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## COVERSTORY

# Ram Temple's Significance as a Cultural Anchor for Bharat

The Ram Temple Emerges as the Soul of Bharat, Reflecting Centuries of Tradition, Spiritual Depth, and National Identity, Anchoring a Collective Cultural Renaissance in Contemporary India



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## Elections 2023 - Game, set, and Match to brand Modi



The recently concluded state assembly elections in India witnessed a political landscape where the formidable combination of a strong Modi brand, a well-organized Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and abundant resources proved to be a decisive force. The opposition, characterized by weak leadership, organizational deficiencies, and a lack of coherent strategy, found itself overwhelmed in the face of the BJP juggernaut.

The Strong Brand Modi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's persona has evolved into a powerful political brand that transcends regional boundaries. His leadership style, characterized by decisiveness, charisma, and effective communication, has created a magnetic effect that resonates with a broad spectrum of voters. Modi's narrative of development, national security, and good governance has become synonymous with the BJP's agenda. In the absence of strong regional faces in the opposition, voters often gravitated towards the familiarity and perceived stability offered by the Modi brand.

Formidable Party Organization: The BJP's organizational strength played a pivotal role in securing victories in the state assembly elections. The party's ground-level machinery, comprising dedicated workers and a robust cadre, effectively executed the election strategy. The BJP's ability to mobilize support at the grassroots level, coupled with its meticulous planning and execution, outshone the disorganized efforts of the opposition. The party's organizational structure, with a clear chain of command and well-defined roles, contributed to a cohesive and disciplined campaign.

Abundance of Resources: The BJP's financial prowess and resource mobilization capabilities significantly contributed to its electoral dominance. The party, backed by a vast network of donors and supporters, had the financial muscle to mount an extensive and well-funded campaign. This financial advantage allowed the BJP to leverage modern campaign tools, conduct large-scale rallies, and invest in extensive outreach programs. In contrast, the cash-strapped opposition struggled to match the BJP's financial firepower, limiting its ability to effectively reach voters and convey its message.

Weak Congress Party Leadership: One of the defining factors in the electoral landscape was the absence of strong and charismatic leaders in the congress camp. The lack of credible regional faces capable of countering Modi's influence left the opposition in a vulnerable position. While the BJP projected a unified leadership under Modi, the opposition appeared fragmented and lacked a unifying figure. The absence of leaders with mass appeal and a clear vision contributed to the perception of a leadership vacuum, which the BJP skillfully exploited.

Organizational Deficiencies: The Congress party's organizational deficiencies were glaring, with infighting, lack of coordination, and factionalism hindering its ability to mount an effective challenge. The absence of a cohesive strategy, both at the state and national levels, further weakened the opposition's position. The BJP's disciplined organizational machinery capitalized on these weaknesses, ensuring that the opposition remained divided and unable to present a united front.

Clueless Strategy: The Congress Party electoral strategy seemed devoid of a coherent and impactful narrative. The failure to articulate a compelling vision or counter the BJP's key themes allowed the Modi-led party to dictate the terms of the electoral discourse. The opposition's inability to connect with voters on critical issues and the absence of a well-defined strategy left it trailing behind the BJP, which effectively controlled the narrative throughout the campaign.

In conclusion, the recently concluded state assembly elections showcased the dominance of the Modi brand, a formidable BJP organization, and abundant resources in shaping electoral outcomes. The weak opposition, characterized by a lack of strong leadership, organizational deficiencies, and a haphazard strategy, found itself outmaneuvered by the well-oiled machinery of the ruling party. As India's political landscape continues to evolve, the lessons from these elections underscore the importance of leadership, organization, and strategic acumen in the pursuit of electoral success.

Prashant Tewari,  
Editor-in-Chief



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# Ram Temple's Significance as a Cultural Anchor for Bharat

By Prashant Tewari, Editor-in-Chief

The construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya holds immense significance for Hindus in independent India, encompassing profound religious, cultural, political, global, and commercial dimensions. This monumental project has been a focal point of contention and aspirations, with its impact rippling through various spheres of life.



### Religious Significance:

At its core, the Ram Temple symbolizes the deeply ingrained religious sentiments of Hindus. Lord Ram, a revered figure in Hinduism, is considered the epitome of virtue and righteousness. The construction of the temple at the believed birthplace of Lord Ram holds spiritual importance, as it fulfills a longstanding desire of the Hindu community to restore a sacred site that has been a subject of historical and legal disputes for centuries. For believers, the temple represents a tangible connection to their faith and a symbol of religious revival.

### Cultural Significance:

The Ram Temple is not just a reli-

gious structure; it is a cultural milestone that reflects the shared heritage of the Indian subcontinent. The epic Ramayana, which narrates the life and adventures of Lord Ram, has shaped the cultural ethos of the region for millennia. The construction of the temple contributes to the preservation and promotion of this cultural legacy, fostering a sense of identity and continuity among Hindus. The temple's architecture, rituals, and festivities associated with its consecration further enrich the nation's cultural tapestry.

### Political Impact:

The Ram Temple has been a focal point of political discourse, playing a pivotal role in shaping the political landscape of India. The

temple issue has been a rallying point for various political movements, leading to the rise of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement in the late 20th century. The culmination of this movement with the construction of the temple marks a significant political milestone, with its completion fulfilling a promise made by various political leaders. The political impact extends beyond the ruling party, influencing electoral dynamics and shaping the national narrative on issues related to identity and secularism.

### Global Implications:

The construction of the Ram Temple has reverberations beyond India's borders. The global Indian diaspora, particularly in countries





with significant Hindu populations, has closely followed and celebrated the temple's construction. It serves as a symbol of pride and identity for Hindus worldwide. Additionally, the global community observes India's handling of religious diversity and its commitment to secularism in the context of this project. The temple's construction contributes to India's global image and position as a pluralistic society accommodating diverse religious beliefs.

#### Commercial Influence:

The construction of the Ram Temple has sparked economic activities, creating commercial opportunities in Ayodhya and its surrounding regions. The development of infrastructure, including the airport

and railway station, not only facilitates pilgrimage but also boosts tourism. The influx of devotees and tourists is expected to stimulate local businesses, hospitality, and the overall economy of the region. The commercial impact extends to the production of religious artifacts, tourism-related services, and the promotion of Ayodhya as a cultural and religious tourism destination.

In conclusion, the Ram Temple's construction in Ayodhya is a multifaceted phenomenon with far-reaching implications. Its religious and cultural significance resonates deeply with the Hindu community, while its political and global impact shapes the narrative of India's socio-religious landscape. The commercial opportunities arising

from the temple's construction contribute to the region's economic development. As the temple takes its place in the collective consciousness of the nation, it becomes a testament to the intricate interplay between faith, culture, politics, global perceptions, and economic dynamics in contemporary India.

# Indian Youth & Politics: Is the youth of today just the leader of tomorrow?

By. Manan Singh

**T**he youngest country in the world, India, is often criticized for not having enough young parliamentarians. On one end dignitaries proudly state that when the world turns old, India will stay young, but on the other hand, only 6% of the Indian parliament comprises people below the age of 30. Thus, though the majority of the Indian population is young, it has near to no participation in the apex body that deals with policymaking. However, India does not fare very poorly in this regard in comparison to the world, as the youngest parliament in the world, of Norway, has only 13.61% parliamentarians under the age of 30. Yet, this is not something to be satisfied with. 13% need not be the benchmark for a country like India,

we must aim higher. It is a fair argument that parliamentarians and policy makers must be mature and experienced individuals but such an argument is not entirely satisfactory. The reason is that experience cannot be considered as an argument to negate the opinions and participation of nearly two-thirds population of our country.

One of the primary reasons for low youth participation is that the minimum age for an individual to be part of India's highest legislative body is 25. Indeed, politics does not just mean being part of the government, rather it is a small part of it, but it is the one which creates the biggest impact on the society. The experience and maturity argument is brought back here. The general notion is that the

youth must be trained and taught and they must learn by observing so that they are the leaders of tomorrow. Nelson Mandela once said, "The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow." As much as I agree with this quote of his, my question is, why are they just leaders of tomorrow and not considered leaders of today? Why is young age considered as a reason for presuming that an individual cannot have a large impact or is not mature enough to participate in policy-making and be part of a country's decision-making body?

The youth is just awaiting an opportunity and the world will see them embarking on a journey of revolution and positive change. With every passing year, the involvement of youth in change-





making is drastically increasing. The interesting thing is that most of these interventions are not because a particular opportunity was provided to the youth but because they saw the need to take action, took the initiative and achieved the goal successfully. Today, it is difficult to back a claim that the youth are not capable enough to be political leaders and do not possess the skill set to let them take an active part in politics. The youth is running their organizations, initiatives, companies, businesses, and forums and are bringing about a change in society by being leaders. In such a scenario, I fail to understand how they are pictured as not being of the right age to be leaders. This argument of the incapability of the youth to participate in politics makes less sense to me when I begin to think

about India's freedom movement. From revolutionaries like Shaheed Bhagat Singh to pioneer politicians like Jawaharlal Nehru and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose began their active political careers in their early or mid-twenties. As much as the old leaders like Mahatma Gandhi are credited for India's independence, the contribution of the youth is at par, if not more.

Another flawed argument in India to prevent youth participation in politics is that they are not interested in being part of politics. Reports tell that students studying subjects like polity, political science and international relations are at an all-time high in India. This rise is not just seen among men; rather reports also state that nearly 52% of the students studying political science in colleges in India today are women. Young

people are opening think tanks and forums to have discussions on pertinent issues and are even involved in policy consultation. If you wish to witness an individual's oratory skills, diplomatic ability and the promptness with policy of today's youth, you must go and attend a Model United Nations (MUN) Conference or a Youth Parliament. Not just in UN committees like the Security Council and General Assembly, the youth has shown exemplary performance in committees like Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and All India Political Parties Meet. With their out-of-the-box thinking, diplomacy skills and new-age thought process, they have at times come up with extremely innovative and on-point suggestions on topics like the New Education Policy, Uniform Civil Code, etc. The current delegates of





Youth20 (Y20) India are also a perfect example to analyze the leadership capabilities of Indian youth.

As the youth asks for a chance to be part of politics, they must also realize that with position comes greater responsibility. Not just the responsibility of making the world a better place to live in by creating stringent policies and ensuring that they are implemented but also by ensuring that they extend a hand to the upcoming generations. All the youth that do get the opportunity to be part of politics, it is their duty as well to pave a path for greater youth participation and also for mentoring the interested youth. Moreover, a know-it-all attitude will not be the most beneficial. A good leader must always listen and learn, that is what the youth will have to keep in mind. Doors for opportunities are gradually opening and the youth must make the most out of the opportunities provided.

Before concluding, an important aspect of youth's involvement in Indian politics, I would like to highlight is diversity. When we say that the youth is the leader of today, which youth are we talking about? The majority of the Indian population continues to be rural or poor and largely unedu-

cated. All the discussion we have had till now tilts towards the urban youth participating in politics and how they have been successful. The independence movement does come to our aid again, as we observe in the movement that all those who participated in politics even then were not educated but with the right guidance and training they could make the apt decisions as per requirement. Today, the numbers of young sarpanch in villages are also rising. Both men and women are taking an active part in not only central or state politics but also rural politics. This diversity of India is not to be ignored and greater attention needs to be paid to guiding rural youth and providing them with opportunities so that they do not get neglected.

This article poses a simple argument, why should youth be only taken as leaders of tomorrow in politics, when they possess the caliber to be leaders of today? Certainly, the right guidance and mentorship are required to compensate for the possible experiential lack, if any. The world must also understand that when they call out the youth for not having the experience, it is they who have not provided the youth with the right opportunities and space to gain

experience, learn and grow. Countries like Rwanda, Kenya and a few others have had this realization and have provided reservations for the youth in their parliaments to ensure consistent participation. Since time immemorial, youth has shown its capability of being a leader and its ability to embark on positive change. Most of these young leaders generally found senior leaders who were willing to groom them and let them be leaders of the present and the future. These mentors never told them to wait for 30 years and be considered mature at 45, to become a political leader. To state a few examples, Gopal Krishna Gokhale mentored Gandhi, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was mentored by Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, and the list goes on. Thus, existing leaders must also follow the decree and take up roles of mentors for young and aspiring leaders. I feel for this young India of today, for the young to be political will be a boon and it is time for the country to create an environment for the same. Today's India is young and it deserves to be aptly represented and make decisions for the world they wish to live in. Youth has the potential and they must be allowed to be leaders of today, not be thought of only as leaders of tomorrow.



# Delhi's Battle for Clean Air: A Political Smog Showdown

By. Sunny

**T**he relentless fight for clean air in the heart of India's political powerhouse, Delhi, has morphed into a high-stakes drama that rivals any Bollywood blockbuster. While the city's air quality reaches alarming lows, a cacophony of contrasting narratives from the power players is creating headlines across the nation. In this riveting exposé, I aim to unravel the intricate tale of Delhi's air pollution and the political power struggles that have left its citizens gasping for breath.

## A Battle That Spans Two Decades

The saga of Delhi's air pollution dates back not years but decades. However, it reached its climax in the mid-2010s when the city was plunged into a suffocating smog of unprecedented proportions in 2016. The consequences have been dire, especially for the vulnerable, like the children and elderly, while the environment itself has taken a severe hit. Air pollution isn't a crisis affecting just a few; it's a menace that encompasses all of Delhi. In this grand narrative, three major protagonists have taken the stage: the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the Delhi Government led by the Aam Admi Party (AAP), and the central Government helmed by the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP). Each of these titans is determined to rewrite the story of Delhi's air quality in their favour.

## Defining the Problem: A Triad of

### Visions

1. Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB): The CPCB is the scientist in this narrative, armed with empirical evidence and cold, hard data. Their perspective lays blame at the wheels of vehicles, attributing a staggering 72% of the city's pollution to vehicular emissions. But they don't stop there; industrial emissions, construction dust, and even the burning of waste get a piece of the pollution pie. And let's not forget the weather, especially during winter, that traps the smog in Delhi's skies.

