



Indian Society

UPSC Mains

General Studies I
Class Notes





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UPSC MAINS

Indian Society

GENERAL STUDIES - I

(Class Notes)

Year 2025-26

Features of Indian Society Notes

Comprehensive Coverage

- Covers entire Indian Society syllabus (GS Paper I) with structured, topic-wise notes.
 - Includes sociological, cultural, regional, and contemporary aspects with balance between static and dynamic portion
-

PYQ-Based Integration

- Detailed Previous Year Question (PYQ) analysis to identify trends, recurring themes, and high-weightage areas.
 - Helps students focus on what UPSC actually asks, not just theory.
-

Value-Addition Content

- Notes enriched with keywords, thinkers, reports, census data, committees, and case studies to make answers more analytical.
 - Ready-to-use diagrams, flowcharts, and examples for quick recall in exams.
-

Answer-Writing Oriented

- Each topic concludes with exam-oriented conclusions and ready-to-insert phrases.
 - Notes structured in Intro–Body–Conclusion format to directly aid Mains answer writing.
-

Current Affairs Linkages

- Integration of recent schemes, policies, debates, and case studies related to society (e.g., caste, gender, regionalism, secularism).
 - Ensures static + dynamic coverage for a holistic approach.
-

Easy to Revise

- Concise, bullet-point format with highlighted keywords.
 - Designed for last-minute quick revision before Mains.
-

Mentorship Edge

- Prepared under guidance of UPSC mentors with focus on clarity + exam relevance.
 - Includes strategic notes on how to use content effectively in real Mains answers.
-

INDEX

Unit 1	1
<i>"Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India."</i>	
1. Salient features of Indian Society	3
2. Diversity of India	22
Unit 2	28
<i>"Effects of Globalization on Indian society."</i>	
Unit 3	39
<i>"Role of Women and Women's Organization."</i>	
1. Role of Women	40
2. Women's Organization	47
Unit 4	53
<i>"Population and Associated Issues"</i>	
Unit 5	64
<i>"Poverty and Developmental issues"</i>	
Unit 6	74
<i>"Urbanization, their problems and their remedies."</i>	
Unit 7	81
<i>"Social Empowerment, Communalism, Regionalism & Secularism"</i>	

UPSC Previous Year Questions

Question	Nature of Question	Core Demand
Critically analyse the proposition that there is a high correlation between India's cultural diversities and socio-economic marginalities. (2024)	Critical Analysis	Critically analyse link between cultural diversity and socio-economic marginalities.
Intercaste marriages between castes which have socio-economic parity have increased, to some extent, but this is less true of interreligious marriages. Discuss. (2024)	Discussion + Analytical	Discuss trends in intercaste and interreligious marriages and reasons.
Do you think marriage as a sacrament is losing its value in Modern India? (2023)	Opinion-based + Analytical	Discuss changing perceptions of marriage as sacrament in modern India.
Why is caste identity in India both fluid and static? (2023)	Conceptual + Analytical	Explain dual nature of caste identity (fluid and static) with examples.
Explore and evaluate the impact of 'Work From Home' on family relationships. (2022)	Exploratory + Evaluation	Evaluate impact of WFH on family dynamics and relationships.
Given the diversities among tribal communities in India, in which specific contexts should they be considered as a single category? (2022)	Analytical + Contextual	Explain contexts where tribals can be treated as single category despite diversity.
Analyse the salience of 'sect' in Indian society vis-a-vis caste, region and religion. (2022)	Comparative + Analytical	Analyse importance of sect compared to caste, region, religion.
How does Indian society maintain continuity in traditional social values? Enumerate the changes taking place in it. (2021)	Conceptual + Change Analysis	Explain continuity and enumerate changes in social values.
Has caste lost its relevance in understanding the multi-cultural Indian Society? Elaborate your answer with illustrations. (2020)	Conceptual + Illustrative	Discuss relevance of caste in present multi-cultural India with examples.
Customs and traditions suppress reason leading to obscurantism. Do you agree? (2020)	Opinion-based + Critical	Discuss whether customs suppress reason, leading to obscurantism.
What makes the Indian society unique in sustaining its culture? Discuss. (2019)	Discussion + Analytical	Discuss factors making Indian society unique in cultural sustenance.

Do we have cultural pockets of small India all over the nation? Elaborate with examples. (2019)	Exploratory + Examples	Discuss idea of 'mini-India' cultural pockets with examples.
"Caste system is assuming new identities and associational forms. Hence, the caste system cannot be eradicated in India." Comment. (2018)	Comment + Analytical	Comment on new forms of caste and challenge to its eradication.
In the context of the diversity of India, can it be said that the regions form cultural units rather than the States? Give reasons with examples for your viewpoint. (2017)	Analytical + Illustrative	Argue if regions form cultural units rather than States, with examples.
The spirit of tolerance and love is not only an interesting feature of Indian society from very early times, but it is also playing an important part at the present. Elaborate. (2017)	Elaboration + Historical Continuity	Elaborate role of tolerance and love historically and today.
Has the formation of linguistic states strengthened the cause of Indian unity? (2016)	Analytical + Evaluation	Analyse impact of linguistic states on Indian unity.
Describe any four cultural elements of diversity in India and rate their relative significance in building a national identity. (2015)	Descriptive + Evaluative	Describe four cultural elements and evaluate their role in national identity.
Debate the issue of whether and how contemporary movements for assertion of Dalit identity work towards annihilation of caste. (2015)	Debate + Analytical	Debate role of Dalit movements in caste annihilation.
The life cycle of a joint family depends on economic factors rather than social values. Discuss. (2014)	Discussion + Analytical	Discuss role of economic factors vs social values in joint family life cycle.

"India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great-grandmother of tradition." — Mark Twain

Introduction

- Indian society, rooted in the ancient ideal of **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** (the world is one family), stands as a symbol of unity in diversity. It is marked by pluralism in religion, language, culture, and traditions, yet bound together by shared values and a strong sense of collective identity. This unique blend of diversity and inclusiveness defines the salient features of Indian society.
- Understanding the salient features and the diversity of Indian society is crucial to appreciate its strengths and address its challenges in the context of nation-building and social development.

Meaning of Society

- Society refers to a group of individuals who share a common geographical space, interact with each other, and are bound together by shared norms, values, customs, and institutions.
- It represents an organized way of life where people cooperate to fulfill social, economic, and cultural needs.
- **Examples:**
 - Indian society, with its diverse castes, religions, and languages, yet united under constitutional values.
 - Tribal societies in Northeast India, where people live collectively and follow traditional customs.
 - Rural agrarian societies, where life revolves around agriculture and village-level institutions.

Evolution of Indian Society

- Indian society is an ancient civilization with continuous evolution shaped by multiple waves of migration, religious philosophies, and cultural interactions.
- The Rigvedic society (c. 1500 BCE) was primarily pastoral, later transitioning to settled agricultural communities during later Vedic

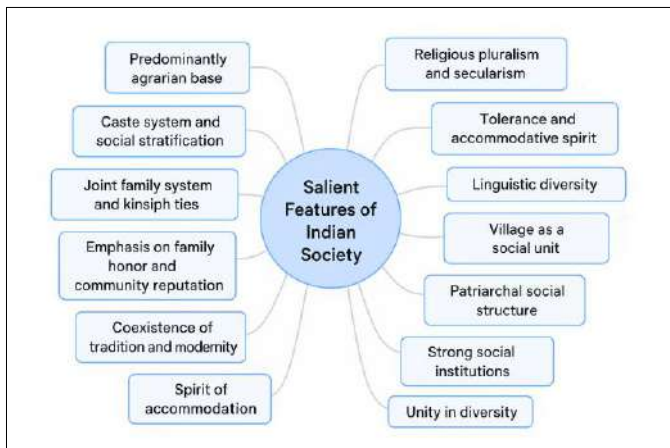
period, leading to social stratification (varna system).

- The varna system gradually became rigid into caste (jati) system; sociologist Louis Dumont viewed caste as a "hierarchical system of purity and pollution" central to Indian social structure.
- Ancient Indian society saw the emergence of urban centers (e.g., Harappa, later cities like Pataliputra) and diverse occupational groups, indicating a high level of social complexity.
- The coming of Buddhism and Jainism in 6th century BCE challenged Brahmanical orthodoxy and emphasized equality, non-violence, and social ethics. For example, Ashoka's Dhamma promoted compassion and respect for all faiths.
- Medieval India witnessed a synthesis of cultures through Bhakti and Sufi movements, promoting social harmony and challenging caste barriers (e.g., teachings of Kabir, Guru Nanak).
- The Mughal period strengthened syncretic traditions; Akbar's policy of Sulh-i-Kul (universal tolerance) reflected a pluralistic vision of society.
- Colonial rule introduced new institutions (e.g., railways, Western education, legal systems) and economic structures that disrupted traditional social fabric. B. R. Ambedkar criticized caste oppression as being reinforced under colonial economic arrangements.
- Reform movements in 19th century (e.g., Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Aligarh Movement) sought to address social evils like Sati, child marriage, and untouchability, initiating a process of social renaissance.
- British policies such as the introduction of modern education (Macaulay's Minute, 1835) created a new middle class, fostering nationalist consciousness and social reform zeal.
- Post-independence, the Indian Constitution established a framework for a modern, egalitarian society based on justice, equality, and secularism. Article 17 abolished untouchability; reservations aimed at uplifting historically marginalized communities.
- **Yogendra Singh (Indian sociologist)** argues that post-independence Indian society entered a phase of "structural modernization," marked by industrialization, urbanization, and democratization of power.
- The Green Revolution (1960s–70s) transformed agrarian relations, reducing feudal structures in

some regions but also deepening class divides in others (e.g., Punjab, Haryana).

- Liberalization since 1991 further accelerated social change through globalization, technological advancement, and market-driven aspirations. Example: expansion of urban middle class and increasing intercultural exchanges.
- However, traditional structures like caste and patriarchy continue to shape social realities, visible in caste-based politics and gender-based violence.
- **André Béteille** notes that Indian society reflects a complex coexistence of "hierarchy and equality," with constitutional ideals constantly interacting with traditional hierarchies.
- In contemporary times, social movements (e.g., Dalit rights movement, LGBTQIA+ rights, environmental movements) highlight ongoing struggles for inclusion and dignity.
- The digital revolution and increasing connectivity are reshaping social identities, fostering new forms of community beyond caste and region (e.g., social media-based activism).

Salient Features of Indian Society



1. Predominantly agrarian base

- Even today, a large segment of the population depends on agriculture and allied activities; around 45% workforce engaged in agriculture (PLFS 2022–23).
- Village community forms the core of social life, shaping local identities and traditional practices.

2. Caste system and social stratification

- The caste system remains a significant feature, influencing social interaction, marriage, and politics.

- Example: Matrimonial advertisements often specify caste preferences.
- M. N. Srinivas highlighted the concept of "Sanskritization," where lower castes adopt upper-caste practices to climb social hierarchy.

3. Joint family system and kinship ties

- While nuclear families are rising in urban areas, joint family ideals continue, especially in rural and semi-urban contexts.
- Example: In states like Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, joint families still control property and maintain social security.

4. Religious pluralism and secularism

- Coexistence of multiple religions (Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism) creates a pluralistic ethos.
- Example: The coexistence of gurdwaras, temples, churches, and mosques in cities like Delhi and Amritsar.
- Indian secularism is "sarva dharma sambhava" — equal respect to all religions rather than strict separation.

5. Tolerance and accommodative spirit

- Historical examples like the Bhakti and Sufi movements reflect India's capacity for religious and cultural accommodation.
- Gandhi's concept of "Sarvodaya" (welfare of all) embodied this inclusive spirit.

6. Village as a social unit

- Village communities are often self-contained units with their own social hierarchies, customs, and dispute resolution mechanisms.
- Example: Panchayati raj institutions formalize traditional local governance practices.

7. Emphasis on family honor and community reputation

- Family reputation governs many decisions, including marriage, education, and career.
- Example: Honor killings in parts of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh when individuals marry outside caste or community.

8. Coexistence of tradition and modernity

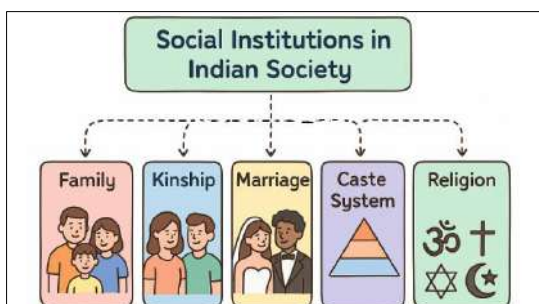
- Urbanization, education, and economic growth have modernized lifestyles, yet traditional values persist.

- Example: While urban youth adopt Western fashion and values, family elders often insist on arranged marriages.
9. **Strong social institutions**
- Institutions like caste councils (khap panchayats), religious bodies, and local associations continue to influence individual behavior and community life.
 - Example: Khap panchayats in Haryana regulating marriages and social conduct.
10. **Spirit of accommodation and syncretism**
- Over centuries, India absorbed external influences (Persian, Central Asian, European) and transformed them into local forms.
 - Example: Indo-Islamic architecture (e.g., Taj Mahal), Hindustani classical music blending Persian and Indian traditions.
11. **Unity in diversity (we will study this in more detail in separate topic)**
- Indian society exhibits immense diversity in religion, language, ethnicity, caste, and region, yet maintains a sense of unity.
 - Example: Festivals like Diwali and Eid are celebrated across regions, fostering collective belonging.
 - Sociologist N. K. Bose emphasized the integrative role of rituals and festivals in maintaining unity despite diversity.

Social Institutions in Indian Society

Meaning of social institutions

- Social institutions are established patterns of norms and roles that organize major areas of social life.
- They provide stability, regulate behavior, and fulfill essential societal needs such as socialization, security, and value transmission.
- **Emile Durkheim** said that these institutions are like "social facts" — they exist outside of individuals and strongly influence how we behave.



1. Kinship

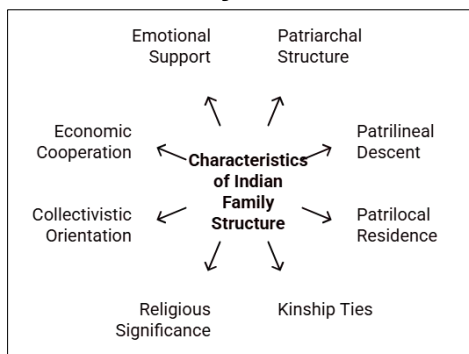
- Kinship refers to the social relationships derived from blood ties (consanguinity), marriage ties (affinity), or adoption, forming the basis for social organization.
- It determines social identity, group membership, inheritance, succession, and marital alliances.
- A. R. Radcliffe-Brown described kinship as a "network of social relationships which is fundamental to the structure of society."
- **Characteristics**
 - **Basis of social structure** : In India, kinship forms the foundation of caste, family, and community organizations.
 - **Descent systems**
 - Indian kinship predominantly follows patrilineal descent, where lineage and inheritance are traced through the male line.
 - Example: In most Hindu families, property passes from father to son.
 - Matrilineal descent exists among certain groups like the Nairs of Kerala and Khasis of Meghalaya.
 - **Extended network of obligations** : Kinship ties involve obligations of support, ritual participation, and mutual assistance, especially during weddings and funerals
 - **Regulation of marriage** : Determines rules of exogamy (e.g., prohibiting marriage within the same gotra among Hindus) and endogamy (e.g., marrying within one's caste or community).
 - **Residence patterns**
 - Patrilocal residence is most common — wife moves to husband's family after marriage.
 - Matrilocal residence (rare) seen among Khasi tribe where husband stays with wife's family.
 - **Clan (gotra) system** : Kinship groups (gotras) among Hindus prevent intra-clan marriages to avoid incest and maintain genetic diversity.
 - **Emotional and economic support** : Kin networks act as informal security systems during crises such as illness, job loss, or widowhood

- **Agency of socialization and value transmission**
 - Elder kin play a key role in transmitting cultural, moral, and religious values to younger generations.
 - Example: Grandparents teaching children about festivals, rituals, and family traditions.
- **Example** : In rural Rajasthan, kinship ties dictate marriage alliances, land disputes resolution, and even panchayat decisions, illustrating the deep social control of kinship.

2. Family

Family is the most fundamental social institution that regulates reproduction, socialization, economic cooperation, and emotional support. Defined as a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood, or adoption, constituting a single household and interacting in roles such as husband, wife, mother, father, son, and daughter.

Characteristics of family in Indian society

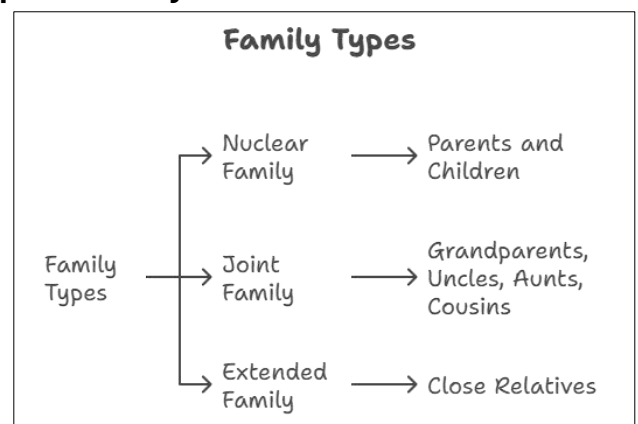


- **Patriarchal structure**
 - Predominantly male-headed families; authority and decision-making concentrated in the hands of the eldest male member.
 - Example: In rural Haryana or Rajasthan, the father or grandfather acts as the ultimate authority.
- **Patrilineal descent and inheritance**
 - Lineage and inheritance traced through the male line; property passed from father to son.
 - Example: Hindu Succession Act amendments promote daughters' rights, but implementation varies.
- **Patrilocal residence**
 - After marriage, the wife moves to her

husband's family home.

- Example: Seen widely across northern and central India.
- **Importance of kinship ties** : Kinship networks play a crucial role in arranging marriages, providing social security, and resolving conflicts.
- **Religious and ritual significance** : Family is central to religious practices, such as conducting ceremonies, festivals, and ancestor worship.
- **Collectivistic orientation**
 - Emphasis on family honor, group goals, and interdependence over individual autonomy.
 - Example: Decisions regarding education, career, and marriage often involve the whole family.
- **Economic cooperation and support**
 - Family traditionally functions as an economic unit where all members contribute; common in agricultural and small business families.
 - Example: In many Marwari or Chettiar business families, business operations are family-managed.
- **Emotional support system** : Family provides care for children, elderly, and sick members, strengthening intergenerational bonds.

Types of family



A. Joint Family

- A joint family is a form of extended family arrangement where multiple generations live together in a common residence, share a common kitchen, and pool resources.
- According to Irawati Karve, a joint family consists of "persons who generally live under one roof, eat food cooked at one hearth, hold property in common, and participate in common family worship and are related to each other as

some particular type of kindred."

● **Characteristics**

- **Common residence and kitchen**
 - All members live together and share meals prepared in a single kitchen.
 - Example: Large joint families among business communities like Chettiars or Marwaris.
- **Collective ownership of property**
 - Property and income are held jointly, managed by the eldest male or "karta."
- **Patriarchal authority** : Head of the family (usually the eldest male) controls decision-making and resource allocation.
- **Mutual support and cooperation** : Members share responsibilities, including care for children, elderly, and sick relatives.
- **Strong kinship bonds** : Relationships are emphasized over individual interests; importance given to family honor and reputation.
- **Religious and ritual unity** : Common participation in religious ceremonies and family rituals, fostering solidarity.
- **Persistence of traditional values** : Acts as a medium for transmitting cultural and moral values across generations.

Merits and Demerits

Merits	Demerits
Provides economic security through pooled income and shared resources.	Suppresses individual freedom and personal ambitions.
Offers emotional and social support in times of crisis.	Tends to perpetuate orthodoxy and resist change.
Facilitates socialization and value transmission to children.	Promotes dependency and discourages initiative.
Care for the elderly and infirm ensured within family.	Leads to conflicts and rivalries due to differences in opinions.

Reduces expenditure through economies of scale (e.g., shared housing, joint celebrations).	Can result in economic inefficiency due to unequal contribution and consumption.
Acts as a social security mechanism in absence of formal welfare systems.	Women often face subordination and lack of autonomy.

Joint Family Life Cycle: Driven by Economics Over Social Values

- Historically, the joint family in India was sustained mainly as an economic unit to manage agricultural land and collective labor efficiently.
- In rural areas, pooled labor and shared resources reduced costs and enhanced productivity, making joint families economically rational.
- Property was managed collectively; large landholdings in states like Punjab and Uttar Pradesh favored joint living to prevent fragmentation.
- Industrialization and urbanization altered economic logic, as rising living costs and diversified occupations made large households less viable.
- Migration of younger members to urban areas for jobs and education led to nuclear family setups for economic convenience.
- The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005, granting daughters equal inheritance rights, increased individual claims on property, accelerating joint family breakups.
- Disputes over business profits and property often lead to divisions, even among traditionally joint-family-oriented business communities like Marwaris and Chettiars.
- Emergence of "functional joint families," where families live separately but unite for rituals and major events, reflects economic pragmatism rather than pure social values.
- Younger generations prioritize economic independence, career flexibility, and personal space over collective living, seeing nuclear families as more efficient.

- A. M. Shah noted that expansion or fragmentation of joint families largely depends on economic stages rather than moral commitment to tradition.
- While cultural narratives highlight emotional bonds and value transmission, they often adapt to justify economic-driven separations.
- Thus, the life cycle of joint families — from formation to fragmentation — is guided more by changing economic interests than by immutable social or moral values.

Counter-Arguments

- Despite economic pressures, many joint families continue to survive primarily due to strong emotional bonds and shared cultural values, especially in rural India.
- Social values like elder respect, family honor, and collective decision-making still motivate many to uphold joint family traditions even when economically challenging.
- In crisis situations (e.g., illness, crop failure, business loss), the joint family acts as an effective social security net, proving its value beyond economics.
- In several business families (e.g., some Gujarati trading communities), joint family living is consciously maintained as a source of collective strength and reputation rather than just economic necessity.

B.Nuclear Family

- A nuclear family is a small family unit consisting of husband, wife, and their unmarried children, living separately from other relatives.
- As per George Peter Murdock, the nuclear family is "a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction, including adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children."
- In metros like Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Delhi, nuclear families are now the dominant family type due to urbanization, job mobility, and space constraints.
- The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) indicates a steady rise in nuclear households, especially among middle-class urban populations.

- Sociologist A. M. Shah highlighted that the shift to nuclear family represents adaptation rather than the total breakdown of traditional joint family values.

● **Characteristics**

- **Limited size and structure** : Typically involves two generations only — parents and dependent children.
- **Individual autonomy** : Greater freedom in decision-making for both spouses and children compared to joint family setups.
- **Economic self-sufficiency** : Income and property usually managed by the immediate family alone, without extended kin control.
- **Residential independence** : Separate residence facilitates privacy and personalized lifestyle choices.
- **Flexible roles** : Household responsibilities often shared more equally between husband and wife, especially in urban educated families.
- **Weaker kinship ties** : Relatively less influence of extended relatives on daily life and decisions.
- **Greater mobility** : Suitable for urban, industrial, and service-based economies requiring frequent relocation.

Merits and Demerits

Merits	Demerits
Promotes individual freedom and personal development.	Reduces support during crises due to absence of extended family.
Encourages emotional intimacy among nuclear members.	Increases the vulnerability of elderly as they may lack family care.
Allows flexibility and faster decision-making.	Children may lack exposure to broader family values and traditions.
Economic independence and privacy are protected.	Creates emotional isolation and higher stress levels in working couples.

Easier adjustment to urban lifestyle and modern work patterns.	Weakens intergenerational bonds and kinship networks.
Facilitates equal participation of women in family decisions (in progressive settings).	Higher childcare costs and responsibility solely on parents.

C. Extended Families

- An extended family is a family system that goes beyond the nuclear unit by including relatives such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and sometimes more distant kin, regardless of whether they live together or not.
- It may consist of multiple nuclear families connected by blood or marriage, maintaining close social, emotional, and functional ties.
- According to sociologist William J. Goode, the extended family serves as a bridge between kinship obligations and nuclear autonomy, especially in transitional societies.
- **Characteristics**
 - **Inclusion of multiple generations** : Typically involves three or more generations interacting closely, even if not co-residing.
 - **Strong kinship bonds** : Emphasis on familial loyalty, support networks, and collective identity over individualism.
 - **Social and emotional security** : Provides emotional anchoring and care for vulnerable members like children and the elderly.
 - **Role in socialization**
 - Elder relatives often participate in value transmission and cultural education of children.
 - **Example:** In many rural areas, grandparents play a key role in shaping children's behavior and beliefs.
 - **Flexible living arrangements** : Members may or may not share a common household; yet, they maintain regular contact and mutual obligations.
 - **Support during crises** : Acts as an informal welfare system during illness,

unemployment, or social emergencies.

- **Reinforcement of traditional values** : Encourages adherence to cultural norms, family honor, and community customs.
- **Example** : In many Indian villages, even if nuclear families have separate homes, extended kin living nearby create a strong "virtual joint family" network, sharing rituals, meals, and agricultural activities.

Impact of 'Work From Home' on Family Relationships

Positive Impact

- **Enhanced family bonding**
 - Increased time at home allows parents to spend more quality time with children and elders.
 - **Example:** Many young parents have reported being able to witness and participate in their children's daily routines and milestones during lockdowns.
- **Improved emotional support**
 - Physical proximity enables family members to provide emotional support during stressful times.
 - Shared meals and activities strengthen couple relationships and intergenerational ties.
- **Flexible schedules enabling shared responsibilities**
 - Couples can better share household chores and childcare, promoting more egalitarian relationships.
 - **Example:** Rise in co-parenting and shared cooking responsibilities among urban nuclear families.
- **Reduced commuting stress**
 - Absence of long travel hours reduces fatigue, freeing up energy for family interactions and leisure.
- **Stronger elder care**
 - Professionals can supervise and care for aging parents more closely, reducing reliance on hired caregivers.

Negative Impact

- **Blurring of work-life boundaries**
 - Lack of clear separation between work

and home life leads to conflicts and increased stress.

- **Example:** Professionals attending calls during family time or meals, creating resentment.

- **Reduced personal space**

- Constant presence can cause friction among spouses or between parents and children due to lack of private time.

- **Gender imbalance in household work**

- Women often bear a disproportionate burden of domestic chores even while working from home, reinforcing patriarchal patterns.
- **Example:** Reports during COVID-19 showed many women struggling to balance office deadlines and family duties.

- **Increased digital fatigue affecting relationships**

- Excessive screen time can reduce meaningful offline family interactions despite physical proximity.

- **Economic stress spillover**

- Job insecurity or overwork pressures at home may lead to irritability and strained relationships with family members.

Changing Forms of Family in Contemporary Society

- **Rise of nuclear families**

- Increasing urbanization, migration for jobs, and higher education have led to a preference for nuclear families.
- **Example:** In metro cities like Bengaluru and Mumbai, over 50% of households are now nuclear (Census 2011).

- **Emergence of single-parent families**

- Due to rising divorce rates, widowhood, or choice (e.g., single motherhood through adoption or assisted reproductive technology), single-parent households are growing.
- **Example:** Urban middle-class women opting for adoption as single parents.

- **Increase in live-in relationships**

- Changing social attitudes among youth, legal recognition (e.g., Supreme Court

judgments upholding rights of live-in partners), and economic independence have encouraged this form.

- **Example:** Higher prevalence in cosmopolitan cities like Delhi and Pune.

- **Rise of childless families (DINK — Double Income, No Kids)**

- Career aspirations, financial priorities, and lifestyle choices drive some couples to remain child-free.
- **Example:** Many dual-income urban couples choosing to focus on careers and travel.

- **Blended or reconstituted families**

- Families formed after remarriage involving children from previous marriages.
- **Example:** Increasingly common in urban contexts due to higher acceptance of divorce and remarriage.

- **Extended families in dispersed form**

- Members may live separately but maintain strong functional ties through frequent interaction and shared rituals.
- **Example:** "Virtual joint families" where families unite for festivals, weddings, and crises despite living in different cities.

- **Same-sex families**

- Gradual social acceptance following decriminalization of Section 377 in 2018 has led to emerging family structures among LGBTQIA+ communities.
- **Example:** Same-sex couples adopting children or raising families together in urban centers.

- **Matrilocal and matrilineal arrangements**

- While rare, communities like the Khasis in Meghalaya and Nairs in Kerala continue to practice matriliney, reflecting regional diversity in family forms.

- **Transnational families**

- Families spread across different countries but connected through remittances, emotional ties, and regular visits.
- **Example:** NRIs maintain close ties with elderly parents in India through frequent visits and virtual calls.

2. Marriage

Marriage as a Social Institution

- Marriage is a socially and legally recognized union between individuals that establishes rights and obligations between them, their children, and their kin.
- It serves as a means of regulating sexual behavior, legitimizing procreation, and ensuring social stability through alliance building.
- In India, marriage is often viewed as a sacred duty (*sanskara*) rather than merely a contract, deeply intertwined with religious and cultural values.

Types of Marriage

- **Monogamy**
 - Marriage of one man with one woman at a time.
 - Most common form globally and legally enforced in India (except under certain personal laws).
- **Polygyny**
 - One man married to multiple women simultaneously.
 - Practiced historically among some Hindu royal families and permitted under Islamic personal law (up to four wives).
- **Polyandry**
 - One woman married to multiple men at the same time.
 - Rare, but practiced among some communities like the Todas of Nilgiris and certain Himalayan tribes (e.g., in parts of Himachal Pradesh).
- **Endogamy**
 - Marriage within a specific caste, community, or social group to maintain social boundaries.
 - Common among Indian caste groups to preserve purity and social status.
- **Exogamy**
 - Marriage outside a defined social group, such as *gotra exogamy* among Hindus where same-clan marriages are prohibited.
- **Cross-cousin and parallel-cousin marriages**
 - Preferred among some South Indian communities (e.g., Tamil Nadu allows cross-cousin marriages).

