEF)** report noted that in terms of economic participation, the **gender gap actually widened in India** by 3% this year.

  ❍ The share of women in **professional and technical roles declined** further to 29.2%.

  ❍ The share of **women in senior and managerial positions also is as low** as 14.6% and **only 8.9% firms in the country have top female managers.**

  ❍ The estimated earned income of women in India is only one-fifth of men's, which puts the country among the bottom 10 globally on this indicator.

    ▪ In Pakistan and Afghanistan, the income of an average woman is below 16% of that of an average man, while in India it is 20.7%.

Government Initiatives for Women Empowerment in Various Fields

- ➢ **In Panchayats:**
  - ○ **Mahila Sabhas in Gram Panchayat**
  - ○ **Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)**
  - ○ **Panchayat Mahila Evam Yuva Shakti Abhiyan (PMEYSA)**
- ➢ **In Education:**
  - ○ **Vigyan Jyoti Scheme**
  - ○ **GATI Scheme**
  - ○ **KIRAN Scheme**
  - ○ **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme**
- ➢ **In Entrepreneurship:**
  - ○ **Mahila e-haat**
  - ○ **Mahila Bank**
  - ○ **Mahila Coir Yojana**
  - ○ **Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)**
  - ○ **Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) Scheme**
- ➢ **Other Initiatives:**
  - ○ **National Creche Scheme**
  - ○ **One Stop Centre Scheme**
  - ○ **Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG)' across the country**

Issues Associated

- ➢ **Lesser Labour Force Participation:** Data from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) has shown that **education and employment have a U-shaped relationship** (a rise and subsequent decline in employment with the rise in education levels).
  - ○ According to the **AISHE Report 2019**, the female students constituted almost half (48.6%) of the total enrolment in higher education but the participation of women in the **labour force stands as low as 18.6%.**
- ➢ **Women with Families:** A large number of women often drop out of their jobs to get married and have a family and later on find it difficult to come back and continue their job. They are seen as an **'unreliable' member of the company.**
  - ○ Moreover, women with families can not be expected to work 12-14 hours a day (including the commute).
- ➢ **Societal Pressure:** Generally there is a fear of women being stigmatized by the community that might see their work as a marker of low status, i.e. the inability of the husband, the main breadwinner, to provide for the family.
  - ○ Further, there is a rise in conservative attitudes that believe a woman's place is inside the home and that if she steps outside the **socially approved threshold,** it would invite a backlash.
- ➢ **Prevalence of Informal Work:** In the informal sector in India, most occupations dominated by women are undervalued and underpaid.
  - ○ The poor quality of the paid work often on top of long hours of arduous unpaid domestic chores is one of the main challenges to women empowerment.
  - ○ Further, the **non-availability of white collar jobs,** disproportionate long hours and lesser job security narrow downs the job opportunities for educated women in India.

Steps to be Taken

- ➢ **Maintaining the Education v/s Employment Ratio:** It needs to be assured that the women education which is being subsidised very heavily is actually put to use for the country.
  - ○ The remaining share of the women, which is educated and skilled but not participating in the labour force, should also be able to utilise its talent and contribute to the GDP of the country.
- ➢ **Encouraging Women Entrepreneurship:** Women shall not only be the seekers but also the creators of job opportunities.
  - ○ Entrepreneurship among women could transform India's economy and society by creating jobs, fuelling innovation, and furthering investment in health and education.
- ➢ **Redesigning the Workplaces:** There is a need to rethink the way the workplaces are designed.
  - ○ It needs not to be essentially a 40-hours-a-week job or a two hour commute to keep a woman in the workforce.
  - ○ We can't expect women with home based responsibilities to work 12+ hours but work from home can be redesigned to make women centric workplace.
- ➢ **Bringing Women in Leadership Role:** Subdued gender participation emanates from social-economic issues,

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which can be treated by bringing behavioural change. This can be changed if more women are given leadership positions.

- ❍ Thus, there is a need to ensure equal representation– from company boards to parliaments, from higher education to public institutions -- through special measures and quotas.

➢ **Changing the Mindset:** Girls, just like male childs, should be asked their dreams, aims, aspirations in family as well as schools.

- ❍ The idea that 'their dreams and career are as important as that of a male' must be instilled in the minds of girls right from the beginning.

- ❍ The society also needs to recognise the role and importance of women in the development of the country.

  - ■ Families must have conversations with women about their choice of work.