2. Delhi Government (AAP): Enter the reluctant protagonist, the AAP-led Delhi Government, which tries to duck the blame like a seasoned politician. They argue that the city's pollution is just an accidental consequence, a collateral effect of actions outside their territory. Crop residue burning in neighbouring states like Punjab and Haryana is their favoured scapegoat, and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has mastered the art of playing the victim, calling for unity with neighbouring states to tackle the smog.

3. Central Government (BJP): The BJP, playing the shrewd rival, has a completely different script in mind. They contend that crop residue burning is a mere subplot, contributing just 5% to Delhi's pollution. They put the lion's share of the blame—95% to be precise—on local factors, holding the AAP accountable. In a politi-

cal masterstroke, they question the AAP's leadership in both Delhi and Punjab, demanding results.

## Political Ambitions in the Smog

These narratives aren't just stories but power plays in a political chess match. The CPCB is the voice of reason, determined to find a solution using hard evidence. They're impartial referees of this contest, prioritizing public health and the environment. AAP's narrative serves a different purpose—it's all about avoiding action against illegal factories and vehicular emissions. Economic factors and their voter base's support are at stake, making them cautious about rash decisions. The BJP's narrative is a power move aimed at presenting itself as the superior alternative. They want to showcase the AAP-led Delhi Government as inefficient and themselves as the champions of effective policies. It's a politically charged game of perception.

Delhi's air pollution isn't just a health concern; it's a gripping political saga with the city's future hanging in the balance. As the battle rages on, it's crucial to decipher the motives behind these narratives and understand how they affect potential solutions and policies. In a city where every breath is a battle, the fight for clean air continues, with the nation watching the epic showdown unfold.

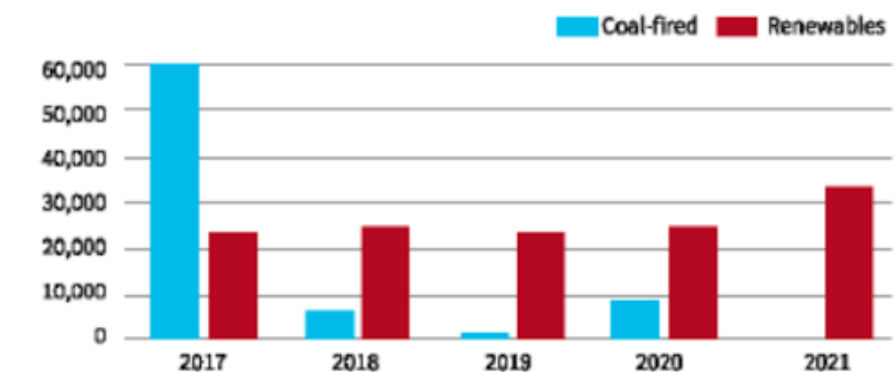
# Green Energy: Can the Private Sector Be the Cure for India's Energy Appetite?

By. Deekshitha S

India's energy landscape has undergone a significant change in the past decade, to tackle the impending climate crisis. India will need an additional \$300 billion to reach the goal of 500 GW of clean energy by 2030 (ADL report). As the transition to clean energy is capital-intensive, the cooperation of the private sector becomes increasingly important. Beyond tackling climate change, harnessing private capital for clean energy can unlock economic growth, generate green jobs, and enhance energy security.

With the government playing a catalytic role, investor confidence in India's clean energy future is soaring. Production-linked incentives and regulatory reforms have fueled a 40% rise in clean energy investment since 2020, boosting investor confidence (Times of India, 2022).

A recent surge in renewable energy loans issued by banks and NBFCs further validates this



The Hindu Data Team: Lending for coal-fired thermal plants and renewable power projects (in ₹ crores)

trend. (Yoshino and Taghizadeh-Hesary, 2015).

In order to facilitate private sector participation in India's green energy ambitions, it becomes necessary to venture beyond mere capacity addition and dip into nascent technologies like green hydrogen, geothermal, ocean, and rooftop solar. Private investment in research and development, a skilled workforce, and technology transfers has become the need of the hour. India requires roughly

\$12 billion annually for clean energy R&D alone, highlighting the substantial gap that private participation can bridge (CEEW, 2023). Furthermore, the rise of renewable energy generation makes effective energy storage solutions vital for addressing energy fluctuations and guaranteeing grid stability. Private companies can invest in and build pumped hydro plants, grid-scale batteries, or other storage solutions, creating a competitive market and driving down costs





(Singh & Mukherjee, 2023). They can also develop innovative ownership models for storage facilities, such as community microgrids or energy storage as a service, ensuring wider accessibility and cost-sharing.

On the investment front, fostering innovative financial instruments like green bonds, climate-linked debt, and crowdfunding platforms can unlock substantial financial resources (Ghosh, 2022). While Adani has raised \$1 billion through green bonds, Tata Power has raised \$320 million via sustainability-linked loans, showcasing diverse funding options in the renewable space (Mint Genie). Although India's private sector is stepping up, its debt burden remains a pressing concern, being 24-32% higher than developed economies like the US and Europe. Market concentration also poses a significant hurdle. The capital-intensive nature of solar and wind power has led to an oligopoly, with just 10 firms holding 60% of the

total market share (Kunal B Fulwale, 2019). While the private sector's enthusiasm is encouraging, fostering a more open and inclusive market, along with managing the debt burden is crucial.

Beyond financial hurdles, land acquisition remains a major bottleneck, stalling projects due to its large footprint and local protests causing potential disruptions, like those in Nedan, Rajasthan. Moreover, acquiring fertile land raises food security concerns (Down to Earth, 2019). Complex logistics in remote areas add another layer of complexity and increase cost. These operational snags trigger a ripple effect, pushing up tariffs that in turn burden the state and discoms (Down to Earth, 2020). Establishing designated renewable energy zones with pre-approved land, robust infrastructure, and a streamlined permitting system could offer a solution for addressing these hurdles.

India's clean energy journey is not a solitary sprint; it's a

collaborative marathon where the private sector's technical prowess and the government's supportive regulatory policies pave the path to a sustainable future. With a projected market size of \$500 billion by 2030 (Times of India, 2023), India's renewable energy sector represents a significant and timely opportunity for private sector participation. This rapid growth presents a compelling avenue for investment and engagement in the future of clean energy.

*Deekshitha S, an engineer turned policy enthusiast.*



# “Reflecting on 15 Years of Lehman Brothers’ Collapse”

By. Arnab Sarkar

According to Reuters, Richard Fuld, the former chief executive, declared, “Lehman Brothers in 2008 was not a bankrupt company,” in front of 1,300 people at a micro-cap stock convention in Manhattan, seven years after Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy.

The bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers on September 15, 2008, was a

defining moment that continues to shape the world of finance, regulation, and public perception. It underscored the importance of robust risk management practices within financial institutions. The excessive risk-taking and reliance on complex financial instruments were key factors in Lehman’s downfall. And Richard had a different opinion on risk management. No mat-

ter what you may have read about Lehman’s risk management, he claimed, “I had 27,000 risk managers at the firm because they were all shareholders in the company” at the same event.

Fuld defended the company’s risk management procedures and asserted that because of their ownership positions, Lehman Brothers workers had a stake in the com-





pany's performance. This was perceived as an effort to minimize the firm's excessive leverage and dangerous exposures. In spite of Fuld's claims, authorities, analysts, and the general public generally believed that Lehman Brothers had taken on excessive risks and had a sizable exposure to subprime mortgages and related instruments. In the end, Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy brought to light the inadequate risk management of the company as well as more general problems throughout the financial sector in the run-up to the crisis. The firm's demise had a significant impact on the world financial system and prompted a review of risk management procedures in the banking industry.

The causes of Lehman Brothers' collapse in 2008 are well-known and comprehensible to a large portion of the population. Lehman's

failure was primarily attributed to its excessive exposure to subprime mortgage assets, insufficient capital reserves, and a heavy reliance on short-term borrowing to finance its operations. These risky practices left the firm vulnerable when the U.S. housing market began to decline, leading to a sharp decline in the value of its assets. But what came next is really what counts.

Governments, central banks, and financial regulators worldwide adopted a number of actions to stabilize financial markets, avert additional economic unrest, and address the crisis' underlying causes after Lehman Brothers' collapse and the start of the global financial crisis in 2008. Following the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the following significant actions were taken like, Government Bailouts and Capital Injections, Interest Rate Reductions, Financial Regulation

and Oversight, Increased Transparency, Consumer Protection, Global Coordination, Deleveraging, etc. But the most important action was Stress Testing. Stress tests are thorough evaluations of a financial institution's resilience to challenging economic conditions. These situations frequently include significant economic downturns, shocks to the financial system, and other stressors. Stress tests have become a crucial tool for regulators and central banks in assessing the health of financial institutions, particularly large systemic banks. In the United States, for example, the Federal Reserve conducts annual stress tests on the largest U.S. banks as part of its Comprehensive Capital Analysis and Review (CCAR) program.

The Comprehensive Capital Analysis and Review (CCAR) program is a regulatory framework

to assess the capital adequacy and overall financial health of large, systemically important financial institutions (SIFIs) in the United States. CCAR is part of the broader supervisory and regulatory framework aimed at maintaining the stability and soundness of the U.S. banking system. The Fed must receive yearly capital plans from bank holding companies that detail their internal procedures for establishing capital adequacy, projected capital distributions, and the regulations governing them. These businesses must have consolidated assets of at least \$50 billion.

The results of these tests determine whether banks can return capital to shareholders through dividends and share buybacks. Stress tests have been instrumental in promoting financial stability and reducing the likelihood of future financial crises.

While this American financial giant's fall from grace occurred thousands of miles away from the Indian subcontinent, its reverberations were felt across the Indian economy.

Global investors sought safety by returning their money home as they grew concerned about the developing global crisis. As a result, India experienced massive financial outflows. The withdrawal of funds by Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) from Indian markets led to a decline in the value of the Indian rupee relative to the US dollar. The trade balance and inflation dynamics of the nation were impacted, posing problems for policymakers.

International banks have been more wary of lending to emerging markets, particularly India, as a result of the global financial crisis. External commercial borrowings (ECBs) and loans in foreign currencies were difficult for Indian enterprises to obtain.

The financing of projects and aspirations for corporate growth were impacted by this credit crunch.

India's economic growth slowed down as the world economy collapsed. Global demand was weaker, which hurt exports, while domestic spending declined. Concerns about the sustainability of India's strong economic progress arose when GDP growth rates declined.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Indian government implemented a number of policy changes in reaction to the global financial crisis. To boost economic activity, the RBI lowered interest rates and started monetary easing programs. The administration unveiled stimulus plans intended to spur economic expansion, particularly in areas negatively impacted by the crisis.

India's outsourcing and information technology (IT) industries were heavily involved with the American banking sector. These industries, which were initially worried about how the crisis would affect their financial sector clients, showed extraordinary resiliency. They increased their services, diversified their clientele, and responded to changing conditions by making adjustments, finally growing stronger.

India had to review its financial regulatory structure in light of the demise of Lehman Brothers and the ensuing global financial crisis. The nation implemented measures aimed at increasing transparency, upgrading risk management procedures, and bolstering financial institution supervision. These changes were made to protect the financial sector from potential shocks.

The crisis and other significant global financial crises changed how investors perceived risk. It made clear how crucial careful risk

management and diversification are. India's economy has proven to be resilient over time. India's consistent economic growth was facilitated by robust domestic consumption, a burgeoning middle class, and a strong services industry.

Fast forward to 2023, and the Bank Nifty soars to reach the 20,000 milestone which signifies economic confidence, strong corporate performance, and investment opportunities. While it bodes well for India's financial landscape, prudent monitoring and regulation are vital to sustain a healthy and stable market environment.

The failure of Lehman Brothers serves as a sobering reminder of the flaws in the international financial system. The financial sector was completely transformed, significant regulatory reforms resulted, and the cultural memory was forever altered. As we consider the 15 years that have passed since that critical day, we must continue to be dedicated to the lessons discovered and work towards a more robust and secure financial system that can resist present and future difficulties.

*Writer Arnab Sarkar is a Business Analyst, Societe Generale Global Solution Center*





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# Red flag: excessive screen time affecting early childhood development - A case of virtual autism.

By. Dhuniraj Chettri

Parents of a 3.5-year-old boy complaining. The child was not responding to his name and crying the whole time I talked to his parents. He continuously made loud sounds and kept crying, moving around the room. I tried to calm him down by giving him some toys, but he did not stop crying. In my assessment, the child showed autistic-like symptoms, which typically include symptoms like difficulty relating with people, do not show age-appropriate and situation-appropriate emotional responses, cannot imitate others, do not have an age-appropriate response to change, having sensory issues, poor eye contact, speech delay, hyperactivity or inactivity. Although, general observation suggests that the number of autistic children is increasing every year in our country. As Dr Bismadev Chakrabarti, a professor at Reading University, points out, India still does not have proper data on autism prevalence in the country. He further suggests that India needs a national program on autism to know precisely the present scenario of the Autistic population.

Something interesting occurred during this encounter with the young boy's parents. As it was

difficult for me to talk to his mother about the ongoing disturbance, his mother opened some videos on her phone and gave the phone to him. The child, who was completely difficult to handle a few minutes before, sat quietly in a chair after getting that phone. I asked his mother when she first gave him a phone, to which she said as early as six months of age. The child's screen time was, on average, 7 to 8 hours a day. The WHO recommendation for screen time for children younger than five years is a maximum of one hour. The lesser, the better. This case is not a single instance. Recently there has been an increase in such cases I have encountered in the clinic. This experience reminded me of the word "Virtual Autism," a term coined by Romanian clinical psychologist Marius Teodor Zamfir.