- Parallel-cousin marriages are less common and usually avoided in most Indian societies.

Significance of Marriage

- **Social Stability and Order**
 - Marriage legitimizes sexual relations and reproduction, providing a socially accepted framework for childbearing and rearing.
 - It helps regulate inheritance, succession, and property rights within families.
- **Alliance Formation**
 - Serves as a means of creating alliances between families, clans, castes, or communities, strengthening social networks and cooperation.
 - **Example:** Arranged marriages often reinforce caste and community solidarity.
- **Socialization and Cultural Transmission :** Marriage forms the basis for the family unit, which is the primary agent of socialization for children, imparting cultural values, norms, and traditions.
- **Economic Cooperation :** Marriage unites two economic units, promoting cooperation in resource sharing, labor division, and wealth accumulation.
- **Emotional and Psychological Support :** Provides companionship, emotional security, and mutual support to spouses and their extended family members.
- **Religious and Ritual Importance :** In Indian society, marriage is a sacred sacrament (*sanskara*), often marking major life transitions and reinforcing religious identity.

Evolving Patterns of Marriage in Modern Times

According to Ulrich Beck, marriage in modern societies is “negotiated” and “individualized,” emphasizing personal fulfillment over social obligation. Indian marriage patterns reflect a blend of enduring traditions and rapid modernization, creating hybrid forms. The change can be seen as follows :

- **Shift from arranged to love marriages**
 - Increasing acceptance of marriages based on personal choice, especially among urban, educated youth.
 - Example: Surveys show about 30-40% of marriages in metros are now love marriages, a significant rise from earlier decades.

- **Increase in inter-caste and inter-religious marriages**
 - Growing social mobility and urbanization facilitate cross-cultural unions, though still limited and sometimes socially resisted.
 - Legal protection under the Special Marriage Act encourages such marriages.
- **Rise of live-in relationships**
 - Acceptance of cohabitation without formal marriage is growing among young adults, challenging traditional norms.
 - Supreme Court rulings have affirmed rights of live-in partners, giving legal recognition to these relationships.
- **Delayed marriages and lower fertility rates**
 - Due to higher education and career prioritization, many postpone marriage and childbirth.
 - This is reflected in increasing median age at marriage and decline in total fertility rate (TFR) in India.
- **Increase in divorce and remarriage**
 - Though still relatively low compared to the West, divorce rates are rising, reflecting changing attitudes towards marital satisfaction and individual autonomy.
 - Greater social acceptance of remarriage for both genders, though women still face stigma in many areas.
- **Changing gender roles within marriage**
 - Movement towards egalitarian relationships with shared decision-making, household chores, and childcare, especially in urban settings.
 - Example: Increase in dual-career couples negotiating traditional roles.
- **Technological impact on matchmaking**
 - Online matrimonial sites and apps have transformed how partners are found, expanding choices beyond traditional social networks.
- **Legal and policy reforms affecting marriage**
 - Amendments in personal laws (e.g., Muslim Women's Protection Act) and recognition of same-sex relationships are reshaping marital norms.

Legalising Same-Sex Marriage

Background

- India decriminalized consensual same-sex relations in 2018 (Navtej Singh Johar vs. Union of India), affirming LGBTQIA+ rights.
- However, same-sex marriage is not yet legally recognized under any personal or civil law in India.
- The demand for legal recognition of same-sex marriage is growing among activists for equality, dignity, and social acceptance.

Arguments in Favor

- **Equality and non-discrimination**
 - Legal recognition ensures equal rights in marriage, inheritance, adoption, taxation, and healthcare.
 - Upholds constitutional principles of equality (Article 14), non-discrimination (Article 15), and personal liberty (Article 21).
- **Social acceptance and dignity**
 - Marriage legalization reduces stigma and promotes social inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals and families.
- **Psychological and emotional benefits**
 - Provides legal security and emotional validation to same-sex couples, improving mental health and well-being.
- **International precedence**
 - Countries like the USA, Canada, and several European nations have legalized same-sex marriage, reflecting global human rights norms.

Arguments Against (Challenges)

- **Cultural and religious opposition**
 - Many view marriage as a union between a man and a woman grounded in religious and traditional beliefs.
 - Some religious groups strongly oppose redefining marriage norms.
- **Legal and social complexities**
 - Personal laws governing marriage in India are religion-specific, complicating uniform legal recognition.
 - Concerns over adoption rights, surrogacy, and parental recognition remain contentious.
- **Societal readiness**
 - Social attitudes, especially in rural and

conservative areas, may resist acceptance of same-sex marriages.

Current Legal Status and Way Forward

- The Special Marriage Act (SMA) of 1954, which allows interfaith marriages, does not currently recognize same-sex unions.
- Several petitions are pending in the Supreme Court seeking legal recognition of same-sex marriage.
- Progressive laws and policies, along with awareness campaigns, are necessary to facilitate social acceptance.
- Legalizing same-sex marriage aligns with India's commitment to human rights and constitutional values.

Interfaith and Intercaste Marriages

Definitions

- **Interfaith Marriage**

- Marriage between partners belonging to different religious communities.
- Governed mainly by the Special Marriage Act, 1954, which allows civil marriages without religious conversion.

- **Intercaste Marriage**

- Marriage between partners from different caste groups within the same religion or across religions.
- Increasingly seen as a challenge to traditional caste hierarchies and endogamous norms.

Significance

- **Social integration and pluralism**

- Promote communal harmony by bridging religious and caste divides.
- Help reduce social prejudices and stereotypes by fostering interpersonal understanding.

- **Challenge to traditional norms**

- Break caste and religious barriers, challenging endogamy and rigid social stratification.
- Seen as a progressive move toward equality and modernization.

- **Legal protection and incentives**

- The Special Marriage Act protects rights without requiring religious conversion.
- Some states (e.g., Kerala, Maharashtra)

offer financial incentives to intercaste couples to encourage social reform.

Challenges

- **Social stigma and family opposition**

- Interfaith and intercaste couples often face resistance, ostracism, or even violence.
- Honor killings and social boycotts have been reported, especially in rural areas.

- **Religious and cultural conflicts** : Conflicts may arise over rituals, child-rearing, and religious identity of offspring.

- **Legal hurdles and procedural complexities** : Bureaucratic delays and harassment sometimes impede registration under the Special Marriage Act.

- **Gendered impacts** : Women from lower castes or minority religions often bear the brunt of social backlash.

Is Marriage as Sacred Sacrament (Sanskara) Losing Its Value in Indian Society?

- **Arguments Indicating Decline in Sacredness**

- **Rising divorce rates and marital discord**

- Increasing cases of separation and divorce in urban and semi-urban India reflect changing perceptions of marriage as a lifelong sacred bond.
- Example: National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data shows a slow but steady increase in divorce rates among educated and working populations.

- **Growth of love marriages and inter-caste/inter-religious unions**

- While positive for individual choice, these sometimes challenge traditional rituals and familial sanctioning of marriage as a sacrament.
- Example: Interfaith marriages often bypass elaborate religious ceremonies, focusing more on legal registration.

- **Changing gender roles and individualism**

- Increasing focus on personal fulfillment, career, and individual rights has shifted marriage from collective religious duty to personal contract.
- Women's economic independence enables questioning of patriarchal marital norms and tolerance of marital breakdowns.
- **Prevalence of live-in relationships and delayed marriages**
 - Growing acceptance of cohabitation without formal marriage challenges traditional sacramental notions.
 - Delayed marriages for education and career delay traditional sanskara ceremonies.
- **Arguments Supporting Continuity of Sacredness**
 - **Deep-rooted cultural and religious significance persists**
 - Majority still perceive marriage as a sacred life ritual, integral to family and community identity.
 - Example: Elaborate wedding ceremonies with religious rites continue to be the norm across India.
 - **Marriage remains a social necessity and expectation**
 - Social pressure, especially in rural areas and among older generations, keeps sacramental marriage relevant.
 - Rituals around birth, death, and marriage continue to anchor social life.
 - **Emergence of redefined but sacred marital values**
 - Many couples and communities reinterpret marriage values to fit contemporary contexts while retaining ritual importance.
 - Renewed focus on mutual respect, partnership, and companionship alongside religious customs.
 - **Legal and institutional reinforcement**
 - Marriage laws (Hindu Marriage Act, Special Marriage Act) recognize and uphold marriage as a formal

institution, linking it to cultural identity and social welfare.

- **Conclusion**

- While the form and individual meanings of marriage are evolving, the sacred sacramental aspect continues to hold significant social and cultural value in India.
- The tension between tradition and modernity is reshaping but not eroding the institution of marriage as a sanskara.

3.Caste System in India

Definition

- The caste system is a hereditary, endogamous social stratification unique to Indian society, dividing people into hierarchical groups based on birth and occupation.
- It is traditionally linked to the varna system mentioned in ancient Hindu texts — Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras — though the caste system is more complex with thousands of jatis (sub-castes).

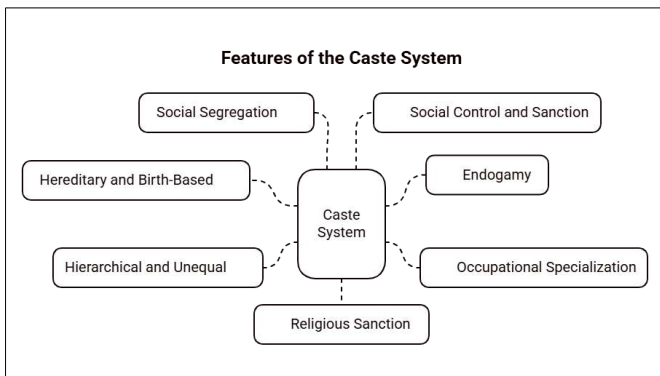
Sociological Perspectives

- **Louis Dumont** : Viewed caste as a "system of pure and impure," emphasizing its religious and ritualistic basis rather than economic factors.
- **M. N. Srinivas** : Introduced concepts like "Sanskritization" — lower castes adopting upper-caste practices to improve social status. Highlighted the role of dominant castes in local power structures.
- **André Bételle** : Emphasized caste as a form of social inequality coexisting with democratic equality in modern India.
- **B. R. Ambedkar** : Critiqued caste as a source of social injustice and untouchability, calling for its abolition and social reforms.

Features of the Caste System

- **Hereditary and birth-based** : Caste identity is ascribed at birth and remains fixed throughout life.
- **Endogamy** : Marriage within the same caste group is strictly enforced to maintain purity.
- **Occupational specialization** : Traditional caste roles dictated specific occupations (e.g., Brahmins as priests, Dalits as manual scavengers).

- **Hierarchical and unequal** : Castes are ranked in a fixed hierarchy, with Brahmins at the top and Dalits (formerly “untouchables”) at the bottom.
- **Social segregation** : Rules of purity and pollution restrict social interactions, including eating, sharing water, and temple entry.
- **Social control and sanction** : Caste panchayats or councils enforce norms and punish violations within caste groups.
- **Religious sanction** : The caste system is legitimized by religious doctrines, such as Manusmriti and later Hindu customs.



Evolution of the Caste System in India

Phase / Aspect	Details and Key Points
Origins and Early Formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rooted in Vedic period (~1500 BCE) with four varnas: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras. ● Varna system symbolized in Rigveda as cosmic body of Purusha; divine social order. ● Evolved into jati system: thousands of localized, endogamous occupational groups. ● Louis Dumont: caste system based on purity and pollution concepts.
Ancient and Classical Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Manusmriti codified caste duties, reinforced social hierarchy and untouchability (~2nd century BCE-3rd CE). ● Occupational specialization and endogamy dominated social life.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Urban trade guilds linked to caste identities.
Medieval Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Bhakti-Sufi movements challenged caste rigidity. ● Saints like Kabir, Saint Tukaram preached caste equality. ● Caste persisted; some Muslim communities developed caste-like structures. ● The Mughal period brought syncretism but not caste abolition.
Colonial Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● British census fixed and rigidified caste identities (from 1871). ● Economic changes disrupted but also reinforced caste boundaries. ● Caste used for administration, military recruitment (“martial races”). ● Social reformers like Phule, Ambedkar criticized caste oppression.
Post-Independence Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Constitution abolished untouchability (Art.17), caste discrimination (Arts.15,16). ● Affirmative action (reservations) for SC, ST, OBC implemented. ● Caste remains influential in politics (e.g., Mandal Commission). ● Urbanization and education erode but do not eliminate caste identity. ● Rise in intercaste marriages, Dalit assertion, occupational mobility seen.

Changes in the Caste System

- **Erosion of occupational rigidity**
 - Traditional caste-based hereditary

occupations are declining due to industrialization and urbanization.

- **Example:** Dalits and other castes moving into diverse professions like IT, business, and government services.
- **Sanskritization and other upward mobility processes**
 - Lower castes adopt upper-caste customs, rituals, and lifestyle to improve social status.
 - **Example:** M. N. Srinivas' concept of Sanskritization observed among backward castes adopting vegetarianism and Brahminical rituals.
- **Political mobilization and democratization of caste**
 - Caste identities have become politicized, leading to the rise of caste-based parties and coalition politics.
 - **Example:** Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh representing Dalit interests.
- **Reservation and affirmative action**
 - Government policies provide educational and employment quotas for SC/ST/OBCs, facilitating social and economic upliftment.
- **Inter-caste and inter-religious marriages**
 - Growing acceptance, especially in urban areas, challenges traditional endogamy norms, fostering social integration.
 - **Example:** Increasing numbers of love marriages crossing caste boundaries.
- **Urbanization and migration**
 - Migration to cities weakens caste-based social control, creating more anonymity and fluid social relations.
 - Urban slums and workplaces often exhibit caste mixing.
- **Rise of Dalit assertion and social movements**
 - Dalit activism has challenged caste hierarchies and promoted identity pride and rights.
 - **Example:** Ambedkarite movements and protests against caste-based atrocities.
- **Changing social attitudes among youth**
 - Younger generations show reduced caste consciousness and prioritize merit and individual identity over caste identity.

Factors Attributing to Changes in the Caste System

- **Urbanization and Industrialization**
 - Movement to urban centers breaks traditional village-based caste controls, fostering anonymity and occupational diversification.
 - Industrial jobs reduce caste-based occupational restrictions.
- **Education**
 - Increased access to education, especially among lower castes, promotes social mobility and awareness of rights.
 - Education challenges traditional caste hierarchies by emphasizing merit.
- **Economic Development and Globalization**
 - New economic opportunities encourage caste groups to diversify occupations and interact beyond caste lines.
 - Global cultural influences promote individualism and challenge traditional norms.
- **Legal and Constitutional Measures**
 - Abolition of untouchability (Article 17) and anti-discrimination laws empower marginalized castes.
 - Reservation policies in education, employment, and politics facilitate upward mobility.
- **Social Reform Movements**
 - Movements led by figures like Jyotirao Phule, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and contemporary activists challenge caste oppression and promote equality.
- **Political Mobilization**
 - Caste-based political parties and voting patterns encourage caste awareness but also politicize caste identity.
- **Inter-caste Marriages and Social Interaction**
 - Increasing acceptance of inter-caste marriages and social mixing, especially in urban areas, weakens caste endogamy.
- **Technological Advancements and Media**
 - Social media exposes caste discrimination and fosters solidarity and activism.
 - Access to information challenges traditional social norms.
- **Migration**
 - Rural-to-urban and interstate migration

dilute caste homogeneity in communities, fostering social fluidity.

Relevance of Caste in Understanding the Multi-cultural Indian Society

- **Caste as a key axis of social differentiation**
 - Indian society's multi-cultural nature is deeply intertwined with caste identities that cut across religions, languages, and regions.
 - Understanding caste helps decode how cultural diversity is organized into hierarchical social groups.
- **Intersectionality of caste with religion and region**
 - Different caste groups have distinct cultural practices, dialects, and rituals even within the same religion (e.g., Brahmins in Tamil Nadu vs. Uttar Pradesh).
 - This layered caste-religion dynamic enriches India's cultural pluralism.
- **Caste shapes community boundaries and identities**
 - Multi-culturalism in India is not just religious or linguistic but also caste-based; caste often determines social networks, festivals, cuisine, dress, and art forms.
 - **Example:** The identity of Rajputs, Jats, Dalits, and tribals involve distinct cultural traditions within India's social mosaic.
- **Caste influences social cohesion and group solidarity**
 - Caste groups often act as cultural units that preserve traditions, oral histories, and customary laws, contributing to India's cultural diversity.
- **Understanding social inclusion and exclusion**
 - The caste system helps explain patterns of social inclusion and exclusion that shape interactions among diverse groups, affecting access to resources and opportunities.
 - Recognizing caste dynamics is essential to comprehend cultural coexistence and conflict.
- **Caste and political representation**
 - Multi-culturalism in India is mediated through caste-based political

mobilization and identity assertion, influencing how diverse communities negotiate power.

- **Caste as a living cultural institution**
 - Despite modern influences, caste continues to inform marriage, rituals, and community life, making it integral to India's living cultural landscape.

Contemporary Reality about Caste System in India

A. Inclusion of Caste Question in 2027 Census Background

- The last comprehensive caste data in India was collected in the **1931 Census**; subsequent censuses have not enumerated caste details except for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).
- Demand for inclusion of caste data resurfaced to enable evidence-based policy-making, particularly for Other Backward Classes (OBCs).
- In **2023**, the Union Government announced plans to include a detailed caste questionnaire in the **2027 Census** to update socio-economic data and aid targeted welfare.

Significance

- **Policy formulation and social justice**
 - Updated caste data will help evaluate the effectiveness of affirmative action and social welfare schemes.
 - Enables identification of the socio-economic conditions of various caste groups, especially OBCs and sub-castes.
- **Addressing social inequalities**
 - Facilitates understanding of caste-based disparities in education, employment, health, and living standards.
 - Helps in recalibrating reservation policies based on current realities.
- **Academic and sociological research**
 - Provides rich data for understanding caste dynamics and social change over time.

Challenges and Concerns

- **Privacy and sensitivity** : Collecting caste data can raise concerns over privacy and misuse of information. There is risk of

deepening caste-based divisions if data is politicized.

- **Administrative complexity** : India's thousands of jatis make enumeration and classification difficult and resource-intensive.
- **Political implications** : Data may fuel caste-based political mobilization and identity assertions, affecting social harmony.
- **Previous controversies** : Past attempts to collect caste data (e.g., Socio-Economic and Caste Census 2011) faced delays and partial release.

B. Contemporary Dalit Movements

Background

- Dalit movements have their roots in the anti-caste struggles led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, focusing on dismantling caste-based oppression and securing constitutional rights.
- Post-independence, these movements evolved to address ongoing social, economic, and political marginalization of Scheduled Castes.
- They emphasize human dignity, equality, and social justice, seeking empowerment through education, political participation, and social reforms.

Key Features

- **Assertion of identity and pride**
 - Reviving Dalit history, culture, and Ambedkarite ideology to combat stigma and foster self-respect.
 - Public celebrations of Ambedkar Jayanti and Bhima Koregaon are symbolic affirmations.
- **Political mobilization and representation**
 - Formation of Dalit-centric political parties (e.g., Bahujan Samaj Party) and increased Dalit leadership in mainstream politics.
 - Utilization of reservation policies to enhance representation in legislatures and administration.
- **Fight against caste atrocities and discrimination**
 - Protests against incidents of caste violence, manual scavenging, and denial of access to public resources.
- **Educational and economic empowerment**
 - Promotion of scholarships, skill development, and entrepreneurship to

overcome socio-economic backwardness.

- **Use of media and technology**
 - Leveraging social media for awareness campaigns, mobilization, and exposing injustices.
- **Intersectionality with other social justice movements**
 - Collaborations with women's rights, tribal rights, and other marginalized groups for broader inclusivity.

Challenges

- **Internal fragmentation** : Diversity within Dalit communities leads to regional and sub-caste divisions, weakening unified action.
- **Persistent socio-economic disadvantages** : Despite legal protections and reservations, many Dalits continue to face poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment.
- **Resistance and backlash** : Upper-caste resistance to Dalit assertion manifests in violence, social exclusion, and institutional discrimination.
- **Limited reach of reforms** : Rural and remote Dalit populations often remain excluded from benefits due to lack of awareness or administrative lapses.

Examples

- **Una Flogging Incident (2016, Gujarat)** : Dalit youths were publicly beaten for skinning a dead cow, sparking nationwide protests against caste violence.
- **Bhima Koregaon Commemoration** : Annual event celebrating Dalit soldiers' victory in 1818, now a platform for Dalit empowerment and identity politics.
- **Social Media Campaigns** : Hashtags like #DalitLivesMatter and viral videos highlighting caste atrocities and demanding justice.

C. Contemporary Caste Dynamics: Emerging Identities and New Associations within the Caste System

Background

- The caste system in India, traditionally seen as a rigid hierarchical structure, has been undergoing significant transformation since independence, particularly post-economic liberalisation.

- Globalisation, urbanisation, affirmative action, and political mobilisation have reshaped caste identities and associations.

Emerging Identities within the Caste System

- **Assertion of Sub-caste Identities**
 - Many caste groups now emphasize their sub-caste (jati) identities for social recognition and to claim benefits (e.g., Marathas in Maharashtra, Kapus in Andhra Pradesh).
 - Creation of new caste associations to consolidate numerical strength.
- **Dalit Identity Consolidation**
 - Dalits have moved from passive victimhood towards active assertion, inspired by Ambedkarite ideology and movements like Dalit Panthers.
 - Pan-India Dalit solidarity transcending regional sub-caste differences.
- **OBC Assertion and Reclassification Demands**
 - Rise of OBC consciousness post-Mandal Commission, leading to demands for further sub-classification among OBCs to ensure equitable distribution of reservation benefits (e.g., creation of “Most Backward Classes”).
- **Intersectionality with Class, Gender, and Region**
 - Caste identities are now increasingly intersecting with issues of gender rights (e.g., Dalit feminism), economic mobility, and urban-rural divides.
 - New forms of discrimination and exclusion manifest in urban informal sectors and elite spaces.
- **Neo-middle-Class Caste Identities**
 - Economic liberalisation created a new aspirational middle class among backward castes, leading to novel intra-caste dynamics and demands for greater political and economic participation.

New Associations and Organisations

- **Caste-Based Political Mobilisation**
 - Emergence of caste-based parties and groups (e.g., BSP, PMK, VCK) to secure electoral bargaining power.

- Alliances between different castes to gain political advantages (e.g., Yadavs and non-Yadav OBCs in UP).

- **Socio-cultural and Religious Associations**

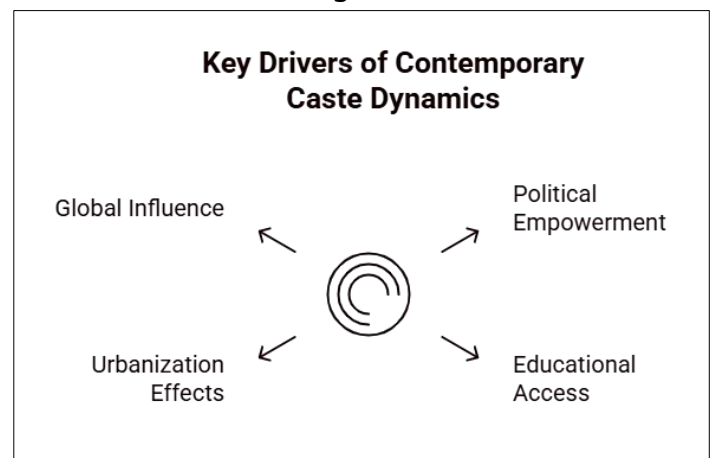
- Establishment of caste-specific community halls, temples, and trusts to promote internal cohesion and socio-cultural assertion.
- Use of digital media and social platforms to mobilise caste groups, counter narratives, and assert pride.

- **Economic and Professional Networks**

- Formation of caste-based business associations and cooperatives (e.g., Vaishya trade associations, Reddy entrepreneurs’ networks).
- Promotion of intra-caste economic solidarity through microfinance and cooperative initiatives.

- **Educational and Welfare Trusts**

- Proliferation of educational trusts to provide scholarships and training exclusively for caste members, reinforcing group identity while addressing backwardness.



Challenges and Critiques

- **Fragmentation and Identity Politics** : Excessive reliance on caste identity may deepen social divisions and hinder broader national integration.
- **Intra-caste Inequality** : Dominant groups within a caste capture most benefits, leading to internal tensions.
- **Reinforcement of Caste Consciousness** : While aimed at upliftment, certain associations inadvertently reinforce caste identities instead of promoting annihilation of caste.

- **Emergence of "Caste Pride" Movements :** Counter to constitutional ideals, these sometimes promote exclusion and caste chauvinism.

4. Religion as a Social Institution

Background

- Religion is one of the most ancient and universal social institutions found across societies.
- It refers to a system of beliefs, practices, and symbols designed to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent and to foster social cohesion.

Key Characteristics of Religion as a Social Institution

- **Beliefs and Faith**
 - Provides explanations about the universe, life, death, and the afterlife.
 - Example: Belief in karma and rebirth in Hinduism.
- **Sacred and Profane Distinction**
 - As per Émile Durkheim, religion divides the world into sacred (holy) and profane (ordinary) aspects.
 - Rituals and ceremonies revolve around the sacred.
- **Rituals and Practices**
 - Collective or individual acts to express religious faith (e.g., prayers, festivals, pilgrimages).
- **Moral and Ethical Framework**
 - Provides moral guidelines and codes of conduct (e.g., Ten Commandments in Christianity, the concept of Ahimsa in Jainism).
- **Organised Structures**
 - Institutionalised hierarchies like priesthood, religious organizations, temples, churches, mosques.
- **Community Life and Social Solidarity**
 - Promotes a sense of belonging and collective identity through shared beliefs and rituals.

Functions of Religion in Society

- **Social Cohesion :** Creates solidarity by uniting people through shared values and ceremonies.

- **Social Control :** Reinforces norms and values; encourages conformity and discourages deviance.
- **Psychological Support :** Provides emotional comfort during crises (e.g., loss, illness, disasters).
- **Legitimisation of Social Order :** Justifies power structures and social hierarchies (e.g., divine kingship, caste system).
- **Agent of Social Change :** Religious movements have driven reform (e.g., Bhakti and Sufi movements challenged orthodoxy).
- **Identity Formation :** Acts as a key marker of identity in multicultural societies like

Customs and Traditions in Indian Society

Definition

- **Customs** are established practices and habitual behaviors followed by a community or society over time, often unwritten but socially binding.
- **Traditions** are inherited cultural beliefs, values, rituals, and practices passed down from generation to generation, giving a community its distinct identity.

Functions of Customs and Traditions

- **Social cohesion and identity :** Customs and traditions create a sense of belonging and collective identity among community members.
- **Transmission of culture :** They serve as vehicles for passing cultural knowledge, values, and norms across generations.
- **Regulation of behavior :** Guide individual and group behavior through accepted norms and social expectations.
- **Preservation of heritage :** Maintain continuity of cultural heritage, rituals, festivals, and languages.
- **Facilitation of social order :** Customs provide informal social control, reducing conflicts and promoting harmony.
- **Marking life transitions :** Traditions govern rites of passage such as birth, marriage, and death, reinforcing social roles.

Challenges to Customs and Traditions

- **Modernization and globalization :** Rapid social and economic changes challenge traditional practices, leading to erosion or transformation.

- **Cultural homogenization** : Influence of mass media and consumer culture can dilute local customs and create uniformity.
- **Generational gaps** : Younger generations may reject or question inherited traditions, causing intergenerational conflicts.
- **Social exclusion and discrimination** : Some customs perpetuate inequality or social injustice (e.g., caste-based practices, gender discrimination).
- **Legal and ethical conflicts** : Certain customs may conflict with constitutional rights or contemporary human rights standards.
- **Urbanization and migration** : Movement to cities and diverse environments weakens community bonds that sustain customs.

Uniqueness of Indian Society in Sustaining Its Culture

- **Unity in Diversity**
 - Indian society maintains cultural unity despite vast linguistic, religious, ethnic, and regional diversity.
 - **Example:** Festivals like Diwali and Eid celebrated across communities symbolize shared cultural ethos.
- **Continuity through Tradition**
 - Deep respect for traditions and customs ensures intergenerational transmission of culture.
 - Oral storytelling, rituals, and family practices keep ancient traditions alive.
- **Flexible Syncretism**
 - Indian culture has absorbed and adapted external influences (e.g., Persian, Mughal, British) without losing its core identity.
 - **Example:** Indo-Islamic architecture and fusion cuisines.
- **Strong Social Institutions**
 - Institutions like family, caste, religious bodies, and local communities act as custodians of cultural values.
 - Joint family system facilitates cultural preservation through collective living.
- **Religious Pluralism and Tolerance**
 - Coexistence of multiple religions promotes mutual respect and cultural exchange.
 - Bhakti and Sufi movements historically promoted inclusiveness and cultural

harmony.

- **Philosophical Depth and Spirituality** : India's diverse philosophical traditions (Vedanta, Buddhism, Jainism) provide moral and spiritual frameworks reinforcing cultural identity.
- **Cultural Practices Embedded in Daily Life** : Festivals, rituals, music, dance, and cuisine are integral to everyday life, strengthening cultural bonds.
- **Adaptability and Resilience** : Indian culture evolves by integrating modernity with tradition, balancing change and continuity effectively.

Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization.” : Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction

As our national song celebrates, India is a vibrant mosaic stretching from the snow-capped Himalayas to the sunlit shores of Kanyakumari — a living carnival of languages, faiths, traditions, and landscapes. This unmatched diversity is not just a feature of India; it is its very essence and strength. Yet, it also demands constant nurturing to preserve harmony and national unity amid differences.

Various Forms of Diversity in India

● Racial Diversity

- India is home to multiple racial groups with distinct physical features and ancestral origins, contributing to its complex demographic mosaic.
- Major racial groups include Negrito, Proto-Australoid, Mongoloid, Mediterranean, and Western Brachycephals.
- Example: The Mongoloid features dominate populations in Northeast India, while the Nilgiri tribes exhibit Negrito traits, reflecting ancient migratory patterns.