➢ **Recognizing Invisible Work:** There is a need to invest significantly in the care economy and social protection, and redefine Gross Domestic Product to make work in the home visible and counted.

- ❍ The concept of **Temporary Basic Income** introduced by **UNDP** can prove as a headstart to other similar initiatives.

➢ **Providing Small Necessities is Empowerment too:** Not just education, job and entrepreneurship lead to women empowerment but also providing basic and other small necessities is an empowerment itself.

- ❍ For example; a bank account in their name, a house of their own or even proper hygiene and sanitation facilities at workplaces, educational institutions etc.

- ❍ A woman who is educated and has worked at places with these basic necessities provided is quite likely to ensure these facilities for the future generations she will be in touch with.

Conclusion

➢ Women empowerment is a starkly long journey but that doesn't imply that it is not worth the efforts.

- ❍ The fruits of women empowerment will require time to ripe and collaborative efforts but all for nothing but a greater good.

➢ The ripple effects of empowering women are undeniable as an educated and empowered woman

will ensure education and empowerment for future generations.

To The Point

National Family Health Survey-5

Introduction

➢ The **National Family Health Survey (NFHS)** is a large-scale, multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India.

➢ The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW),** Government of India has designated the **International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) Mumbai,** as the **nodal agency** for providing coordination and technical guidance for the survey.

- ❍ IIPS collaborates with a number of Field Organizations (FO) for survey implementation.

➢ The survey provides **state and national information** for India on:

- ❍ Fertility

- ❍ Infant and child mortality

- ❍ The practice of family planning

- ❍ Maternal and child health

- ❍ Reproductive health

- ❍ Nutrition

- ❍ Anaemia

- ❍ Utilization and quality of health and family planning services

➢ Each successive round of the NFHS has had two specific goals:

- ❍ To provide essential data on health and family welfare needed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and other agencies for policy and programme purposes.

- ❍ To provide information on important emerging health and family welfare issues.

➢ The funding for different rounds of NFHS has been provided by **USAID, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UNICEF, UNFPA, and MoHFW (Government of India).**

The United States Agency for International

Note:

Development:

➢ USAID is the world's premier international development agency.

➢ It is an independent agency primarily responsible for administering civilian foreign aid and development assistance.

➢ It was established by former US President John. F. Kennedy in 1961.

History of National Family Health Survey

➢ The **First National Family Health Survey (NFHS-1)** was conducted in **1992-93.**

➢ The **Second National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2)** was conducted in **1998-99** in **all 26 states of India.** The project was funded by the **USAID,** with additional support from **UNICEF.**

➢ The **Third National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3)** was carried out in **2005-2006.** NFHS-3 funding was provided by the USAID, the **Department for International Development** (UK), **the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UNICEF, UNFPA,** and the **Government of India.**

➢ The **Fourth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4)** in **2014-2015,** the fourth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) was conducted.

  ○ In addition to the **29 states,** NFHS-4 **included all six union territories** for the first time and provided estimates of most indicators at the district level for all **640 districts in the country** as per the **2011 census.**

  ○ The survey covered a range of health-related issues, including fertility, infant and child mortality, maternal and child health, perinatal mortality, adolescent reproductive health, high-risk sexual behaviour, safe injections, tuberculosis, and malaria, non-communicable diseases, domestic violence, HIV knowledge, and attitudes toward people living with HIV.

National Family Health Survey (NFHS) - 5

➢ The NFHS-5 has captured the data during 2019-20 and has been conducted in around 6.1 lakh households.

➢ Many indicators of NFHS-5 are similar to those of NFHS-4, carried out in 2015-16 to make possible comparisons over time.

➢ Phase 2 of the survey (covering remaining states) was delayed due to the **Covid-19 pandemic** and its results are expected to be made available in May 2021.

Key Points

➢ It provides an indicator for tracking 30 **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** that the country aims to achieve by 2030.

➢ NFHS-5 includes some new topics, such as **preschool education, disability, access to a toilet facility, death registration, bathing practices during menstruation,** and **methods and reasons for abortion.**

➢ NFHS-5 includes new focal areas that will give requisite input for strengthening existing programmes and evolving new strategies for policy intervention. The areas are:

  ○ Expanded domains of child immunization

  ○ Components of micro-nutrients to children

  ○ Menstrual hygiene

  ○ Frequency of alcohol and tobacco use

  ○ Additional components of non-communicable diseases (NCDs)

  ○ Expanded age ranges for measuring hypertension and diabetes among all aged 15 years and above.