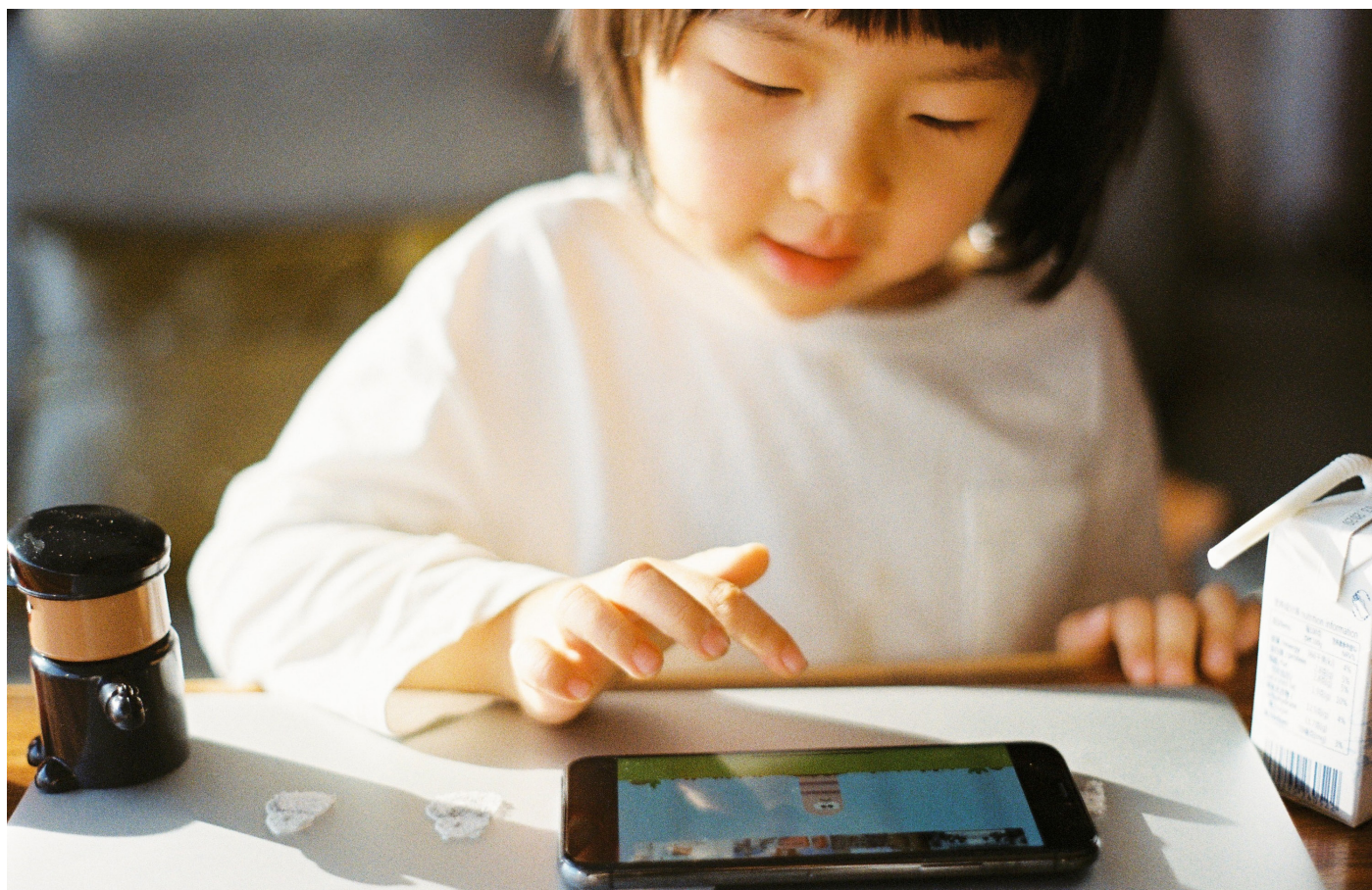
Screen Time and Virtual Autism

The digital screen, a smartphone with the internet, has reached a considerable population in the country. Screen dependency has increased across all ages. The mobile phone internet penetration in India has grown fast in recent times. It was 45.84% in 2019 and 66.16 % in 2022; it is expected to reach 96.11% by 2040. At the same

time, children born in this generation are exposed to this screen very early, creating a large-scale problem in their development. New-age parents think that using smartphones makes their kind smarter. They also use phones as entertainment, as playing outdoor games has decreased drastically. Making them eat by showing them their favourite video has become common among parents. Children getting screen time as early as five to six months of age and spending more than six hours a day in front of the screen are having trouble in many areas of their development. The consequences of over-exposure to a virtual environment make some children develop autistic-like symptoms. These symptoms are typically seen in children who use screens for more than six to seven hours daily during their initial development period. This condition is called Virtual Autism.

In Virtual autism, children of 0 to 3 years exhibit symptoms similar to classical autism. However, the cause of autistic-like symptoms is excessive exposure to the virtual environment. It should not be confused with classical autism, as virtual autism can be cured entirely with little intervention. It is





vital not to misdiagnose a case of classic autism with virtual autism. If a child shows autistic-like symptoms and he has excessive screen time, removing the screen would reduce their autistic-like symptom. The parent should see immediate change at least two weeks after removing the screen. If you don't see the difference, then you should not prolong to consult professionals working with autism.

Early exposure to the virtual environment deprives children of interaction with the real world. This deprivation makes the child avoid eye contact, show some repetitive behaviour, and be less willing to interact with the real world. National Institutes of Health (NIH), in 2020, found a link between excessive screen use and disruptions in a child's sleep patterns, leading to potential sleep disturbances and shorter sleep durations. One parent said, "I gave him the phone to keep him engaged since he was five months of age; we both used to work from home during

covid, and now he just wants the phone and does not respond to his name. He uses non-verbal communication to indicate for the food, in that also he needs a screen to eat; otherwise, he will not eat". American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children aged 2 to 5 years have supervised screen time limited to one hour daily, focusing on high-quality educational content. The virtual environment is unhealthy for children in their critical development period as it affects their developmental trajectory. Parents should be aware of the following signs: if your child of one and a half year do not have the following things:

- 1- Do not point their finger at objects.
  - 2- Do not answer their name.
  - 3- Do not understand simple language.
  - 4- Do not have a symbolic play like peek-a-boo.
  - 5- Do not have eye contact.
- If you see any of these signs in your child, you should contact profes-

sionals working with autism. These cases are a red flag for society to think wisely about using virtual environments. For now, it is sure that something terrible happens to our toddler's brains when they are deprived of human interaction during a crucial development period. Hence, we should be wary of giving the phone to infants.

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# Canadians are paying the price for Trudeau's over spending

By. Surjit Singh Flora

Starting on January 1, 2024, Canada will implement substantial changes to its study permit program for international students. These changes include a reduction in the number of study permits issued, limitations on working hours, and an increase in the financial requirement for study permit applicants. The cost-of-living financial requirement will be raised from the current amount of \$10,000 to \$20,635. Additionally, applicants will need to demonstrate sufficient funds to cover their first year of tuition fees and travel expenses. These adjustments aim to enhance the preparedness of international students for their lives in Canada. The minister asserts that the current situation has reached a point where further action is necessary.

Indeed, the truth is, these changes were made due to the fact that there are too many students in Canada, no proper housing arrangements, no jobs, and Canadians, including foreign students, depending on food banks, while many food banks denied catering to international students last month. After that, many Canadians made noise about why these international students were depending on food banks while Canadian immigration policy required \$10,000 while they studied.

Blame lies with the government and loan companies that



exploit students for visa money. The government will be increasing the student permit fee starting on January 1, 2024. Proof of funds is required annually along with tax returns. However, this is still insufficient. Once a student is approved for a study visa and arrives in Canada, they will repay the loan, and their bank account will be left with very little funds. The government must make it mandatory for them to provide proof of their bank statement every month to demonstrate that they have sufficient funds in their account.

Also, life's unpredictable, and while students sometimes need a helping hand so do we. Don't punish the good for the bad and the flawed.

However, Canada was once a popular destination for immigrants seeking to earn a living, but

the situation has deteriorated due to these problems. From there, the immigrants have either chosen to move to other countries or return to their homeland. The number of immigrants entering Canada has been steadily rising since the 1980s, according to a recent survey by the Conference Board of Canada for the Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC), titled "The Leaky Bucket: A Study of Immigrant Retention Trends in Canada." This trend gained momentum in both 2017 and 2019, resulting in a significant 31 percent increase in average revenue. The number increased after COVID-19 as the economic condition of Canadians generally declined.

The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) has released their analysis of the Liberal fall minibus budget, which can be summa-



alized as follows: prices are increasing, debt is increasing, taxes are increasing, and time is running out. After eight years under Justin Trudeau's leadership, Canadians are facing the challenge of managing a significant increase in national debt, amounting to one hundred billion dollars. This surge in debt has contributed to higher inflation rates, resulting in a situation where the government's wealth has grown while the financial well-being of the general population has declined.

In their analysis, the PBO reported that the deficit will be \$8.5 billion worse this year than the Liberals promised, meaning more Canadian tax dollars will be spent servicing interest costs on Trudeau's debt. On top of this, they will add another \$20.7 billion in inflationary debt, despite warnings from the Governor of the Bank of Canada that this will make everything more expensive.

Justin Trudeau's uncontrolled spending will keep inflation and interest rates higher for longer, pushing already struggling Canadians over the edge. And this reckless spending risks a mortgage meltdown on the \$900 billion of mortgages that will renew over the next three years.

Immigration and reverse migration hurt Canada's population balance. In 2010, 14.1% of Canada's population was 65 or older, according to Statistics Canada. By 2022, it had jumped to 19%. Migration disruption could fuel these trends. In 1966, 7.8% of Canadians were over 65. In 2022, it dropped to 3.4%, and by 2050, it will likely be below 3%. This affects government funds by having fewer taxpayers and more people relying on support. More elderly, more strain on healthcare.

Canada's aging population poses a big challenge for policy-

makers. Canada actively encourages young immigrants, offering various immigration options such as granting permanent resident status to international students after they finish their studies. This approach remains popular among policymakers. Canada will welcome 485K immigrants in 2024 and 500K in 2025. Canada welcomes skilled workers, temporary workers, and international students as immigrants. Each worker faces unique challenges. Skilled workers in Canada: excitement turns to challenges. Skilled individuals struggle to find suitable jobs and often settle for low-paying work to provide for their families.

America prefers to hire educated people, even if they do not have the same educational qualifications and experience as other immigrants.

The process of getting a license is quite complicated and expensive and takes a lot of time to complete. The influx of international students increased after Canada eased the rules to allow part-time work immediately after school admission. This also benefited the Canadian economy immensely. By 2022, more than 8 million study permit holders will be enrolled in educational institutions. In 2022, the contribution of international students to Canada's gross domestic product was estimated to reach \$22 billion, helping to create nearly 200,000 jobs.

International students are usually paid the minimum wage, which helps small and retail entrepreneurs run their businesses. After completing two years of education and one year of work experience in Canada (1560 hours), a person is eligible to apply for Permanent Residence (PR) but the PR is awarded based on Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS) scores. goes CRS is a points-based system

that is used to measure one's score and rank in the Express Entry pool. The CRS score depends on language, education, work, and age. The CRS cut-off varies in each PR draw round. 2022 saw CRS scores ranging from 491 to 557. The cut-off price depends on applicants, scores, and housing decisions. On October 23, 2023, 214,873 applications were in the pool. Only 3,600 applicants with scores of 431 or higher were invited for the draw on October 26. Applicants must wait a long time to earn more points. They'll be temporary workers with a three-year permit. Earn extra points by getting a job offer or LMIA approval. There were few applications and many rejections. The government sometimes lowers the CRS score requirement, like in 2021, when it dropped to 75, helping many applicants. Exemptions remain uncertain in terms of amount and timing. International students often go back home. Indian students wait and try various tactics to boost their CRS score, but it's not for everyone. CBC News reported that half of international students had no tax records after finishing their studies, indicating they likely went back home. According to an ICC survey that the same channel cited, 23% of educated new Canadians intend to leave the country in the next two years. High living costs here make migrants give up on their dreams. Canada's inflation is squeezing wallets as wages remain stagnant. Canada offers immigration, refugee, and citizenship programs but lacks support for their long-term maintenance. The road to residency is a maze of rules and surprises.

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# IMF'S FORECAST ON INDIA'S DEBT IS NOT A MOMENT TO PANIC

By. Yokheswara

**T**he recent report of the International Monetary Fund gave a warning to India regarding its high rate of public debt. Public debt means the percentage of debt to that of GDP. In 2020, India's debt stood at 89% of GDP. Although the rate reduced in the last 2 years, the debt rate is still above 80%. India's remarkable international show by becoming the 5th largest economy after pushing Britain to 6th did add value to the economy but is still far away from improving the fundamentals. Top rating agencies like the S&P and Moody's have given low ratings to the economy in the recent past because of its cumbersome economic

fundamentals with public debt and high interest rates being the centre-stone of concerns. Despite all these, the IMF report on public debt does not give the complete picture of the 'well-rounded' Indian economy. Imagine that you start an automobile company. You will not have the required money at the very beginning which would lead you to take a loan from the bank. You fund that borrowed money into your company by manufacturing the automobile which will lead to sales and give you returns eventually repaying the loan taken from the bank. The same case goes in this situation. Public debt includes the liabilities (borrowings) to be

paid from the Consolidated Fund of India. So, the government borrows money from various sources to fund and maintain the economy of the country because the revenue collected by the government is not enough. If the government utilizes the borrowed money and invests it into the economy to give returns, the economy will be in a growth trajectory and the debt will be repaid in the future as the economy produces returns. This return will be in the form of Net Capital formation. It is the accumulation of capital (wealth) in the form of assets, and direct and indirect revenue. An economy needs to increase its production of its goods and ser-





vices for an increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and an increase in GDP leads to an increase in national aggregate. For an increase in GDP, there has to be an increase in savings and investment with an increased growth rate of investments. The money utilized in the form of investments will be swirling around the economy for production purposes. Therefore, the faster the capital formation, the stronger the economic growth.