● Religious Diversity

- India practices nearly all major world religions, making it a hub of religious pluralism and spiritual variety.
- Hinduism constitutes about 80% of the population, followed by Islam (14%), Christianity (2.3%), Sikhism (1.7%), along with Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and numerous tribal faiths.
- This religious diversity influences festivals, rituals, and community life, enriching India's cultural fabric.

● Linguistic Diversity

- India's linguistic landscape is vast, with 22 officially recognized scheduled languages, around 122 major languages, and over 1,600 dialects spoken across regions.
- The linguistic diversity often shapes regional identities and politics, as seen in the resistance by South Indian states to the imposition of Hindi as a national language,

emphasizing the need for linguistic accommodation.

● Cultural Diversity

- Rich and varied cultural expressions manifest through art forms, literature, dance, music, cuisine, and festivals.
- Different regions have distinct cultural identities, exemplified by Manipuri dance in the Northeast and Kathakali in Kerala, or festivals like Durga Puja in Bengal, Bihu in Assam, and Pongal in Tamil Nadu.
- Such diversity sustains India's pluralistic ethos and creative heritage.

● Geographical and Ecological Diversity

- India's physical geography ranges from the Himalayan mountains and the Indo-Gangetic plains to coastal belts and deserts, leading to diverse ecological zones.
- These geographical variations shape lifestyles, occupations, agricultural practices, and dietary habits—for example, rice cultivation predominates in the south and east, while wheat is common in northern plains.

● Social Diversity

- India's social structure is complex, featuring caste stratification, tribal societies, and urban-rural divides.
- Tribal groups like the Gonds, Santhals, and Bhils have distinct languages, customs, and social organizations, contributing to the social mosaic.
- The interplay of caste and tribe further complicates social identities and access to resources.

Cultural Elements of Diversity in India

● Language and Literature

- India boasts a rich literary heritage with classical languages like **Sanskrit** and **Tamil** laying the foundation for ancient texts, epics, and philosophy.
- Modern literary traditions thrive in languages such as **Hindi**, **Bengali**, **Marathi**, and **Urdu**, reflecting regional identities and contemporary themes.

● Performing Arts

- Classical dance forms like **Bharatanatyam**, **Kathak**, **Odissi**, and **Kathakali** showcase

regional stories and religious narratives.

- Folk traditions such as **Garba** (Gujarat) and **Bhangra** (Punjab) express community life, celebrations, and local folklore.
- **Visual Arts**
 - Distinct painting styles reflect cultural specificity—**Madhubani** from Bihar, **Warli** from Maharashtra, and **Tanjore** paintings from Tamil Nadu, each with unique motifs and symbolism.
- **Cuisine**
 - Indian cuisine varies widely with religious and ecological influences; for example, northern belts emphasize **wheat and non-vegetarian** dishes, while southern and western regions have **rice-based and vegetarian** diets.
 - The choice of cooking oil also varies, such as **mustard oil** in the north and east, and **coconut oil** in the south.
- **Clothing and Ornaments**
 - Traditional attire and ornamentation reflect cultural identity—different **saree draping styles** (e.g., Bengali vs. Maharashtrian), distinctive **turbans** (Rajasthani vs. Punjabi), and region-specific jewelry patterns preserve heritage.
- **Rituals and Festivals**
 - While many festivals share common religious roots, regional variations create a vibrant cultural mosaic.
 - For example, **Makar Sankranti** is celebrated as **Pongal** in Tamil Nadu, **Lohri** in Punjab, and **Bihu** in Assam, each with unique customs and significance.

Integrative Factors Behind Unity in Diversity in India

- **Constitutional Framework** : The Indian Constitution promotes unity through principles of secularism, democracy, equality, and justice, ensuring respect for all cultural, religious, and linguistic groups.
- **Shared Historical and Cultural Heritage** : Common historical experiences, such as the freedom struggle, and shared cultural symbols like the national anthem and festivals foster a sense of collective identity.
- **Spirit of Tolerance and Accommodation** : India's long-standing tradition of religious

pluralism, exemplified by movements like Bhakti and Sufism, encourages coexistence and mutual respect among diverse communities.

- **Language Policy and Multilingualism** : Recognition of multiple official languages and promotion of mother tongues alongside Hindi and English help preserve linguistic diversity while maintaining communication.
- **Festivals and Rituals** : Festivals like Diwali, Eid, Christmas, and regional celebrations like Onam and Baisakhi are widely celebrated, promoting social harmony.
- **Interdependence through Economic and Social Networks** : Trade, occupational specialization, and social institutions (family, caste, community) create interlinked networks binding diverse groups.
- **Democratic and Political Processes** : Electoral politics often encourage coalition-building across caste, religion, and regional lines, promoting negotiated unity.
- **Educational and Media Influence** : National education curricula and mass media emphasize national integration and highlight shared values and achievements.

Cultural Pockets of “Mini India”

- **Definition**
 - Cultural pockets, often referred to as “Mini India,” are regions or localities within India where diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious, or cultural groups coexist, creating microcosms of India's larger diversity.
- **Examples**
 - **Urban Examples**
 - **Mumbai** is called a “Mini India” due to its cosmopolitan population comprising Gujaratis, Marathis, North Indians, South Indians, Parsis, Muslims, and others living together.
 - **Delhi** similarly hosts diverse communities representing almost all Indian states and religions.
 - **Rural and Regional Examples**
 - Certain towns or districts showcase multi-ethnic coexistence, like **Shillong** in Meghalaya with tribal, Bengali, and Nepali populations.
 - **Hyderabad** is known for its fusion of Telugu and Urdu cultures, Hindu-

Muslim syncretism, and diverse cuisine.

- **Significance of Cultural Pockets**

- Cultural pockets preserve and nurture distinct languages, traditions, and customs within India's larger pluralistic society.
- They promote intercultural dialogue and exchange, fostering mutual understanding and social cohesion.
- Serve as centers of cultural innovation where hybrid identities and new social practices emerge.
- Help in balancing regional diversity with national integration by allowing communities to maintain unique identities while participating in the broader Indian framework.

- **Challenges of Cultural Pockets**

- Cultural pockets may face ethnic tensions and conflicts due to competition over resources and identity assertions.
- Risk of social fragmentation and segregation if communities become insular and resist integration.
- Pressure from dominant cultural groups can lead to marginalization or erosion of minority identities.
- Urbanization and modernization sometimes disrupt traditional lifestyles, threatening the preservation of unique cultural traits.

Obstacles to India's Unity and Diversity

- **Caste-based divisions:** Persistent caste hierarchies create social fragmentation and exclusion, often leading to conflicts and caste-based violence. For example, caste clashes in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar frequently disrupt social harmony.
- **Religious tensions and communalism:** Communal riots and polarization between religious groups undermine national unity; the 2002 Gujarat riots exemplify such tensions fueled by political agendas.
- **Linguistic conflicts:** Disputes over language imposition, like the opposition to Hindi in South India, create regional resentment and hamper integration efforts.
- **Regionalism and separatist movements:** Ethnic and regional identity-based demands for autonomy, as seen in Kashmir and the

Northeast, challenge the territorial integrity and unity of India.

- **Economic disparities:** Uneven development across regions and social groups fuels dissatisfaction and social exclusion, contributing to unrest in backward areas like parts of Jharkhand and Odisha.
- **Social inequalities and discrimination:** Gender bias, caste discrimination, and tribal marginalization weaken social cohesion by excluding significant populations from development opportunities.
- **Political polarization and identity politics:** Politics centered on caste, religion, or regional identities often deepen societal divisions, reducing trust and increasing polarization, visible in many state elections.

Contemporary Issues

Language Politics: A Threat to National Harmony and Unity

Context : The recent reversal of Maharashtra's three-language policy for primary education has sparked widespread protests across the state. Many groups saw this as an attempt to impose Hindi at the cost of Marathi, reigniting debates on language rights and cultural identity.

How Language Politics Harms National Harmony and Unity

- **Creates Regional Alienation**
 - Perceived imposition of a dominant language (e.g., Hindi) leads to feelings of cultural domination among non-Hindi speaking regions.
 - Strengthens regional identities over a shared national identity, weakening emotional integration.
- **Fuels Social Division**
 - Language becomes a tool for exclusion, creating "insider" vs "outsider" narratives in states and cities (e.g., tensions in Bengaluru against Hindi speakers).
 - Can lead to vigilantism and social discrimination against migrants or linguistic minorities.
- **Threatens Cultural Diversity**

- Promotes linguistic homogenisation, undermining local languages and rich cultural heritage.
- Causes resentment among communities striving to preserve their traditional scripts, literature, and oral traditions.
- **Disrupts Educational Harmony**
 - Sudden policy changes on language medium confuse students, parents, and teachers, impacting learning outcomes and fostering distrust in governance.
- **Encourages Identity Politics**
 - Language is often politicised for electoral gains, diverting focus from development and inclusive governance.
 - Weakens democratic values by prioritising linguistic majoritarianism over pluralism.

Way Forward

- **Promote Multilingualism** : Strengthen the three-language formula with flexibility: prioritise mother tongue, allow regional language, and include Hindi/English as options without compulsion.
- **Protect Regional Languages** : Encourage use of regional languages in administration, education, and public life to preserve cultural diversity.
- **Consensus-Based Policy Making** : Formulate language policies through dialogue with states and local communities rather than top-down imposition.
- **Educate on Linguistic Tolerance** : Promote campaigns highlighting linguistic diversity as a national strength, fostering mutual respect among citizens.
- **Balanced Curriculum Approach** : Gradually introduce additional languages in a phased, voluntary manner, ensuring no disruption to foundational learning.
- **Strengthen Constitutional Values** : Uphold Article 29 and 30 (cultural and educational rights of minorities) and respect the spirit of federalism in language matters.

Value Addition

Keywords : Pluralism, Multiculturalism, Social hierarchy, Social inclusion, Cultural syncretism, Social mobility, Social cohesion, Secularism,

Patriarchy, Kinship networks, Agrarian society, Modernization, Sanskritization, Urbanization, Social stratification, Endogamy, Social transformation, Affirmative action, Identity politics, Tolerance

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Q1.Examine how India's traditional joint family system has adapted in urban settings.

Q2.Tribal identity in India is both diverse and cohesive. Comment with examples.

Q3.Analyse the impact of caste-based reservations on social diversity and integration.

Q4.How does religious pluralism contribute to India's cultural syncretism? Provide examples.

Q5.How does regional diversity influence economic development patterns in India?

Q6.Discuss the role of festivals in promoting social harmony in a diverse society like India.

Acronyms

Salient features of Indian society DRAFT VIEWS

- D — Diversity and pluralism (religion, language, culture)
- R — Religious tolerance and secular ethos
- A — Accommodation and assimilation (Bhakti, Sufi, syncretism)
- F — Family and kinship importance (joint families, kin networks)
- T — Tradition and modernity coexistence
- V — Village-centric rural base
- I — Institutional strength (caste, panchayats, religious bodies)
- E — Emphasis on community honor and collective life
- W — Wide social stratification (caste, tribe, class)
- S — Spiritual outlook and value-based life

Features of caste system

Acronym: **HEROS**

- H — Hierarchical order
- E — Endogamy (marriage within caste)
- R — Ritual purity and pollution
- — Occupational specialization (jati-based roles)
- S — Social and religious sanctions

Joint family vs nuclear family

Joint family: Acronym **SPIRIT**

- S — Shared residence and resources
- P — Patriarchal authority
- I — Interdependence and support system
- R — Ritual unity and value transmission
- I — Inheritance held jointly
- T — Traditional social security

Nuclear family: Acronym **FREED**

- F — Freedom and privacy
- R — Reduced size and structure
- E — Economic independence
- E — Emotional intimacy within small unit
- D — Decision-making autonomy

Effect of customs and traditions on society

Acronym: **BRACE**

- B — Bind society together (cohesion and continuity)
- R — Regulate individual and group behavior
- A — Affect rights and liberties (e.g., patriarchy, caste practices)
- C — Conserve cultural identity and heritage
- E — Exclude or marginalize vulnerable groups

Challenges to diversity of Indian society

Acronym: **CREST**

- C — Casteism and communalism
- R — Regionalism and separatism
- E — Economic inequalities and disparities
- S — Social discrimination (gender, tribes, minorities)
- T — Threat from globalization and cultural homogenization

Ready template on common themes :-

1. Factors of social change:-

Major heading	Subheadings	Explanation
Socio-economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalization • Industrialisation • Green revolution • Urbanization 	
Socio-political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation • Governance • Pressure group 	
Socio-cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Social reforms and activism • Secularisation 	
Socio-geographical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change • Agriculture • Resources 	

Socio-technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements of 4th industrial revolution. Eg:- AI, machine learning etc • Growth of IT sector • Allied sectors - health, education etc 	
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2. Reasons for diversity:-

Heading	Subheadings	Explanation
Geographical reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Himalayan • Desert • Vast area 	
Historical reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different time period of different rulers • Mughals, Marathas, rajputs etc • Pluralistic historical evolution 	
Economic reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalization • trade and tourism 	

Cultural reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value of Tolerance • Vasudhaiva kutumbakam 	
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Factors leading to unity amidst diversity:-

Heading	Subheadings	Explanation
Political factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All India services • Federalism • Constitution 	
Social factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social movements • Religious practices • Institutions of pilgrimage • Festivals 	
Economic factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of trade and commerce • Tourism • GST - one nation one tax 	
Geographical factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural boundaries • Climatic conditions 	

UPSC Previous Year Questions

Question	Nature of Question	Core Demand
Globalization has increased urban migration by skilled, young, unmarried women from various classes. How has this trend impacted upon their personal freedom and relationship with family? (2024)	Analytical + Societal Impact	Analyse impact of urban migration on women's freedom and family ties.
Child cuddling is now being replaced by mobile phones. Discuss its impact on the socialization of children. (2023)	Discussion + Social Impact	Discuss impact of gadgets on children's socialization.
What is Cryptocurrency? How does it affect global society? Has it been affecting Indian society also? (2021)	Conceptual + Analytical	Explain cryptocurrency, its global and Indian societal effects.
Is diversity and pluralism in India under threat due to globalisation? Justify your answer. (2020)	Critical Analysis + Justification	Justify whether globalization threatens diversity and pluralism.
Are we losing our local identity for the global identity? Discuss. (2019)	Discussion + Analytical	Discuss loss of local identity to global identity.
'Globalisation is generally said to promote cultural homogenisation but due to this cultural specificities appear to be strengthened in the Indian society.' Elucidate. (2018)	Elucidation + Analytical	Elucidate how globalization strengthens cultural specificities despite homogenisation.
To what extent globalisation has influenced the core of cultural diversity in India? Explain. (2016)	Analytical + Explanatory	Explain extent of globalization's influence on India's cultural diversity.
Discuss the positive and negative effects of globalization on women in India. (2015)	Discussion + Balanced Analysis	Discuss pros and cons of globalization on Indian women.

Effect of Globalisation on Society

Introduction

Globalization, marked by increased cross-border flows of goods, ideas, technology, and people, has deeply transformed Indian society since the 1990s economic reforms. While it has created new opportunities and connected India to the world, it has also reshaped traditional social structures, cultural practices, and value systems, bringing both positive changes and new challenges.

Key Elements of Globalisation

● Economic

- Expansion of international trade, investment, and financial flows linking economies worldwide.
- **Example:** Growth of multinational corporations and global supply chains.

● Technological Advancement

- Rapid development in communication and information technologies enabling instant global connectivity.
- **Example:** Internet, mobile communication, and digital platforms.

● Cultural Exchange

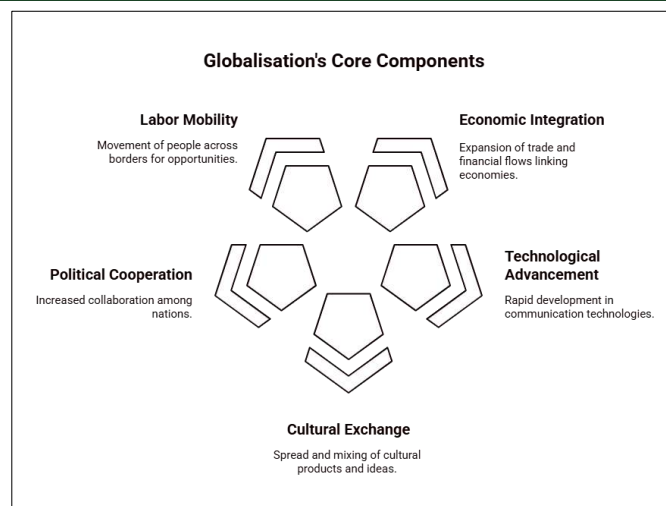
- Spread and mixing of cultural products, ideas, and lifestyles across countries.
- **Example:** Global popularity of Bollywood films and yoga.

● Political Cooperation

- Increased collaboration among nations through international organizations like the UN, WTO, and G20.
- **Example:** Global efforts to address climate change through the Paris Agreement.

● Labor Mobility

- Movement of people across borders for work, education, and better opportunities.
- **Example:** Migration of skilled professionals and laborers.



Is Diversity and Pluralism in India Under Threat Due to Globalisation?

● Arguments Indicating Threats to Diversity and Pluralism

- **Cultural homogenization:** Globalisation promotes dominant global cultures, often Western, leading to erosion of indigenous languages, traditions, and arts. For instance, younger generations increasingly prefer English and global pop culture over regional languages and folk traditions.
- **Consumerism and materialism:** Global consumer culture shifts societal values toward individualism and material success, weakening community-centric cultural practices and social bonds that sustain pluralism.
- **Marginalization of local identities:** Smaller, less economically powerful communities, including many tribal and rural groups, face cultural dilution or economic marginalization as globalisation prioritizes uniform development models.
- **Commercialization of culture:** Sacred rituals and traditional festivals sometimes lose their original meanings as they become commodified for tourism or media, reducing authentic cultural experiences.
- **Language endangerment:** Globalisation intensifies dominance of a few languages (English, Hindi), threatening the survival of

many minority and tribal languages, impacting cultural diversity.

- **Arguments Supporting Continuity and Strengthening of Diversity and Pluralism**

- **Cultural hybridity and syncretism:** Globalisation also facilitates cross-cultural exchanges, creating new hybrid identities that enrich Indian culture, such as fusion music, cuisine, and fashion.
- **Revival and global promotion of Indian culture:** India's diverse cultural heritage gains global visibility through festivals, yoga, Bollywood, and digital platforms, fostering pride and preservation efforts.
- **Empowerment through technology:** Social media and the internet enable marginalized communities to share their culture widely, mobilize for rights, and sustain pluralistic identities.
- **Policy and legal protections:** Constitutional guarantees of secularism, linguistic diversity, and minority rights safeguard pluralism despite global pressures.
- **Increased intercultural dialogue:** Globalisation encourages intercultural understanding and tolerance, as Indian youth engage with diverse ideas and identities.

Impact of Globalisation on Customs and Traditions in Indian Society

- **Erosion of traditional practices:**
 - Global exposure and Western lifestyles have led to a decline in adherence to many age-old customs and rituals, especially among urban youth.
 - **Example:** Reduced participation in joint family rituals and arranged marriages.
- **Cultural homogenization:**
 - Global media and consumer culture promote uniformity in fashion, food, and

celebrations, diluting regional and community-specific traditions.

- **Example:** Celebration of global festivals like Halloween alongside traditional Indian festivals.

- **Adaptation and hybridization:**

- Many communities blend traditional customs with modern influences, creating hybrid practices that reflect both global and local cultures.
- **Example:** Fusion cuisines combining Indian spices with Western dishes.

- **Shift in social values:**

- Individualism promoted by globalisation challenges collectivist customs such as community decision-making and respect for elders.
- **Example:** Youth prioritizing personal choice over arranged marriages.

- **Revival and commodification of culture:**

- Global interest in Indian culture has led to the revival of some customs through tourism and media, but sometimes these traditions are commercialized and lose authenticity.
- **Example:** Folk dances showcased at international cultural festivals.

- **Changing role of rituals:**

- Many rituals are losing their traditional spiritual significance and are increasingly performed as social formalities or ceremonies for status display.
- **Example:** Weddings becoming lavish events influenced by global trends.

- **Influence on language and communication:**

- The spread of global languages like English affects traditional linguistic customs, impacting oral traditions and folk storytelling.
- **Example:** Decline in usage of regional dialects among younger generations.

- **Transformation in festival celebrations:**

- Globalisation has introduced new ways of celebrating festivals, including online participation and digital greetings, altering communal and family bonding rituals.
- **Example:** Virtual Diwali celebrations during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Impact on dress and adornment customs:**
 - Traditional clothing styles are being replaced or blended with Western fashion, affecting cultural expression through attire.
 - **Example:** Younger generations preferring jeans and t-shirts over traditional wear in daily life.
- **Changing food habits:**
 - Globalisation introduces fast food culture and international cuisines, influencing traditional dietary customs and practices.
 - **Example:** Urban Indian families increasingly adopting Western fast food alongside traditional meals.

Effect of Globalisation on Different Aspect of Society & Social Institution

1. Effect of Globalisation on Family

Positive Effects:

- **Changing family structure:** Globalization and urbanization have encouraged the rise of nuclear families, giving individuals greater autonomy and privacy. For instance, in metropolitan cities like Bengaluru and Mumbai, many young professionals prefer nuclear family setups for better work-life balance and mobility.
- **Economic opportunities:** Global job markets and migration allow family members to secure better-paying jobs abroad or in urban centers. Remittances sent by migrant workers from the Gulf countries have significantly improved the living standards of rural families in states like Kerala and Punjab.
- **Cultural openness:** Exposure to global ideas has fostered more progressive attitudes, especially toward women's education and employment. For example, families in urban

India increasingly support daughters pursuing higher education and careers, reflecting changing gender norms.

- **Technology and connectivity:** Advances in communication tools like WhatsApp and video calls enable migrant family members to maintain close emotional ties despite physical distance, strengthening family bonds across continents.

Negative Effects:

- **Family fragmentation:** Economic migration often results in prolonged separation of spouses or parents and children. Many families from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have members working in cities like Delhi, leading to joint families breaking into nuclear units and weakening traditional support systems.
- **Erosion of traditional roles:** The influx of global cultural norms challenges established authority, sometimes causing generational conflicts. For example, elders in traditional households may struggle to accept young members adopting Western lifestyles, including dating or live-in relationships.
- **Rise of individualism:** Increased emphasis on personal aspirations can undermine collective family responsibilities. Urban youth may prioritize career growth over familial duties, leading to reduced care for elderly family members, a shift observed in metropolitan India.
- **Changing communication patterns:** While digital connectivity bridges distances, excessive screen time reduces quality in-person interactions. Families in urban India often report that members are physically present but emotionally distant due to overuse of smartphones and social media.

2. Effect of Globalisation on Marriage

Positive Effects:

- **Greater individual choice:** Exposure to global cultural values has empowered individuals,

especially youth, to choose their partners based on love rather than solely arranged matches. For example, urban centers like Delhi and Pune have witnessed a rise in love marriages and inter-caste unions reflecting this shift.

- **Intercultural and interfaith marriages:** Globalization facilitates cross-cultural interactions, increasing acceptance of intercultural and interfaith marriages. The growing number of such marriages in cosmopolitan cities like Mumbai highlights this trend.
- **Changing gender roles within marriage:** Global exposure encourages more egalitarian marital relationships, with couples sharing household responsibilities and decision-making. Dual-career couples in IT hubs like Bengaluru often negotiate these roles more flexibly.
- **Delayed marriages for education and career:** Global economic competition pushes individuals to prioritize education and career before marriage, leading to delayed but more stable marital choices. This trend is evident among urban middle classes across India.

Negative Effects:

- **Decline of traditional marital institutions:** Global cultural influence challenges traditional marriage customs and rituals, causing some families to feel alienated from their heritage. For instance, declining interest in elaborate arranged marriage ceremonies among urban youth reflects this.
- **Rising marital instability:** Greater emphasis on personal fulfillment has contributed to an increase in divorce rates and marital conflicts, especially in urban India. Cities like Mumbai and Chennai report higher divorce rates compared to rural areas.
- **Conflict of values:** Global and traditional values sometimes clash within marriages, causing tensions between spouses or generations. For example, conflicts arise when one partner

adopts Western lifestyle choices that clash with conservative family expectations.

- **Pressure on family structures:** Migration for global opportunities can physically separate spouses or extended families, weakening traditional support networks critical for marital stability.

3.Effect of Globalisation on Women

Positive Effects:

- **Increased employment opportunities:** Globalization has expanded women's participation in the workforce, especially in sectors like IT, retail, and services. For example, cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad have become hubs for women professionals in tech industries.
- **Empowerment through education and skills:** Access to global knowledge and training programs has enhanced women's educational attainment and skill development, enabling economic independence. Programs like Skill India and digital literacy campaigns support this growth.
- **Greater social awareness and rights activism:** Exposure to global feminist ideas and human rights norms has encouraged women's movements in India to demand gender equality, leading to stronger laws against domestic violence and sexual harassment.
- **Access to technology and information:** The internet and social media provide platforms for women to voice issues, connect with support groups, and raise awareness about gender justice. Campaigns like #MeToo India highlight this impact.

Negative Effects

- **Job insecurity and exploitation:** Many women work in informal or export-oriented sectors with low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of social security. For example, women in garment factories in Tirupur face long hours and unsafe environments.

- **Double burden of work and domestic responsibilities:** Despite increased workforce participation, women continue to shoulder the majority of household chores and caregiving, limiting career advancement and causing stress.
- **Cultural backlash and patriarchal resistance:** Women's growing independence often meets resistance in conservative settings, leading to social pressures or even violence, especially in rural areas.
- **Unequal access to opportunities:** Globalisation's benefits are uneven, with rural and marginalized women lacking access to education, technology, and formal jobs, deepening existing inequalities.
- **Commodification and objectification:** Global media can sometimes reinforce stereotypes and commodify women's bodies, impacting social attitudes negatively. For instance, widespread portrayal of women as fashion or cosmetic brand models in advertising (e.g., fairness cream ads, item songs in Bollywood influenced by Western music videos) promotes unrealistic body images and reinforces gender stereotypes.

4. Effect of Globalisation on Youth

Positive Effects:

- **Exposure to global ideas and values:** Globalisation provides youth with access to diverse cultures, education, and career opportunities, fostering openness and innovation. For example, many Indian students pursue higher education and jobs abroad, gaining global exposure.
- **Technological empowerment:** Increased internet and smartphone penetration enables youth to connect, learn, and express themselves freely through social media and online platforms. Movements like the climate change protests have been youth-led and globalized.
- **Economic opportunities:** Global markets have created new job avenues in IT, startups, and

creative industries, leading to rising aspirations among urban youth.

- **Cultural hybridization:** Young people blend traditional Indian values with global cultural trends, resulting in dynamic and evolving identities.

Negative Effects:

- **Rising mental health challenges:** Globalisation intensifies competition and social media pressures, leading to anxiety, depression, and burnout among youth. Studies show that nearly 1 in 7 Indian youth suffer from mental health issues, exacerbated by academic and career stress.
- **Sedentary lifestyles and health risks:** Increased screen time and urban lifestyles have led to physical inactivity, obesity, and lifestyle diseases among young Indians, especially in metros. WHO reports a growing incidence of diabetes and cardiovascular issues linked to sedentary behavior.
- **Influence of Consumerism:** The rise of materialism has led to financial strain among youth chasing branded products and lifestyles beyond their means. Additionally the exposure to global media creating unrealistic expectations, contributing to dissatisfaction and mental health challenges among youth.
- **Cultural alienation and value conflicts:** Exposure to conflicting global and traditional values creates identity dilemmas, generational tensions, and sometimes social isolation, especially in conservative rural areas. For example, urban youth embracing liberal lifestyles may face familial pushback.

5. Effect of Globalisation on Children

Positive Effects:

- **Improved access to education:** Globalisation has expanded access to quality education through digital platforms and international curricula. For example, the rise of online learning tools like BYJU'S and Khan Academy has

made education more accessible to children across India.

- **Exposure to diverse cultures:** Children today are exposed to global cultures through media, travel, and technology, fostering tolerance and broader worldviews. Celebrations of international festivals like Halloween alongside Diwali illustrate this cultural blending.
- **Better health awareness and nutrition:** Global health initiatives and improved supply chains have increased awareness about child nutrition and healthcare. Programs like the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) are supported by global partnerships to reduce malnutrition.
- **Enhanced technological skills:** Early access to computers and smartphones equips children with digital literacy crucial for the modern world, preparing them for future job markets.

Negative Effects:

- **Commercialization and consumerism:** Global media often targets children with advertisements promoting materialistic values, leading to increased consumer pressure and reduced focus on traditional values.
- **Sedentary lifestyle and health risks:** Increased screen time contributes to obesity, vision problems, and reduced physical activity among children, with urban Indian children particularly vulnerable.
- **Cultural dislocation:** Exposure to conflicting global and traditional cultural norms can confuse children's identity formation, especially in conservative families. For instance, children may face conflicts between modern peer influences and family expectations.
- **Digital divide and unequal access:** While some children benefit from globalised technology, many in rural or marginalized communities lack access, exacerbating educational inequalities.
- **Psychological stress:** The pressure to perform academically in a globalised competitive

environment increases stress and anxiety among children.

6. Effects of Globalisation on Tribals

Positive Effects:

- **Economic empowerment through expanded markets:** Globalisation has opened international markets for tribal handicrafts, organic products, and forest produce, increasing incomes and reducing poverty. For example, tribal artisans from Odisha and Jharkhand now export goods globally, boosting local economies.
- **Improved infrastructure and connectivity:** Global investments and development schemes have enhanced transport, electricity, and communication facilities in tribal regions, improving access to healthcare, education, and markets, thereby raising living standards.
- **Access to education and digital tools:** Educational outreach programs supported by global partnerships have increased literacy and digital skills among tribal youth, expanding employment opportunities beyond traditional sectors.
- **Cultural exchange and awareness:** Exposure to global cultures has helped tribal communities promote their unique heritage internationally, fostering pride and encouraging preservation efforts of languages and arts.
- **Legal and social rights awareness:** Global human rights movements and NGOs have empowered tribal populations to demand their rights, resist exploitation, and engage in policy dialogues, enhancing social justice.