➢ In 2019, for the first time, the NFHS-5 sought details on the percentage of women and men who have ever used the Internet.

Key Findings of the NFHS-5

➢ **Sex ratio at birth (SRB)** has remained unchanged or increased in most States/UTs.

  ○ Majority of the states are in normal sex ratio of 952 or above.

  ○ **SRB** is below 900 in Telangana, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu.

➢ **Child Marriages:** There has been an increase in **child marriages** in **Tripura** (40.1% from 33.1% in 2015-16), **Manipur** (16.3% from 13.7% in 2015-16) and **Assam** (31.8% from 30.8 % in 2015-16).

  ○ States such as **Tripura, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Nagaland** have also shown an increase in teenage pregnancies.

➢ **Child nutrition indicators** show a mixed pattern across states. While the situation improved in many States/ UTs, there has been minor deterioration in others

  ○ **Malnutrition:** it has worsened. Stunting has risen

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in 11 out of 18 states. Wasting was going up in 14 states.

- ○ **Stunting:** 13 out of 22 states and UTs surveyed, recorded a rise in the percentage of stunting in children.
- ○ **Wasted:** 12 out of 22 states and UTs surveyed, recorded a rise in the percentage of children under five years who are wasted in comparison to NFHS 4.
- ○ **Overweight:** 20 states and UTs have recorded a rise in the percentage of children under 5 years who are overweight.
- ○ **Diarrhoea:** Children with diarrhoea in the two weeks preceding the survey also jumped to 7.2% from 6.6%.

➤ **Infant & Child Mortalities; NMR, IMR and U5MR**
- ○ Infant and child mortality rates across most Indian states have declined.
  - ■ Sikkim, Jammu & Kashmir, Goa and Assam were the best performers as they witnessed a steep reduction in **neonatal mortality rate (NMR), infant mortality rate (IMR)** and **under-five mortality rate (U5MR).**
- ○ Tripura, Andaman & Nicobar Island, Meghalaya and Manipur Recorded a spike in all three categories of child mortality.
- ○ **Bihar** registered the **highest prevalence of NMR (34), IMR (47), and U5MR (56)** across 22 surveyed states and Union territories while Kerala reported the lowest death rates.
- ○ The child mortality rate of Maharashtra remained unchanged in the last five years.

➤ **Spousal Violence** has witnessed an increase in five states, namely **Sikkim, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Assam and Karnataka.**
- ○ **Karnataka** witnessed the largest increase in spousal violence, from 20.6% in NFHS 4 to 44.4% in NFHS 5.

Comparison between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5

➤ **The Total Fertility Rates (TFR): Declined since NFHS-4** in almost all the Phase-1 States and UTs.
- ○ **Replacement Level of Fertility** (2.1) has been achieved in 19 out of the 22 States/UTs.
- ○ Only 3 states viz. Manipur (2.2), Meghalaya (2.9) and Bihar (3.0) have TFR above replacement levels now.

➤ **Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR): Increased**

substantially in most States/UTs.
- ○ Highest in Himachal Pradesh and West Bengal (74%).
- ○ Use of modern methods of contraception has also increased in almost all States/UTs.

➤ **Unmet needs of family planning have witnessed a declining trend** in most of the Phase-1 States/UTs.
- ○ The percentage has come down to less than 10% in all the States except Meghalaya and Mizoram.

➤ **Bank Accounts: Considerable progress** has been recorded between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 in regard to women operating bank accounts.

➤ **Immunisation:** Full immunization drive among children aged 12-23 months has recorded **substantial improvement** across States/UTs/districts.
- ○ More than two-third of children are fully immunized in all the States and UTs except Nagaland, Meghalaya and Assam.
- ○ In almost three-fourths of districts, 70% or more children aged 12-23 months are **fully immunized against childhood diseases.**

➤ **Institutional births:** Institutional births have **increased substantially** with over four-fifth of the women delivering in institutions in 19 States and UTs.
- ○ Institutional delivery is over 90% in 14 out of the total 22 States and UTs.
- ○ Almost 91% of districts recorded over 70% institutional deliveries of births in the 5 years preceding the survey.
- ○ Along with an increase in institutional births, there has also been a substantial increase in C-section deliveries in many States/UTs especially in private health facilities.

➤ **Improved Sanitation and Cooking Facilities:** The percentage of households with **improved sanitation facilities and clean fuel** for cooking has increased in almost all the 22 States/UTs over the last four years (from 2015-16 to 2019-20).