So, an economy's growth is defined in terms of capital formation and the rate of it. From 2010 to 2018, India's public debt averaged 68.56% of GDP with the public debt going up to 75% in 2019 from 66% in 2014 showing an increase of around 14%. At the same time, the capital formation averaged around 1,45,000 billion US Dollars with the capital formation going up to 2,10,000 billion US Dollars in 2019 from 1,35,000 billion US Dollars in 2014 showing a staggering 60% increase in 5 years. This shows that the economy was performing well on its fundamentals despite an increase in the rate of public debt. Now, let us look at the important years. Due to COVID-19, the economy was impacted heavily. Public debt suddenly reached

a new height of 89.5% in 2020 and reduced slightly to 89.3% in 2021. A minor revival took place in 2022 with a reduction of around 5-6%. What is interesting is the numbers of capital formation in the same COVID-affected years. Capital formation plunged to 1,10,000 billion USD in 2020 from 2,20,000 in 2019 but sparked a high of 2,40,000 billion USD in 2021 and touched a new height of 2,60,000 billion USD in 2022. The economy saw a commendable 136% increase. It is not a surprise to see why some of the developed countries were shocked to see the revival of the Indian economy after 2020.

With the Lok Sabha elections approaching and considering the current political stability in the country, it is doubtful to see any fluctuation in the rate of investments leading to gross capital formation. Thus, even if the economy witnesses some increase in the rate of public debt, the economy is well in shape to not let the poor get affected. However, public debt is not something that can be taken lightly. A high rate of public debt acts as a big hindrance to the positive trajectory of an economy by forcing the government to raise tax rates and impose heavy duties on busi-

nesses affecting the poor as well as the Small and Medium Enterprises (including startups) which gave a big boost to the economy in the last 5 years and will have a continuing positive impact over the years. Let us hope that steps are taken to bring the public debt down. One of the main ways of doing this is by lowering the interest rates. This will pave the way for huge and segregated SMEs to chirp more money into production thereby increasing the overall production of the economy with less capital. Owing to the fact the pandemic wreaked havoc on the economy, it is not expected to lower the interest rates rapidly. However, a decrease in interest rates in the next 2 years will place the economy on the right tangent. If everything goes well in the next 5 years, the economic fundamentals of the Indian economy will be in a much better position when India overtakes Japan to become the 3rd largest economy which will be the first phase of the economic upliftment of the middle class in India.

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# Can the Global South Still Trust India?

By. Dr. Abhishank Mishra

Despite the Global South accounting for more than 39 percent of the global GDP and 85 percent of the global population, since 2008 nearly half of all the G-20 Summits have taken place and been presided over by countries in the Global North in either Europe or North America. This is indicative of how historically; the global north has had a strong hold over global economic institutions and its attendant agenda. Since, the 2008 financial crisis, countries in the Global South have emerged as beacons of economic growth and dynamism which has necessitated a shift in power in this forum as well. In 2015, Turkey emerged as the first non-western member to preside over this forum. With this symbolic changing of the guard, the unique concerns of the global south have also started to percolate in the agenda of this forum with issues such as financial inclusion and the refugee crisis being addressed by Western powers for the first time in 2015. Other significant global south presidencies that contributed in enriching the agenda of this forum include China in 2016 steering the conversation towards inclusive growth and connectivity and in 2018, Argentina urging its members to prioritize poverty alleviation and sustainable development. This shows how global south leadership of the forum has been transformative in character. This also shows how assimilation of the global south concerns can elevate the efficacy of this multilateral

framework to address the challenges of tomorrow.

## India's evolving approach to multilateralism

Historically, since independence, as a developing country, India has had an essentially reformist approach to the international order. In realizing its vision of a more just and egalitarian order and achieving better outcomes for developing countries, it deposed faith in multilateralism and its attendant principles, rules and decision-making procedures. In the past 25 years, as India has ascended in the global order, its outlook towards the international order has come to be characterized by an approach towards holding onto its traditional support base in the global south while creating newer pathways for concerted action with the developed west. This approach can be corroborated through assertions of India being a 'South-Western' power by functionaries such as the External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar who asserts that India possesses potential as 'a power with very strong bonding with the developed world, which would enjoy as it goes up in the international order, the degree of trust and confidence of other developing states.' This is indicative of an approach towards cautious transformation. With maintaining continuity, in the persistent support for elements of the constitutive order, such as state sovereignty, multipolarity,

multilateralism, with recognition and concern for issues of the global south. And pushing for change, in signaling convergence with the West through qualified alignment to liberal internationalism.

## India at G-20: Going down the 'Old Town Road'

Despite its evolving image with regard to its G-20 presidency, in its official discourse, India still postures itself as the 'voice of the global south', not merely as an architect of the global agenda but also as a relentless driver of change, growth and sustainability for the global south. This is indicative of the fact that despite increasing unilateral capabilities, India still wants to cast itself as a 'leader of the global south', because it is certain that the support of its counterparts in the global south will be the key to aiding its transition from being a 'norm taker' to a 'norm maker.' Casting itself in this role comes with the responsibility of taking up concerns of the global south.

In this regard, India through its G-20 presidency and New Delhi declaration, has tried to reaffirm its credentials in championing the Global South cause in three ways. First, aiding the transition to low carbon emission technologies through creating pathways for facilitating low-cost financing to global southern countries. The declaration also highlighted the importance of expediting the process of development,





deployment and dissemination of clean power technologies, renewable energy and policy frameworks to transition away from high-emission energy systems. Second by pushing reforms in the pre-existing financial institutions to cater to concerns of the global south. In the face of mounting debt vulnerabilities, India through the declaration indicated a resolve to protect the vulnerable by fostering financial and macroeconomic stability. With the India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman asserted how India in a bid to enhance 'the representation and voice of developing countries' calls on the need to reform pre-existing pillars of the global economic order. In this regard, India reached an agreement to enhance the World Bank's financial capacity and headroom of the International Bank for Re-

construction and Development (IBRD) to aid middle- and low-income countries. Third, through laying down the groundwork for providing international public goods to developing nations. With regards to bridging capability gaps in the global south, in this summit, India asserted a triple agenda of addressing 'elimination of extreme poverty, inclusive growth and the financing of global public goods' and improving access to digital public infrastructure to boost sustainable inclusive growth. It also asserted the intent at constituting a Financial Inclusion Action Plan (FIAP) and 'Global challenges funding' mechanism for financial inclusion of marginalized sections in the global south and securing global public goods. The most significant marker of Indian commitment to the Global South bloc has

been the inclusion of the African Union (AU) into the G-20. In sum, India's mirroring of the concerns of the global south; the positive agenda of the declaration and global south countries holding the reigns of this forum for the next two summits, could be instrumental in creating much-needed momentum in shaping a more inclusive and just international order.

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# Single Use Plastics: In the news but also in your hands

By. Shubhi Arora



As one walks on the streets of India, the sight of plastic litter is quite common. As of January, India has already exceeded its capacity to handle its plastic waste. Despite various government schemes such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, tailored towards awareness programs and public participation efforts, it is evident that the problem of plastic waste management in India remains far from resolved. On July 1, 2022, the Government of India banned 19 single-use plastic (SUP) items to mitigate plastic pollution. This ban initially appeared promising, with huge amounts of banned plastic being seized, and fines imposed on offenders. It seemed as though the authorities had sent a loud and clear message to the entire supply chain of single-use plastic items.

Nevertheless, business as usual continues a year after the ban's implementation. Vegetable vendors continue to use polyethylene bags, while juice stalls and soda vendors still provide plastic straws. Furthermore, many food chains and local eateries persist in their use of plastic cutlery. Because the ban is based on the microns or thickness of plastic bags, its enforcement is challenging, resulting in a continuous circulation of SUP-banned items. Moreover, a significant number of banned items are manufactured within the unorganized sector, making it difficult to oversee their production. Consequently, it seems that the ban's primary focus lies in raising awareness amongst millions rather than implementing measures at the production level.

India generates almost 4 million tonnes of plastic waste each year, out of which 43 % is single-use plastic items. Due to the low utility of single-use plastic items, they often end up in landfills or water bodies. This leads to marine

pollution, increasing use of land for landfills, methane emissions from landfills and microplastic entering food chains. The problem of poor waste management is even worse in urban areas. In Delhi, almost 240 tonnes of plastic gets dumped every day in landfills. Three major landfill sites in Delhi have more than 28 million tonnes of waste and are as tall as the Qutub Minar.

Although the ban recognizes the need for alternative materials for effective implementation, it fails to consider that alternatives cost more than single-use plastic items. Local vendors who struggle for a stable livelihood often can't afford to buy materials. Furthermore, with SUP items still available in wholesale markets and negligible fines, the vendors revert to using SUP items. From an industrial perspective, the high cost of alternatives also leads to a rise in price and forces the consumer to buy less, impacting the growth of the industry.

India could consider learning from other countries that have enforced a stringent ban on single-use plastics. For instance, some East African countries, such as Rwanda, have set examples by imposing hefty fines, up to \$5000, for those using single-use plastic items. Moreover, the packaging cost for vendors has decreased since most consumers carry their bags. The country has also shifted towards making products from bamboo and paper to transition to a circular plastic-free economy. As a result Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, is now the cleanest city in Africa.

It is crucial to reevaluate the current policy framework to introduce substantial fines and offer subsidies for alternatives, making it viable for vendors to transition to low-impact options. The elimination of single-use plastics to es-

tablish a circular economy in India is multifaceted and is not limited to one stakeholder group. Various stakeholders – including raw material suppliers, plastic manufacturers, packaging companies, consumers, vendors, and local, state, and national governments – should be required to equally participate in the implementation of the ban. The plastic industry, manufacturers, and packaging companies have to overcome the design challenges and replace single-use plastic items with environmentally friendly alternatives.


As plastic waste overwhelms India's capacity to handle it ethically, the urgency to address this threat cannot be overstated. While public participation is crucial to curbing the circulation of single-use plastic items, no country can effectively enforce the ban without stringent guidelines and stronger enforcement measures from public authorities.

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# **THE TOMATO BOTCHUP – CAN WE AFFORD IT?**

**By. Sharmistha Sikdar**



**I**n a typical market economy, the demand and supply determine prices, with limited or no government interventions. Therefore, going by the first principles of microeconomic theory, if the demand is more than supply, prices would rise and vice-versa. The sudden spikes in demand and supply shortages are especially felt when there are natural disasters or calamities like wars, or earthquakes. India, though less strictly a market economy and more of a mixed economy, has had its share of woes with unprecedented price hikes due to demand and supply shocks.

Take the recent price hike of tomatoes in India, for instance. A few months ago, the prices of tomatoes suddenly shot up to approximately Rs. 200/- per kg. This

price hike happened due to the low production of tomatoes which popular press has attributed to scarce rainfall and extreme heat conditions. As there was a shortage of rainfall, there was a shortage of the crop. Additionally, extreme heat conditions led to pest attacks resulting in a lower output, and consequently higher market rates.

If one examines the domino effect of this, one would not be astonished. Not so laughably, some establishments hired bouncers to guard the “priceless” tomatoes to prevent thefts! Then, most restaurants, at the risk of being considered looters and losing patrons, stopped adding tomatoes to sandwiches and green salad. A friend of one of the authors of this article was aghast to receive a vegetarian sandwich with cucumbers

and potatoes, with no sign of the quintessential tomato slices. The transporters and truckers charged exorbitant fees to ferry tomatoes as they feared a reaction from angered consumers.

Medium-income households took stock of the situation and changed their weekly routine. Parents of tantrum-throwing adolescents refused to pay for the suddenly high salad prices of Swiggy and Zomato. Lower-income households forgot the tomatoes altogether and instead opted to eat tomato-less (albeit tasteless) lentils with rice.

This price hike of tomatoes in India due to production deficit from adverse weather conditions is what economists might call price gouging. More formally, price gouging is a practice, where firms





raise prices in response to supply and demand shocks that occur typically after emergencies, calamities or natural disasters. The development during the recent COVID pandemic is a case in point. In many countries, including India and the United States, prices of essential items like disinfectants and home cleaners soared due to a sudden increase in demand on one hand, and constraints in the supply chain on the other. In India, essential medicines were black-marketed in some cases. This imbalance in lower-than-average demand for non-essentials and higher-than-average demand for essential items led to an asymmetry. While pharmaceutical companies handed out bonus cheques to their employees other companies laid them off or halved their salaries, in a rather

tragic irony.

From an ethical standpoint, should firms hike prices during calamities and emergencies? Some economists would answer winsomely – why not? For instance, Nobel Prize winning economist Milton Friedman's famous viewpoint is "Gougers deserve a medal" for clearing the market. This Ethics versus Opportunity is a vexed debate often resting in favour of "opportunity" as a logical corollary of a market-driven economy. During periods of abundance, prices fall, and the customer enjoys the day. Likewise, if there is a shortage, prices rise, and the suppliers have their way. Are business owners morally obligated to provide customers fair access to essential items in times of crises and a resultant desperate need? Are the ones who

hike prices, looters or smart businesspeople?

Regulators argue that since price gouging distorts prices, it hurts overall social and consumer welfare. Thus, several countries have anti-price gouging laws in place as a preventative measure. For instance, in the United States, in response to the widespread pandemic-driven price gouging, 42 US states have anti-gouging laws effective March 2021. The penalties for businesses also vary. In North Carolina, for example, courts can impose fines of up to \$5,000 for each violation, and enforce refunds for the customers affected. This law thus holds all parties in the supply chain – manufacturers, distributors, and retailers – accountable. In India, the Essential Commodities Act, of 1955 (which was later

amended in 2020) ensures that essential commodities, e.g., food items, drugs, fuel, be made available to Indian consumers at fair prices.

However, in developed countries like the US or the UK or European nations, prices of “essential items” do not skyrocket in absence of a natural disaster or calamity. In the tomato price hike context, the popular press has attributed poor rainfall and extreme heat as the drivers of production shortfall. We argue that this might be incomplete and imperfect reasoning. It is a sad reality that Indian farmers continue to depend on rainfall instead of modern irrigation methods. This gap in modern farming methods makes Indian farmers more vulnerable than their counterparts in more developed nations to weather-related fluctuations. However, the question that remains unanswered is why these weather fluctuations affect only tomatoes.

The Government of India (“GoI”)s response to the shortage of tomatoes and the resultant price hike was knee-jerk. It had launched a “Tomato Grand Challenge Hackathon” in Delhi to glean ideas on how to combat rising tomato prices. The Department of Consumer Affairs directed consumer cooperatives to source tomatoes from vegetable markets, from high-production states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra to redistribute to major cities. In crises like these such as a crop shortage, the government often resorts to the Essential Commodities Act to impose stock limits. How much of that helps the farmers or the common man is anyone’s guess. The Individual Quick-Freezing procedure used by the GoI to store vegetables like peas comes to the rescue but how long can we store tomatoes or po-

tatoes to maintain adequate stock?

While these measures can bring short-term relief, the government can do much more. In the case of the tomato price hikes, the GoI needs to investigate in depth to identify the underlying factors that caused the scarcity of tomatoes. If the reality of the situation is that the shortfall in tomato production was due to weather, then the GoI should take long-term measures to prevent this in the future. For instance, the GoI should invest in modern farming methods and train farmers to use manual irrigation methods. In the interim, farmers may be advised to produce overproduce and create buffer stocks during periods of stable weather conditions. The Essential Commodities Act needs to be amended to stipulate stiff penalties for individuals who hoard and then create artificial scarcity.

On a final note, if rumours are true, onions will make us cry quite literally, as their prices are forecasted to rise to Rs. 150/- per kg. A few days ago, it had reached Rs. 85/- per kg forcing the GoI to add 200,000 tonnes of buffer to its already existing stock of 500,000 tonnes, to ensure that Indian consumers get a steady flow of onions at an affordable price. The GoI has also set a minimum export price due to under-invoicing. It has used the help of the NAFED (National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd.) mobile vans to transport onions and stock up major consumption centers all over the country. Hopefully, these initiatives will work, and prevent another tomato price hike-like situation.

As India rests on the cusp of being a superpower and eyes to be the third-largest economy, it stands to reason that its citizens enjoy the benefits of an abundant supply of essential items to eventu-

ally be able to afford some luxury items. We think that the customers are smart enough to know who to patronize after a crisis is over. Thus, businesses and firms should be ethical in their pricing practices if they indeed want to retain existing customers, attract new ones, and build on future revenues. The GoI, likewise, should be more transparent and strategic in its policies. As Ethicists, we argue that though the numbers game is very enticing for any nation, the Happiness Quotient does play an important role in determining the long-term viability of democracy, political stability, and economic vibrancy.

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# What Ghana can learn from India's ODOP

By. Samir Bhattacharya

In October 2022, Ghana sought the IMF (International Monetary Fund) bailout for the record 17th time. Actually, very few people anticipated that Ghana, which until recently was considered Africa's brightest star, would experience this level of financial catastrophe in such a short time. Even in 2019, Ghana's Economy was expanding at the fastest rate in the world. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were optimistic about the steady rise of the nation. Although Ghana's Economy is primarily driven by oil, non-oil industries

like agriculture, manufacturing, and services were also expanding quickly. Everything was going well until the outbreak of the pandemic.

And today, Ghana, the economic poster boy of West Africa, is on the verge of entering into a full-blown economic recession. Despite being a significant exporter of cocoa and gold, it is presently experiencing its worst financial crisis in decades. The Inflation rose from 13.9% in January to 37.2% in September, the highest level in 21 years. Some analysts believe the actual level is more than twice the official rate, around 98%. Pet-

rol and diesel prices have jumped by 88.6% and 128.6%, respectively. Most public transport fares have increased by over 100% since January.

Initially, the government was hopeful that the Economy would recover after the pandemic. Ghana's economic revival, however, got a severe jolt from Russia's conflict in Ukraine. Between January and October 2022, the cedi, the country's currency, lost more than 50 per cent of its worth, increasing Ghana's debt by \$6 billion. The President recently acknowledged to the nation that Ghana is in-



deed in trouble. He attributed the predicament to external factors, including the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Indeed, Agriculture contributes more than 40 per cent of Ghana's export revenue and represents 21 per cent of the country's GDP. At the same time, it supplies more than 90 per cent of the nation's food requirements. And the revival of the agriculture sector is primordial to boost the Economy, generate jobs, and reduce food insecurity. The government understands the importance of the agriculture sector for reviving the Economy. In fact, very early in his tenure, the Akufo administration introduced the One District One Factory (1D1F) development plan to attract value-added investment to the agricultural industry. The program called for creating an industrial zone in each of Ghana's ten provinces and one new factory in the country's 216 districts. According to the project, each district was expected to generate about 6,000 direct employments. The 1D1F initiative and other pro-business policies were intended to increase export-related manufacturing and FDI for its industrial infrastruc-

ture.

While the success of the 1D1F plan is crucial for revitalising the agriculture sector and overall Economy, the foreign investors are still cautious and want the government to do more to ensure their investment is safe. Given the circumstances, the 1D1F plan needs to be amended and revitalised as Ghana seeks to advance technical advancements and engage more young people in sustaining and enhancing the nation's economic performance. As his regime desperately scrambles to inject much-needed impetus to galvanise the beleaguered Economy, he can draw some inspiration from India, especially from the policies of the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Similar to 1D1F, the Uttar Pradesh state administration introduced the "One District One Product (ODOP)" programme in 2018. ODOP was viewed as a crucial initiative as the government of UP aimed to increase the state's Economy to \$1 trillion and increase its share of India's GDP from 8% to 15-16%. The overall goal of ODOP was to stimulate regional growth by utilising local talent, resources, and expertise.

Modelled after the Japanese "One Village One Product" programme of the 1980s, the ODOP sought to revitalise the Economy by fostering regional development through local resources, talent, and knowledge.

The ODOP could serve as a model for 1D1F and assist Ghana in its economic revival. Like the ODOP programme, Ghana's 1D1F programme can be more successful if it prioritises value chain development, product marketing support, financial aid, and skill development. In Ghana, there is a lack of convergence of these four crucial components. The country of West Africa may also emulate UP's systematic participation of institutions from both the public and private sectors at all levels.

Another bailout won't resolve the financial crisis of Ghana. The Akufo administration knows very well that the long-term solution to this crisis is to increase investments instead of focusing only on fiscal discipline. Time is of the essence, as only the success of 1D1F will determine the dream of a return to power for the current President as well as set the course for the future of Ghana.



# Improved tax compliance: evidence from Indian taxpayers' behaviour

By. Susanta Mishra

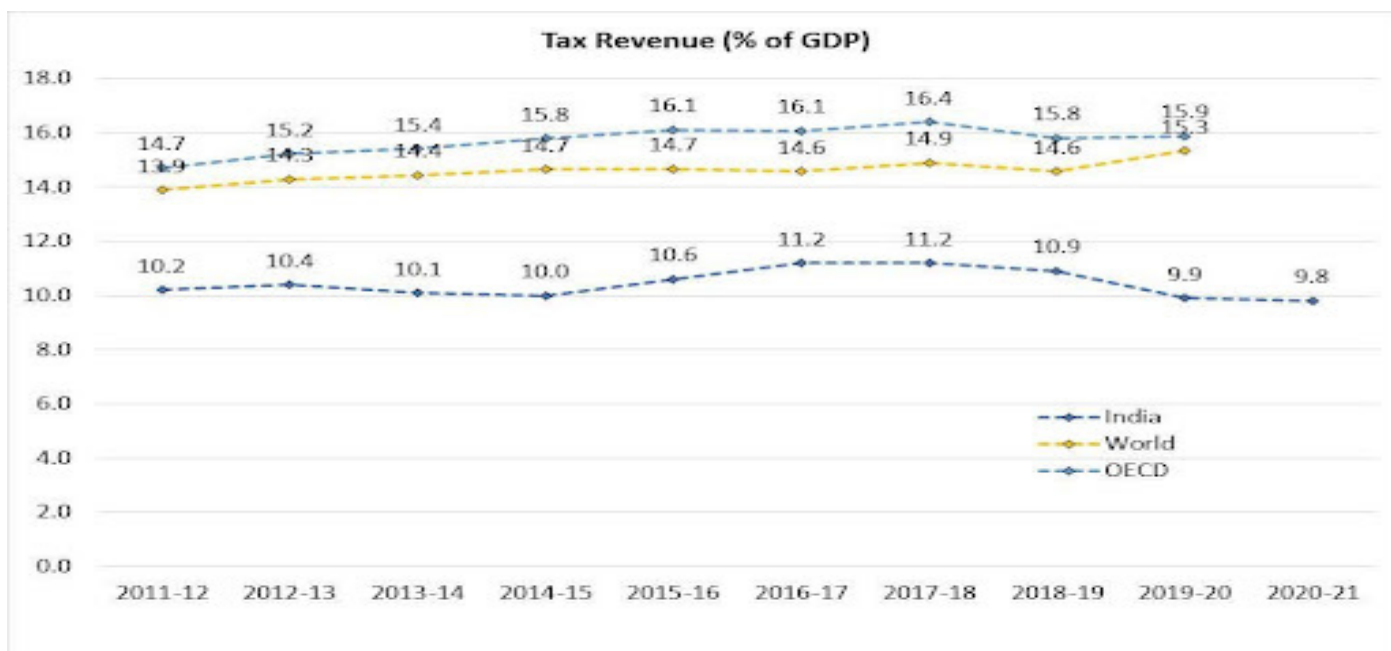
## Abstract:

Tax revenue of India as a percent. of its GDP is much lower as compared to the world average. Low tax base and low tax compliance are the two major factors which hinders the optimal collection of tax. The low tax base is an administrative issue which can be optimally designed by the policymakers. But the compliance issue is an interplay of several layers of social, psychological, and economic factors in which a taxpayer passes through before making any tax decision. Therefore, Government of India has started focusing more into the taxpayer's behavioural perspective and deployed few nudging tools for improving tax compliance. Early evidence suggests for improvement in compliance thereby leading to improved tax collections.

## Introduction:

India is the second most populous country in world having 1.38 billion population. In terms of GDP, India is the fifth largest economy in the world, with a GDP of US \$3.75 trillion in 2019. A huge population is an asset for India, however when it comes to the tax contribution by citizens, Indians do not contribute to exchequer in a big way as compared to other developed countries. Amongst many reasons for such low tax contribution; low tax base, low tax compliance are two major factors which requires close examination.

This paper briefly examines the importance of tax revenue for India and compares its tax revenue figures with that of developed countries. Factors contributing towards low tax revenue and low compliance from a taxpayer's behavioural perspective is also analysed. The recent actions taken by Indian income tax department towards nudging taxpayers for improved compliance is further examined. And at the end, few suggestions have been proposed for India, taking help from international best practices in order to further address the compliance issue.



### India's low tax revenue issue:

Tax collection is one of the sovereign functions of a government. Tax is collected as part of the social contract made by a state with its citizens in order to provide funds for the socio development programs, and to create public goods that fosters growth and development. Tax is also used as a tool for transferring resources from rich to poor for equitable distribution of national wealth.

The efficiency of a tax system can be assessed by looking at the tax to GDP ratio of a country which represents the size of the tax revenue relative to the size of the GDP. This ratio is widely used as an indicator of tax compliance. It also determines the extent to which the government is able to provide financial support to its planned expenditures from tax revenue. Therefore, raising tax revenue requires an efficient, effective tax system and well compliant citizen (World Bank, 2019).

From figure 1, it can be seen that India's tax collection is one of the lowest in the world. India's Tax-GDP ratio in the financial year 2020-21 was around 10% meaning that India has to borrow a lot to finance its programs. De-

veloped countries have higher tax-to-GDP ratio. Among the global peers, India's tax-to-GDP ratio is much below than the world average. In OECD countries, tax collection on an average contributes to 16% of GDP.

Tax revenue collection is the most important priority for India. However, the low levels of Tax-GDP ratio show that tax buoyancy is not optimal. Tax collection is not keeping pace with the rising GDP growth. Rising population in India demanding better public goods and better governance from Government which ultimately adding pressure on the exchequer.

### Factors contributing towards low tax revenue:

The low tax revenue collection points towards low tax base and low levels of compliance. Bringing more and more citizen within tax net will widen the tax base and lead to improvement in tax revenue. This can be done by lowering tax rate and threshold taxable income. Government should also focus on improving tax to GDP ratio by ensuring the citizens pay their taxes. These two measures i.e. improve tax compliance and widen the tax base will yield higher tax revenue.

A well in place compliance mechanism will also check tax evasion and curb black money generation leading to higher growth.

"Tax compliance" is defined as the percentage of individuals or organisations who are registered as taxpayer and who pay taxes by filing returns. Timely filing of tax return is a direct indicator of compliance. This paper only focuses on the individual tax payer compliance. It is often believed that India is "a tax non-compliant country and many people knowingly or unknowingly evade taxes". Recently Prime Minister of India publicly made a statement about the low tax payment in India. According to him, only 1.5 Crore people pay the taxes in a country of 130 crores. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), the apex body responsible for tax administration in India has also released the compliance figures on 2017-18. According to CBDT, in 2017, the compliance rate was about only 11.6%. For the financial year 2018-19, although the number of return filers is about 5.78 crore, only 1.46 crores have paid taxes and remaining 4.32 crore individuals reported their income below the tax bracket.

Since firms and individuals who are formally registered as taxpayer



fail to file their tax declarations on time, it leads to loss of huge tax revenue. Loss of revenue puts a hole on the tax basket. The difference between revenues received and those that are expected to be received from the tax system is known as the tax gap. In 2020, the Finance Commission of India has estimated the tax gap figures, which is more than 5 per cent of GDP, compared to actual tax potential (XV Finance Commission, pg-18).

### Understanding compliance from a taxpayer's perspective:

In order to design any policy solution to address the compliance issue it is very important to understand tax compliance from the perception of a taxpayer. Every tax payer passes through several layers of social, psychological, and economic factors before making any tax decision. Taxpayers constantly struggle in understanding tax compliance cycle under following four broad headings. The detail list is attached at annexure I.

Understanding tax process: ignorance of law and complexity in legal language leaves space for a taxpayer what exactly he needs to do. Deciding to pay taxes: consequences of non-payment of tax on time, social norms like whether others are paying tax or not and what government is going to do with my money runs in the mind of a taxpayer while deciding to pay tax.

Declaring taxes: human mind can process limited information. So, while deciding to declare tax, a taxpayer faces difficulty about how much to pay, how to pay and where to pay the tax.

Paying taxes: liquidity constraints, continues urge to delay payment and choosing best payment plat-

form often run in the mind of tax payer during the final payment stage.

Apart from the above factors, taxpayers also behave in certain way depending upon the payment burden, complexity of law that leaves scope for corruption and if too much taxing feelings emerges.

### Behavioural insights for addressing tax compliance:

The standard policy measures for improving compliance, such as making stringent legislation, strict administration, audit and preventive tax inspectors sometimes not enough. These standard tools are also time-consuming, infeasible due infrastructure, limited resources, and political constraints. Therefore, the behavioural understandings from tax payer perspective as mentioned in previous paragraph provides an excellent ground to use behavioural nudges to address tax compliance. A Nudge is human centric intervention to influence behaviour. Nudging tools are simple, cost effective, easy to deploy and been tested worldwide by Behavioural Economists. Some of the most important BE insights and associated tools to nudge taxpayers to become compliant are briefly described under. The detail list of nudging techniques and policy solutions are attached at annexure II and III.

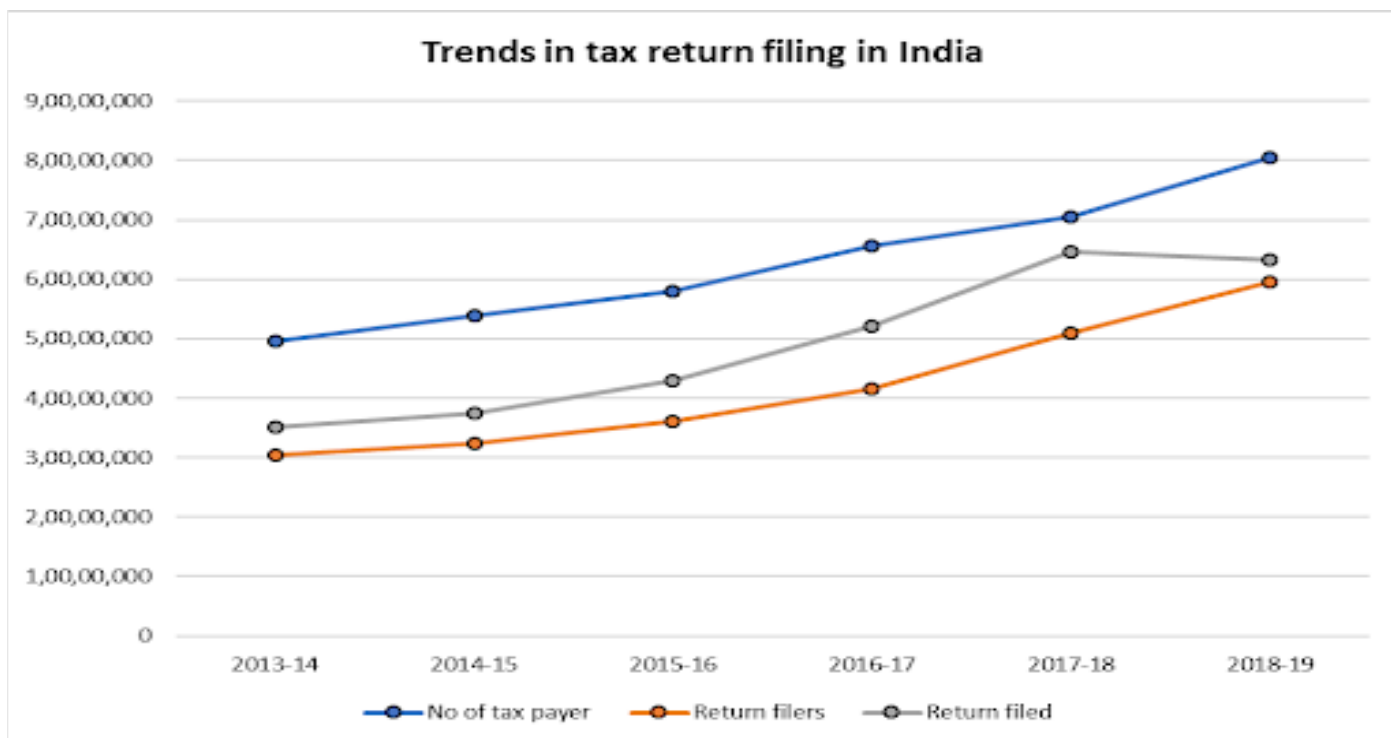
(a) Cognitive load: Human mind has limited capacity to comprehend and process information. Because tax laws are complex and understanding the compliance process is very difficult for an average taxpayer, cognitive hurdles automatically emerge. To address this issue tax law and compliance mechanism can be made simple. The simplification processes also need to be communicated to tax

payers effectively.

(b) Social norms: Often society impacts in a big way for individuals decision making. A taxpayer is concerned about his social image in the society. If most of the members of a society are non-compliant; tax evasion is accepted as a norm in the society, then tax policy should try to alter the norms. A Tax payer also ponders about the usage of his tax paid to the Government. If he feels that his hard-earned money paid to the government is wasted in careless way, or he faces lack of infrastructure in his vicinity, then taxpayer automatically get demotivated to pay tax on time. Therefore, tax policy should be framed in such a way, that it must motivate tax payer or feel valued. Intrinsic motivation is a major driver of tax compliance.

(c) Time inconsistency: Self compliant and committed people often forgets to pay tax on time either due to lack of information or due to non-availability of cash on time. Further, short term benefits often outweigh long-term gains. As gains from tax is long term, a taxpayer often desists to pay tax on time and spend the money towards other sort term use. This kind of procrastination and inconsistent behaviour can be changed, if tax department can send timely and repeated messages. In these cases, often providing small incentives to taxpayers also act as catalyst to become compliant.

(d) Framing: As mentioned previously that tax laws are complex and not easy for an average taxpayer to understand. Often the communication, public notices issued by tax department for tax payers are not framed in taxpayer friendly manner. Losses, penalty and fines for delayed tax payments are mainly



communicated. Negative way of communications threatens more than motivation. Therefore, it should be better if tax policy makers pay more attention towards positive framing of tax benefits. Appeal to an individual's sense of duty and good citizenship, and emphasizing on "how paying taxes is valuable for nation" would certainly drive compliance.

(e) Loss aversion: Individuals don't like losses. Studies by Kahneman and Tversky, 1979 shown that losses loom larger than gains. It means people put greater value to a given item which they possess now. Similarly, a tax payer doesn't like to pay fine and penalty for non-compliance. Therefore, as a policy measure, if fine, penalty or even prosecution for non-compliance would be clear and concrete, it would refrain people in margin to take risk and definitely help improving tax compliance.

### How India nudging its taxpayer for better compliance:

From finance year 2017-18 onwards, India is experiencing rapid changes in its tax administration.

The social norm getting changed from "evading taxes is acceptable" to "paying taxes honestly is honourable." In order to make tax compliance hassle free and simple, tax systems becoming more tax friendly. India has taken mainly following three steps to address compliance problem.

(i) Simplified return: Previously it was sole responsibility of a tax payer to calculate the annual income using combination of documents, e.g. salary statement, interest from savings account etc. Then the tax payers also have to check his eligible deductions and arrive at the net tax liability. It was really cumbersome and time consuming to process so many information. The risk of making error was at higher side. Now filing a return is simple and technology driven. When a taxpayer enters into the system, he gets a pre-filing tax return. It either accepts the values filled in the auto populated return or rejects and provides his own value. The error margin is low and submission followed by assessment of return is quick.

(ii) Text messages: Now a tax payer

getting all the information about tax payment through text messages. Quarterly tax deducted by the employer, time of tax payment, last days for payment are being repeatedly informed to him. Again, when the return is filed, the status of his return, payment of refund etc are also informed promptly. Attempts have also been made to wish a taxpayer on his birth day and also during new year and other important days.

(iii) Thanking a taxpayer: India has started publicly and explicitly thanking its tax payers to let tax payer feel valued and honoured in this country. Tax department also issuing appreciation letters to tax payers so as to further encourage them to continue with good work.

(iv) Awareness drive: many awareness drives are conducted to instil sense of reasonability towards nation building. Over the years many technical sessions/ workshops are also being conducted to handhold tax payers for easy compliance. Certain kind of strict messages, like, "undisclosed income is ticking time bomb", "the big boss is watching you" etc are also being widely

circulated in print and electronic media for noncompliant and tax evaders. The underlying message is clear for both honest tax payer and dishonest tax payer.

It has been more than five years; India is nudging its taxpayers to remain compliant. Although there is no study being carried out to measure effectiveness of these efforts, the recent compliance trends in terms of return filing shows positive improvement. From the figure 2, it can be seen that both the number of tax payers and return filers are steadily increasing.

### Findings and way forward:

India is effectively nudging its taxpayers for better tax compliance using simplification of return filing process, sending repeated reminders and informing tax payers promptly. These actions are targeted for all taxpayers in India and not specifically targeted to evaders. It is not effectively utilising the data mining, and data analysis tools to address tax evasion. Therefore, it would be great if India can go a step further and implement the following policy suggestions. The suggestions are drawn from other tax jurisdictions which are proven to be very effective in tackling tax evasion and improving tax collection vis-à-vis compliance.

First, using data mining tools, India should classify the tax payers into 'disengaged', 'resisters', 'triers' and 'supporters' categories and then take appropriate action. Classification of taxpayers into these categories provides an effective way to address risk compliance. For supporters and triers, nudging for compliance would be easy and therefore government can better facilitate their needs. Similarly, for disengaged and resisters category, it can take visible deterrent actions and force towards

strict compliance.

Second, improved tax compliance in a society effectively checks tax evasion and curbs black money circulation. Not asking for a receipt/ invoices also facilitates retail level evasion. Particularly from the consumer side this societal cost of facilitating evasion is often not considered in policy formulation stage. There this is an urgent requirement for India to nudge its society for attitude change. It can incentivise its citizens by treating his tax receipts as lottery coupon. It will promote consumers to ask every supplier to issue authenticated invoice. Experiences from Singapore & Philippines shows that this softer measure effectively addresses tax evasion.

Third, some of the tax jurisdictions like Australian Taxation Office, Minnesota Revenue regularly publish the names of tax evaders on the internet as a public shaming device. People who are concerned about their reputation in the society become more compliant. India can also do similar exercise and regularly publish tax non-compliant or evader details in public forum and use this social norm as a nudge tool to address the non-compliance issue. Apart from this, tax department may also look for honouring the honest tax payers by providing tax credit or some kind of cash back. It will also positively motivate its citizen to file tax return on time.

To conclude, non-compliance of tax law remains a measure policy challenge for India and this non-compliance leaves space for huge tax gap to the tune of 5 percent. of Indian GDP. Off late, from 2017-18 onwards India has taken several steps to address the tax payers concern and using simple BE tools it is nudging its tax payers to become more compliant. The

action taken so far seems effective. There are few more steps required to be taken by Indian tax authorities to concretely address the compliance issue.

**Declaration:** The Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

*Susanta Mishra: The author is a 2013 batch IRS Officer.*



# Would you cheer if my children are murdered?

By. Richard Schindelheim

This morning as my five-year-old was having a temper tantrum after spilling his second cup of cereal on the way to the car, I scooped the little guy up, put him in his seat and started to buckle him in. “You’re pushing me!” he shouted. He’s very cute (he looks like his mother) but—especially when we’re late for school because I’ve been glued to the news coming out of Israel—he can drive me crazy. I had to cut him some slack, though, because when I looked at him I couldn’t help but think, “Poor guy, you have no idea that there are (at least) thousands of people who would slaughter you in your little blue car bed if they only had the chance and countless others around the world who would gleefully defend and even celebrate your killers.” So, I just kissed him on his little head and drove to school thinking about how if, instead of Cleveland we lived in southern Israel, like some of my cousins do, he might be decapitated or burnt to ashes or a hostage in Gaza. After October 7th, it’s hard to look at any of my children without having that thought.

As someone familiar with Jewish history, this fear is, unfortunately, not so foreign. What is surprising to American Jews is the shock-

ingly open support, justifications and celebrations of the murder and kidnapping of innocent Jews—including infants, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Being a Jew makes one ineligible for the protection of intersectionality. BLM Chicago’s logo, lionizing the Hamas baby killers, apparently has no concern for the suffering of Ethiopian Israelis. The pro-Palestine demonstration in Sydney in which freedom-loving, humanists chanted, “gas the Jews and f... the Jews,” are happy to cheer for the execution of Israel’s LGBTQ+ community. And, of course, the peaceful supporters of the Global Day of Jihad have no qualms about targeting individuals with disabilities, as long as they’re Jewish.

Fortunately, we do have friends in this world who are willing to call evil what it is and stand for what is right. Among them, are President Biden and NYC’s Mayor Adams whose unequivocal and compassionate support for Israel gives hope to Jews—and all people who seek goodness, truth and justice over barbarism and evil—worldwide. Secretary Blinken is also an important friend in these horrific times. However, he said something in a speech in Israel that I wish were true, but I know is false. Like many

others have assured us recently, Secretary Blinken said, “We know Hamas doesn’t represent the Palestinian people.” If only they did not elect Hamas after Israel left the Gaza Strip in 2005. Is that not the definition of representing a people? And what about the videos of last Saturday’s brutality that show Gazan civilians openly celebrating the violence—just as Palestinians did on 9/11. Secretary Blinken—like every decent person—wants to believe that they are just like us. Why would your average person wish harm upon someone they don’t even know? This is not something our Western minds can seem to comprehend. We come from a civilization that values all human life and believes that each individual—regardless of identity—has the right to live in dignity. But understand that the “holy warriors” who carried out this stomach-churning violence also come from a civilization.

That is why our hearts break for the children of Gaza as well. Not because they have a bounty on their heads like Jewish children do. It is heartbreaking because their leadership is happy for them to die as a “shaheed” so they can be used as propaganda tools against Israel. I’m not just inferring this from their well-



known, cynical tactic of using children as human shields. They say it out loud. For example, in a TV interview, Hamas's Ali Bakar said plainly, "The Israelis are known to love life. We, on the other hand, sacrifice ourselves. We consider our dead to be martyrs." We in the West just don't accept this. That can't be what he means. They must just want to live freely like we do. They just want to watch football and play with their kids on Thanksgiving like we do. For how long will we keep lying to ourselves? They have been telling us all along. And although last Saturday was not the first time they showed us what they want, it was certainly the clearest demonstration of the depths of their hatred and barbarism. Reports of the atrocities committed in Israel from last weekend have been repeatedly described as "incomprehensible." Well, we'd better start comprehending. We'd better listen to the cries of the children who were forced to watch their parents' execution. We'd better hear the shrieks of the parents who had to watch their children's precious bodies defiled. We'd better see the in-

nocent Jewish blood smeared all over the houses and on the diaper-wearing infants of the kibbutzim and towns of southern Israel. We'd better smell the burning flesh of Jewish babies, torched in their own homes. For if we don't—if we continue telling ourselves that this kind of evil is incomprehensible—then the 1300 killed, 155 missing and thousands of injured will be just the beginning. And it won't stop in Israel, just like Al-Qaeda and ISIS didn't stop in Afghanistan and Iraq.

If we do want to live in a world in which such evil truly is "incomprehensible," then we should heed the words of Psalms, some of the greatest poetry of that Western canon upon which our just and decent civilization was built:

Who is the one who desires life? Who loves long days, to see goodness?

Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. (Psalms, 34)

Those of us who love life and not death, good and not evil—we have a

responsibility. Guard your tongue from defending and justifying evil. Guard your lips from equivocating and deceitfully claiming that a massacre of unarmed Jews in their homes is a "political issue." If you love life, then love Jewish life as well. If you want to see goodness in the world, then speak the truth. If we can't do that, then what's next? We've suffered the agony of September 11th and the horror of October 7th. Dare we imagine what November might bring?

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# “Navigating Healthcare’s Crossroads: Misinformation, Heroism, and Governmental Accountability”

By. Prince Raj

The recent Supreme Court ruling has brought into focus the pervasive issue of misinformation in healthcare, particularly concerning Baba Ramdev’s statements against modern medicine and vaccines. This critical moment demands a thorough assessment while acknowledging the tireless efforts of those combatting the pandemic.

Baba Ramdev’s influence has enabled the propagation of misleading information about modern medicine and COVID-19 vaccines. His unverified claims and disparaging remarks have not only clouded public perception but have also undermined the relentless efforts of global medical professionals.

These statements, including linking the surge in cancer cases to the COVID-19 pandemic and alleged mockery of individuals in dire need of oxygen during the crisis, have raised serious concerns. Such misinformation erodes trust in established medical practices and fosters reluctance towards life-saving vaccines, directly impacting public health outcomes.

Simultaneously, amidst this turmoil, healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses, and medical professionals, have displayed unparalleled dedication and brav-

ery. Their sacrifices, expertise, and unwavering commitment to saving lives in the face of overwhelming adversity deserve immense recognition and gratitude.

However, amidst the criticism of misinformation propagated by influential figures, the Union Government’s passive stance raises troubling concerns. The failure to address the spread of misleading claims and the endorsement of unverified remedies, such as Patanjali’s Coronil medicine by a former Health Minister during its launch, exacerbates the issue. By inadvertently legitimizing unproven treatments, the government not only contributes to the dissemination of misleading information but also compromises public trust in established medical practices.

This lack of decisive action raises ethical concerns and underscores the urgent need for governmental accountability in countering misinformation and promoting evidence-based healthcare practices.

The recent Supreme Court reprimand of Baba Ramdev’s Patanjali Ayurveda for misleading advertisements and false claims is a step towards curbing such detrimental misinformation. However, addressing this issue shouldn’t

solely rely on judicial intervention. There exists a collective responsibility among individuals, corporations, and regulatory bodies to prioritize truth, accuracy, and ethical communication in matters of public health.

As society navigates these tumultuous times, valuing evidence-based information, trusting in the proficiency of medical professionals, and collectively working towards a more informed and healthier community is crucial. While critique of misinformation is necessary, equal emphasis should be placed on acknowledging and honoring the relentless efforts of healthcare professionals who have worked tirelessly to safeguard public health, showcasing unwavering dedication and altruism in challenging circumstances.

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# Understanding Affirmative Action: The Purpose and Controversies of Reservation

By. Pranjal

**T**his piece is written in light of recent events in Bihar, where the state assembly approved the Reservation Amendment Bill. This legislation has led to an increase in the reservation quota for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) from the current 50% to a new total of 65%. When implemented, this 65%, coupled with the 10% of EWS Reservation, will increase reservation to 75%.

The reservation policy in India has been a perennial subject of discussion and deliberation since its inception. It was designed to rectify alleged historical injustices and foster social equality and has undergone substantial changes over time. A pivotal moment in the evolution of India's reservation policy occurred in 1992 when the government implemented the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. In this article, we will conduct a critical analysis of India's reservation policy post-1992, exploring its implications for various facets of Indian society.

The reservation system was created with the noble intention of promoting social justice and equality, but it has become a double-edged sword, with several instances of misuse. Reservation policies in India have their roots in the country's history of caste-based discrimination and social inequality. The framers of the Indian Con-

stitution recognized the need to address these deeply ingrained inequities and introduced affirmative action measures through the reservation system. Reservations were initially meant to be a temporary measure to uplift the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and to mainstream them along with bringing them on a level playing field with the rest of the population.

The practice of giving special treatment to socially disadvantaged groups has a history that goes back to 1880 when Jyotiba Phule petitioned the Hunter Commission, the British Government, to reserve seats for the historically marginalized community. Further, in 1902, at that time, Shahu, the Maharaja of Kolhapur, introduced reservation in education to support non-Brahmins and backward classes. Another state, Mysore, also implemented a similar kind of affirmative action. In 1932, thanks to the efforts of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and an agreement between Sh. M. K. Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar, famously known as the Poona Pact, the British Government agreed to reserve seats for depressed castes within Hindu electorates. Post-Independence in 1950, the Constitution of India committed to reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; later in 1990, the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, of 27% reservations, were implemented by the Govern-

ment of India, under the leadership of Sh. VP Singh.

The moot question is, who benefits from reservation? Anybody but not the actual needy. Those who need reservation most have been least benefited by the reservation. The marginalized and deprived section of society is still destitute and living in vagrancy. According to J.K. Bajaj, Director, Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai, also an esteemed member of the J. Rohini Commission, less than 1% of OBC Caste corners 50% of the reservation, and 20% of OBC Caste have not been able to hold space in participation.

In Central Government services, the current representation stands at 15% for Scheduled Castes, 7.5% for Scheduled Tribes, and 21.57% for Other Backward Classes (OBCs). It's noteworthy that these percentages do not directly align with the respective shares in the overall population. The population shares for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Castes are 16.6%, 8.6%, and 41%, respectively. This indicates that the representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in government services is slightly below their demographic proportions and highly low for OBCs. It is noteworthy that these are the figures even after 74 years of SC and ST reservation and 33 years of OBC Reservation. This reflects a clear anomaly in the current reservation structure of India.

It is also advisable to consider the urban and rural divide in making policies for preferential treatment rather than taking reservation as the panacea for all existing problems.

There are also evident discrepancies in the implementation of reservation policies, i.e. Muslims classified under the Julahas category in Uttar Pradesh (UP), as well as Dhunias (cotton carders) and Darzis in Bihar, currently enjoy reservation status in the central list of Other Backward Classes (OBCs). However, individuals from the Hindu community belonging to these identical groups have been excluded from this reservation provision. In Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, there is a distinct category in the central list for Muslims whose occupational class deems them eligible for Other Backward Classes (OBC) status. However, Hindu individuals belonging to the same occupational groups are not included in this list. (The Report of the J. Rohini Commission is much awaited to shed more light on this aspect).

One of the most significant misuses of the reservation system is by certain communities within the reserved categories who are already well-off. Some dominant groups within these categories have cornered a significant share of the reserved seats, leaving the genuinely needy at a disadvantage. In many cases, reservation policies have inadvertently created a new class of privilege among the reserved categories. This often leads to a sense of entitlement rather than empowerment.

Politicians have frequently manipulated reservation politics to garner votes. They promise to expand reservations or introduce new quotas for political gain, often without a clear agenda for the actual devel-



opment and welfare of these communities. The concept of a “creamy layer” was introduced to ensure that the benefits of reservation policies reach the neediest. However, this provision is often overlooked, allowing well-off individuals from reserved categories to continue enjoying the benefits.

In certain cases, reservation policies have led to reverse discrimination, where individuals from the general category feel disadvantaged in educational and job opportunities. This can create a sense of injustice among a significant section of the population. Reservation policies, while providing quotas in education and employment, have often failed to address the underlying issues of inadequate access to quality education and skill development within marginalized communities. As a result, the intended beneficiaries may still lack the necessary skills and qualifications to compete effectively.

The reservation system has not been subjected to regular, comprehensive reviews. As a result, there has been little effort to ensure that the system remains fair, relevant, and equitable over time. The misuse of reservation politics in India is a matter of concern. While the system was introduced with good

intentions to promote social justice and uplift marginalized communities, its misuse has led to unintended consequences, including the perpetuation of inequality and the neglect of the truly disadvantaged. Political leaders and parties must take a long-term view when dealing with reservation policies, prioritizing comprehensive socio-economic development over immediate electoral advantages. It's crucial to strike a balance between affirmative action and meritocracy, ensuring that reservation effectively uplifts marginalized communities without being manipulated for short-term political gains.

The use of reservation in Indian politics to gain votes presents a major obstacle to the initial goals of affirmative action. A more nuanced and considerate approach is necessary to tackle the intricate issues of social justice and inclusion.

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# Unveiling the Silent Struggle: Housewives and India's Alarming Female Suicide Rates

By. Major Gaurav Tak (Retd)

India, a nation that takes pride in its progress toward gender equality and female empowerment, is grappling with a deeply distressing issue that deserves our immediate attention: the disproportionately high rate of suicides among Indian housewives.

## Beyond Individual Weakness: A Society in Crisis

At first glance, suicide may appear to be an individual's inability to cope with life's pressures. However, the data paints a sombre picture of a society grappling with pervasive patriarchy, despite advances in education and equal opportunities for women. Even as we tout initiatives like "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao," the alarming trend of educated women resorting to extreme measures underscores the need for broader societal change.

## The Subtle Shackles of Patriarchy

The subtle but potent grip of patriarchy is a significant driver behind the distressing number of female suicides in India. Educated women, who aspire to equitable partnerships, find themselves caught in a web of conflicting societal expectations, leading to internal conflicts and feelings of helplessness. The stark contrast between their roles as wives and sisters of husbands at home raises profound questions, leaving them torn between tradition and modernity.

## The Trap of Role Stereotyping

Role stereotyping perpetuates these challenges, as men and women are often conditioned into stereotypical roles, with men as breadwinners and women as homemakers. This misguided view of social roles as fixed and unchanging fails to acknowledge that individuals can exercise agency in shaping their roles. Educated women are more likely to question and challenge these expectations, seeking to redefine their roles through social interaction rather than passively conforming.

## Legitimizing Discriminatory Practices

In some instances, even educated women, including mothers and older family members, endorse a functionalist perspective that legitimizes discriminatory practices. This acceptance of patriarchy as a necessary element for societal order only perpetuates social discrimination and control exercised by elder women on behalf of men, underscoring the deep-seated nature of patriarchy.

## Unseen Forms of Social Control

Society exerts personal, unofficial, and often uncoded social control on women. These forms of control include subtle expressions like smiles, frowns, body language, criticism, ridicule, and laughter. Such constant social pressure compels women to accept societal norms and change themselves, putting them through emotional labor. Research indicates that this

continuous emotional labor generates immense stress and, when there's no outlet, can lead to suicidal tendencies.

## A Call to Action: Recognize and Empower

To address this crisis, we must recognize the multifaceted challenges faced by Indian housewives and take concrete steps to empower them. Educating society alone is insufficient; we must shift the prevailing mindset and dismantle the subtle yet oppressive structures that drive women to such extremes.

Furthermore, it is time to acknowledge the profound contributions of homemakers and explore ways to compensate them financially. Organizations where husbands are employed can lead by recognizing the invaluable work of their employees' spouses. Such recognition, beyond economic empowerment, will instil a sense of value and self-worth among homemakers, alleviating their emotional labour and stress.

In conclusion, let us not only raise awareness about the struggles faced by Indian housewives but also take decisive actions to recognize their work and empower them. Suicide prevention is not merely about saving lives; it's about creating a society where every individual can flourish, free from the constraints of outdated norms and expectations. The time for change is now.



# Political Conveniences and Appeasement: A Summation of USCIRF's hearing on India

By Aditya Saraff and Nishant Pradhan

'Exert pressure on India' was the most frequently heard phrase last week at the hearing convened by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to discuss the apparent erosion of values of religious freedom for the minority religions in India with the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Dr. Fernand de Varennes. Hearing the recorded proceedings of the trial would truly shake your beliefs about the inclusivity and brotherhood that every Indian prides himself on and while, prima facie, this may all paint a very gruesome picture, it is not the full picture by any means. The unfortunate truth, as it stands, is that for all the talk about justice, only selective justice was applied when it came to presentation of facts by Dr. Varennes and only those facts that painted the picture that the numerical majority religion was majoritarian were presented. While actively trying to stop ourselves from taking a political stand on this, through this article, we try to present the other side of facts that were conveniently not presented in the hearing and to prove to you that not only was the sole purpose of this meeting to denounce India but also to selectively victimize certain 'minority' communities while demonizing the majority community.

Mr. David Curry, one of the commissioners at USCIRF, betrayed the true line of questioning when

he suggested that drafts exist for a new Indian constitution that will deny voting power to minorities, to which Dr. Varennes testified saying that there probably are, without, much less providing a shred of empirical proof of the same, even a hint of where this conclusion was being drawn from. The commission then went on to discuss persecution by the Indian government of its minority religions abroad, and especially the Sikh minority, making direct allusions to the wild claims hurled by Canada relating to the killing of Nijjar, a Khalistani terrorist. They concluded on this regard, again, like they did on all others, that though the veracity of Canada's statements was not known, a strong message needed to be sent to the Indian government nonetheless. A hearing and wild accusations, and yet, no proof!

At one point in the hearing, Dr. Varennes exhorts all other nations who exercise the values of law, democracy and inclusion to exert any and all kinds of pressure on the Indian government to 'force' them to take cognizance of the decadence of minorities in India. Neither have other nations, like India, tolerated, welcomed and accepted every single victim of persecution into their country, irrespective of the religion they belong to or their ethnicity, nor have most countries have trysts with democracy as far back as India did. We do not even feel it necessary to provide creden-

tials when we say that if there has been one country that has been truly inclusive, it is India.

What was particularly shocking was the fact that certain legislations that form the core of Hindu thought were criticized for being myopic in their view and for enabling the persecution of religious minorities. Anti-conversion laws that prohibit conversion of religion by force, were criticized for restricting the freedom of religious expression of minorities; as were policies restricting the impartation of religious education and cow slaughter. Other legislations too were criticized. These include the restriction that had been placed on the wearing of Hijabs inside educational institutions, the revocation of Article 370 and the Citizenship Amendment Act. While each of these are vast topics by themselves, we shall endeavor to limit ourselves to providing the other side of the facts misrepresented by Dr. Varennes on these legislations.

When not eating the meat of certain animals is expected out of certain religions, like pigs in Islam, why can the situation not be similar in Hinduism, where the cow is worshipped as a divine entity in its own right, without double standard arguments of communalism being hurled? Also, it is a well-known fact that despite the constitution providing for the provision of protection of cows from slaughter, instead of banning cow

slaughter indiscriminately, only the slaughter of humped cow with horns, *Bos Indicus*, has been restricted.

India has seen institutionalized violence. Most of it, however, has been directed towards the one religious community, Hindus, that had neither any representation in the USCIRF council hearing, even though it is the minority religion in eight of the Indian States, nor saw any mention of itself in Dr. Varennes' report. Reports relating to forceful conversions, or even worse, brainwashing to convert people, exhorting examples of those such as Tipu and Aurangzeb, going back decades can be easily accessed. To stop such blatant acts of trying to separate masses from their religious consciousness, various legislations restricting, and not prohibiting, religious conversions were introduced. Under these, anyone wishing to convert to a different religion must undergo some legal formalities relating to filling of forms before the permission to convert is legally granted. However, not only is it interesting to note the Dr. Varennes feels that restriction on religious conversions is an impediment to the practices of the minority religions, but also more so because any shred of knowledge of the past would reveal the necessities behind the enactment of these legislations.

Similarly, institutions imparting Hindu religious education saw, to use the words that Mr. Curry did for religious minorities, 'sophisticated and systematic persecution'. Grants for these institutions were delayed, promised scholarships delayed and funding stopped, until most of these institutions succumbed to financial pressure. However, the religious institutions such as Madrasahs continued to prosper with massive state funding. Without touching

the subject of its constitutionality, I invite Dr. Varennes to challenge the fact that such institutions have, in the past, and continue to indoctrinate students with unsustainable ideas relating to monotheism and intolerance of other cultures. Videos like those of compulsory offering of Namaz by all students, irrespective of their religion, at some institutions, before education is imparted, or those of young Madrasah-going children being made to chop off the head of a cow-shaped cake can easily be found. In addition to this, Hindu temples are still subject to state control unlike any other religious institutions. However, the ideals that the USCIRF seems to promote are those of appeasement at any cost, as long as it is not in the US.

Dr. Varennes proceeded to touch upon how the revocation of Article 370 meant enhanced persecution of Muslims as their right of political self-determination was taken away from them by bringing them under the direct rule of the Central Government. Notwithstanding the innumerable benefits that have emerged from the revocation, the most notable of them being a decline in the cases of open violence and projection of Anti-Indian agendas from within the state, we would like to state that this is categorically false. The government has testified in the Supreme Court too that it intends on revoking the President's rule and conducting elections in the Kashmir valley. Finally, on the subject of Citizenship Amendment Act, it was stated that everyone except the Muslims were being given the right to citizenship in India and the exercise of making a National Register of Citizens, especially in Assam, was compared to persecution of the Jews under Nazi rule. This is again misrepresentation of facts on two counts. First, while the popu-

lation of religious minorities have increased in India since the Indian independence, that of Hindus and the other religions under the larger umbrella of Hindu Dharma, have dramatically decreased. This is not inconsistent with the persecution that they face, in Islamic neighboring countries such as Pakistan, due to belonging to a non-Islamic religion. The need behind granting citizenship to persecuted minorities was, thus, religion and so, the answer too was based in religion i.e. while a Hindu, Sikh, Jain etc. may be entering India due to persecution, such would not be the case with Muslims in Islamic nations; and thus, while the former would be granted citizenships, the latter wouldn't. The bill does not, contrary to what Dr. Varennes would have you believe, revoke or disturb the citizenship rights of Indian Muslims. Additionally, to clear the air on the Assamese implementation of the law that was used multiple times as an example of minority persecution, initial reports as well as all government claims seem to only point to one direction: that more Hindus, than other religious minorities, have been detained under the act; yet none of this data was presented. The examples of Miran Haider, arrested for alleged pre-meditated roles in causing the Delhi Riots in 2020, and of Rupesh Singh, an alleged Maoist caught with arms in the red corridor of India, were used to show persecution of journalists yet recent examples of Debmalaya Bagchi and Mukesh Kumar among others were not even touched upon. More so, deliberately, the conversation, while touching upon apparent constitution drafts, steered clear of the discussion on the Uniform Civil Code or that on draconian acts such as the Waqf Act, 1995.

Among other things, what took the centerstage, was the Ma-

nipur issue and yet, one must be surprised that there was no mention of the Meitei casualties, which as of 6th August were at 65 out of 187 deaths. It would seem that one life counts less than the other when the dead belong to the 'majority' community. There were many allusions to the sexual assault video of the two Kuki women, a shame to the dignity every woman that enraged, as it should have, every citizen; yet, sadly, very few know of the two Meitei kids and the father of one of the two kids, who were mercilessly kidnapped and gunned down by the Kuki militants. Dr. Varennes also presented 'facts' relating to the burning of more than 250 churches in the state, but perhaps forgot to mention the approximate 393 Meitei temples violated in the state.

Social media, as per what Dr. Varennes stated, has been weaponized as a tool to sow the seeds of violence and rioting. It was additionally added that there was paralysis in the executive and legal machineries in booking cases against those calling for genocide of religious minorities. While this is not false, it doesn't show you the larger picture. The machinery is in paralysis, not for certain religions, but as a whole, and even it were more paralyzed in recognizing aggressions towards certain religions, we'd argue that is Hinduism. The first example of this are the recent remarks made by Udayanidhi Stalin, calling for the eradication of everyone under the fold of the Sanatana Dharma, and getting away with it scot-free. Much less filing suo moto cases against him, the top court had not even held the state in contempt of its own order to file suo-moto cases against hate speeches till 22nd September, the date on which it just issued notices to the Tamil Nadu government. It was said by Dr. Varennes, that In-

dia is a CPC (Country of Particular Concern), even more so than Tajikistan. I would agree; where the call for genocide of around 80% of the population is considered normal, there must be concerns. This episode is completely antithetic to that of Nupur Sharma, who was told by a Supreme Court Justice, that she 'possessed a loose tongue', for quoting the Islamic Scripture Sahih al-Bukhari 5134 and the Sunan an-Nasa'I 3378. It may be noted that there were case hearings conducted for apparent discriminations in the Sabarimala Temple entry system, the rituals of the Dharmapuram Adheenam Pattina Pravesam, and for the 'inhuman' Jalikattu practices or the dangers of Makarsankranti and Diwali celebrations, but none for similar practices in Sedia Gestatoria, Moharram, Christmas and New Year celebrations. The second example of this relates to the media optics of the Nuh violence, which was discussed by the Chairman of USCIRF in the hearing. We have seen every media outlet, and USCIRF, cover the burning of the mosque and the killing of the Imam, both tragic events that must be investigated, but how many times have we heard about Abhishek, 22 and the breadwinner of a family of six, who was shot through with bullets trying to protect pregnant women and whose head was chopped off his body as he lay on the street dying? Or the case of stones being pelted at the VHP rally and their cars being burnt? In fact, this country has normalized stone pelting when it comes to celebrating Ram Navami and Ganesh Chaturthi, the recent events in Surat only adding to the mix.

Peaceful protests have, since even before the gunning down of hundreds of Hindu pandits and their cows in front of the parliament house in 1966, been

rewarded with violence, whether it be for the ban of cow slaughter, justice for Kashmiri Hindu pandits or the Ayodhya temple. To quote Dr. Anand Ranganathan from his book 'Hindus in Hindu Rashtra':

The entire hearing was based on exceptions, and these were projected as the norm in India. Again and again, a single side of multi-faceted truths were presented. One has to wonder, in these circumstances, whether the denial to USCIRF for visiting India was not the best thing that could have been done. It is also, to us, ironical that a country with a history of human rights violations relating to gun violence, targeted violence against colored folks and women-autonomy rights, felt the need to lecture this country about the fair treatment of its minorities. Furthermore, given the United States' history of unilaterally declaring terrorists and organizing extra-judicial killings of the same, it seems unjustified that someone sitting in an armchair in the US feels that they have the right to lecture India on this subject. In the words of Dr. Varennes, 'India risks becoming world's one of the greatest generators of instability, atrocities and violence'. However, I invite them to have a look into the western backyard first: the recent violence in France, recurring reports of gun violence against ethnic minorities in the US and the rise of terrorist tendencies in Canada. It is not India, but the US, that seems on the brink of political and financial troubles, and risks generating instability in the world. Selectivity in representation of facts and a hearing of conveniences, that is how the recent hearing of the USCIRF, relating to India, can be summed up.



# Post-Acquittal Incarceration: Section 437A CrPC and the Constitutional Conundrum

By. Sonal Gupta



**I**n a confounding paradox, the aftermath of acquittal in India often metamorphoses into a prolonged incarceration, a stark contradiction to the very essence of justice. At the heart of this legal conundrum lies the discord between Section 354(1)(d) and the contentious Section 437A of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). While the former mandates the immediate release of the acquitted, the latter demands a mandatory bail bond, casting a shadow of uncertainty over their freedom.

The genesis of Section 437A finds its place in the State of Gujarat v. Harish Laxman Solanki

(1994) case, ostensibly conceived to address the challenge of locating acquitted individuals during the appeal process. However, the 2009 amendment, while imbued with good intentions, inadvertently overlooked the sanctity of Section 354(1)(d). This omission, as underscored by the Gujarat High Court in the Omprakash Tekchand Batra case, raises a fundamental query — whether an appeal is merely an extension of the legal process, akin to releasing an accused, rendering the imposition of a bail bond under Section 437A justifiable. Conversely, does the trial court's proclamation of not guilty, guided by

Section 354(1)(d), automatically entitle the accused to liberty without the burden of bail bonds?

However, the constitutional challenge before the Supreme Court of India thrusts Section 437A into the crucible of constitutional scrutiny. The paradoxical juxtaposition of Section 354(1)(d) and Section 437A raises a pertinent question — does the imposition of a mandatory bail bond infringe upon the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of India?

Article 14, Article 19, and Article 21 stand as pillars of justice, and the discord between acquittal



and incarceration under Section 437A strikes at their very core. The right to liberty, as sacrosanct under Article 21, is trampled upon when an acquitted individual, unable to furnish the mandatory bail bond, languishes behind bars. The specter of financial constraints amplifies the violation of the right to equality, creating a disparate landscape where access to liberty is dictated by economic prowess.

Furthermore, the right to freedom of movement, enshrined in Article 19(1)(d), withers when an individual, bound by the chains of Section 437A, finds themselves confined and unable to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. The very essence of justice is marred when the legal apparatus, instead of being a beacon of liberation, becomes a custodian of captivity.

Additionally, the 268th Law Commission Report of 2017 and the recent judgment of the Delhi High Court in the Firsat Hussain Case underscore the imperative for a re-evaluation of Sec-

tion 437A. The Delhi High Court's recommendation to amend the provision, echoed in the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), is a clarion call for change. The substitution of the imperative 'shall' with the discretionary 'may' and the flexible term 'personal bond with or without surety' in lieu of the rigid 'bail or bail bond' signifies a paradigm shift in legal thought.

And, the BNSS seemingly acknowledges the need for balance. The inclusion of the term 'bond' in its Section 483, which is akin to Section 437A CrPC raises the crucial query — does it imply a reprieve in the form of a personal bond?

Thus, this legal conundrum births a dystopian reality where the proclamation of innocence echoes hollow for those acquitted, ensnared in a Kafkaesque legal quagmire. This complexity demands a nuanced, comprehensive resolution that not only upholds the interests of society but also safeguards the constitutional ideals of

liberty, equality, and freedom.

As the Supreme Court of India grapples with the constitutional crucible of Section 437A, the scales of justice must tilt towards a harmonious coexistence of societal interests and individual liberties. The resolution must transcend the mere annulment of a legal provision; it must usher in an era where justice, unshackled and true, prevails over the paradoxes that threaten its very essence.

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