Negative Effects:

- **Displacement and loss of traditional livelihoods:** Industrialization and mining, driven by global demand, have displaced numerous tribal communities, severing their connection to ancestral lands and sustainable livelihoods, leading to poverty and social disintegration.

- **Cultural erosion and loss of identity:** Global consumer culture and mainstream media overshadow tribal traditions, causing younger generations to abandon native languages, rituals, and crafts, risking extinction of rich cultural diversity.
- **Economic marginalization and exploitation:** Despite global economic growth, many tribals remain in informal, low-paying jobs with little social security, often exploited as cheap labor in industries like mining and agriculture.
- **Environmental degradation harming sustenance:** Large-scale deforestation and pollution linked to resource extraction for global markets degrade the natural ecosystems tribal communities depend upon, threatening food security and health.
- **Social dislocation and psychological stress:** Forced displacement and rapid social changes have led to loss of community cohesion and increased mental health issues among tribals struggling to adapt to modern economic realities.

7. Effect of Globalisation on Differently-Abled Community

Positive Effects:

- **Access to advanced assistive technologies:** Global tech innovations have increased availability of devices like prosthetics and communication aids, improving autonomy.
- **Global advocacy strengthening rights:** International disability rights frameworks have influenced Indian laws and social attitudes positively.
- **Increased educational inclusion:** Global educational models promote inclusive classrooms in India.
- **Employment in new sectors:** IT and service industries, influenced by globalisation, offer flexible work options suited to differently-abled persons.

- **Social awareness via global media:** Exposure to international narratives reduces stigma and encourages integration.

Negative Effects (Due to Globalisation):

- **Widening digital divide:** Despite tech advances, many differently-abled persons in rural or economically backward regions remain excluded due to unequal global tech diffusion.
- **Market-driven commodification of disability:** Globalisation's emphasis on productivity sidelines those with disabilities who cannot meet market demands, increasing marginalisation.
- **Cultural homogenization diminishing traditional support:** Global consumer culture undermines local community-based support systems historically vital for differently-abled persons.
- **Urban migration pressures:** Global economic trends cause urban migration, disrupting family and community care structures for the differently-abled.
- **Healthcare inequities exacerbated by global pharmaceutical pricing:** Access to affordable assistive medicines and devices is limited as global pricing favors wealthier markets.

8. Effect of Globalisation on LGBTQ Community

Positive Effects:

- **Legal reforms influenced by global LGBTQ movements:** Decriminalisation of homosexuality (Section 377) and growing activism owe much to international human rights pressure.
- **Visibility and solidarity via global networks:** Online platforms connect Indian LGBTQ persons to global communities for support and awareness.
- **Cultural exchange fostering acceptance:** Exposure to global LGBTQ cultures challenges local prejudices.

- **Access to global mental health resources:** Online counseling and peer groups support LGBTQ mental well-being.
- **Global funding and NGO support:** International organizations provide resources for local LGBTQ rights work.

Negative Effects (Due to Globalisation):

- **Westernization of LGBTQ identities leading to cultural dissonance:** Global LGBTQ narratives sometimes impose Western frameworks that clash with Indian socio-cultural realities, causing alienation within communities.
- **Commercialization of Pride and queer culture:** Global corporate sponsorship of Pride events may dilute grassroots activism and create exclusion of marginalized queer groups.
- **Digital surveillance and cyberbullying:** Increased online presence from global connectivity exposes LGBTQ persons to targeted cyber harassment exploiting global platforms.
- **Economic inequality intensified by neoliberal policies:** Global economic restructuring disproportionately affects LGBTQ persons, especially sex workers and marginalized groups lacking social protection.
- **Backlash from conservative global-local cultural clashes:** Global LGBTQ visibility can provoke stronger conservative resistance in traditional societies, intensifying social ostracism.

Contemporary Issue

Growing Digital Addiction in Children and Adolescents

Context

- With the rapid proliferation of smartphones, tablets, and internet access, children and adolescents are increasingly reliant on digital devices for education, entertainment, and social interaction.
- The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend, making online schooling and virtual communication the norm, which significantly

increased screen time among young populations.

- While digital technology offers numerous benefits, excessive and uncontrolled use has led to growing concerns about **digital addiction and its multifaceted impacts.**

Impact of Digital Addiction

● Physical Health Impacts:

- Increased sedentary behavior contributes to obesity, poor posture, and related cardiovascular risks among children.
- A notable rise in vision problems such as myopia (nearsightedness) and digital eye strain has been observed, with urban children particularly affected due to prolonged screen exposure and reduced outdoor activity.
- Sleep disturbances are common, as screen exposure disrupts circadian rhythms, leading to insomnia and daytime fatigue.

● Mental Health Impacts:

- Excessive screen use is linked to anxiety, depression, irritability, and mood swings in adolescents.
- Withdrawal symptoms when devices are taken away cause behavioral problems and emotional distress.
- Social isolation arises as screen time replaces real-life interactions, impairing social skills and emotional intelligence.

● Cognitive and Academic Effects:

- Reduced attention span and concentration difficulties are frequently reported, negatively affecting academic performance.
- Overdependence on instant gratification from digital content hampers development of patience and critical thinking skills.

● Social and Behavioral Consequences:

- Decline in physical play and outdoor activities limits physical development and social bonding.
- Excessive online gaming and social media use can expose children to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and risky online behavior.
- Family dynamics are affected as children may become less communicative and more withdrawn.

Intervention and Prevention Strategies

- **Parental Monitoring and Limits:**
 - Use of parental controls, screen time limits, and creating device-free zones (e.g., dining rooms, bedrooms) help regulate usage.
 - Parents should model responsible device use to set healthy examples.
- **Promotion of Alternative Activities:**
 - Encouraging outdoor play, hobbies such as reading, arts, sports, and family interactions reduce screen dependency and improve holistic development.
- **School-based Initiatives:**
 - Incorporating digital wellness education, organizing device-free periods, and promoting group physical and creative activities can mitigate excessive screen use.
- **Medical and Psychological Support:**
 - Professional counseling and digital detox programs should be sought if addiction symptoms severely impair daily functioning or mental health.
- **Community Awareness and Policy Measures:**
 - Public health campaigns highlighting the risks of digital addiction and promoting balanced technology use are vital.
 - Guidelines on appropriate screen time by health authorities (e.g., WHO recommendations) can inform caregivers and educators.

Value Addition

Keywords : Cultural homogenisation, Hybrid identities, Social transformation, Economic liberalisation, Consumerism, Individualism, Cultural resilience, Social mobility, Identity conflicts, Technological diffusion, Urbanisation, Global connectivity, Gender empowerment, Family restructuring, Youth aspirations, Marginalisation, Cultural commodification, Digital divide.

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Examine how globalization has reshaped the Indian family system, citing both positive and negative effects.
2. How has globalization influenced cultural diversity in India—has it led to

homogenization or cultural reinvigoration?

3. Analyse globalization's impact on employment patterns in India, focusing on the IT and informal sectors.
4. In what ways has globalization affected marginalized communities in India, such as tribal populations and the elderly?
5. Has globalization eroded local identities in India? Discuss with relevant examples.

Acronyms

Effect of Globalisation

Social and cultural effects

MELTS

- M — Media and consumerism rise
- E — Erosion of traditional values in some areas
- L — Lifestyle changes (fast food, clothing, entertainment)
- T — Transnational cultural flows (music, movies, social media)
- S — Spread of individualism and nuclear family preferences

Effects on family and marriage

SHIFT

- S — Shift towards nuclear families
- H — Higher divorce rates and changing marital norms
- I — Increased women's workforce participation
- F — Focus on individual autonomy in decisions
- T — Transformation in marriage practices (late marriage, live-in relationships)

Effects on vulnerable sections

JUMP

- J — Job insecurity and informalization for unskilled workers
- U — Urban-rural divide widened
- M — Migration pressures and urban slums growth
- P — Persistence of inequalities and digital divides

Political and administrative effects:

RIDE

- R — Rise of global governance norms (environment, human rights)
- I — International pressure on policies (WTO, IMF, SDGs)
- D — Decentralization and competitive federalism
- E — E-governance and administrative reforms

Ready framework on common themes

Positive Impact of globalisation on Indian society:-

Heading	Subheadings	Explanation
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural exchange • Standard of living • Western values (equality) 	
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International cooperation • Effectivity of International institutions (world bank , WHO) • political values (democracy, right to vote etc) 	
Economical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic growth and development • Forex reserves • Employment • Poverty alleviation • Urbanization 	
Geographic al/climatic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration • Global villages • Direction towards borderless world • Climate cooperation (COP) 	

Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and development • IR 4.0 • TECH HUB cities 	
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Negative impact of globalisation on various sections of India society:-

Heading	Subheadings	Explanation
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divorce • Alienation from family members • Nuclear families 	
Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double burden • Exclusion • Feminisation of poverty 	
Tribals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alienation from JAL-JUNGAL- JAMEEN • Exploitation through cheap labour • Loss of cultural identity 	
Rural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration • Ignorance • Depeasantisation and agriculture loss 	
Old age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion from social services. • Isolation and depression • Suicides 	

UPSC Previous Year Questions

Question	Nature of Question	Core Demand
Distinguish between gender equality, gender equity and women's empowerment. Why is it important to take gender concerns into account in programme design and implementation? (2024)	Conceptual + Analytical	Define gender equality, equity, empowerment; explain importance of gender concerns in programmes.
Explain why suicide among young women is increasing in Indian society. (2023)	Causal Analysis	Explain reasons for rising suicides among young women.
Examine the role of 'Gig Economy' in the process of empowerment of women in India. (2021)	Examination + Analytical	Examine how gig economy empowers women.
"Empowering women is the key to controlling population growth." Discuss. (2019)	Discussion + Analytical	Discuss link between women's empowerment and population control.
What are the continued challenges for women in India against time and space? (2019)	Analytical + Comprehensive	Explain ongoing challenges faced by women across regions and time.
'Women's movement in India has not addressed the issues of women of lower social strata.' Substantiate your view. (2018)	Analytical + Substantiation	Argue whether women's movements included lower strata women's issues.
How do you explain the statistics that show that the sex ratio in Tribes in India is more favourable to women than the sex ratio among Scheduled Castes? (2015)	Analytical + Explanatory	Explain better sex ratio among tribes compared to SCs.
How does patriarchy impact the position of a middle class working woman in India? (2014)	Analytical + Impact-based	Explain impact of patriarchy on middle class working women.
Why do some of the most prosperous regions of India have an adverse sex ratio for women? Give your arguments. (2014)	Analytical + Argumentation	Explain reasons for adverse sex ratio in prosperous regions.
Discuss the various economic and socio-cultural forces that are driving increasing feminization of agriculture in India. (2014)	Discussion + Analytical	Discuss forces driving feminization of agriculture.
Male membership needs to be encouraged in order to make women's organization free from gender bias. Comment. (2013)	Comment + Analytical	Comment on including men to reduce gender bias in women's organizations.

"I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved" - Dr.B.R.Ambedkar

Introduction

Women have played a crucial role in shaping Indian society, evolving from traditional domestic roles to active contributors in social, economic, and political spheres. While progress toward gender equality and empowerment has accelerated, deep-rooted patriarchy, regional disparities, and emerging challenges continue to test their journey. Women's organizations, both historical and contemporary, have been instrumental in driving this transformation and advocating for an inclusive, equitable society.

Evolution of the 'Woman's Question' in India

- **Ancient Period (Vedic Age)** : Women enjoyed relatively high status during the early Vedic period. They had access to education, could participate in religious rituals, and were respected as scholars (e.g., Gargi, Maitreyi). However, as society became more patriarchal in the later Vedic period, women's freedom and status declined.
- **Post-Vedic and Medieval Periods** : The position of women significantly deteriorated. Practices like child marriage, Sati, Purdah, and denial of education became prevalent. Women's roles became largely confined to the household, and they had minimal public or decision-making presence.
- **Colonial Period** : Colonial rule saw the rise of social reform movements (e.g., Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj) led by reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, who campaigned against Sati and for widow remarriage and female education. The introduction of modern education and legislation (e.g., Widow Remarriage Act, 1856) slowly began empowering women.
- **Freedom Struggle Era** : Women played an active role in the freedom movement, challenging traditional gender roles. Leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Kasturba Gandhi, and Aruna Asaf Ali inspired many women to participate in public life. This period

marked the beginning of women's assertion in political and social spheres.

- **Post-Independence Period** : The Constitution of India guaranteed equality (Articles 14–16), non-discrimination (Article 15), and special provisions for women (Article 15(3)). Women gained the right to vote and to stand for elections on equal footing with men. However, socio-economic challenges continued to restrict their full potential.
- **Contemporary Developments** : In recent decades, there has been remarkable progress in women's education, employment, and political representation. The rise of women in leadership roles (e.g., in Panchayati Raj institutions after 73rd Amendment), sports, corporate sectors, science, and armed forces shows expanding horizons. Nevertheless, issues like gender-based violence, wage gap, underrepresentation in higher judiciary, and glass ceiling persist.
- **Emerging Trends** : Women are increasingly asserting their rights, leading movements like #MeToo and protests for safer public spaces. There is greater visibility of women entrepreneurs and professionals, and legal reforms such as criminalization of triple talaq and strengthening of laws against sexual harassment show growing state support for gender justice.

Status of Women in Indian Society

- **Gender Gap and Global Ranking**
 - As per Global Gender Gap Report 2025, India ranks **131th out of 148 countries**, having closed only about **64.1%** of its gender gap.
 - Economic and political participation of women remains low despite some progress.
- **Female Labour Force Participation**
 - India's female labor force participation rate has increased to about **35.6%** (PLFS 2023–24), but most of this work is in informal or low-paid jobs.
 - Rural participation rose from **24.6% to 41.5%**, while urban participation increased from **20.4% to 25.4%** in recent years.
- **Political Representation**
 - Women hold around **14%** of seats in Lok Sabha (2024), the highest so far.

- The Women's Reservation Act (2023) proposes **33% reservation** in legislatures, but it is yet to be implemented.
- **Education Status**
 - As per **2011 Census**:
 - Female literacy rate: **65.5%** (compared to 82% for males).
 - Female literacy was lower in rural areas (57.9%) than in urban areas (79.1%).
 - Recent surveys (NFHS-5) show improvement, with female literacy now around **71%**, but gaps remain in higher and technical education.
- **Nutritional and Health Status**
 - According to **NFHS-5 (2019–21)**:
 - **57% of women aged 15–49 years are anaemic**, indicating widespread nutritional deficiency.
 - **18.7% of women (15–49 years)** have a low Body Mass Index (BMI), reflecting undernutrition.
 - Around **24% of women** are overweight or obese, showing rising trends of lifestyle-related health issues.
 - Maternal health indicators have improved: institutional deliveries rose to **88.6%**, showing better access to healthcare.
- **Safety and Violence**
 - As per NCRB data ,crimes against women increased from **228,650 (2011)** to about **428,278 (2021)**.
 - About **30% of cases** are domestic violence-related, and safety remains a major concern restricting mobility and work participation.
- Recently UN Women asserted that India's progress towards gender equality has accelerated in recent years, with increased investments and focus on women's leadership at the grassroots but social norms, limited workforce participation and gaps in safety measures hinder full gender parity.

Understanding the Concept of Patriarchy

● Definition

- Patriarchy is a social system where men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control over property.
- It structures gender relations by

privileging masculine authority and subordinating women.

● Characteristics

- Male dominance in family, community, and institutions.
- Control over women's sexuality, labor, and reproductive rights.
- Inheritance and descent traced through the male line (patrilineality).
- Gender roles are socially constructed to maintain male authority.

● Historical and sociological perspectives

- Feminist theorists (e.g., Sylvia Walby) describe patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices that institutionalize male dominance.
- Anthropologists argue that patriarchy emerged with private property and class societies, linking economic control to gender hierarchy.

● Manifestations in Indian society

- Preference for sons, dowry system, limited mobility and decision-making power for women.
- Practices like female infanticide, child marriage, and honor killings are extreme outcomes.
- Patriarchal norms embedded in religion, law, and culture.

● How Patriarchy Plays Its Role on Women Across Different Social Classes in India

○ Upper-Class Women:

- Patriarchy controls upper-class women through subtle but strong social expectations. Despite education and wealth, they are often expected to uphold family honor, maintain "respectable" behavior, and prioritize marriage and family reputation over personal freedom.
- **Example:** In elite families, women may have high education but face restrictions on career choices or public roles to protect social status.

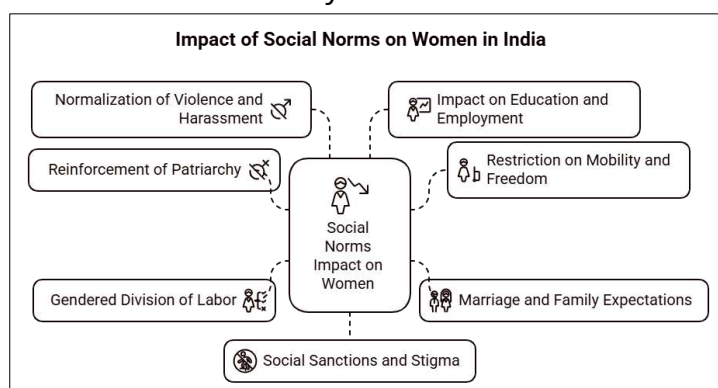
○ Middle-Class Women:

- Patriarchy imposes the dual burden of professional work and traditional domestic roles. Middle-class women are often expected to manage the

household perfectly while succeeding at work, reinforcing the “superwoman” ideal.

- **Example:** Urban professionals face pressure to conform to ideal images of a good wife and mother, limiting personal ambitions and causing stress.
- **Lower-Class Women:**
 - Patriarchy intersects with economic hardship and caste oppression, intensifying control over lower-class women. They face early marriages, lack of education, and are pushed into low-paid or exploitative labor while remaining under male authority at home.
 - **Example:** Many Dalit and tribal women work as agricultural laborers or domestic workers, enduring violence and lacking agency in personal and economic decisions.

- **Normalization of Violence and Harassment:** Social acceptance or silence around domestic violence, sexual harassment, and honor killings perpetuates gender-based violence. Victim-blaming attitudes often prevent women from seeking justice.
- **Impact on Education and Employment:** Social norms undervalue girls’ education, leading to lower literacy rates and workforce participation among women. For instance, female labor force participation in India remains low at around 20-25%.
- **Social Sanctions and Stigma:** Women who defy traditional norms may face ostracism, reduced marriage prospects, or family dishonor, which enforces conformity and limits freedom.



How Social Norms Impact Women in India

- **Reinforcement of Patriarchy:** Social norms uphold male dominance by prescribing rigid gender roles that limit women’s autonomy and decision-making. For example, women are often expected to prioritize household duties over education or career aspirations.
- **Restriction on Mobility and Freedom:** Norms restrict women’s movement and social interaction, enforcing practices like purdah or restrictions on traveling alone. This limits their access to education, employment, and participation in public life.
- **Marriage and Family Expectations:** Early marriage, dowry demands, and pressure to bear sons are socially sanctioned norms that adversely impact women’s health and social status. The preference for male children has contributed to skewed sex ratios in India.
- **Gendered Division of Labor:** Women disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid domestic work along with paid labor, restricting their economic independence. Social norms discourage men from participating equally in household chores.

Gender Equality, Gender Equity, and Women’s Empowerment

- **Gender Equality**
 - Gender equality refers to the principle that all human beings, regardless of gender, should have equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities in all spheres of life — social, economic, political, and cultural.
 - It focuses on providing the same conditions and treatment to men and women so that they can realize their full potential. It rejects all forms of discrimination and aims to remove structural and societal barriers that restrict women’s access to opportunities.
 - **Examples:**
 - Providing equal pay for equal work, ensuring that women and men receive the same remuneration for the same job profile.
 - Ensuring equal access to quality education for girls and boys, as reflected in schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao.

- Equal representation in political decision-making bodies, such as efforts to reserve one-third seats for women in local governance (Panchayati Raj institutions).

- **Gender Equity**

- While gender equality emphasizes equal treatment, gender equity focuses on fairness and justice in treatment, taking into account the different needs and circumstances of men and women. It acknowledges that historical and social disadvantages have kept women behind and, therefore, they might require special measures to reach an equal footing.
- Gender equity is thus a corrective mechanism to achieve gender equality by addressing systemic inequalities. It supports policies and interventions that prioritize women and other marginalized gender identities to compensate for past discrimination.

- **Examples:**

- Reservation of seats for women in local bodies to ensure their political participation and voice in decision-making.
- Maternity benefits, such as paid maternity leave and crèche facilities at workplaces, which recognize women's unique reproductive roles and seek to balance family and professional responsibilities.
- Scholarships or fee waivers for girl students to promote higher education among women, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.

- **Women's Empowerment**

- Women's empowerment refers to the process through which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices. It is not just about providing opportunities but enabling women to access, utilize, and benefit from those opportunities.
- Empowerment implies enhancing women's agency, autonomy, self-confidence, and their ability to influence decision-making at different levels — from the household to the national level. It is multi-dimensional and

involves social, economic, political, and psychological aspects.

- **Examples:**

- The Self-Help Group (SHG) movement in India, such as Kudumbashree in Kerala, has economically empowered rural women by providing microcredit and collective bargaining power.
- Legal measures like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, empower women to seek justice against domestic abuse and assert their rights.
- The increase in women entrepreneurs through schemes like Stand-Up India or MUDRA Yojana enables financial independence and leadership in business sectors.
- Political empowerment through reservation policies has led to women emerging as sarpanches and local leaders, transforming community governance.

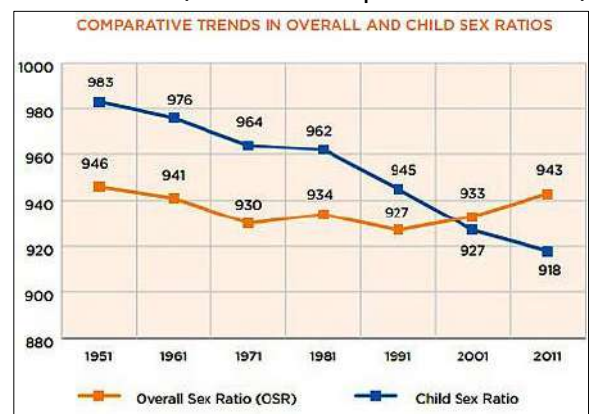
- **Interconnectedness of Concepts**

- Gender equity acts as a strategy to achieve gender equality, while women's empowerment is both a means and an end in this process. Empowering women strengthens their capabilities and voice, thereby promoting equitable conditions, and ultimately fostering gender equality in society.

Contemporary Issues

1. Skewed sex Ratio in India

Context : According to the World Bank, India's sex ratio is projected to decline to 936 females per 1,000 males by 2031, which is even lower than the sex ratio recorded in 1951 (946 females per 1,000 males).



Reasons Behind Decline in Sex Ratio in India

- **Preference for male children:** Deep-rooted socio-cultural belief that sons carry forward the family lineage, perform last rites, and provide old-age security.
Example: In many northern states like Haryana and Punjab, son preference is strongly prevalent.
- **Dowry system and economic burden of daughters:** Daughters are often seen as financial liabilities due to dowry expectations and marriage expenses, discouraging families from desiring girl children.
- **Sex-selective abortions:** Advancement and misuse of prenatal diagnostic techniques (like ultrasound) enable sex-selective abortions despite being illegal under the PCPNDT Act, 1994.
- **Neglect of girl children:** Girls receive less nutrition, healthcare, and educational opportunities, leading to higher infant and child mortality among girls.
- **Patriarchal social norms:** Societal structures that value male dominance reinforce the desire for male offspring and devalue daughters.
- **Inheritance and property rights bias:** Preference for sons to inherit family property discourages acceptance of daughters as equal heirs, influencing family planning decisions.
- **Security concerns for girls:** Fear of sexual violence and social stigma associated with girls' safety lead some families to prefer sons.

Government Initiatives to Tackle Declining Sex Ratio

- **Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994:** Prohibits sex selection before or after conception and regulates diagnostic techniques to prevent misuse for sex determination.
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme (2015):** Launched to improve child sex ratio, prevent gender-biased sex-selective elimination, and promote education and empowerment of girls. **For example:** Focus districts have shown improvement in birth registration and awareness about girl child rights.
- **Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (2015):** Savings

scheme for the girl child, encouraging families to see daughters as assets by securing their education and marriage expenses.

- **Balika Samridhi Yojana:** Provides financial incentives to families for the birth and schooling of girl children to reduce discrimination and promote survival and education.
- **National Girl Child Day (January 24):** Observed to raise awareness on issues affecting girls and highlight the importance of gender equality.
- **Incentives under Janani Suraksha Yojana:** Promotes institutional deliveries and maternal care, reducing female infant and maternal mortality rates.
- **Conditional cash transfer schemes in states:**
Examples:
 - Ladli Scheme (Haryana & Delhi) — financial assistance to families with girl children to encourage positive perception.
 - Kanyashree Prakalpa (West Bengal) — financial incentives to delay marriage and encourage education.
- **Awareness campaigns and community mobilization:** Mass media campaigns, local community programs, and involvement of religious and social leaders to change mindset.
- **Strengthening enforcement and monitoring:** Regular inspections and strict penalties for violations of PCPNDT Act to deter illegal sex determination.

What Needs to Be Done at Societal Level to Tackle Declining Sex Ratio

- **Change in social mindset and value system:** Promote the idea that daughters are equal to sons in all respects, challenging patriarchal notions of male preference. For instance, celebrating the birth of girls publicly to create positive social narratives.
- **Strengthening community-based awareness:** Engage community leaders, religious figures, and local influencers to advocate against gender-biased practices and promote gender equality.
- **Encouraging equal inheritance rights:** Ensure social acceptance of girls as rightful heirs to family property, reducing economic preference for sons.
- **Promoting education of girls:** Increase community-driven efforts to enroll and retain

girls in schools, fostering empowerment and reducing child marriages.

- **Empowering women economically and socially:** Support women's access to skills, jobs, and leadership roles, increasing their value within families and communities.
- **Ending dowry practices:** Mobilize collective community action against dowry demands, which perpetuate viewing daughters as financial burdens.
- **Building safer environments for women and girls:** Address safety concerns through community vigilance, better policing, and safe public infrastructure to reduce fear around raising daughters.
- **Encouraging positive role models:** Highlight successful women from diverse backgrounds to inspire families to invest equally in daughters.
- **Promoting collective responsibility:** Foster a culture where entire communities monitor and discourage sex-selective practices and support families with daughters.

2. Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence against women

Context :

- A recent report by UN Women highlights that millions of women and girls worldwide face emerging challenges in the form of digital abuse and technology-facilitated violence each year.
- The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) and the growing influence of the manosphere (an ecosystem of misogynistic content) are increasingly infiltrating mainstream culture, shaping societal attitudes towards women, and fueling gender-based violence.

What is Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence?

- Technology-facilitated gender-based violence refers to any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified through the use of information and communication technologies or other digital tools, resulting in — or likely to result in — physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or infringement of rights and freedoms.
- While terms like *digital violence* or *online violence* are commonly used, "technology-facilitated gender-based violence" more

accurately captures how technology enables harm in both online and offline contexts.

● Example

- **Doxing:** The act of sharing someone's personal information online, which can lead to real-life consequences such as stalking, threats, and physical violence.
- **Deepfake Abuse:** The creation and distribution of manipulated images or videos online, causing offline reputational damage and long-lasting psychological and social impacts.
- **Cyberbullying:** The repeated use of digital platforms to harass, threaten, or humiliate someone for example, spreading abusive messages, sharing embarrassing photos without consent, or creating fake accounts to defame an individual.

Who is Most at Risk of Digital Abuse and Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women?

- **All women and girls can be affected**, but certain groups are especially vulnerable due to intersecting factors.
- **Young women and girls:**
 - More likely to use technology for learning, social connection, and accessing information, making them more exposed to online violence.
 - A global study revealed that **58% of girls and young women** have experienced some form of online harassment.
- **Women facing multiple forms of discrimination:**
 - Includes women with disabilities, Black and Indigenous women, other women of colour, migrant women, and LGBTIQ+ individuals.
 - These groups often face compounded risks and more severe forms of digital violence.
- **Women in political and public life:**
 - Human rights defenders, activists, journalists, and lawmakers experience higher rates of online and offline violence.
 - According to a UNESCO study, **73% of women journalists** have faced online violence in their work.
 - The Inter-Parliamentary Union reported that **58% of African women parliamentarians** had been subjected to

online attacks.

How Can We Stop Digital Abuse and Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women?

- **Strengthen multi-stakeholder cooperation:** Foster collaboration among governments, technology companies, women's rights organizations, and civil society to build stronger policies that protect women and prevent violence before it occurs.
- **Address data gaps:** Improve data collection and analysis to understand root causes, identify perpetrator profiles, and design more effective prevention and response strategies.
- **Develop inclusive laws and regulations:** Create and enforce legal frameworks with active input from survivors and women's organizations to ensure laws are survivor-centered and effective.
- **Hold the tech industry accountable:** Establish clear standards for transparency and accountability regarding digital violence and data practices on all online platforms.
- **Promote digital citizenship and ethics in education:** Integrate lessons on ethical digital behavior and responsible online engagement into school curricula. Sensitize young people—especially young men and boys—as well as caregivers and educators to foster a culture of respect and empathy online and offline.
- **Empower women and girls in technology:** Encourage and support women's leadership and participation in the tech sector to help design safer digital tools and create violence-free online spaces.
- **Transform harmful social norms:** Challenge misogynistic narratives and promote positive masculinities, using technology and AI as tools to reshape public attitudes and reduce gender-based violence.
- **Prioritize prevention across sectors:** Ensure both public and private entities adopt human rights-based approaches, integrate safety by design, and invest adequately in eliminating digital violence.

3.Feminization of Agriculture

Context :

- According to the 2011 Census, India has witnessed a notable "feminisation of

agriculture," marked by a 24% rise in the number of women agricultural labourers compared to the 2001 Census. Despite this increasing participation, women's crucial roles in land and livestock management often remain unrecognized and undervalued.

Reasons Behind the Feminisation of Agriculture

- **Male outmigration :** Large-scale migration of men to urban areas in search of non-farm employment leaves women responsible for agricultural activities in rural areas.
- **Distress diversification :** As agriculture becomes less remunerative, men move to other sectors, while women continue to engage in farming and allied activities for subsistence.
- **Increasing participation in allied activities :** Women are more involved in livestock rearing, dairy, fisheries, and kitchen gardens, which supplement household income and food security.
- **Shifts in cropping patterns and farm mechanization :** Certain tasks traditionally managed by men have become mechanized, while women continue to perform labor-intensive tasks such as weeding, sowing, transplanting, and harvesting.
- **Changing social norms and economic necessity :** Gradual acceptance of women working outside traditional household roles due to economic compulsions and poverty.
- **Rise of female-headed households :** With male migration and mortality, many rural households are now led by women, making them primary decision-makers in farming.

Introduction

Women's organizations play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality and empowering women across social, economic, and political spheres. By advocating for rights, providing support services, and mobilizing communities, these organizations have been instrumental in challenging patriarchal structures and driving transformative social change in India.

Meaning and Importance of Women's Organizations

- **Meaning:** Women's organizations refer to formal or informal groups established to promote and protect the rights and welfare of women. They operate at various levels — local, regional, national, and international — and address a wide range of issues affecting women.
- **Importance:**
 - **Advocacy for women's rights and empowerment**
 - Act as collective voices demanding gender justice and equality.
 - Push for constitutional and legal rights, ensuring implementation of pro-women laws.
 - **Addressing social, economic, political, and legal issues**
 - Work on critical issues such as domestic violence, dowry, workplace harassment, wage gaps, and political underrepresentation.
 - Campaign for equitable access to education, healthcare, and property rights.
 - **Acting as a bridge between government policies and grassroots needs**
 - Translate policy provisions into actionable programs at the community level.
 - Provide feedback to policymakers on ground realities, thus strengthening participatory governance.
 - **Facilitating economic empowerment**
 - Organize training, credit access, and market linkages for women entrepreneurs.
 - Promote self-help groups (SHGs) and

cooperatives to enhance financial independence.

- **Enhancing social awareness and changing mindsets**
 - Conduct awareness drives to challenge patriarchal norms and stereotypes.
 - Promote values of dignity, equality, and mutual respect within families and society.
- **Promoting political participation and leadership**
 - Encourage women to contest elections and occupy decision-making positions.
 - Build leadership skills through capacity-building programs.
- **Providing support and rehabilitation**
 - Offer shelters, counseling, and legal aid to victims of violence and discrimination.
 - Facilitate reintegration of marginalized women into society.
- **Building solidarity and networks**
 - Create a support system for women to collectively negotiate and demand rights.
 - Link local struggles with national and global feminist movements.

Historical Background of Women's Organizations in India

- **Pre-Independence Period**
 - **Early social reform context:**
 - The 19th and early 20th centuries saw women's organizations emerge as part of broader social reform and nationalist movements.
 - Focused on challenging harmful practices like sati, child marriage, and supporting widow remarriage.
 - **Bharat Stree Mahamandal (1910):**
 - Founded by Sarala Devi Chaudhurani.
 - One of the first all-India women's organizations aiming to promote women's education and social reform.
 - **All India Women's Conference (AIWC) (1927):**
 - Founded by Margaret Cousins along with Indian reformers like Sarojini Naidu and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay.
 - Initially focused on women's education,

- later expanded to address social legislation and women's rights.
 - Played a key role in advocating for the Sarda Act (1929) to curb child marriage.
- **Participation in the freedom struggle:**
 - Women's groups actively engaged in civil disobedience, salt satyagraha, and anti-imperialist campaigns.
 - Linked national freedom with social emancipation of women.
 - Example: Involvement of Kasturba Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, and Aruna Asaf Ali in mass movements.
- **Post-Independence Period**
 - **Shift to legal reforms and social justice:**
 - Focus moved from nationalist priorities to legal and constitutional rights for women.
 - Advocacy for equal rights in marriage, inheritance, and employment.
 - **Campaigns for progressive legislation:**
 - Demand for Uniform Civil Code to ensure gender-just personal laws.
 - Support for anti-dowry laws (Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961) and equal remuneration (Equal Remuneration Act, 1976).
 - **Promotion of political representation:**
 - Campaigns for greater representation of women in Parliament and state assemblies.
 - Example: Advocacy that led to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments mandating one-third reservation for women in local bodies.
 - **New movements in the 1970s-80s**
 - Post-1975 (International Women's Year), resurgence of autonomous feminist groups addressing violence against women, rape laws, custodial violence, and workplace harassment.
 - Example: Mathura rape case (1972) sparked a nationwide movement demanding reform of rape laws.
 - **Focus on intersectional issues:**
 - Addressing challenges faced by Dalit, Adivasi, and minority women.
 - Emphasis on linking gender justice with class, caste, and regional inequalities.

Types of Women's Organizations

- **National Statutory Bodies**
 - **Definition:** Officially established institutions mandated by law to protect and promote women's rights.
 - **Examples:**
 - **National Commission for Women (NCW):** Established in 1992 to review legal safeguards, monitor violations, and advise the government on policy matters concerning women.
 - **State Women's Commissions:** Function at the state level to address regional gender issues and provide grievance redressal.
 - **Role:**
 - Conduct investigations, recommend legal reforms, and support victims through counseling and legal aid.
 - Act as quasi-judicial bodies to handle complaints of harassment and discrimination.
- **Grassroots and Community-Based Organizations**
 - **Definition:** Locally rooted groups focusing on community mobilization and empowering marginalized women.
 - **Examples:**
 - **SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association):** Supports informal sector women workers through cooperatives, training, and advocacy.
 - **Mahila Mandals:** Local women's collectives promoting health, literacy, and livelihood initiatives.
 - **Role:**
 - Bridge the gap between policy and practice by addressing local socio-economic realities.
 - Encourage collective bargaining and community leadership.
- **Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Microfinance Collectives**
 - **Definition:** Informal groups of women who pool savings and offer credit support to each other, promoting economic self-reliance.
 - **Examples:**
 - **Kudumbashree (Kerala):** A renowned SHG network focused on poverty

alleviation and women's empowerment.

- SHG networks supported under NRLM (National Rural Livelihoods Mission).
- **Role:**
 - Enhance financial inclusion, improve household incomes, and strengthen decision-making power among women.
 - Act as platforms for training, health awareness, and social campaigns.
- **Issue-Based Advocacy Groups**
 - **Definition:** Organizations focused on specific themes like violence against women, reproductive rights, or workplace equality.
 - **Examples:**
 - **Jagori:** Works on women's safety and gender sensitization.
 - **Breakthrough:** Focuses on gender-based violence, early marriage prevention, and rights awareness.
 - **Bebaak Collective:** Works on the rights of minority women, especially in the context of personal laws.
 - **Role:**
 - Influence public opinion, shape policy debates, and initiate legal and social reforms.
 - Use media, campaigns, and legal interventions to bring attention to critical gender issues.

Major Roles and Contributions of Women's Organizations

- **Legal Aid and Awareness Campaigns**
 - Conduct workshops, legal literacy camps, and counseling to make women aware of rights under laws such as the Domestic Violence Act (2005), Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), and Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013).
 - Provide free legal aid and help women navigate courts and police procedures.
 - **Example:** National Commission for Women's nationwide legal awareness programs on women's rights.
- **Economic Empowerment through Training, Credit, and Cooperatives**
 - Promote skill development and vocational training to improve employability among

marginalized women.

- Facilitate access to microcredit and support women-led cooperatives to encourage entrepreneurship.
- **Example:** SEWA's cooperatives have empowered thousands of informal women workers to gain economic independence.
- **Political Mobilization and Leadership Promotion**
 - Encourage women's participation in local governance bodies (Panchayati Raj institutions) and legislative processes.
 - Build leadership skills and support women candidates during elections.
 - **Example:** Mahila Samakhya program's work in mobilizing rural women to contest panchayat elections.
- **Health, Nutrition, and Reproductive Rights Advocacy**
 - Conduct health camps and awareness drives on maternal health, menstrual hygiene, family planning, and nutrition.
 - Challenge societal taboos and misinformation regarding reproductive rights.
 - **Example:** Kudumbashree's community health volunteers promoting maternal and child health awareness in Kerala.
- **Education and Skill Development Initiatives**
 - Run literacy programs, remedial education centers, and adult education campaigns to reduce dropout rates among girls.
 - Offer digital literacy and computer training to bridge the skills gap.
 - **Example:** NGOs like Pratham and Jagori working to improve educational access for young girls in urban and rural areas.
- **Combating Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination**
 - Offer crisis intervention services, helplines, safe shelters, and legal support to survivors of domestic and sexual violence.
 - Lead campaigns to change discriminatory cultural practices and promote gender sensitivity.
 - **Example:** The #MeToo movement in India received strong support and amplification from women's advocacy organizations, bringing workplace harassment to the

forefront.



Challenges Faced by Women's Organizations

• Structural and Organizational Challenges

- **Resource constraints:** Many organizations face chronic lack of funds, affecting outreach, capacity building, and sustainability.
- **Dependence on external funding:** Overreliance on donor agencies can influence agendas, reduce autonomy, and create volatility in operations.
- **Limited professional capacity:** Inadequate trained human resources, especially in rural and smaller organizations, limits effective functioning.

• Socio-cultural Challenges

- **Patriarchal resistance:** Deep-rooted patriarchal mindsets hinder women's mobilization and participation at grassroots levels.
- **Stigma and backlash:** Organizations working on sensitive issues (e.g., domestic violence, sexual rights) often face social stigma and threats from conservative sections.
- **Low community engagement:** Sometimes, local women hesitate to associate openly due to fear of social ostracism.

• Legal and Policy Constraints

- **Weak implementation of laws:** Even when progressive laws exist (like the Domestic Violence Act, 2005), poor enforcement limits organizational impact.
- **Bureaucratic hurdles:** Complex registration and compliance requirements

(e.g., FCRA norms) create operational bottlenecks.

- **Lack of institutional support:** Insufficient collaboration with government agencies reduces effectiveness in policy advocacy and service delivery.

• Political Challenges

- **Politicization of women's issues:** Women's rights are sometimes used as vote-bank politics, diluting the focus on genuine empowerment.
- **Limited political will:** Inadequate prioritization of gender equity in policy agendas restricts opportunities for advocacy-based organizations.

• Financial Challenges

- **Irregular funding flows:** Delays and unpredictability in grants affect program continuity.
- **Lack of diversified income streams:** Overdependence on singular funding sources makes organizations vulnerable to sudden financial crises.

• Intersectional and Representation Issues

- **Urban-rural divide:** Dominance of urban-based organizations often marginalizes rural voices and localized issues.
- **Inadequate representation of marginalized women:** Dalit, Adivasi, minority, and disabled women are often underrepresented in leadership positions.
- **Intersectional blindness:** Failure to address overlapping forms of discrimination (e.g., caste, religion, disability) weakens holistic impact.

• Technological and Digital Divide

- **Limited digital capacity:** Many organizations, especially in rural areas, struggle to adopt digital tools for outreach and advocacy.
- **Cyber harassment:** Increased online presence has led to new forms of threats and trolling against activists and organizations.

Way Forward:

- Promote capacity building and leadership training for women at all levels.
- Develop sustainable and diversified funding

mechanisms.

- Strengthen collaboration with government and other institutional stakeholders.
- Enhance digital literacy and technological capacity among organizations.
- Ensure greater inclusion of marginalized groups in leadership roles.
- Advocate for stronger implementation and monitoring of gender-related laws.
- Build community awareness to reduce patriarchal resistance and stigma.
- Encourage intersectional approaches addressing caste, class, and regional differences.

Value Addition

Keywords : Women empowerment, Gender equality, Gender equity, Patriarchy, Feminism, Social reform, Political representation, Economic independence, Gender-based violence, Social mobility, Education access, Intersectionality, Leadership promotion, Legal rights, Women's movements, Feminisation of agriculture, Digital violence, Gender justice, Social transformation, Grassroots activism

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss the role of women's organizations in enhancing women's economic empowerment in India.
2. How have women's organizations influenced legislative reforms related to women's rights?
3. Examine the contribution of grassroots women's movements in addressing rural women's issues.
4. Comment on the impact of national-level women's organizations in shaping public discourse on gender equality.
5. Analyse the role of women's organizations in combating social evils like dowry and female foeticide.

Acronyms

Role of Women in Indian Society

"LEAD PROSPER" (to show dynamic, active roles)

- L — Leadership in politics & panchayats
- E — Education sector contributions (teachers, grassroots educators)
- A — Agriculture and rural economy backbone
- D — Defense, sports, science breakthroughs
- P — Public service and administration
- R — Reproductive and unpaid care work
- — Organizing self-help groups and community initiatives
- S — Social reformers and activists
- P — Private sector and entrepreneurship
- E — Environmental stewardship roles
- R — Rising representation in media & arts

Issues and Challenges Faced by Women

"BIG BADS GAP" (emphasizes multiple barriers)

- B — Bias and stereotypes
- I — Inequality in pay and access
- G — Gender-based violence
- B — Burden of unpaid work
- A — Access to health and education gaps
- D — Discriminatory inheritance and property rights
- S — Social exclusion in leadership
- G — Glass ceiling effects
- A — Atrocities and crimes (honor killings, acid attacks)
- P — Patriarchy reinforced through customs

Role of Women's Organizations

"FEMINIST AID"

- F — Fighting violence and providing shelters
- E — Empowerment through skill training
- M — Mobilizing grassroots movements
- I — Influencing policy and law
- N — Networking and building solidarity
- I — Informing and educating masses
- S — Supporting economic independence
- T — Transforming mindsets
- A — Advocacy at national & international forums
- I — Intervening in crisis (legal, financial aid)
- D — Driving campaigns (dowry, child

marriage, trafficking)

Readymade templates on common themes :-

Challenges of women empowerment

Heading	Subheadings	Explanation
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Under representation• Sarpanch pati• Legislation	
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Glass ceiling• Gender pay gap• Feminisation of poverty• Pink collar jobs	
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Patriarchal norms• Family structures• Marriage, kinship	
Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low representation in STEM• female foeticide	

UPSC Previous Year Questions

Question	Nature of Question	Core Demand
What is the concept of a 'demographic winter'? Is the world moving towards such a situation? Elaborate. (2024)	Conceptual + Analytical	Define demographic winter; elaborate on global trends indicating movement towards it.
Discuss the main objectives of Population Education and point out the measures to achieve them in India in detail. (2021)	Descriptive + Suggestive	State objectives of population education and suggest detailed measures for India.
Critically examine whether growing population is the cause of poverty OR poverty is the main cause of population increase in India. (2015)	Critical Examination	Critically examine relationship between poverty and population growth in India.
Discuss the changes in the trends of labour migration within and outside India in the last four decades. (2015)	Discussion + Trend Analysis	Discuss changing trends in internal and external labour migration in last 40 years.
Critically examine the effects of globalization on the aged population in India. (2013)	Critical Examination	Examine how globalization affects elderly population in India.

Introduction

India's vast and diverse population — now the largest in the world — is both its greatest asset and one of its biggest challenges. A youthful demographic offers immense potential for economic growth, yet rapid population pressures strain resources, deepen inequalities, and stress health, education, and environmental systems. Balancing these opportunities and challenges is key to ensuring sustainable and inclusive national development.

India's Population Statistics (as per United Nations Population Fund Data)

- **India's Population Overview**
 - **Total population:** Approximately **1.46 billion**, making India the most populous country in the world.
 - **Share of world population:** Around **17.8%**.
 - **Annual growth rate:** ~0.89% per year.
- **Demographic Breakdown**
 - **Sex ratio:** Around **106 males per 100 females** (roughly 754 million males and 709 million females).
 - **Median age:** About **29 years**.
 - **Age structure:**
 - Ages **0-14:** ~24-25%
 - Ages **15-64:** ~65-68% (working-age population)
 - Ages **65+:** ~5-7%
- **Urbanization:** About **37%** of the population lives in urban areas (~543 million people); ~63% live in rural areas.
- **Population density:** Approximately **492 persons per square km**.
- **Vital Indicators**
 - **Total Fertility Rate (TFR):** Around **1.9 children per woman**, which is below the replacement level of 2.1.
 - **Life expectancy at birth:**
 - Overall: ~72 years
 - Male: ~70.5 years
 - Female: ~73.6 years

Salient Features of India's Population

- **Second largest population in the world:** India has around 1.4 billion people (2023

estimate), recently surpassing China as the most populous country.

- **High population growth but declining rate:** Growth rate has slowed from over 2% in the 1970s to about 1% currently, reflecting progress in fertility reduction.
- **Demographic diversity:** Marked variations in growth rates, fertility, mortality, and sex ratio across states. **Example:** Bihar has a high fertility rate (~3.0), while Kerala and Tamil Nadu have low rates (~1.6-1.7).
- **Young age structure (Demographic dividend):** Median age is around 28 years; over 60% of the population is in the working-age group (15-59 years), offering economic potential.
- **Uneven spatial distribution:** High density in Indo-Gangetic plains (e.g., Uttar Pradesh, Bihar) and coastal regions; sparse in hilly and desert areas like Ladakh and Rajasthan's Thar region.
- **Rural-urban divide:** Majority (~65%) still live in rural areas, but urbanization is steadily rising (34% urban population as per Census 2011).
- **Low sex ratio:** Overall sex ratio is about 1020 females per 1000 males (as per NFHS-5), but child sex ratio remains skewed in several states due to son preference.
- **Diverse ethnic and linguistic composition:** Over 2000 ethnic groups and 22 scheduled languages, reflecting a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual society.
- **Religious composition:** Predominantly Hindu (around 79.8%), followed by Muslims (~14.2%), Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and others (Census 2011).
- **High dependency ratio in certain regions:** States with higher fertility (e.g., Uttar Pradesh, Bihar) have larger young dependent populations, while states with aging trends (e.g., Kerala) face rising elderly dependency.
- **Increasing life expectancy:** Improved healthcare has raised life expectancy to about 70 years (2023), though significant inter-state and rural-urban disparities persist.
- **Migration trends:** Significant internal migration from rural to urban areas and from poorer states to industrial hubs for

employment (e.g., Bihar to Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh to Delhi).

Various Factors for Growth of Population in India

● Socio-cultural factors

- **Early marriage and universal marriage system** : In many parts of India, marriage happens at an early age, especially among women, which prolongs the reproductive span and leads to higher fertility. Although the legal age for marriage is 18 for women and 21 for men, child marriage still exists in several regions due to traditional practices and lack of enforcement.
- **Preference for male children** : A strong son preference encourages couples to continue having children until a desired number of sons are born. Sons are seen as future breadwinners, carriers of family lineage, and support in old age, leading to higher fertility rates.
- **Religious and cultural beliefs** : Certain religious and social norms discourage the use of contraceptives or promote large families as a sign of prosperity and divine blessing. Some communities view large families as a source of social security.
- **Extended family norms and social pressure** : Families and communities often exert pressure on couples to have more children, especially sons, to maintain family status and labor force in agriculture-based societies.

● Economic factors

- **Children as economic assets** : In agrarian and informal economies, children contribute to family income from a young age through work in fields, small trades, or domestic work. This economic utility encourages higher fertility.
- **Lack of social security** : In absence of comprehensive social security systems, parents see children—particularly sons—as a source of support in their old age.
- **Poverty and insecurity** : Poor families often view large families as a survival strategy to ensure that at least some children will survive and support them later. High infant and child mortality rates historically reinforced this mindset.

● Educational factors

- **Low female education levels** : Women's education is strongly correlated with lower fertility rates. In India, regions with low female literacy and educational attainment have higher fertility. Educated women tend to marry later, have fewer children, and adopt modern family planning methods.
- **Limited female workforce participation** : When women are primarily engaged in unpaid domestic work and have limited economic independence, fertility tends to be higher. Employment delays marriage and first childbirth and empowers women to make reproductive choices.

● Health and demographic factors

- **Decline in mortality without proportional fertility decline** : Due to improvements in medical facilities, vaccination, and disease control, mortality rates have decreased significantly. However, fertility rates have not declined at the same pace, resulting in high natural growth.
- **Improved child survival** : As more children survive infancy and early childhood, families who previously would have more children as a hedge against child mortality continue to have larger families out of habit and cultural inertia.

● Accessibility and awareness factors

- **Limited access to family planning services** : In many rural and remote areas, there is inadequate availability of contraceptives, limited access to reproductive health services, and lack of trained health personnel.
- **Lack of awareness and myths about contraception** : Misinformation about side effects, religious taboos, and social stigma attached to contraceptive use discourage people from adopting family planning measures.

● Policy and governance factors

- **Weak implementation of population control policies** : While India has had family planning policies since the 1950s, their uneven implementation and lack of follow-up have reduced their impact, particularly in certain high-fertility states.

- **Inadequate incentives for small families :** Socio-economic incentives for small family norms are either insufficient or poorly communicated, failing to motivate behavior change.

- **Migration and urbanization dynamics**

- **Rural to urban migration and slum growth :** High fertility rates persist among migrant populations in urban slums due to lack of education, poor living conditions, and minimal health services.
- **Cultural continuity in urban areas :** Migrant families often continue rural reproductive norms in cities, sustaining high fertility even in urban contexts.

Factors responsible for uneven Distribution of Population in India

- **Physical factors**

- **Relief and topography**
 - Plains and lowlands (e.g., Indo-Gangetic plains) support high population density due to flat land, fertile soil, and ease of construction and transport.
 - Mountainous and hilly areas (e.g., Himalayas, Western Ghats, Northeast) have sparse population because of steep slopes, thin soil cover, and harsh climate.
- **Climate**
 - Moderate and pleasant climate attracts dense settlements (e.g., coastal plains of Kerala, coastal Maharashtra).
 - Extremely hot, cold, or arid regions discourage habitation (e.g., Thar Desert, Ladakh).
- **Soil fertility**
 - Fertile alluvial soils in river valleys (Ganga, Brahmaputra, Godavari) support intensive agriculture, leading to high density.
 - Infertile soils in deserts, rocky plateaus, and mountainous regions discourage agriculture and thus settlement.
- **Water availability**
 - Regions with perennial rivers (Punjab, Haryana) and good groundwater recharge support dense populations.
 - Arid and semi-arid areas with scarce water resources (Rajasthan, interior

Deccan) have sparse populations.

- **Economic factors**

- **Agricultural development :** Areas supporting multiple cropping, irrigation facilities, and modern agricultural practices (e.g., Punjab, Uttar Pradesh) have dense populations.
- **Industrialization and job opportunities :** Industrial and mining belts (e.g., Mumbai-Pune belt, Chotanagpur plateau, Gujarat industrial areas) attract migrants and have higher densities.
- **Urbanization :** Cities with economic opportunities and infrastructure (e.g., Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru) witness heavy population concentration.
- **Transport and trade facilities :** Areas with good connectivity, ports, and trade hubs (e.g., Kolkata, Chennai) attract people for economic activities.

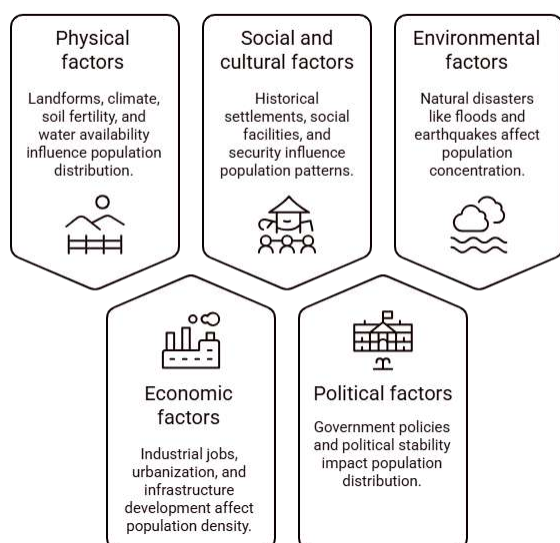
- **Social and historical factors**

- **Historical settlement patterns :** Regions with ancient civilization centers (e.g., Varanasi, Patna, Delhi) have been population centers for centuries.
- **Migration trends :** Inter-state and intra-state migration due to economic pull factors (jobs, education) or push factors (poverty, lack of employment) shapes population density.
- **Social infrastructure :** Areas with better schools, healthcare, and civic amenities encourage higher settlement (e.g., urban centers in southern and western India).

- **Political and policy factors**

- **Security and stability :** Border and conflict-prone areas (e.g., parts of Jammu & Kashmir, Northeast) see lower densities due to security concerns.
- **Government policies and land reforms :** Government initiatives promoting settlement (e.g., canal colonies in Punjab during British rule) have historically affected regional densities.

Population distribution factors



Demographic Dividend

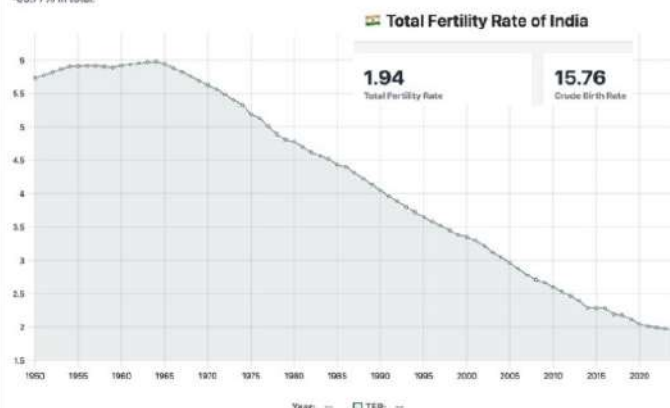
- **Definition:** Demographic dividend refers to the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a country's age structure, mainly when the working-age population (15–64 years) is larger than the dependent (young and elderly) population.

Features of India's Demographic Dividend

- **Large working-age population:** India has about **68%** of its population in the working-age group (15–64 years) as per recent estimates (2023).
 - **Median age:** Approximately **29 years**, much lower than China (around 39) and Western countries (above 40).
- **Declining fertility rate:** A new UN demographic report, which adds that the country's total fertility rate (TFR) has declined to 1.9, falling below the replacement level of 2.1

Historic Total Fertility Rate of India (1950–2024)

India has seen a decrease of the population fertility rate since the 1950's. From 5.7316 to 1.9622 births per woman, a decrease of -65.77% in total.



Regional variations:

- Youth bulge is stronger in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh.
- Southern states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu are moving toward aging populations.
- **Potential economic window:** The demographic window of opportunity is expected to last until **2055**, offering a few decades to harness this advantage.

Opportunities from Demographic Dividend

- **Higher economic growth potential:** A larger workforce can increase productivity, savings, and investment, boosting GDP growth if gainfully employed.
- **Rise in savings and investment:** With fewer dependents, families can save more, leading to higher capital formation and economic expansion.
- **Innovation and entrepreneurship:** Young populations tend to be more dynamic and innovative, fostering start-ups and new industries.
- **Strengthening social security systems:** Higher worker-to-retiree ratio can support social welfare schemes and reduce fiscal burden.
- **Global labor market advantage:** India can supply skilled labor to aging economies like Japan, Europe, and North America.

Challenges in Reaping the Dividend

- **Unemployment and underemployment:** India's unemployment rate among youth (15–29 years) is high (~18%, PLFS data), risking a "demographic disaster" instead of a dividend.
- **Skill mismatch and low employability:** According to India Skills Report 2023, only about **50%** of graduates are considered employable
- **Poor quality of education and health:** Inadequate public health, malnutrition (e.g., 35% stunting in children as per NFHS-5), and low learning outcomes limit productivity.
- **Gender disparities in labor force participation:** Female labor force participation remains low (~20–25%), restricting full utilization of human capital.
- **Regional imbalances:** Northern states have the highest youth share but weaker social infrastructure and job markets.

Way Forward

- **Invest in human capital:** Improve education quality, vocational training, and lifelong learning to match market needs.
- **Generate sufficient and quality jobs:** Focus on labor-intensive sectors (manufacturing, agro-processing), MSMEs, and green jobs.
- **Promote women's participation:** Address safety, workplace biases, and provide support for work-life balance to raise female workforce numbers.
- **Strengthen health and nutrition:** Ensure universal access to healthcare and reduce malnutrition to improve workforce productivity.
- **Manage regional disparities:** Target backward states with special skill development and industrialization programs.

Issues Associated with Population of India

- **High absolute population size**
 - India's population is about **1.4 billion (2023)**, making it the largest in the world.
 - Even though the growth rate has declined to about **1%**, the absolute increase adds roughly 12-15 million people every year — equivalent to adding the entire population of a medium-sized country.
 - This sheer size puts tremendous strain on natural resources, energy, food supply, water availability, and social services.
 - **Example:** States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar face enormous challenges in delivering basic health and educational services due to large population bases.
- **Population density and resource strain**
 - The national average population density is **382 persons per sq km** (Census 2011), but states like Bihar (~1,106), West Bengal (~1,029), and Kerala (~860) far exceed this.
 - High densities exacerbate land fragmentation, reduce per capita land availability, and cause over-exploitation of groundwater and other resources.
 - Deforestation and encroachment on ecologically sensitive areas occur to accommodate housing and agriculture.
 - **Example:** Groundwater crisis in Punjab due to intensive farming and population pressure.

● Regional disparities

- Significant differences in growth rates and demographic profiles across states create complex governance challenges.
- Northern and eastern states (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh) still have high fertility rates (Bihar TFR ~3.0), resulting in young, growing populations.
- Southern states (Kerala, Tamil Nadu) are experiencing declining fertility and rising aging populations, increasing their dependency ratios.
- Such disparities complicate national policy uniformity in education, health, and welfare schemes.
- **Example:** While Bihar needs policies focused on maternal health and child education, Kerala requires policies to support elderly care.

● Unemployment and underemployment

- India's labor force growth outpaces job creation, causing high unemployment and disguised unemployment, especially in agriculture.
- Youth unemployment is particularly severe — ~18% (PLFS data), indicating under-utilization of demographic dividend.
- Informal sector dominance (~90% of workforce) leads to low wages, job insecurity, and absence of social protection.
- **Example:** Educated graduates in urban areas frequently forced into gig or informal jobs far below their qualifications.

● Pressure on health and education systems

- Rapid population growth overwhelms primary healthcare and educational facilities, especially in rural and peri-urban areas.
- Shortage of healthcare personnel, inadequate infrastructure, and low doctor-to-population ratio (~1:1,511 vs. WHO standard of 1:1,000).
- Schools face overcrowding, poor teacher-student ratios, and high dropout rates.
- **Example:** ASER reports highlight that nearly 50% of rural children in grade 5 cannot read basic texts meant for grade 2.

● Urbanization and slum proliferation

- India's urban population has increased to ~35%, but urban infrastructure development has lagged.
- Unplanned migration results in mushrooming of slums lacking sanitation, clean water, and health services.
- **Example:** In Delhi and Mumbai, 40–50% of the population lives in slums or informal settlements (Census 2011, updated urban surveys).
- **Environmental degradation**
 - Growing population demands lead to overuse of natural resources, deforestation, land degradation, and increasing carbon emissions.
 - Air and water pollution levels in major cities among the highest globally.
 - Waste management systems are overstretched, leading to hazardous living conditions.
 - **Example:** Air Quality Index (AQI) in Delhi often exceeds 400 in winter months, categorized as "severe."
- **Gender imbalances**
 - Continued son preference results in skewed child sex ratio (929 girls per 1,000 boys as per NFHS-5).
 - Adverse sex ratio leads to long-term social issues: increased violence against women, trafficking, and "bride shortage" in certain regions.
 - **Example:** States like Haryana and Punjab witness bride imports from poorer regions due to skewed local sex ratios.
- **Aging population in certain regions**
 - States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu are experiencing higher life expectancy and lower fertility rates, resulting in rising elderly populations.
 - Increased demand for geriatric care, social security, and specialized health services.
 - **Example:** Kerala's elderly (60+ years) constitute about 13% of its population, among the highest in India.
- **Food and nutritional insecurity**
 - High population growth and land degradation impact food production and distribution.
 - Malnutrition remains a major concern — ~35% of children under 5 are stunted, ~19% wasted (NFHS-5).
 - Double burden of malnutrition: coexistence of undernutrition and rising obesity in urban areas.
 - **Example:** India ranked 107th out of 121 countries on the Global Hunger Index 2022.
- **Migration-related stresses**
 - Internal migration causes labor shortages in rural areas and overburdened urban labor markets.
 - Migrants often lack housing, social security, and access to healthcare in destination cities.
 - **Example:** COVID-19 lockdown exposed the vulnerability of 40–50 million migrant workers forced to return to villages without support.

Aging Population in India

● Overview

- India is often perceived as a young country, but it is also experiencing a **gradual demographic transition toward aging**.
- As per **Census 2011**, people aged **60 years and above comprised 8.6%** of the total population (around 104 million).
- This is projected to rise to **19% by 2050**, crossing 300 million (UN World Population Prospects, 2022).

● Causes of Aging Population

- **Declining fertility rate:** A new UN demographic report, which adds that the country's total fertility rate (TFR) has declined to 1.9, falling below the replacement level of 2.1. In some states it's going far below replacement level in many states (e.g., Kerala, Tamil Nadu).
- **Increased life expectancy:** Life expectancy has improved significantly — from around 50 years in the 1970s to about **70 years today**, due to better healthcare and nutrition.
- **Improved healthcare services:** Decline in communicable diseases and better maternal and child health outcomes contribute to more people surviving into old age.

- **Regional Patterns**

- Southern states like **Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh**, and some northeastern states already show advanced aging trends.
- Kerala has around **13% elderly population**, the highest among Indian states, due to early demographic transition and social development.

- **Socio-Economic Implications**

- **Increased dependency ratio:** Fewer working-age individuals supporting more elderly dependents can strain household and national economies. Example: Kerala facing shortage of young labor force, requiring migrant workers from other states.
- **Pressure on healthcare infrastructure:** Rise in chronic diseases (diabetes, hypertension, arthritis) among the elderly requires specialized, long-term, and expensive care.
- **Pension and social security burden:** Limited formal pension coverage in India (~10–12% of workforce), creating economic vulnerability for most elderly, especially in the informal sector.
- **Elderly poverty and neglect:** High poverty among elderly women due to lower lifetime earnings and widowhood. Many elders face social isolation and abuse.
- **Changing family structures:** Decline of joint families and rise of nuclear families reduce traditional elder care support systems. Example: Increase in old age homes and elder care facilities in urban India.
- **Urban-rural disparities:** Rural elderly more dependent on family support and more vulnerable due to lack of healthcare facilities and pensions

- **Government Initiatives**

- **National Policy on Older Persons (1999):** Framework for welfare, health care, and financial security.
- **Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP):** Supports NGOs to run old age homes, day care centers, and mobile medicare units.
- **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS):** Provides pension to

elderly below poverty line.

- **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007:** Legal obligation for children/relatives to maintain senior citizens and provision for speedy redressal.
- **National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE):** Focused on providing dedicated healthcare facilities to senior citizens.

- **Challenges**

- Inadequate coverage and low pension amounts, especially for informal workers.
- Poor accessibility and affordability of geriatric healthcare.
- Insufficient trained workforce in geriatric care and counseling.
- Weak legal enforcement to protect elderly from abuse and neglect.
- Social stigma against institutional elder care in traditional societies.

- **Way Forward**

- Strengthen social security systems, including universal or contributory pension schemes.
- Expand geriatric healthcare infrastructure and train professionals in elder care.
- Promote community-based elder support systems and encourage intergenerational bonding.
- Strengthen legal frameworks and community vigilance to prevent elder abuse.
- Leverage technology (e.g., telemedicine, mobile healthcare units) to improve rural elder care.

'Demographic Winter': Concept and Global Trends

What is 'Demographic Winter'?

- **Definition:** 'Demographic Winter' refers to a situation where a country or region experiences **sustained low birth rates and declining population**, leading to an aging population, shrinking workforce, and potential economic stagnation.
- The term highlights fears of societal and economic collapse due to severe demographic decline.

Indicators of Demographic Winter

- **Total Fertility Rate (TFR) falling below replacement level (2.1)** for a prolonged period.
- **Rising median age** and high proportion of elderly population.
- **Declining youth population**, resulting in labor shortages and increasing dependency ratios.
- **Negative or stagnant population growth rates.**

Global Trends Suggesting Movement Toward Demographic Winter

- **Europe:** Many European nations have TFR well below replacement level.
 - Italy (~1.2), Spain (~1.3), Germany (~1.5).
 - Populations either shrinking or growing only due to immigration.
- **East Asia:** Countries like Japan (TFR ~1.3), South Korea (~0.8 — world's lowest), and China (~1.2) are facing rapidly aging populations and workforce declines.
 - *Example:* Japan's population peaked in 2010 and has been declining since.
- **Russia and Eastern Europe:** Persistent low birth rates and emigration have led to population declines.
 - *Example:* Russia's population dropped from ~148 million in 1991 to ~143 million today.
- **United States:** Though historically above replacement, recent trends show TFR falling to around 1.7, driven by economic uncertainty and lifestyle changes.

Are We Moving Towards a Global Demographic Winter?

- **Emerging trends in advanced economies suggest yes:** Sustained low fertility, increasing elderly populations, and shrinking labor forces point toward demographic contraction.
- **However, the global picture is mixed:**
 - South Asia (excluding China), Sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of the Middle East continue to have high fertility rates and young populations.
 - *Example:* Niger's TFR ~6.7, Nigeria ~5.2, India ~2.0 but with large youth base.
- **India's case:** While India's TFR has fallen to

2.0 (NFHS-5), it still has a large youthful base and is expected to maintain positive population momentum until around 2055.

- **Policy adjustments:** Countries experiencing "demographic winter" are introducing pronatalist policies (e.g., financial incentives in Hungary, parental support in South Korea) and promoting immigration to stabilize workforce size.

Challenges Associated with Demographic Winter

- **Economic stagnation:** Shrinking working-age population reduces economic productivity and innovation capacity.
- **Increased dependency ratio:** Larger elderly populations require more healthcare and social support, straining public finances.
- **Pressure on pension and welfare systems:** Fewer contributors supporting more retirees leads to fiscal stress.
- **Social changes:** Declining youth population can weaken societal dynamism and intergenerational support systems.

Population Education

- **Definition**
 - Population education refers to an **educational program designed to create awareness and develop understanding about population dynamics**, their impacts on social, economic, and environmental aspects, and promote responsible behavior regarding family size and resource use.
 - UNESCO defines it as "an educational process which helps individuals understand the nature of population issues and enables them to act accordingly."
- **Objectives**
 - To provide factual knowledge about population trends, distribution, and characteristics.
 - To explain the relationship between population growth and development, resource depletion, and environmental degradation.
 - To promote attitudes and practices that help achieve small family norms and gender equality.

- To develop informed decision-making skills regarding reproductive health, family planning, and responsible parenthood.
- To reduce myths and misconceptions around fertility, contraception, and reproductive health.
- **Need for Population Education in India**
 - **High population pressure:** With ~1.4 billion people, India faces immense pressure on land, water, food, and public services.
 - **Early marriage and high fertility rates:** In certain states (e.g., Bihar, Uttar Pradesh), early marriages contribute to higher fertility and maternal health issues.
 - **Gender inequality:** Low status of women in decision-making related to family planning and reproductive rights.
 - **High dropout rates and child labor:** Large families often result in resource constraints, leading to child labor and reduced educational attainment.
 - **Health and nutrition issues:** Malnutrition, maternal mortality, and high infant mortality correlate strongly with high fertility and lack of reproductive awareness.
 - **Environmental stress:** Overpopulation exacerbates resource depletion, waste generation, and pollution, threatening sustainability.
- **Key Components of Population Education**
 - **Demographic concepts:** Understanding birth rate, death rate, fertility rate, migration, and population distribution.
 - **Family planning and reproductive health:** Awareness of contraceptive methods, benefits of birth spacing, and safe motherhood practices.
 - **Small family norm promotion:** Emphasizing economic, social, and health benefits of smaller families.
 - **Gender sensitivity :** Promoting women's rights in reproductive decision-making and highlighting the value of the girl child.
 - **Responsible resource use:** Linking population with environmental conservation and sustainable living.
- **Methods and Approaches**
 - **Integration into school curricula:** Population education introduced in social

science and science textbooks from middle school onwards.

- **Community outreach programs:** Using local leaders, NGOs, ASHA workers, and self-help groups to spread messages.
- **Mass media campaigns:** Radio, TV, and digital platforms used to disseminate family planning and small family norm messages.
 - **Example:** "Hum Do Hamare Do" slogan to promote two-child norm.
- **Workshops and interactive sessions:** Youth-focused sessions to encourage informed attitudes toward marriage and reproduction.
- **Government and Policy Initiatives**
 - **Population Education Project (PEP):** Launched in 1980 under NCERT, aimed at integrating population education into school education.
 - **National Population Policy, 2000:** Emphasizes achieving replacement-level fertility and promoting educational interventions.
 - **Family Welfare Programme:** Largest government-supported program to promote contraceptive use and reproductive health.
 - **Mission Parivar Vikas (2017):** Targeted at high-fertility districts to accelerate access to family planning services and education.

Value Addition

Keywords : Population growth, Demographic dividend, Aging population, Youth bulge, Fertility rate, Dependency ratio, Population density, Urbanization, Migration, Resource strain, Regional disparities, Gender imbalance, Environmental degradation, Health infrastructure, Unemployment, Underemployment, Informal sector, Food insecurity, Malnutrition, Population education, Family planning, Small family norm, Social security, Sustainable development

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Critically examine whether rapid population growth in India is a driver of poverty or a result of it.

2. Discuss the objectives of population education and suggest measures for its effective implementation in India.
3. Analyse the social and economic implications of a skewed sex ratio in Indian states.
4. How has urban migration influenced the demographic profile and infrastructure challenges of Tier-2 Indian cities?
5. Examine the impact of aging population on Indian society and the economy.

Acronyms

1. Population Issues and Challenges

"PRESS LOAD"

- **P** — Pressure on resources (land, water, food, housing)
- **R** — Rising unemployment and underemployment
- **E** — Environmental degradation
- **S** — Social infrastructure strain (healthcare, education)
- **S** — Slum proliferation and urban issues
- **L** — Low human development indicators in some states
- **O** — Overcrowding in cities, transport, services
- **A** — Aging population, future health and pension challenges
- **D** — Demographic imbalance (e.g., skewed sex ratio, regional migration)

2. Government Measures and Policies

"STEPS"

- **S** — Schemes for family planning and reproductive health (Mission Parivar Vikas, ASHA, Janani Suraksha)
- **T** — Targeted incentives and awareness campaigns
- **E** — Empowering women (education, delay in marriage, economic opportunities)
- **P** — Population stabilization policies (National Population Policy 2000)
- **S** — Strengthening health and social infrastructure

UPSC Previous Year Questions

Question	Nature of Question	Core Demand
What is regional disparity? How does it differ from diversity? How serious is the issue of regional disparity in India? (2024)	Conceptual + Analytical	Define regional disparity and diversity; analyze seriousness of regional disparity in India.
In dealing with socio-economic issues of development, what kind of collaboration between government, NGOs and private sector would be most productive? (2024)	Analytical + Suggestive	Discuss productive models of collaboration for development.
Why did human development fail to keep pace with economic development in India? (2023)	Analytical + Causal	Analyze reasons for lag of human development behind economic growth in India.
COVID-19 pandemic accelerated class inequalities and poverty in India. Comment. (2020)	Comment + Analytical	Comment on how COVID-19 worsened inequalities and poverty.
'Despite the implementation of various programmes for the eradication of poverty by the government in India, poverty is still existing'. Explain by giving reasons. (2018)	Explanatory + Analytical	Explain reasons for persistence of poverty despite programmes.
"An essential condition to eradicate poverty is to liberate the poor from the process of deprivation." Substantiate this statement with suitable examples. (2016)	Substantiation + Illustrative	Substantiate link between deprivation and poverty eradication with examples.

Introduction

Poverty remains one of India's most persistent and complex challenges, affecting millions across rural and urban areas. It not only reflects economic deprivation but also embodies social exclusion, lack of access to basic services, and multidimensional vulnerabilities. Addressing poverty is central to ensuring inclusive and sustainable development, and remains a critical focus of policy and planning in India.

Concept and Measurement of Poverty

Definitions

- **Absolute Poverty:**
 - Refers to a condition where individuals lack basic necessities of life such as adequate food, clothing, shelter, and healthcare.
 - Measured using a fixed income or consumption threshold, below which a person is considered poor.
 - Example: World Bank defines extreme poverty as living on less than **\$2.15 per day (PPP)**.
- **Relative Poverty:**
 - Defines poverty in relation to the overall distribution of income or consumption in a society.
 - Focuses on inequality and social exclusion rather than minimum subsistence.
 - Example: In developed countries, people earning less than 50% of median income may be classified as poor.

Measurement Methods

- **Poverty Line Approach**
 - **Consumption or income threshold** below which a person is considered poor.
 - Indian poverty lines traditionally based on minimum caloric intake requirements (2,400 kcal in rural areas, 2,100 kcal in urban areas).
- **Tendulkar Committee (2009)**
 - Shifted from calorie-based norm to a **mixed reference** including consumption of health, education, and other non-food essentials.
 - Recommended using **uniform poverty line baskets** for rural and urban areas, adjusting for price differences.
 - Fixed poverty line (2004-05 prices):

- ₹27.2 per capita per day in rural areas.
 - ₹33.3 per capita per day in urban areas.
- Estimated poverty rate for 2011–12: **21.9%**.
- **Rangarajan Committee (2014)**
 - Adopted higher expenditure norms to account for basic needs more realistically.
 - Fixed poverty line (2011–12 prices):
 - ₹32 in rural areas.
 - ₹47 in urban areas.
 - Estimated poverty rate for 2011–12: **29.5%**.
 - Included broader components like clothing, rent, conveyance, education, and health.
- **Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)**
 - Introduced by UNDP and Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI).
 - Measures poverty based on **deprivations across multiple dimensions**, rather than just income or consumption.
 - **Three main dimensions:**
 - Health (nutrition, child mortality).
 - Education (years of schooling, school attendance).
 - Standard of living (access to electricity, sanitation, drinking water, housing, assets, cooking fuel).
- **India's MPI trends:**
 - As per Global MPI 2023, about **16.4%** of Indians were multidimensionally poor (down from ~55% in 2005–06).
 - Significant progress in states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

Recent Data and Trends

- **Declining poverty rates:**
 - According to NITI Aayog's National Multidimensional Poverty Index (2023 update), Multidimensional poverty in India was found to have declined from 29.17% in 2013-14 to 11.28% in 2022-23
 - Approximately **24.82 crore people** moved out of multidimensional poverty during this period.
- **Rural-urban divide persists:** Poverty remains higher in rural areas (~19.3%) than urban areas (~5.3%).
- **Regional disparities:**
 - Highest poverty levels observed in Bihar (33.8%), Jharkhand (28.8%), and Uttar

- Pradesh (22.9%).
- Southern and western states show lower poverty incidence.
- **Covid-19 impact:** Pandemic disrupted poverty reduction progress globally and in India, pushing vulnerable populations back into poverty temporarily.

Types and Dimensions of Poverty

● Rural vs. Urban Poverty

- **Rural Poverty:**
 - Higher incidence due to dependence on agriculture, seasonal employment, and vulnerability to climate shocks.
 - Poor access to basic services such as healthcare, quality education, and infrastructure.
 - **Example:** According to NITI Aayog's MPI 2023, rural poverty was **19.3%**, significantly higher than urban areas.
- **Urban Poverty:**
 - Associated with informal sector employment, lack of secure housing, and slum living conditions.
 - Issues include overcrowding, poor sanitation, and limited social security.
 - **Example:** Large slum populations in cities like Mumbai (Dharavi), Delhi, and Kolkata.

● Chronic vs. Transient Poverty

- **Chronic Poverty:**
 - Persistent poverty over a long period or across generations.
 - Linked to structural factors such as caste discrimination, landlessness, and lack of education.
 - **Example:** Landless Dalit laborers in rural Bihar trapped in intergenerational poverty cycles.
- **Transient Poverty:**
 - Temporary poverty due to sudden shocks such as illness, job loss, natural disasters, or pandemics.
 - People may fluctuate above and below the poverty line depending on circumstances.
 - **Example:** Many urban daily-wage workers fell into transient poverty during the COVID-19 lockdown.

● Regional, Caste, and Gender Dimensions

- **Regional Dimensions:**
 - Poverty is concentrated in certain "poverty hotspots" or BIMARU states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh).
 - Southern and western states (e.g., Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat) show lower poverty rates due to better development indicators.
- **Caste Dimensions:**
 - Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) face higher poverty due to historical exclusion and limited access to assets.
 - **Example:** Poverty rate among STs is about **45.9%** compared to **25%** for the general category (as per various socio-economic surveys).
- **Gender Dimensions:**
 - "Feminization of poverty" — women face higher poverty risk due to wage gaps, asset ownership inequality, and unpaid care burdens.
 - Widows, single women, and elderly women are particularly vulnerable.
 - **Example:** Female-headed households often experience lower income security and access to resources.
- **Multidimensional Deprivation :** Poverty is not merely about income but involves multiple, intersecting deprivations affecting quality of life.
 - **Education Deprivation**
 - Low literacy rates, school dropout, and poor learning outcomes hinder human capital formation.
 - **Example:** ASER reports show that over 50% of rural children in grade 5 cannot read grade 2 level texts.
 - **Health Deprivation**
 - Limited access to healthcare, high malnutrition rates, and poor maternal and child health outcomes.
 - **Example:** NFHS-5 reports **35%** of children under five as stunted and **19%** as wasted.
 - **Living Standards Deprivation**
 - Inadequate housing, unsafe drinking water, lack of sanitation, electricity, and clean cooking fuel.

- **Example:** Around **50%** of rural households lack access to clean cooking fuel (NFHS-5).

Causes of Poverty in India

● Historical and Structural Inequalities

- Legacy of **colonial exploitation** led to deindustrialization, destruction of handicrafts, and stagnation in agriculture.
- Zamindari and landlord systems created land concentration and widespread landlessness among peasants.
- Post-independence, unequal access to education, health, and opportunities perpetuated structural inequalities.
- **Example:** Historical marginalization of Dalits and Adivasis continues to limit their socio-economic mobility.

● Unemployment and Underemployment

- High incidence of **disguised unemployment** in agriculture, where more workers are engaged than necessary, leading to low productivity and incomes.
- Lack of sufficient non-farm job opportunities for rural youth; informal sector jobs in urban areas often low-paid and insecure.
- Rising educated youth unemployment (~18%, PLFS data), reflecting skill mismatch and slow formal job creation.
- **Example:** Rural workers migrating to cities often end up in casual, daily wage jobs without security.

● Low Asset Ownership and Landlessness

- Limited or no access to productive assets like land, livestock, or capital restricts income-generating capacity
- Land reforms have been uneven and poorly implemented, especially in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
- High dependence on tenant farming and marginal holdings traps rural families in poverty cycles.
- **Example:** Over **56% of rural households** do not own any land (NSSO data), forcing them into low-wage labor.

● Regional Imbalance and Development Disparities

- Economic growth has been concentrated in certain states and urban centers, leading to stark disparities.
- BIMARU states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh) lag in infrastructure, industrialization, and human development indicators.
- Inadequate investment in social and physical infrastructure perpetuates backwardness.
- **Example:** Per capita income in Bihar is about **one-third** of states like Maharashtra or Gujarat.

● Social Exclusion (Caste, Tribe, Gender)

- **Caste-based discrimination** restricts access to resources, education, and employment for SCs and STs.
- Tribal populations face displacement due to development projects and resource extraction, leading to loss of traditional livelihoods.
- Gender inequality limits women's access to education, inheritance, property, and decent employment, resulting in feminization of poverty.
- **Example:** SCs and STs continue to have higher poverty rates (ST poverty ~46%) and lower human development outcomes.
- **Example:** Women own only **about 13% of operational land holdings** in India (Agricultural Census 2015-16).

Developmental Issues Related to Poverty

● Malnutrition and Hunger

- Poverty limits access to adequate and nutritious food, leading to high levels of **chronic malnutrition and undernourishment**.
- NFHS-5 data:
 - **35.5%** of children under five are stunted (low height-for-age).
 - **19.3%** are wasted (low weight-for-height).
 - **57%** of women and **25%** of men are anemic.
- Hunger perpetuates intergenerational poverty by impairing physical and cognitive development in children, affecting future productivity.

- **Example:** In the 2024 Global Hunger Index (GHI), India's rank is 105th out of 127 countries, with a "serious" level of hunger indicated by a score of 27.3.
- **Lack of Quality Education and Skill Development**
 - Poor families often prioritize immediate income over children's education, resulting in high dropout rates, especially among girls and marginalized groups.
 - Inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and poor learning outcomes worsen the situation.
 - ASER 2022 report: Over **50%** of rural children in grade 5 cannot read a grade 2-level text.
 - Lack of vocational and market-relevant skills leads to low employability and underemployment, trapping people in informal, low-paying jobs.
- **Poor Healthcare Access**
 - Poverty-stricken households lack financial capacity for preventive or curative healthcare.
 - High out-of-pocket expenditures (~55% of total health spending) push families deeper into debt.
 - Shortages of healthcare facilities and professionals in rural and tribal areas aggravate exclusion.
 - **Example:** Many poor women lack access to institutional delivery and maternal health services, contributing to high maternal mortality.
- **Housing Shortages and Urban Slums**
 - Migration to cities due to rural poverty leads to expansion of informal settlements and slums lacking basic amenities.
 - About **24%** of urban households live in slums (Census 2011), with poor sanitation, overcrowding, and insecure tenure.
 - Lack of affordable housing exacerbates vulnerability to eviction, disease outbreaks, and disasters.
 - **Example:** Dharavi in Mumbai is Asia's largest slum, housing nearly 1 million people in extremely cramped conditions.
- **Water and Sanitation Challenges**
 - Poverty restricts access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation facilities,

increasing disease burden.

- NFHS-5 data:
 - Only **70%** of households have access to improved sanitation.
 - Around **43%** of rural households rely on unimproved or shared water sources.
- Women and girls often face greater hardships, including safety risks and time burdens due to water collection.
- **Digital Divide and Exclusion**
 - Poor households lack access to digital devices, internet connectivity, and digital literacy, widening gaps in education, health information, and economic opportunities.
 - Only **33%** of Indian women have access to mobile internet (GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report, 2022), highlighting gendered exclusion.
 - Limited digital access impedes access to online services like telemedicine, e-learning, and digital payments, further isolating the poor.
 - **Example:** During COVID-19, many children from poor families were excluded from online classes, exacerbating educational inequalities.

Relationship Between Poverty and Hunger in India

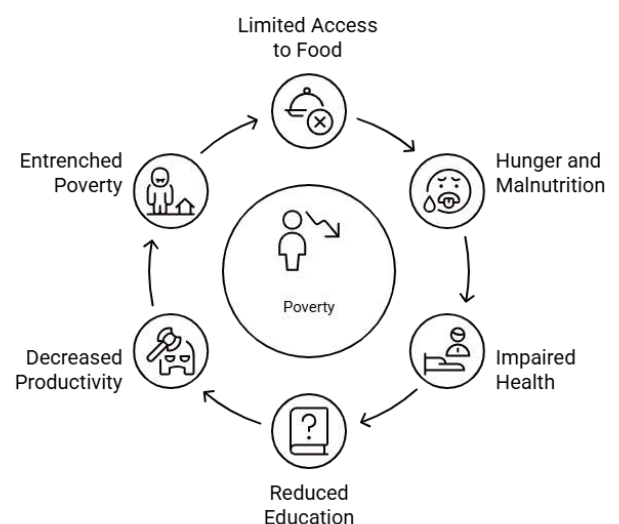
- Poverty and hunger in India are deeply intertwined, with poverty acting as a primary driver of hunger and food insecurity, while hunger perpetuates poverty through its impact on health, productivity, and economic potential. Below is a detailed analysis of their relationship :
- **Poverty as a Cause of Hunger**
 - **Limited Purchasing Power:** Poverty restricts access to adequate and nutritious food. The 2022-23 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey shows that the poorest 5% in rural areas consume only **1,564 kcal/day** (required: 2,172 kcal) and in urban areas **1,607 kcal/day** (required: 2,135 kcal). A 2023 NITI Aayog report indicates that **74.1%** of India's population cannot afford a healthy diet due to low income.
 - **Economic Inequality:** The top **10%** hold **77%** of national wealth, and the top **1%** own **73%** (Oxfam). This inequality limits food

access for the poor, exacerbating hunger. Rural consumer spending has declined by **10%** annually, and urban spending by **4%**, reducing access to quality food.

- **Unemployment and Low Wages:** Poverty often stems from unemployment or low-paying jobs, particularly in rural areas where **7.2%** of the population lives in extreme poverty (2022-23). This restricts households' ability to purchase sufficient food, leading to undernourishment (**13.7%** of the population, GHI 2024).
- **Social and Regional Disparities:** Marginalized groups (e.g., Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes) and regions prone to natural disasters (e.g., Assam, Bihar) face higher poverty rates, correlating with higher hunger levels. For instance, rural areas have higher multidimensional poverty (**11.3%**, MPI 2024), contributing to worse nutritional outcomes.
- **Hunger as a Contributor to Poverty**
 - **Health and Productivity Loss:** Hunger leads to malnutrition, which impairs physical and cognitive development. The 2024 GHI reports **18.7%** child wasting and **35.5%** child stunting, the highest globally. Malnourished children are less likely to complete education or secure well-paying jobs, perpetuating the poverty cycle.
 - **Intergenerational Poverty:** Malnutrition in mothers (e.g., **51.4%** of women aged 15-49 are anemic, NFHS-5) leads to low birth weights and health issues in children, limiting their future earning potential and trapping families in poverty.
 - **Reduced Economic Productivity:** Undernourishment (**189.2 million people**, FAO 2020) reduces workforce productivity, particularly in agriculture-dependent rural areas, where low energy intake hampers physical labor, further entrenching poverty.
- **Common Structural Factors**
 - **Inefficient Food Systems:** The Public Distribution System (PDS) suffers from leakages and exclusion errors, denying over **90 million eligible people** food entitlements. This disproportionately affects the poor, worsening hunger.

- **Agricultural Challenges:** Low agricultural productivity and **40% post-harvest losses** due to poor infrastructure limit food availability, impacting both poverty (through reduced income for farmers) and hunger (through reduced food supply).
- **Climate Vulnerability:** Climate change-induced events like droughts and floods disrupt agricultural output, affecting rural livelihoods and food access, particularly for the **5.3%** living below the \$3/day poverty line (2022-23).
- **Social Inequalities:** Caste, gender, and regional disparities exacerbate both poverty and hunger. For example, marginalized communities face barriers to education, employment, and food access, reinforcing the cycle.
- **Vicious Cycle**
 - Poverty limits access to nutritious food, leading to hunger and malnutrition, which impair health, education, and productivity, further entrenching poverty. For instance, **32%** of children under five are underweight (NFHS-5), reducing their future economic potential and perpetuating poverty across generations.

The Vicious Cycle of Poverty



Government Interventions to Address Poverty and Hunger in India

Poverty and hunger in India are closely interlinked, with poverty driving food insecurity and hunger perpetuating poverty through health and productivity losses. The Indian government has

implemented comprehensive programs to address both issues. Below are consolidated overview of key interventions, their impact, challenges.

1. Food Security and Subsidized Food Distribution

- **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:**
 - **Objective:** Provides subsidized food grains (rice at ₹3/kg, wheat at ₹2/kg, coarse grains at ₹1/kg) to **75%** of rural and **50%** of urban populations through the Public Distribution System (PDS).
 - **Impact:** Covers over **800 million people**, reducing undernourishment (**13.7%**, GHI 2024) and supporting the poorest 5% who consume only **1,564 kcal/day** (rural) and **1,607 kcal/day** (urban, 2022-23). Contributes to poverty reduction (**5.1%**, \$3/day, 2023-24).
 - **Challenges:** Leakages, corruption, and exclusion errors exclude over **90 million eligible beneficiaries**. Poor grain quality and irregular supply in remote areas.
- **One Nation, One Ration Card (ONORC):**
 - **Objective:** Enables migrant workers to access PDS benefits nationwide, addressing hunger among mobile, poverty-stricken populations.
 - **Impact:** Implemented in **32 states/UTs**, benefiting millions of migrants, particularly during economic disruptions like COVID-19.
 - **Challenges:** Technical glitches, incomplete portability, and low awareness among beneficiaries.
- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):**
 - **Objective:** Provides additional free food grains (5 kg/person/month) to NFSA beneficiaries during crises.
 - **Impact:** Supported over **80 crore people** (2020-23), mitigating hunger during economic shocks.
 - **Challenges:** Temporary nature and logistical issues in remote areas limit long-term impact.

2. Income Generation and Employment

- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):**

- **Objective:** Guarantees 100 days of wage employment per year to rural households for unskilled manual work, boosting income to address poverty and hunger.

- **Impact:** Provided employment to over **55 million households** in 2022-23, enhancing purchasing power in rural areas (**7.2%** in extreme poverty, 2022-23) and reducing food insecurity.

- **Challenges:** Delayed wage payments, limited work availability in some regions, and administrative inefficiencies.

- **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM):**

- **Objective:** Promotes self-employment and skill development through self-help groups (SHGs), particularly for women, to create sustainable livelihoods.

- **Impact:** Mobilized over **8 crore women** into SHGs, increasing household incomes and reducing multidimensional poverty (**11.3%**, MPI 2024).

- **Challenges:** Uneven implementation across states and limited market linkages for SHG products.

- **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM):**

- **Objective:** Provides skill training, microcredit, and employment opportunities to urban poor, including slum dwellers and street vendors.

- **Impact:** Supported over **10 lakh urban poor** with livelihoods, addressing urban poverty (urban spending decline of **4%** annually).

- **Challenges:** Rapid urbanization outpaces program coverage, leaving informal sector workers vulnerable.

3. Nutrition-Specific Interventions

- **Poshan Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission):**

- **Objective:** Reduces malnutrition, stunting (**35.5%**, GHI 2024), wasting (**18.7%**), and anemia (**51.4%** in women, NFHS-5) among children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers.

- **Impact:** Reached millions through Anganwadi centers, providing supplementary nutrition and health education, addressing health-related poverty and hunger drivers.
 - **Challenges:** Inadequate funding, uneven implementation, and lack of trained personnel.
 - **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS):**
 - **Objective:** Provides supplementary nutrition, health check-ups, and pre-school education to children under 6 and pregnant/lactating women.
 - **Impact:** Covers over **10 crore beneficiaries**, reducing child underweight rates (**32%**, NFHS-5) and supporting early childhood development.
 - **Challenges:** Poor infrastructure, irregular food supply, and staffing shortages in rural areas.
 - **Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDM):**
 - **Objective:** Provides free meals to school children to improve nutrition and school attendance, addressing hunger and education barriers.
 - **Impact:** Serves over **12 crore children** daily, reducing child wasting and boosting enrollment among the poor.
 - **Challenges:** Inconsistent meal quality, hygiene issues, and disruptions during school closures.
- 4. Agricultural and Food Supply Enhancement**
- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY):**
 - **Objective:** Improves irrigation and agricultural productivity to ensure food availability and reduce hunger.
 - **Impact:** Enhanced irrigation for over **20 lakh hectares**, supporting food grain production (**330 million tonnes**, 2022-23).
 - **Challenges:** Slow implementation and dependence on monsoons.
 - **National Food Security Mission (NFSM):**
 - **Objective:** Increases production of rice, wheat, pulses, and coarse cereals to improve food affordability for the poor.
 - **Impact:** Boosted pulse production by **20%** (2016-23), improving access to protein-rich foods.
 - **Challenges:** Post-harvest losses (**40%** for some crops) due to poor storage and infrastructure.
 - **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN):**
 - **Objective:** Provides ₹6,000 annually to small and marginal farmers to support agricultural households' food security and income.
 - **Impact:** Reached over **11 crore farmers**, enhancing food access and rural incomes.
 - **Challenges:** Excludes landless agricultural laborers, a highly food-insecure group.
- 5. Health and Sanitation for Nutrition and Poverty Reduction**
- **Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY):**
 - **Objective:** Provides up to ₹5 lakh per family annually for hospitalization to over 50 crore people, preventing health-related poverty and hunger.
 - **Impact:** Covered over **6 crore hospitalizations** by 2023, reducing out-of-pocket healthcare costs that exacerbate poverty.
 - **Challenges:** Limited outpatient care and inadequate rural healthcare infrastructure.
 - **National Health Mission (NHM):**
 - **Objective:** Improves maternal and child health, addressing poverty-linked malnutrition and anemia.
 - **Impact:** Reduced under-five mortality to **2.9%** (GHI 2024), supporting economic productivity.
 - **Challenges:** Shortages of healthcare workers and uneven access in remote areas.
 - **Swachh Bharat Mission:**
 - **Objective:** Ensures access to sanitation and clean water to reduce diseases that impair nutrition uptake and worsen poverty.
 - **Impact:** Achieved **100% open defecation-free status** in rural areas by

2019, improving nutrition absorption and health outcomes.

- **Challenges:** Maintenance of facilities and water scarcity in some regions.

6. Education and Skill Development

- **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan:**
 - **Objective:** Provides free education to children aged 6-14 to break the poverty-hunger cycle through improved human capital.
 - **Impact:** Increased enrollment and reduced multidimensional poverty from **24.85%** (2015-16) to **14.96%** (2019-21).
 - **Challenges:** Poor infrastructure and teacher shortages in rural areas.
- **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY):**
 - **Objective:** Offers skill training to youth to improve employability and income for food access.
 - **Impact:** Trained over **1.4 crore youth** by 2023, supporting urban and rural livelihoods.
 - **Challenges:** Mismatch between skills and market demands, and limited outreach to marginalized groups.

7. Housing and Financial Inclusion

- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY):**
 - **Objective:** Provides affordable housing to urban and rural poor, improving living standards.
 - **Impact:** Constructed over **4 crore houses** by 2023, reducing multidimensional poverty indicators like inadequate housing.
 - **Challenges:** Construction delays, land acquisition issues, and urban-rural disparities.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY):**
 - **Objective:** Promotes financial inclusion through bank accounts, credit, and insurance for the poor.
 - **Impact:** Over **50 crore accounts** opened by 2023, enabling direct benefit transfers (DBTs) worth **₹34 lakh crore**, supporting poverty and hunger alleviation.
 - **Challenges:** Low financial literacy and limited credit access for the poorest.

Value Addition

Keywords : Poverty, Absolute poverty, Relative poverty, Multidimensional poverty, Poverty line, Consumption expenditure, Malnutrition, Hunger, Unemployment, Underemployment, Landlessness, Regional disparity, Social exclusion, Gender inequality, Rural poverty, Urban poverty, Chronic poverty, Transient poverty, Health deprivation, Education deprivation, Slums, Food security, Skill development, Social security, Inclusive development

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Critically examine whether poverty in India is primarily a consequence of deprivation or low economic growth.
2. Discuss the multidimensional nature of poverty and its implications for achieving sustainable development goals.
3. Analyse the implications of rural-urban disparity in poverty levels for India's development planning.
4. Discuss how climate change exacerbates poverty among marginalised farmers.
5. Analyse the gendered dimensions of poverty in India and suggest ways to address them.

Acronyms

Nature and Types of Poverty in India "HUMAN FACE"

- **H** — Hidden poverty (underemployment, informal work)
- **U** — Urban poverty (slums, informal settlements)
- **M** — Multidimensional poverty (education, health, living standards)
- **A** — Absolute poverty (below subsistence level)
- **N** — Nutritional poverty (malnutrition, hunger)
- **F** — Female poverty (feminization of poverty)
- **A** — Asset-based poverty (lack of land, productive assets)
- **C** — Chronic poverty (intergenerational,

persistent)

- **E** — Exclusion-based poverty (SC/ST, minorities, disabled)

Causes of Poverty

Acronym: "**LACK ROOTS**"

- **L** — Low productivity in agriculture
- **A** — Asset inequality (land, credit, skills)
- **C** — Colonial legacy and historical factors
- **K** — Knowledge and education deficits
- **R** — Regional disparities
- **O** — Overdependence on informal sector
- **O** — Outdated social norms (caste, gender barriers)
- **T** — Technological backwardness
- **S** — Structural unemployment

Developmental Issues Linked to Poverty

Acronym: "**GAPS WIDEN**"

- **G** — Gender inequality and low women's participation
- **A** — Access to health and education services
- **P** — Poor infrastructure (roads, electricity, housing)
- **S** — Social exclusion of vulnerable groups
- **W** — Weak human capital formation
- **I** — Income inequality rising
- **D** — Distress migration and urban slums
- **E** — Environmental degradation and resource depletion
- **N** — Nutritional insecurity

UPSC Previous Year Question

Question	Nature of Question	Core Demand
Does urbanization lead to more segregation and/or marginalization of the poor in Indian metropolises? (2023)	Analytical + Critical	Analyse impact of urbanization on segregation and marginalization of poor.
How is the growth of Tier 2 cities related to the rise of a new middle class with an emphasis on the culture of consumption? (2022)	Analytical + Causal	Explain link between Tier 2 city growth, new middle class, and consumer culture.
What are the main socio-economic implications arising out of the development of IT industries in major cities of India? (2021)	Analytical + Implications	Discuss socio-economic impacts of IT industries in urban India.
“The growth of cities as I.T. hubs has opened up new avenues of employment, but has also created new problems”. Substantiate this statement with examples. (2017)	Substantiation + Illustrative	Substantiate pros and cons of IT hub cities with examples.
With a brief background of quality of urban life in India, introduce the objectives and strategy of the ‘Smart City Programme.’ (2016)	Descriptive + Policy	Provide background on urban life; explain Smart City objectives and strategy.
Smart cities in India cannot sustain without smart villages. Discuss this statement in the backdrop of rural urban integration. (2015)	Discussion + Integration Analysis	Discuss need for rural-urban integration for sustainable smart cities.
Discuss the various social problems which originated out of the speedy process of urbanization in India. (2013)	Discussion + Analytical	Discuss social problems arising from rapid urbanization in India.

Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Introduction

- Urbanization refers to the process by which rural populations migrate to urban areas, transforming demographic, economic, and social landscapes. In India, urbanization is both a marker and a driver of economic growth and modernization, reflecting shifts in livelihoods, aspirations, and lifestyles.
- According to the 2011 Census, **about 31% of India's population lives in urban areas**, and this share is projected to rise to **over 40% by 2035** (UN World Urbanization Prospects). Rapid urban growth has fostered new opportunities—industrial expansion, technological hubs, and a dynamic services sector—yet it has also exacerbated inequalities, environmental degradation, and infrastructural stress.

Characteristics of Indian Urbanization

- **Lopsided and uneven growth:**
 - Urbanization in India is highly concentrated in a few large cities and metro regions.
 - **Example:** Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Chennai account for a significant share of the urban economy and population, while many smaller towns remain underdeveloped.
- **Metropolitan dominance and rise of mega-cities:**
 - The number of cities with populations above 1 million has grown sharply — from 23 in 1991 to 53 in 2011.
 - **Example:** Delhi NCR has become one of the world's largest urban agglomerations, with over 30 million people.
- **Emergence of Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities:**
 - Recent trends show growth spilling over into mid-sized cities like Pune, Lucknow, Jaipur, Coimbatore, and Indore, driven by IT, manufacturing, and service sectors.
- **Migration-driven urbanization:**
 - Unlike many Western countries where urbanization was driven by industrialization, in India, rural-to-urban migration (due to agrarian distress and push factors) is a major driver.
 - **Example:** Seasonal migration from eastern states like Bihar and Odisha to cities like Delhi and Mumbai.
- **Predominance of informal economy:**

- A large proportion of urban workers are engaged in informal, insecure, low-wage jobs without social protection.
- **Example:** Street vendors, construction workers, domestic helpers, gig economy workers.
- **Urban poverty and slum proliferation:**
 - Nearly **24% of urban households** live in slums or informal settlements (Census 2011), characterized by inadequate housing, poor sanitation, and lack of basic services.
- **Spatial and social inequality:**
 - Sharp contrasts exist between affluent gated communities and marginalized settlements.
 - **Example:** In cities like Gurgaon and Mumbai, high-end apartments coexist alongside vast slum clusters.
- **Gendered urban experience:**
 - Urban spaces often remain unsafe and exclusionary for women due to harassment risks and lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure.
 - **Example:** Limited access to safe public transport restricts women's mobility and workforce participation.
- **Environmental stress and infrastructure deficits:**
 - Rapid urban expansion has led to congestion, pollution, waste management crises, and depletion of green spaces.
 - **Example:** Severe air pollution crises in Delhi; flooding in Bengaluru due to encroachment on lakes and wetlands.
- **Cultural pluralism and cosmopolitanism:**
 - Cities have become melting pots of diverse linguistic, cultural, and religious groups, leading to both rich cultural exchanges and social tensions.

Causes of Urbanization in India

- **Rural Push Factors**
 - **Agrarian distress and decline in farm incomes:**
 - Fragmentation of landholdings, stagnant agricultural productivity, and frequent crop failures push rural populations to seek better livelihoods in cities.

- **Example:** Farmers from drought-prone regions of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh migrating to Mumbai and Hyderabad.
- **Lack of rural employment opportunities:**
 - Limited non-farm job options and disguised unemployment in agriculture force rural youth to migrate to urban centers.
- **Inadequate rural infrastructure and services:**
 - Poor healthcare, education, and sanitation facilities in villages compel families to move to cities for better living standards.
- **Urban Pull Factors**
 - **Better employment opportunities:**
 - Cities offer diverse jobs in manufacturing, construction, services, and the gig economy, attracting rural migrants.
 - **Example:** Construction and service sector jobs in Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai.
 - **Access to quality education and healthcare:**
 - Availability of reputed schools, colleges, and advanced medical facilities pull families toward urban areas.
 - **Higher standards of living and aspirations:**
 - Urban centers symbolize modern lifestyles, better amenities, and greater social mobility, fueling aspirational migration.
- **Economic Structural Changes**
 - **Growth of service and IT sectors:**
 - Rapid expansion of IT, finance, retail, hospitality, and other service sectors has created concentrated urban job markets.
 - **Example:** Emergence of IT hubs in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, and Gurugram.
 - **Industrialization and liberalization:**
 - Post-1991 economic reforms accelerated private sector growth and foreign investments, fostering urban industrial corridors and SEZs (Special Economic Zones).
- **Urban-centric infrastructure and investments:**
 - Large-scale infrastructure projects and urban-centric development policies reinforce city-centric economic growth.
 - **Example:** Smart Cities Mission, metro rail projects, industrial corridors.
- **Migration Due to Globalization and Economic Reforms**
 - **Increased integration with global markets:**
 - Urban areas have become centers of export-oriented industries and global service outsourcing, attracting labor and talent.
 - **Cultural exposure and consumerism:**
 - Global media and communication networks have reshaped aspirations, encouraging migration to urban "global" spaces for modern lifestyles.
- Positive Impacts of Urbanization**
- **Economic Dynamism and Diversification**
 - Urbanization promotes **rapid economic growth**, transforming cities into hubs of industry, services, and innovation.
 - Diversification from traditional agriculture to manufacturing, IT, finance, retail, and creative industries boosts overall economic resilience.
 - **Example:** Mumbai as India's financial capital; Bengaluru as a global IT and start-up hub.
- **Emergence of New Employment Avenues**
 - Expansion of formal and informal sectors creates diverse job opportunities for rural migrants and urban residents.
 - Growth of new sectors like IT services, e-commerce, hospitality, gig economy, and creative industries empowers youth and skilled workers.
 - **Example:** Rise of app-based gig jobs (e.g., delivery partners, ride-sharing drivers) in metropolitan areas.
- **Infrastructure Development and Modernization**
 - Urbanization drives investments in **transport networks**, housing, water supply, sanitation, energy systems, and communication technologies.

- Leads to creation of metro systems, smart roads, urban flyovers, and improved airports, transforming cityscapes.
- **Example:** Delhi Metro has become a backbone of urban mobility, reducing travel time and emissions.
- **Greater Social and Cultural Interaction**
 - Cities act as **melting pots of cultures**, fostering pluralism, innovation, and cosmopolitan lifestyles.
 - Exposure to diverse ideas and practices promotes tolerance and social mobility.
 - **Example:** Festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi in Mumbai and Durga Puja in Delhi are celebrated by diverse communities beyond regional boundaries.
- **Improved Access to Services**
 - Urban residents generally have better access to **education, healthcare, banking, and communication services** compared to rural areas.
 - Facilitates human capital development and enhances quality of life.
 - **Example:** Presence of top hospitals like AIIMS (Delhi), and educational institutions like IITs and IIMs in urban centers.
- **Catalyst for Technological and Social Innovation**
 - Urban environments encourage experimentation in governance, service delivery, and technology adoption.
 - **Example:** Smart city projects integrating digital solutions for waste management, traffic control, and public services.

Social Problems Originating from Rapid Urbanization

- **Proliferation of Slums and Informal Settlements**
 - Rapid migration and unaffordable housing push poor migrants into slums and squatter settlements.
 - Slums lack basic amenities like clean water, sanitation, waste disposal, electricity, and secure tenure.
 - Overcrowding in slums increases health risks, communicable diseases, and vulnerability to disasters (e.g., floods, fires).
 - **Example:** Dharavi in Mumbai, Asia's largest

slum, houses nearly 1 million people in extremely dense conditions.

- **Rising Inequality and Ghettoization**
 - Economic growth in cities often benefits middle and upper classes, leaving informal workers marginalized.
 - Spatial segregation intensifies, with luxury gated communities and business districts coexisting next to slums and informal areas.
 - Deepens social and economic divides, leading to exclusion and resentment among the urban poor.
 - **Example:** Gurugram's rapid growth created stark divides between glass-fronted towers and migrant labor settlements.
- **Marginalization and Segregation of Urban Poor**
 - Informal workers face discrimination in accessing public services, legal housing, and social security.
 - Evictions and slum demolitions push the poor further to city peripheries, disconnecting them from employment hubs.
 - Limited political representation reduces their voice in urban governance and planning decisions.
- **Overburdened Healthcare and Educational Facilities**
 - Influx of migrants and rapid population growth strain existing public health and education infrastructure.
 - Leads to overcrowded hospitals, shortage of doctors and health workers, and inadequate urban primary health centers.
 - Schools face high student-teacher ratios, poor infrastructure, and high dropout rates among slum children.
 - **Example:** During COVID-19, metropolitan hospitals were overwhelmed, highlighting infrastructural vulnerabilities.
- **Increased Crime and Social Tensions**
 - High unemployment and lack of social safety nets among urban poor can contribute to rising petty crimes and violence.
 - Competition for limited resources like housing and jobs increases communal and regional tensions.

- Example: Rising thefts, drug abuse, and gang-related crimes reported in major cities like Delhi and Mumbai.
- **Rise in Lifestyle Diseases and Mental Health Issues**
 - Sedentary lifestyles, pollution, and processed food consumption in urban areas increase risk of diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and cardiovascular diseases.
 - High stress levels due to fast-paced urban life, job insecurity, and social isolation contribute to anxiety and depression.
 - Limited mental health services in most Indian cities exacerbate these challenges.
 - **Example:** NCRB data shows increasing suicide rates in urban areas, often linked to economic and social pressures.
- **Gendered Challenges: Safety and Informal Sector Exploitation**
 - Urban spaces often unsafe for women, with frequent harassment in public transport, streets, and workplaces.
 - Women constitute a significant share of informal sector workers (e.g., domestic workers, vendors), often lacking social protection and fair wages.
 - Poor urban infrastructure (lack of lighting, public toilets) restricts women's mobility and economic participation.
 - **Example:** Low female labor force participation rate (~20-25%) partly due to unsafe urban environments.

Environmental and Infrastructural Issues

● Air, Water, and Land Pollution

- **Air pollution:**
 - High vehicle density, industrial emissions, construction dust, and burning of waste worsen urban air quality.
 - Major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata frequently record AQI levels in the "severe" category.
 - Health impacts include rising asthma, lung diseases, and cardiovascular problems.
- **Water pollution:**
 - Untreated sewage and industrial effluents discharged into rivers and lakes contaminate urban water bodies.

- Example: Yamuna river near Delhi receives ~70% of the city's untreated sewage.
- **Land and soil pollution:**
 - Open dumping of solid waste leads to contamination of soil and groundwater.
 - Toxic leachate from landfill sites poses serious health risks to nearby communities.
- **Waste Management Crises**
 - Rapid urban growth leads to generation of enormous solid waste — estimated at **1.5 lakh metric tonnes per day** across urban India.
 - Inadequate segregation, poor recycling systems, and overburdened landfill sites worsen the crisis.
 - **Example:** Ghazipur landfill in Delhi, rising taller than a 17-story building, symbolizes the challenge.
 - Informal waste pickers often work without safety equipment, facing severe health risks.
- **Traffic Congestion and Inadequate Public Transport**
 - Rising private vehicle ownership and poorly planned roads cause severe traffic jams and long commute times.
 - Increased fossil fuel consumption aggravates air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.
 - Lack of efficient, reliable, and affordable public transport disproportionately affects the urban poor and women.
 - **Example:** Bengaluru commuters spend an average of 2-3 hours daily stuck in traffic, impacting productivity and mental health.
- **Depletion of Urban Green Spaces**
 - Expansion of concrete infrastructure encroaches on parks, wetlands, lakes, and urban forests.
 - Loss of green cover reduces urban resilience to heatwaves, flooding, and air pollution.
 - **Example:** Bengaluru's lake systems, once a hallmark of its ecosystem, have been heavily encroached upon, contributing to frequent urban flooding.
- **Water Scarcity and Over-extraction**
 - High urban water demand leads to over-extraction of groundwater and depletion of

local water bodies.

- Many cities depend on distant water sources, creating regional ecological and political conflicts.
- **Example:** Chennai faced "Day Zero" in 2019 when major reservoirs ran dry, affecting millions.
- **Inadequate Housing and Basic Infrastructure**
 - Shortages of affordable housing push poor migrants into informal settlements and slums.
 - Poor sanitation, irregular water supply, and lack of drainage systems cause health hazards and urban flooding.
 - **Example:** Mumbai's annual monsoon floods partly result from inadequate drainage in slum-dominated low-lying areas.
- **Urban Heat Island Effect**
 - Dense built-up areas, reduced vegetation, and heat-retaining materials cause cities to be significantly warmer than surrounding rural areas.
 - Intensifies health risks for vulnerable populations, particularly during summer months.

Remedies and Policy Interventions

- **Strengthening Urban Local Governance and Participatory Planning**
 - Empower Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) as per the 74th Constitutional Amendment to ensure decentralized decision-making.
 - Involve citizens' groups, resident welfare associations, and marginalized communities in planning and monitoring.
 - **Example:** Ward committees and area sabhas in Bengaluru enabling local problem-solving.
- **Promoting Inclusive Housing Policies and Slum Rehabilitation**
 - Implement affordable housing schemes such as **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)** to reduce slum proliferation.
 - Adopt in-situ slum redevelopment with secure tenure to prevent forced evictions and promote community integration.
 - Incentivize rental housing for migrants and informal workers.
 - **Example:** Dharavi redevelopment model

(though facing challenges) as an attempt to integrate slum communities.

- **Improving Urban Public Transport and Green Mobility Solutions**
 - Expand and modernize metro rail, bus rapid transit (BRT) systems, and last-mile connectivity.
 - Promote non-motorized transport infrastructure (footpaths, bicycle lanes).
 - Encourage electric vehicles and low-emission transport through subsidies and policy support.
 - **Example:** Delhi Metro's success in reducing vehicular congestion and emissions.
- **Strengthening Health, Education, and Social Welfare Services**
 - Increase investments in urban primary healthcare centers and mobile clinics to reach slum and migrant populations.
 - Improve quality of municipal schools and vocational training to integrate urban poor into the formal economy.
 - Expand social protection schemes such as PDS, urban employment guarantee programs, and subsidized childcare facilities.
- **Enhancing Waste Management and Environmental Sustainability**
 - Implement strict solid waste segregation at source, encourage recycling, and develop scientific landfill management.
 - Promote urban green spaces, rejuvenate lakes and wetlands, and enforce strict anti-encroachment measures.
 - **Example:** Indore's success story in achieving "cleanest city" status through community-led waste management reforms.
- **Smart Cities Mission and AMRUT for Sustainable Infrastructure**
 - Smart Cities Mission focuses on improving urban governance, ICT-enabled service delivery, and infrastructure upgrades.
 - AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) emphasizes universal water supply, sewerage, and green spaces.
 - **Example:** Pune Smart City initiatives including smart bus management and

integrated command centers.

- **Encouraging Balanced Regional Development to Reduce Migration Pressure**

- Develop Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities as alternative economic and employment hubs to reduce overcrowding in metro cities.
- Strengthen rural infrastructure and create non-farm employment through schemes like MGNREGA and rural skill missions.
- Promote regional industrial corridors and economic clusters in lagging states.

Value Addition

Keywords : Urban growth, Slums, Informal settlements, Infrastructure deficit, Urban poverty, Pollution, Waste management, Traffic congestion, Affordable housing, Public transport, Environmental degradation, Urban inequality, Smart cities, AMRUT, Green mobility, Urban governance, Inclusive planning, Social services, Urban health, Urban heat islands, Water scarcity, Regional disparities, Sustainable development

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Examine the major challenges arising from rapid urbanization in India.
2. Discuss how inadequate urban infrastructure exacerbates social inequality.
3. Analyse the impact of urban sprawl on agricultural land and the environment.
4. What are the public health issues associated with overcrowded urban settlements? Suggest solutions.
5. How does traffic congestion affect urban productivity, and what measures can mitigate it?
6. Examine the implications of urban waste management failures and propose remedial strategies.

Acronyms

1. Problems of Urbanization

"CHOKES"

- C — Congestion and traffic woes
- H — Housing shortage and slums
- — Overstressed civic amenities (water, sewage, electricity)
- K — Knowledge and skill mismatch among migrants
- E — Environmental degradation (air, water, waste)
- S — Social fragmentation and crime rise

2. Remedies and Policy Measures

"SMART PLAN"

- S — Sustainable urban transport (metro, e-mobility)
- M — Mixed-use and inclusive zoning policies
- A — Affordable housing projects (PMAY-U, rental housing schemes)
- R — Revamp urban governance (empower municipalities, 74th Amendment)
- T — Technology-based solutions (smart cities, e-governance)
- P — Public-private partnerships (PPP models)
- L — Localized waste management and green initiatives
- A — Augment infrastructure finance (AMRUT, metro projects)
- N — New skill development for urban poor

UPSC Previous Year Questions

Question	Nature of Question	Core Demand
Despite comprehensive policies for equity and social justice, underprivileged sections are not yet getting the full benefits of affirmative action envisaged by the Constitution. Comment. (2024)	Comment + Analytical	Comment on reasons for limited impact of affirmative action despite policies.
Discuss the impact of post-liberal economy on ethnic identity and communalism. (2023)	Analytical + Impact-based	Discuss effect of post-liberal economy on ethnic identity and communalism.
Are tolerance, assimilation and pluralism the key elements in the making of an Indian form of secularism? Justify your answer. (2022)	Justification + Analytical	Justify role of tolerance, assimilation, pluralism in Indian secularism.
Do you agree that regionalism in India appears to be a consequence of rising cultural assertiveness? Argue. (2020)	Argumentative + Analytical	Argue if regionalism results from cultural assertiveness.
How have digital initiatives in India contributed to the functioning of the education system in the country? Elaborate your answer. (2020)	Elaborative + Analytical	Elaborate impact of digital initiatives on education system.
What are the challenges to our cultural practices in the name of secularism? (2019)	Analytical + Critical	Analyse challenges to cultural practices posed by secularism.
How the Indian concept of secularism different from the western model of secularism? Discuss. (2018)	Comparative + Analytical	Discuss difference between Indian and Western secularism.
'Communalism arises either due to power struggle or relative deprivation.' Argue by giving suitable illustrations. (2018)	Argumentative + Illustrative	Argue reasons for communalism with examples.
What are the two major legal initiatives by the State since Independence addressing discrimination against Scheduled Tribes (STs)? (2017)	Descriptive + Policy	Describe two major legal initiatives for STs since independence.
Distinguish between religiousness/religiosity and communalism giving one example of how the former has got transformed into the latter in independent India. (2017)	Conceptual + Illustrative	Distinguish religiosity vs communalism; give example of transformation.

Why are the tribals in India referred to as 'the Scheduled Tribes'? Indicate the major provisions enshrined in the Constitution of India for their upliftment. (2016)	Descriptive + Constitutional	Explain term 'Scheduled Tribes'; mention constitutional provisions for upliftment.
What is the basis of regionalism? Is it that unequal distribution of benefits of development on regional basis eventually promotes regionalism? Substantiate your answer. (2016)	Substantiation + Analytical	Substantiate if uneven development promotes regionalism.
How do the Indian debates on secularism differ from the debates in the West? (2014)	Comparative + Analytical	Compare secularism debates in India and the West.
Growing feeling of regionalism is an important factor in the generation of demand for a separate state. Discuss.(2013)	Discussion + Analytical	Discuss how regionalism fuels demand for separate states.

Social Empowerment

Introduction

Social empowerment refers to the process of enabling individuals and marginalized communities to gain control over their lives, exercise their rights, and actively participate in social, economic, and political spheres. It focuses on dismantling systemic barriers, reducing inequalities, and creating an inclusive society where every individual can live with dignity and self-respect. In the Indian context, social empowerment is crucial for achieving constitutional ideals of justice, equality, and fraternity, and for realizing the vision of an inclusive and harmonious society.

Components of Social Empowerment

- **Education and Awareness**
 - Universal access to quality education, including higher and vocational education.
 - Skill development programs to enhance employability and promote self-reliance.
 - Legal literacy initiatives to make people aware of their rights and entitlements.
 - Promotion of values like equality, tolerance, and constitutional morality.
- **Economic Empowerment**
 - Access to productive resources such as land, credit, and technology.
 - Promotion of entrepreneurship through self-help groups, cooperatives, and microfinance initiatives.
 - Employment generation and expansion of financial inclusion measures.
 - Strengthening social security and livelihood support systems for vulnerable groups.
- **Political Empowerment**
 - Greater representation of marginalized groups in political and decision-making bodies.
 - Implementation of reservation policies for women and disadvantaged communities.
 - Strengthening participatory democracy and empowering local governance structures.
 - Encouraging active civic participation and leadership development.
- **Health and Well-being**
 - Access to affordable, quality healthcare services, including mental health care.
 - Ensuring nutrition security, safe drinking water, and improved sanitation facilities.

- Addressing community-specific health concerns, including maternal and child health.
- Promoting preventive healthcare and awareness campaigns.
- **Legal and Rights-Based Empowerment**
 - Strong legal protections against discrimination, violence, and exploitation.
 - Improved access to justice and effective grievance redressal mechanisms.
 - Safeguarding land, cultural, and identity rights of indigenous and tribal communities.
 - Strengthening human rights education and promoting accountability mechanisms.

Need for Social Empowerment in India

- **Addressing Historical Inequalities**
 - Deep-rooted caste, gender, and class-based discrimination have marginalized large sections of society for centuries.
 - Historical social structures have denied Dalits, Adivasis, women, and minorities equal access to resources, education, and decision-making.
- **Reducing Poverty and Economic Vulnerabilities**
 - Social empowerment equips marginalized communities with skills, education, and opportunities, enabling them to break the cycle of poverty.
 - **Example:** Empowering rural women through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) enhances financial independence and household welfare.
- **Ensuring Inclusive Growth**
 - Economic growth without social empowerment leads to uneven development and social tensions.
 - True inclusivity requires all sections to participate in and benefit from the growth process.
 - **Example:** Despite high GDP growth, India still ranks low on Human Development Index due to persistent social exclusion.
- **Strengthening Democracy and Social Justice**
 - Empowered citizens actively participate in democratic processes and hold institutions accountable.
 - Social empowerment promotes awareness

of rights and duties, fostering a more equitable society.

- **Example:** Women's increased participation in Panchayati Raj institutions after reservation policies.
- **Combating Gender Inequality**
 - Women face multiple barriers in education, health, employment, and political representation.
 - Social empowerment is essential to achieve gender parity and fulfill constitutional commitments to equality.
 - **Example:** Campaigns against child marriage and dowry have reduced harmful practices but require further empowerment efforts.
- **Enhancing Social Cohesion and Reducing Conflicts**
 - Marginalization and exclusion can fuel social unrest, violence, and extremism.
 - Inclusive social policies and empowerment programs build trust, reduce grievances, and promote harmony.
 - **Example:** Empowerment of tribal communities reduces alienation and supports integration into mainstream society.
- **Meeting Constitutional and Global Commitments**
 - Article 15, 17, and 46 mandate protection and promotion of interests of socially and educationally backward classes.
 - Aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Challenges to Social Empowerment

- **Deep-rooted social prejudices and stereotypes:** Despite constitutional guarantees, caste-based discrimination, untouchability, and social exclusion continue to prevail in many parts of India. Patriarchal mindsets limit women's participation in education, workforce, and decision-making. Similarly, stereotypes against minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, and persons with disabilities hinder their full integration into society and deny them equal opportunities.
- **Ineffective implementation of policies and laws:** While progressive policies and legal

frameworks exist, their on-ground implementation remains weak due to bureaucratic apathy, corruption, and lack of awareness among beneficiaries. Many welfare schemes fail to reach the most marginalized, and grievance redressal mechanisms are often inaccessible or ineffective, undermining trust in the system.

- **Economic inequalities:** Persistent disparities in wealth and income distribution reinforce social hierarchies and restrict access to quality education, healthcare, and employment for marginalized groups. Many individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds remain trapped in low-paying, insecure jobs in the informal sector, perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependence.
- **Digital divide and technological barriers:** The rapid shift towards digital governance and services has excluded large sections of the rural population and marginalized communities due to lack of internet access, inadequate infrastructure, and low digital literacy. This digital gap further limits opportunities for education, financial inclusion, and access to government benefits.
- **Violence and atrocities against marginalized groups:** High levels of caste-based violence, honor killings, gender-based violence, and attacks on activists discourage marginalized communities from asserting their rights. Fear of retaliation and social ostracism often forces them into silence and perpetuates their subjugation.
- **Urban-rural and regional disparities:** Developmental imbalances between urban and rural areas, as well as among different regions, hinder equitable access to health, education, and livelihood opportunities. Poor infrastructure and limited state capacity in backward regions exacerbate social exclusion and restrict mobility.
- **Low political participation and representation:** Marginalized communities and women continue to be underrepresented in political institutions and decision-making bodies. Even when represented, they often face tokenism and lack actual power to influence policies and decisions affecting their lives.

Way Forward

- Strengthen effective implementation and monitoring of welfare schemes and legal safeguards.
- Promote inclusive and quality education with special focus on marginalized communities.
- Expand skill development and livelihood opportunities to reduce economic inequalities.
- Bridge the digital divide through infrastructure development and digital literacy initiatives.
- Increase political representation and meaningful participation of marginalized groups.
- Strengthen community-level institutions and empower local governance structures.
- Foster social awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and promote equality.
- Encourage private sector and CSR initiatives to support social empowerment efforts.
- Improve access to affordable healthcare and social protection systems.
- Promote intercultural dialogue and community cohesion to build an inclusive society.

Communalism

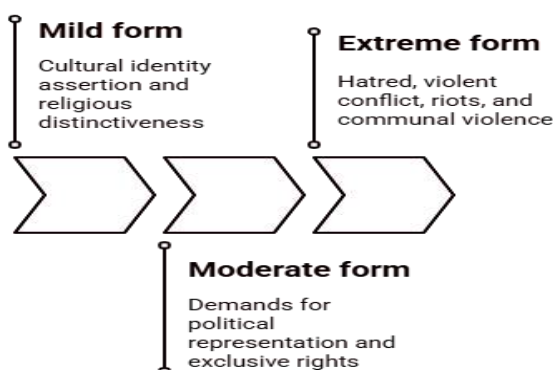
Introduction

Communalism remains one of the most pressing challenges to India's social harmony and national integration. Rooted in historical divisions and perpetuated by political and social factors, it threatens the ideals of unity in diversity and secularism enshrined in the Indian Constitution. From colonial times to contemporary society, communal tensions have often erupted into violence, undermining democratic values and creating deep mistrust among communities. Addressing communalism is thus critical for building an inclusive, peaceful, and resilient society.

Meaning and Concept of Communalism

- Communalism is a political and social ideology that prioritizes the interests of one religious community over others, often resulting in conflict and division. It reduces complex social identities to a singular religious identity and views different religious communities as separate, incompatible groups with opposing interests.
- It typically develops in stages:
 - **Mild form:** Begins with cultural identity assertion and emphasis on religious distinctiveness in social and cultural matters.
 - **Moderate form:** Evolves into demands for separate political representation and exclusive rights, creating political fragmentation.
 - **Extreme form:** Can lead to hatred, violent conflict, riots, and communal violence, posing a serious threat to national integrity and social cohesion.

The Escalating Stages of Communalism



Historical Background

- **Colonial policies of divide and rule:** The British colonial administration systematically encouraged divisions among religious communities to weaken collective national consciousness and consolidate their power.
- **Separate electorates (Morley-Minto Reforms, 1909):** The introduction of separate electorates for Muslims institutionalized communal divisions in politics, laying the groundwork for communal representation instead of shared national identity.
- **Partition of Bengal (1905):** Undertaken ostensibly for administrative convenience, this move was perceived as an attempt to divide Hindus and Muslims, sparking widespread protests and deepening communal sentiments.
- **Communal Award (1932):** Announced by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, it extended separate electorates to depressed classes, further fragmenting the Indian society along communal lines.
- **Legacy of Partition (1947):** The violent division of India and Pakistan on religious lines led to large-scale displacement, communal massacres, and enduring mistrust between communities, leaving deep social and psychological scars.
- **Post-independence communal tensions:** Despite constitutional safeguards, independent India witnessed periodic communal riots and violence (e.g., anti-Sikh riots of 1984, Babri Masjid demolition in 1992, Gujarat riots of 2002), reflecting the long-standing impact of historical communal divisions.

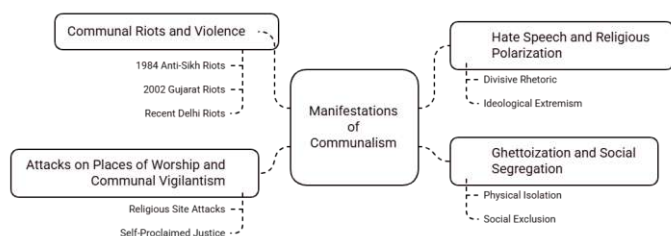
Causes of Communalism in India

- **Historical and political manipulation:** Colonial policies and continued exploitation of religious sentiments by political actors have entrenched communal identities and divisions.
- **Vote-bank politics and electoral polarization:** Political parties mobilize communities on religious lines to gain electoral advantage, encouraging communal thinking and deepening sectarian divides.
- **Socio-economic inequalities and marginalization:** Economic and educational backwardness among certain religious groups creates feelings of deprivation and fuels

resentment, making them vulnerable to communal mobilization.

- **Stereotypes, prejudices, and lack of inter-community dialogue:** Persistent misconceptions and lack of social interaction between communities foster mistrust and hostility.
- **Role of media and misinformation:** Sensationalism, biased reporting, and the unchecked spread of rumors on social media provoke fear, hatred, and violence.
- **Communal historiography and biased education:** Distorted interpretations of history in textbooks and public narratives often highlight conflicts rather than shared cultural heritage, reinforcing divisive sentiments.
- **Weak law enforcement and political patronage:** Failure to punish communal offenders, coupled with political support for extremist groups, emboldens communal elements and perpetuates violence.
- **Religious fundamentalism and radicalization:** Growth of extremist ideologies and rigid interpretations of religion reduce tolerance and encourage sectarian exclusivity.
- **Economic competition and resource conflicts:** Competition for limited resources like jobs, land, and government benefits can take a communal turn when identities are politicized.
- **Ghettoization and spatial segregation:** Physical separation of communities into exclusive localities limits social integration and reinforces communal identities.

Manifestations of Communalism



Impact of Communalism

- **Threat to National Unity and Integrity**
 - Communalism undermines India's core principle of **unity in diversity**, threatening the secular fabric envisioned by the Constitution.
 - Fuels separatist tendencies and regional tensions, destabilizing social harmony.

- **Example:** Repeated communal clashes in regions like Delhi (2020 riots) strain inter-community relationships and polarize society.
- **Erosion of Secular Values**
 - Weakens constitutional ideals of secularism and fraternity (as enshrined in the Preamble).
 - Political mobilization on religious lines erodes democratic debate and promotes identity-based politics.
 - **Example:** Use of religious sentiments in electoral campaigns leads to polarization rather than focusing on developmental issues.
- **Social Fragmentation and Distrust**
 - Deepens divisions between communities, creating an atmosphere of suspicion and fear.
 - Restricts social interactions and inter-community cooperation in shared spaces like neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces.
 - **Example:** Ghettos or community-specific enclaves in urban areas (e.g., parts of Ahmedabad and Mumbai) illustrate spatial and social segregation.
- **Violence and Loss of Life and Property**
 - Communal riots and targeted violence lead to casualties, destruction of property, and large-scale displacement.
 - Disrupts economic activities and creates long-lasting trauma among affected populations.
 - **Example:** 2002 Gujarat riots resulted in over 1,000 deaths and massive property loss.
- **Economic Consequences**
 - Decline in investor confidence and disruption of local economies in violence-affected regions
 - Increased burden on public resources for relief, rehabilitation, and maintaining law and order.
 - **Example:** Businesses and tourism often suffer in states perceived as communally volatile.
- **Marginalization of Minority Communities**
 - Social exclusion and discrimination against minority groups in education, employment,

- and housing.
- Psychological impact leading to alienation and weakening of national integration efforts.
- **Example:** Reluctance of landlords to rent homes to members of certain communities in major cities.
- **Hindrance to Human Development**
 - Communal conflicts disrupt children's education, access to health services, and livelihoods
 - Leads to generational disadvantage among affected communities, exacerbating poverty and underdevelopment.

Relation to politics	Usually apolitical; focuses on spiritual upliftment rather than political mobilization.	Deeply political; used to gain power and mobilize vote banks on religious lines.
Examples	Practices like prayer, fasting, charity, pilgrimage done with spiritual intent.	Communal riots, demands for separate electorates, religious hate speeches.

Distinguish between Religiousness/Religiosity and Communalism

Aspect	Religiousness / Religiosity	Communalism
Meaning	Personal faith, devotion, and spiritual practices of an individual or community.	Political and social ideology that places one religious community's interests above others, often leading to conflict.
Nature	Individual and spiritual in nature; emphasizes moral and ethical development.	Collective and political; promotes exclusivity and antagonism towards other communities.
Approach to other religions	Generally tolerant and accommodative; respects coexistence and pluralism.	Intolerant and divisive; views other religious communities as adversaries.
Impact on society	Promotes personal moral values, social harmony, and community service.	Leads to social division, violence, and threatens national unity and secularism.

Measures to Curb Communalism

- **Strengthening secular values and constitutional safeguards:** Promote the principles of secularism, equality, and fraternity as enshrined in the Constitution through education, public discourse, and state policies.
- **Effective implementation of laws against hate speech and violence:** Enforce stringent action against individuals and groups involved in spreading communal hatred, inciting violence, or engaging in discriminatory practices.
- **Promoting inclusive and unbiased education:** Reform school curricula to emphasize shared cultural heritage, pluralism, and constitutional morality, thereby reducing prejudices from an early age.
- **Encouraging interfaith dialogue and community-level peace initiatives:** Facilitate platforms where different religious communities can engage, understand each other's perspectives, and resolve differences peacefully.
- **Responsible role of media and regulation of misinformation:** Strengthen media ethics, promote unbiased reporting, and regulate fake news and inflammatory content on social media to prevent communal flare-ups.
- **Political accountability and reforms to reduce communal mobilization:** Penalize parties and leaders indulging in communal rhetoric and adopt electoral reforms to discourage identity-based campaigning.
- **Empowering local governance structures:** Involve panchayats, urban local bodies, and

community leaders in fostering communal harmony at the grassroots level.

- **Supporting civil society and NGOs:** Encourage non-governmental organizations to run awareness campaigns, peace-building programs, and legal aid services for victims of communal violence.
- **Strengthening law enforcement and intelligence networks:** Improve capacity to detect, prevent, and respond swiftly to potential communal tensions and violence.
- **Promoting economic and social equity:** Address underlying socio-economic disparities to reduce feelings of deprivation and prevent communities from falling prey to divisive politics.

Secularism

Introduction

India's rich tapestry of religious and cultural diversity makes the principle of secularism essential for maintaining social harmony and national unity. Enshrined in the Constitution and reflected in the country's ethos, secularism serves as a guiding force to protect pluralism, ensure equal respect for all faiths, and strengthen the democratic fabric of the nation.

Meaning and Concept of Secularism

- Secularism refers to the principle of separating religion from the State and ensuring equal treatment of all religions. It seeks to prevent religious interference in government affairs and vice versa, thereby promoting individual freedom of conscience and equal citizenship.

Indian vs. Western Model of Secularism

Aspect	Indian Secularism	Western Secularism
Approach	Equal respect for all religions ("Sarva Dharma Sambhava").	Strict separation of State and Church.
State's role	State can intervene in religious matters to ensure social reform and equality.	State remains completely detached from religious affairs.
Religious freedoms	Positive engagement to protect religious minorities and promote inter-religious harmony.	Focuses on individual freedom from religion and religious influence on State.
Cultural context	Based on India's multi-religious, pluralistic society; emphasizes tolerance and coexistence.	Emerged from historical conflicts with the Church; emphasizes complete privatization of religion.
Examples	State subsidies for Haj pilgrimage, regulation of religious institutions, temple entry reforms.	Ban on religious symbols in public institutions (e.g., France's ban on hijab in schools).

Historical Background

- **Ancient traditions of religious tolerance:** Indian society has a long history of pluralism and respect for diverse faiths. Emperor Ashoka's

edicts promoted religious tolerance and respect for all sects after the Kalinga war.

- **Bhakti and Sufi movements:** These medieval socio-religious movements emphasized love, compassion, and devotion, transcending rigid caste and religious boundaries. They promoted a syncretic culture and fostered interfaith understanding.
- **Colonial divide-and-rule policy:** British colonial policies deliberately encouraged communal divisions to weaken emerging nationalist sentiments. Introduction of separate electorates and communal awards institutionalized religious identities in politics.
- **Partition and communal tensions:** The violent partition of India in 1947 on religious lines deeply affected the national psyche and highlighted the need for a secular State to protect diverse communities.
- **Adoption in the Constitution post-independence:** After independence, India consciously chose secularism as a guiding principle to ensure equality and protect the rights of all religious communities. The term "secular" was explicitly added to the Preamble by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment in 1976, reaffirming this commitment.

Constitutional Provisions

Article/ Provision	Description
Preamble	Declares India as a "secular" state, emphasizing equality and fraternity among citizens.
Article 14	Guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws, prohibiting religious discrimination.
Article 15	Prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
Article 25	Guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality, and health.
Article 26	Grants every religious denomination the right to manage its own affairs in matters of religion.

Article 27	Prohibits compulsory payment of taxes for promotion or maintenance of any particular religion.
Article 28	Prohibits religious instruction in State-funded educational institutions.
Articles 29 & 30	Protect cultural and educational rights of minorities, allowing them to conserve their distinct identity and establish educational institutions.

Significance of Secularism in India

- **Ensures unity in diversity:** Secularism helps maintain harmony among India's diverse religious, linguistic, and cultural communities, preserving the idea of "unity in diversity."
- **Protects minority rights:** By guaranteeing equal treatment and freedom of religion, secularism safeguards the rights and interests of religious and cultural minorities.
- **Promotes social harmony and national integration:** It acts as a strong foundation to prevent communal tensions, reduce religious conflicts, and strengthen national unity.
- **Upholds democratic and human rights:** Secularism ensures equal citizenship, dignity, and non-discrimination, aligning with the core democratic values of liberty, equality, and fraternity.
- **Supports social reform:** Allows the State to intervene in religious practices when necessary to promote social justice and reform, such as abolishing untouchability or promoting gender equality.
- **Strengthens constitutional morality:** Reinforces faith in constitutional values over narrow religious loyalties, fostering a shared civic identity among citizens.

Challenges to Secularism

- **Rise of communalism and religious polarization:** Frequent incidents of communal riots and tensions (e.g., Delhi riots 2020, various localized clashes in small towns) show that religious identities are often used to mobilize communities against each other, undermining coexistence.
- **Intolerance, hate speech, and mob violence:** Cases of mob lynching in the name of cow protection and moral policing highlight

increasing intolerance and erosion of mutual respect. According to a report by IndiaSpend, over 100 incidents of cow-related violence were reported between 2010 and 2017.

- **Ghettoization and social segregation:** Residential segregation along religious lines limits social interaction and fosters suspicion. For instance, areas like Juhapura in Ahmedabad and certain pockets in Mumbai have become isolated religious enclaves.
- **Misuse of social media and misinformation:** Viral fake news and inflammatory videos have triggered local communal tensions in many parts of India. The lack of strong regulation makes it easier to spread rumors and deepen divides.
- **Weak enforcement of legal safeguards:** Laws such as IPC Sections 153A (promoting enmity between groups) and 295A (outraging religious feelings) are often poorly implemented, allowing hate speech and incitement to go unchecked.
- **Perceived bias in administration and justice delivery:** Delayed investigations and justice in cases of communal violence create a perception of partiality and erode trust in secular governance.
- **Religious radicalization and extremist ideologies:** Growing influence of fundamentalist groups, rigid interpretations of faith, and aggressive proselytization efforts threaten pluralistic traditions and encourage exclusivist thinking.
- **Socio-economic disparities:** Economic marginalization of certain religious groups (e.g., as highlighted in the Sachar Committee Report for Muslims) creates a sense of alienation and feeds into communal narratives.

Way Forward

- Strengthen constitutional values through widespread civic and constitutional education from school level onward.
- Promote inclusive and unbiased curricula to encourage respect for all religions and shared heritage.
- Strictly enforce laws against hate speech, incitement, and communal violence to deter offenders.

- Encourage interfaith dialogue and community-based peace initiatives to build mutual trust and understanding.
- Strengthen regulation of social media platforms to curb misinformation and inflammatory content.
- Promote economic and social inclusion of marginalized religious communities to reduce alienation.
- Foster shared public spaces and cultural exchange programs to increase interaction among diverse groups.
- Empower local governance bodies and civil society organizations to act as first responders and peacebuilders.
- Encourage ethical and responsible journalism to counter divisive narratives and highlight stories of harmony.
- Build early warning systems and rapid response mechanisms to prevent escalation of local tensions.

Regionalism

Introduction

Regionalism has emerged as a significant socio-political phenomenon in India, reflecting people's strong attachment to their local identities, languages, cultures, and economic interests. While it can foster cultural preservation and local development, unchecked regionalism often challenges national unity and threatens the spirit of cooperative federalism. Addressing regional aspirations while maintaining national integrity is thus crucial for India's democratic and pluralistic framework.

Meaning and Concept of Regionalism

- Regionalism refers to the strong loyalty or attachment of people to their own region, often prioritizing regional interests over national goals. It arises when people identify primarily with their linguistic, cultural, economic, or geographical region rather than with the nation as a whole.
- Regionalism can be expressed in both **positive and negative forms**:
 - Positive regionalism** emphasizes cultural preservation, regional pride, and demand for local development within the constitutional framework. It can strengthen local governance and enrich national diversity.
 - Negative regionalism** promotes exclusionary sentiments, conflicts with other regions or the central government, and can lead to separatism or violence, threatening national integration.
- In India, regionalism manifests through movements for separate statehood, demands for greater autonomy, or opposition to migration and resource sharing, reflecting the diverse and complex socio-political landscape.

Types of Regionalism

Type	Description	Examples
Demand for separate statehood	Movements seeking creation of a new state for better governance, cultural identity, or regional development.	Telangana (2014), Gorkhaland movement in West Bengal.

Demand for regional autonomy	Movements seeking greater administrative or political autonomy within an existing state.	Bodoland demand in Assam, demands for Sixth Schedule autonomous councils in Northeast India.
Inter-state disputes	Conflicts between states over resources, boundaries, or administrative issues.	Cauvery water dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu; Maharashtra-Karnataka border dispute.
Sons-of-the-soil movements	Movements advocating preference to local residents in jobs and resources, often opposing migration.	Marathi manoos movement in Maharashtra, Assam agitation against outsiders.
Language assertion movements	Movements emphasizing protection and promotion of regional languages and demanding linguistic rights.	Anti-Hindi agitation in Tamil Nadu, demands for classical language status for various languages.

Causes of Regionalism

- Uneven economic development and regional disparities** : Regional imbalances in economic growth, infrastructure, and industrialization create feelings of neglect and deprivation. For example, backwardness in regions like Vidarbha (Maharashtra) and Bundelkhand (Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh) fuels demands for separate statehood or special attention.
- Neglect of local language and culture** : Policies perceived to undermine regional languages and cultural identities lead to resentment. For instance, anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu arose due to fears of cultural domination by Hindi-speaking states.
- Political mobilization and identity politics** : Regional leaders and parties often mobilize support by emphasizing local identity and grievances against the center or other states. The rise of parties like Shiv Sena in Maharashtra is rooted in regional identity politics.
- Migration and resource competition** : Influx of migrants to certain states or cities can lead to

competition over jobs, housing, and resources, creating tensions. Sons-of-the-soil movements in Maharashtra and Assam are examples of this.

- **Historical and geographical factors** : Distinct historical trajectories, such as princely state legacies (e.g., Hyderabad), and geographical isolation (e.g., Northeastern states) strengthen regional consciousness and aspirations for autonomy.
- **Administrative neglect and governance failure** : Long-standing neglect in governance, inadequate service delivery, and poor representation in decision-making foster alienation and fuel regionalist sentiments.

Impact of Regionalism

- **Strengthens local identity and cultural preservation (positive aspect)** : Regionalism can promote pride in local languages, art, culture, and traditions, helping preserve India's diverse heritage. For example, movements to promote languages like Telugu and Tamil have strengthened regional literature and arts.
- **Threat to national integration and unity (negative aspect)** : When taken to an extreme, regionalism can undermine national solidarity and foster separatist tendencies. The demand for Khalistan in Punjab and repeated demands for Gorkhaland illustrate this risk.
- **Rise of separatist movements and violence** : Extreme forms of regionalism may escalate into violent movements or insurgencies, leading to instability. For instance, militancy in parts of Northeast India has been driven by strong regional and ethnic identities.
- **Hinders equitable development and creates social tensions** : Frequent agitations and regional demands divert attention and resources, disrupt economic activities, and create tensions between states, affecting overall national development.
- **Encourages inter-state disputes** : Regionalism can exacerbate disputes over resources like water and territory. The Cauvery water dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and the Krishna river water dispute are prominent examples.
- **Leads to ghettoization and exclusionary practices** : Movements like "sons-of-the-soil" in Maharashtra have led to discrimination against

migrants, creating social divisions and restricting economic mobility.

Measures to Address Regionalism

- **Balanced regional development and inclusive economic policies** : Reduce disparities by promoting equitable distribution of resources, targeted investment in backward regions (e.g., special economic packages for Northeastern states), and improving infrastructure and employment opportunities.
- **Strengthening cooperative federalism** : Encourage greater collaboration and trust between the Center and states through mechanisms like the Inter-State Council and regular consultations on policy matters.
- **Promotion of inter-state cultural exchanges** : Organize cultural exchange programs, educational tours, and festivals to foster mutual understanding and respect among different regions.
- **Effective implementation of constitutional safeguards** : Ensure proper functioning of provisions like Article 371 (special provisions for certain states) and protection of cultural and linguistic rights to address regional aspirations within the constitutional framework.
- **Strengthening regional representation in governance** : Provide fair representation to different regions in central decision-making bodies and ensure local participation in planning and development processes.
- **Empowering local governance and decentralization** : Strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies to address local needs effectively and give people a greater voice in governance.
- **Addressing migration-related tensions** : Implement policies for skill development and employment generation to reduce migration pressures and create harmony between locals and migrants.

Value Addition

Keywords : social empowerment, inclusive growth, marginalized communities, constitutional values, caste discrimination, gender equality, economic disparities, cooperative federalism, communalism, secularism, religious tolerance, communal violence, national integration,

regionalism, cultural identity, linguistic assertion, vote bank politics, interfaith dialogue, social justice, unity in diversity.

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. How can social empowerment initiatives help address inequality and marginalisation in India?
2. Analyse the role of education and skill development in empowering disadvantaged sections of society.
3. Discuss how communalism poses a threat to India's social harmony and national integration.
4. How does regionalism shape political discourse and public policy outcomes in India?
5. Discuss the positive and negative impacts of regional cultural identities on national unity.
6. Evaluate the challenges to secularism in India and suggest practical ways to uphold it.
7. In what ways can civil society and legal mechanisms strengthen secular values in India?

Acronyms

1.Components of Social Empowerment

"HERES"

- H — Health and nutrition security
- E — Educational access and equity
- R — Rights awareness and legal empowerment
- E — Economic opportunities (livelihoods, entrepreneurship, land rights)
- S — Social inclusion and dignity (ending discrimination, representation)

2.Causes of Communalism

"HERD POLITICS"

- H — Historical grievances and partition legacy
- E — Economic competition among communities
- R — Religious fundamentalism and

radicalization

- D — Divide-and-rule colonial policies
- P — Political mobilization for votes
- — Opportunistic leadership and hate propaganda
- L — Lack of interfaith dialogue and civic education
- I — Institutional failures (biased policing, delayed justice)
- T — Targeted violence and fear creation
- I — Ignorance and stereotypes in society
- C — Communal narratives in media
- S — Social segregation in neighborhoods and schools

3.Impacts of Regionalism

"FRACTURES"

- F — Federal tensions and center-state conflicts
- R — Rise of regional parties and local identity politics
- A — Alienation and separatist demands (e.g., Gorkhaland, Bodoland)
- C — Challenges to national unity and integration
- T — Tensions over resource sharing and employment
- U — Uneven development focus shifting to local issues only
- R — Regional language and cultural chauvinism
- E — Economic fragmentation (barriers to trade, migration)
- S — Social unrest and protests

4.Challenges to Secularism

"BIGOT IDEAS"

- B — Biased political rhetoric and majoritarianism
- I — Institutional weakness and selective law enforcement
- G — Growth of fundamentalism
- — Opportunistic alliances with religious groups
- T — Targeting minorities for polarization
- I — Identity-based mobilization in elections
- D — Decline of civic education and secular

values

- E — Erosion of constitutional morality in society
- A — Aggressive religious conversions or reconversions
- S — Spread of misinformation and communal propaganda

**Ready templates on common themes:-
General causes of regionalism**

Heading	Subheadings	Explanation
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Isolation• State Party politics• Lack of Representation• Regional political parties	
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poverty• Development imbalance• Resources protection• Unemployment	
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ethnicity• Social support• Education• Backwardness	
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Corruption• Inefficiency• Red tapism	



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