➤ **Anaemia:** **Anaemia among women** and children **continues to be a cause of concern.**
- ○ More than half of the children and women are anaemic in 13 of the 22 States/UTs.
- ○ It has also been observed that anaemia among pregnant women has increased in half of the States/UTs compared to NFHS-4, in spite of substantial increase in the consumption of IFA tablets by pregnant women for 180 days or more.

Key Terms

Note:

- ➢ **Neonatal death** is defined as a death during the first 28 days of life, while **neonatal mortality rate** is defined as the number of neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births.
    - ○ **SDG goal 3** calls for an end to preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age and specifies that all countries should aim to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 deaths per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality to at least as low as 25 deaths per 1,000 live births by 2030.
- ➢ **Total Fertility Rate:** TFR indicates the average number of children expected to be born to a woman during her reproductive span of 15-49 years.
    - ○ **The replacement level** is the number of children needed to replace the parents, after accounting for fatalities, skewed sex ratio, infant mortality, etc. Population starts falling below this level.
    - ○ [India's total fertility rate](#) (TFR) is declining. **It is now 2.2 per woman,** nearing the **replacement rate of 2.1,** according to the latest government data.
- ➢ **Contraceptive Prevalence Rate:** CPR is the proportion of women who are currently using, or whose sexual partner is currently using, at least one method of **contraception,** regardless of the method being used.

- ○ It is reported as a **percentage** with reference to women of respective marital status and age group.
- ➢ **Sex ratio at birth (SRB)** is defined as the number of female births per 1,000 male births. The SRB is a key indicator of a son's preference vis-à-vis daughters.
- ➢ **Stunting** is the impaired growth and development that children experience from poor nutrition, repeated infection, and inadequate psychosocial stimulation.
    - ○ It is the result of chronic or recurrent undernutrition, usually associated with poverty, poor maternal health and nutrition, frequent illness and/or inappropriate feeding and care in early life.
- ➢ **Wasting** is defined as **low weight-for-height.** It often indicates recent and severe weight loss, although it can also persist for a long time. Wasting in children is associated with a higher risk of death if not treated properly.
- ➢ [Infant Mortality Rate (IMR)](#) is defined as the 'number of deaths of children under the age of 1 year per 1000 live births for a given year.
    - ○ The country's average IMR stands at 32 per 1,000 live births which includes an average 36 deaths for rural and 23 for urban areas.

Mains Questions

1. "In society, women are traditionally discriminated against and excluded from political and family-related decisions along with all the concerns inadequate nutrition is also a major one." Elaborate.
2. "The existing crises that are taking place globally are influencing food security in a direct or indirect manner." Discuss.
3. Discuss the measures that can be taken to establish a work culture that is more human-centred and ensures preventative safety for all the workers.
4. Discuss the key challenges faced by the public schools in India.
5. "No society can legitimately call itself civilised if a sick person is denied medical aid because of lack of means." Comment.
6. Discuss the key factors slowing the migration policy momentum in India and the role that the government shall play in addressing the issues of migrant workers.

7. "Entrepreneurship by women is important not just for gender equality, but the entire economy". Comment.
8. Discuss why the Old Age Homes (OAHs) for the elderly are becoming a norm and what measures can be taken to improve the conditions of these care homes?
9. "India is making determined strides towards realising the Sustainable Development Goals; however, the target is far from being achieved unless the poor working conditions of the rag-pickers in India is addressed". Comment.
10. "Manual scavenging in the 21st century sounds an abhorrent alarm about caste domination". Comment.
11. "A safe and healthy workplace is a productive and dynamic one. It directly contributes to the sound socioeconomic development of India.". Comment.
12. "The overcrowding and lack of proper medical health facilities in prisons is a violation of the right to life and right to health of prison inmates". Comment.

Note:

13. Discuss the opportunities that the upcoming Union Budget offers in terms of tackling socio-economic inequality in India.

14. "The issue of inadequate and unaffordable urban housing is a major roadblock to good urbanisation". Discuss.

15. "Although increasing the legal age for marriage of women is a progressive step in achieving gender equality, it is more important to focus on the effective implementation of the existing policy frameworks and laws". Discuss.

16. "The NFHS 5 has provided encouraging outcomes on several fronts but it also highlights the need for further improvement to address gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls". Discuss the measures that can be taken to facilitate women related development.

17. About one-fifth (20%) of India's total population will be aged by 2050. In this context, discuss how the elderly can be transformed into active participants in the Indian economy.

18. Discuss the issues faced by the female entrepreneurs in male-dominated businesses.

19. The Nordic Economic Model is a prudent way forward to solve the problem of socio-economic inequalities in India. Discuss.

20. Explain the interconnection between the climate crisis and rising food insecurity globally and suggest measures to deal with these issues simultaneously.

21. Discuss the factors that impede female labour force participation rate and suggest the measures that can be taken to overcome the same.

22. "The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) is second only to the exhaustive data that the decennial population census provides. It ought to be treated as an important turning point for policymaking in India". Comment.

23. Drivers for social change like education, legal provisions and initiatives for creating awareness have still a lot to cover with respect to eliminating girl child marriage. Comment.

24. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme was originally supposed to be a demand-based programme. But lately it has become a supply-basedprogramme. Discuss.

25. The problem of drug abuse can be solved with holistic reform action. Suggest some measures to tackle the issue of drug abuse.

26. 'Social media is a double-edged sword in the present times.' Discuss the need to regulate social media platforms to protect youth from its ill-effects.

27. India's long journey from chronic food shortage to surplus food producer offers several interesting lessons for other developing countries in the world. Discuss

28. 'We cannot prevent every single outbreak but with a well-functioning disease surveillance system, we can reduce their impact.' Discuss.

29. Covid-19 reinforces that good urbanisation is our most powerful technology for poverty reduction. Comment.

30. "E-Shram Portal is a vital system to provide hitherto invisible workers much-needed visibility". Comment.

31. It is necessary to place the issue of reservation in a new framework that takes due care of the changes taking place in Indian society and economy. Discuss.

32. The marital rape exception to the definition of rape is antithetical to women's dignity, equality and autonomy. Discuss.

33. Food fortification is an excellent method to improve the nutritional health of a large section of the population, all at once. Critically discuss.

34. India's women who are enrolled in education are far less than their counterparts. Examine the reasons and probable solutions for this gap in India.

35. Caste plays a dominant role in our social, economic and political life, still no credible and comprehensive caste data exists. Comment.

36. Leverage women's collectives and the Panchayati Raj system is an effective way to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Comment.

37. 'Urban areas are growth engines of the country.' In the light of the statement discuss the need for livelihood security to the people in the urban areas.

38. "A number of welfare schemes and availability of numerous resources have no significance if they are not brought into effective implementation and proper utilisation. The condition is completely satisfied in the case of Food Security in India." Discuss.

Note:

39. Civil societies cannot remain aloof to new technologies and need to shift towards technology-driven ecosystems. Discuss.

40. 'The contribution of migrant workers to the economy is innumerable, even though they are often employed in precarious jobs.' In the light of the statement, discuss the supreme court's recent order on registration of migrant workers on national databases.

41. The Covid-19 pandemic highlights issues and reiterates the importance of Public Health systems. Comment.

42. One Nation One Ration Card scheme is the far-reaching reform of the public distribution ecosystem since the Food Security Act. Discuss.

43. The practice of dowry is not only illegal but also unethical. Therefore, social consciousness about the ill effects of the dowry system needs to be aroused. Comment.

44. Population control is a double-edged sword. India has scope to cut its population size, but it needs to avoid a trap that awaits it. Discuss.

45. Despite judicial verdicts, India's sexual minorities face discrimination in employment, health issues and personal rights. Discuss.

46. Women must be given opportunities to participate in every sphere of life, whether spiritual or material. Discuss.

47. Child labour deprives children of their right to go to school and reinforces intergenerational cycles of poverty. Comment.

48. Digital technologies are re-organising education and health in ways that make access more inequitable in an already unequal society. Discuss.

49. One Health concept is ever more relevant as the world is facing a second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. Comment.

50. Though food wastage is a global problem, India stands a chance to convert this into an opportunity, if it can address it properly. Comment.

51. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for establishing an universal social protection architecture in India. Justify.

52. The Delhi High Court's judgment in MJ Akbar vs Priya Ramani case can act as a landmark in India's #MeToo movement and women's rights. Analyze.

53. Strengthening public health, education and nutrition, and ending gender discrimination will usher a more egalitarian order. Comment.

54. Access to water and sanitation, if delivered well, empowers women economically and socially. Done poorly, it may undermine women's position at home and in the community. Comment.

Note: