

#RiseWithRICE

RICE IAS

Expected
**EDITORIAL
EXPLAINED**

for

IAS Mains Examination

9th *to* 14th Feb 2026



INDEX

1. GENERAL STUDIES 1	01
1.1. SOCIETY	01
1.1.1. Social Media Regulation for Children	01
2. GENERAL STUDIES 2	05
2.1. POLITY & GOVERNANCE	05
2.1.1. Judicial Review of Religious Disputes in India	05
3. GENERAL STUDIES 3	10
3.1. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY	10
3.1.1. The Approaching Ai Surge, Its Global Consequences	10
3.1.2. The Shanti Act and India's Nuclear Transition	13
3.2. ECONOMY	17
3.2.1. Revised Labour Codes Reform Wage Structures and Empower Workers	17
4. GENERAL STUDIES 4	23
3.1. ETHICS	23
3.1.1. The Mineable Self – Human Life as The Next Big Commodity	23

Scan to know more about our courses...



IAS 2-Year GS PCM



IAS 10-Month GS PCM



Degree + IAS



Prelims Test Series

1.1. SOCIETY

1.1.1. SOCIAL MEDIA REGULATION FOR CHILDREN

Context:

- The tragic suicide of three sisters in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, recently has reignited debates on social media's impact on **adolescent mental health**. Preliminary investigations point to screen addiction and **familial conflicts**, prompting calls for outright bans amid global precedents.
- However, such **blunt policy measures** may inadvertently compromise the **digital rights** of minors while absolving technology platforms of **structural accountability**, necessitating a shift toward a **healthy media ecology**.



Social Media's Dual-Edged Potential

I. Benefits of Social Media for Children

Social media platforms offer **substantial developmental and social advantages**, especially in an increasingly digital society, despite legitimate concerns:

- **Access to information and learning:** Enables exposure to **educational content, skill-building resources**, and **collaborative learning communities**, supplementing formal education.
- **Creative expression:** Provides avenues for **artistic, literary, musical, and innovative expression**, fostering **imagination, confidence, and problem-solving skills**.
- **Social inclusion and support:** Acts as a **lifeline for marginalised groups**, including **LGBTQIA+ youth, children with disabilities**, and those in **remote or socially restrictive environments**.
 - Facilitates **peer-support networks** and shared experiences that may be unavailable offline.
- **Digital skills development:** Early engagement enhances **media literacy, communication competencies**, and **digital skills** essential for **future employability**.
- **Civic and cultural engagement:** Encourages participation in **social causes, awareness campaigns**, and **cultural exchange**, promoting **active digital citizenship**.
- **Social mobility and gender equity:** Social media can expand access to **information and opportunities**, particularly for girls.
 - **National Sample Survey data** indicate that only **33.3% of women** in India have ever used the internet compared to **57.1% of men**, highlighting how **restrictive measures risk deepening gendered digital divides**.

II. Necessity of Banning Social Media Use Among Children

Concerns around banning or restricting social media for children arise from its **multi-dimensional impact on health, behaviour, and safety**, particularly during formative years:

- **Impact on cognitive functioning:** Excessive screen exposure is associated with **reduced attention span, impaired concentration, and difficulty in learning and information retention**, adversely affecting **academic performance**.
- **Mental health vulnerabilities:** Prolonged and addictive use has been linked to **heightened anxiety, depressive tendencies, low self-esteem**, diminished **emotional self-regulation**, and a rise in **attention-related disorders such as ADHD**.
- **Adverse physical health outcomes:** Repeated exposure to curated content encourages **sedentary lifestyles, disordered eating patterns, and unrealistic body image standards**, contributing to **sleep disturbances, obesity**, and related health concerns.
- **Disruption of social development:** Over-reliance on virtual interactions can reduce **face-to-face communication**, leading to **social withdrawal, strained family relationships**, and difficulties in **emotional regulation**.
- **Online safety and child protection risks:** Children are increasingly vulnerable to **cyberbullying, online harassment, sexual exploitation**, and exposure to **age-inappropriate or harmful content**.
- **Influence of hazardous viral trends:** The rapid spread of **risky online challenges**—such as **breath-holding** or **delinquent behaviour trends**—poses risks of **physical harm, legal consequences**, and **disciplinary action** among minors.
- **Inadequate parental supervision:** In **urban and dual-income households**, limited parental oversight has contributed to **unregulated screen time**, often reflected in the phenomenon of **excessive device-dependent childhood**.
- **Algorithm-driven overuse:** **Engagement-maximising algorithms** personalise content to prolong usage, making it **difficult for children to disengage** and increasing the risk of **addictive behaviour**.

Key Challenges Linked to Banning Social Media for Children

Drawing on **Stanley Cohen's concept of moral panic**, such prohibitionist responses risk framing digital platforms as *"folk devils"*—creating an illusion of control while **diverting attention from structural gaps in child mental-health governance and digital regulation**. These challenges manifest across multiple dimensions:

- **Concerns over age verification and privacy:** The absence of **credible age-verification systems** allows underage users to evade restrictions using **VPNs and other workarounds**. Measures such as **government ID linkage, biometric verification, or age-estimation tools** pose significant **privacy and data-security risks**.
- **Possibility of excessive regulation:** Blanket restrictions may inadvertently include **gaming and communication platforms** like **Roblox and Discord**, leading to **unnecessary curbs on legitimate users**.

- **Movement to unsafe online spaces:** Since bans are difficult to enforce, children may migrate to **unregulated and encrypted platforms**, including the **Dark Web**, increasing exposure to harm.
- **Rights-related concerns and exclusion:** Prohibitions can undermine **freedom of expression and access to information**, disproportionately affecting **vulnerable communities**, especially **LGBTQIA+ youth** who rely on online support networks.
- **Barriers to digital skill building:** Limiting access also curtails **creative engagement, educational collaboration**, and **interest-based learning**, weakening the development of **essential digital skills**.

Why a Blanket Ban Will Not Work in India

Copy-pasting foreign bans ignores India's unique socio-technical landscape, yielding democratic deficits and unintended harms.

- **Technical Porosity:** India's vast digital population makes enforcement impractical.
- **Diversity of Contexts:** One-size-fits-all policies ignore variations across class, caste, gender, and region.
- **Democratic Deficit:** Policies are often framed **without consulting children**, disregarding their agency.
- **Institutional Capacity Constraints:** Regulatory institutions lack technical expertise to monitor compliance effectively.
- **Risk of State Overreach:** Linking social media access to identity verification may erode civil liberties.

India's Initiatives to Protect Children on Online Platforms

India has enacted a multi-layered framework emphasizing prevention, consent, and enforcement.

- **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023:** Mandates verifiable parental consent for processing data of those under 18, addressing consent gating flaws.
- **Section 67B, IT Act, 2000:** Imposes stringent penalties for child sexual abuse material (CSAM) publication, transmission, or viewing.
- **National Action Plan for Children, 2016:** Targets prevention of crimes, prioritizing sexual offenses.
- **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012:** Safeguards children under 18 from exploitation, ensuring child-centric judicial processes.
- **National Commission of Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) Mechanisms:** Operates online complaint systems for swift redressal.
- **Ratification of UNCRC {UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)} 1990:** Promotes protections for online/offline child rights violations.

Global Steps taken to Protect children from Social Media

- **Australia:** Australia enacted a law that prohibits anyone under 16 from **holding accounts on 10 major platforms**—including **Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, and X**—enforced through

mandatory age verification and fines of up to 50 million Australian dollars, making **Australia the first country** to effectively ban **under-16 social media accounts**.

- **Germany and France:** Raised age needed for parental consent to open an account.
- **United States:** Kids Online Safety Act provides protections for children online related to privacy and mental health concerns.
- **U.K.:** Online Safety Act, 2023 sets tougher standards for social media platforms like facebook- including appropriate age restrictions.
- **Netherlands and South Korea:** Restricted use of cell-phones in classrooms.

Way Forward

A **nuanced, child-centric strategy** must prioritise a **healthy media ecology** over blanket bans, integrating **multiple stakeholders** to create **sustainable and rights-respecting safeguards**.

- **Child-Centric Digital Governance:** Promote **age-appropriate design, privacy-by-default, and algorithmic accountability** through coordinated action by the State, platforms, and civil society; draw lessons from the **UK's Age-Appropriate Design Code**.
- **Strengthen Redressal Mechanisms:** Enhance **Child Helpline 1098**, appoint and train **cyber nodal officers**, and expand rapid-response tools such as **POCSO e-Box panic buttons** for online abuse reporting.
- **Improving Digital Skills and Education:** Institutionalise **digital literacy, responsible online behaviour, and self-regulation** through school-based initiatives; replicate **Kerala's Digital De-Addiction (D-DAD) centres** for children facing screen dependency.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Leverage national programmes like **NIPUN Bharat** and **Digital India** to empower **communities, parents, and educators** to recognise and mitigate **online risks**.
- **Parental Involvement and Control:** Encourage **joint parent-child accounts**, robust **privacy settings**, and **screen-time management tools** such as **Google Family Link**.
- **Tech Company Accountability:** Enforce a **duty of care** on platforms, strengthen **digital competition laws**, and ensure oversight by an **independent regulator** beyond **MeitY**; platforms like **Meta** already prescribe **13+ age thresholds**.

Conclusion

Bans provide illusory control, eroding digital rights while ignoring social media's dual-edged potential. True protection demands **robust regulation, local research, youth-inclusive policymaking, and equitable access**—fostering resilience in a tech-driven world. This **balanced ecology** aligns with India's constitutional ethos of empowering the young without compromising freedoms.

Q. Discuss the tension between child protection and digital rights in the regulation of social media platforms in India. How can the State ensure a rights-based, child-centric digital governance framework? 250 Words

2.1. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

2.1.1. JUDICIAL REVIEW OF RELIGIOUS DISPUTES IN INDIA

Context:

Recently, the **Madras High Court** delivered **two landmark judgments** involving the **Thiruparankundram Deepathoon** and the **hymn-reciting rights of the Thenkalai sect** at the **Kanchipuram Varadaraja Perumal temple**.

These rulings highlight the **increasing role of the judiciary** in adjudicating complex religious disputes. By intervening in these matters, the court has reaffirmed that temples are not **exclusive "private spaces"** immune to **constitutional oversight**.

This development signifies a critical juncture in Indian law where religious practices are systematically aligned with **Constitutional Principles**.



Evolution from Civil Rights to Constitutional Rights in Temple-Related Disputes

- 1. Pre-Constitutional Era: Temple Entry as Civil Disputes Civil Litigation Framework:** In the **pre-constitutional era**, disputes regarding **temple entry and co-worship** were treated as private **civil rights disputes**. **Kamudhi Temple Entry Case:** A classic example is the **Kamudhi temple entry case**, where the **Nadar community** fought for the right to enter the **Kamudhi temple** in **Ramanathapuram**, with the litigation eventually reaching the **Privy Council in London**. In **Sankaralinga Nadan and Ors v. Raja Rajeswara Dorai and Ors (1908)**, the **Privy Council** was called upon to decide whether the **Nadar community** had a **right to enter the Kamudhi temple**, reflecting how such questions were framed in terms of civil rights rather than fundamental rights.
- 2. Legislative Interventions in the Madras Presidency Regulatory Milestones:** In 1927, the **Madras Presidency government** enacted the **Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act** to govern temples and their endowments.
Supervisory Role: This legislation enabled the **auditing of temple funds** and the **creation of local temple committees**, thereby enshrining the **supervisory role of the Presidency government** over temple administration.
- 3. Post-1950: The Shift to Fundamental Rights Constitutional Adoption:** The Indian Constitution adopted in 1950, introduced **Articles 25 and 26**, granting **freedom of worship** to both **individuals** and **religious denominations**. **Public Interest Restrictions:** These rights were made **subject to public order, health, and morality**, allowing the state to regulate worship that offended the **public conscience**. **Jurisprudential Transformation:** Courts moved beyond civil rights to focus on **constitutional directives, equality, and religious freedom**, leading to the blossoming of modern jurisprudence around **temple entry, religious freedoms, and equality in the appointment of priests**.

4. Role of States in Shaping Temple-Related Jurisprudence Legislative Leadership: Many States led the way by enacting the **Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act** for better governance.

However, these regulations invited **judicial oversight**, where **writ courts** adjudicated whether **State intervention** respected **religious denominational rights** while safeguarding the **constitutional rights** of others, thereby contributing to the development of temple-related jurisprudence over the last 70 years.

Core Constitutional Concept: The Essential Religious Practice (ERP) Test

1. Nature of the Essential Religious Practice Test Concept of the Doctrine of Essentiality: In development of **jurisprudence on religious disputes**, inquiry has been undertaken by courts to determine whether **religious practices** conflict with **constitutional principles**, particularly in instances involving **restriction of entry** or **customary practices** that infringe upon **fundamental rights**, and such matters have accordingly been brought before **constitutional courts** for adjudication.

Subsequently, **Essential Religious Practice (ERP) Test**, doctrine evolved by **Supreme Court**, has been applied to ascertain whether particular custom or practice is **essentially integral to religion**, failing which it has been subjected to scrutiny under established **constitutional norms**. **Secular vs. Sacred:** Practices that are not **essentially religious** have been deemed “**secular**” and therefore open to **judicial guidance**, whereas those found to be **essential** are given **greater protection**, though not **absolute immunity**.

2. Criticism and Continued Use of the Essential Religious Practice Test Judicial Criticism: The **essential religious practice test** has faced criticism for **inconsistent interpretation in subsequent judgments**, with different benches arriving at **divergent conclusions** on what qualifies as “essential”. Despite this criticism, courts have continued to use the test to bring a **measure of objectivity to decisions** by **focusing on the core tenets of the religion** itself, **rather than on transient or peripheral customs**.

- **Sabarimala Judgment and Consolidation of Doctrine:** In **Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala (2018)**, widely known as **Sabarimala Case**, significant consolidation was undertaken when it was held by **Supreme Court** that even practices regarded as essential cannot be shielded from **judicial review** if found inconsistent with **constitutional morality**.
- **Supremacy of Constitutional Morality:** It has now been established as **law of land** that **religious freedoms** remain subject to **constitutional morality**, which is founded upon foundational principles of **justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity**.

Recent Madras High Court Judgments

1. Thiruparankundram Deepathoon Judgment Upholding Rituals: The court permitted the **lighting of the Karthigai Deepam** at the stone pillar on the hilltop, treating it as a part of the

temple's ritual framework. Regulation of Customs: This reaffirmed that **constitutional courts** can uphold religious rituals when they intersect with **tradition and constitutional law**.

2. **Kanchipuram Varadaraja Perumal Temple Dispute Sectarian Rights:** The court resolved a divide between the **Thenkalai and Vadakalai sects** regarding **hymn-recitation**.

- **Exclusive Rights Upheld:** Relying on **200-year-old disputes** and orders from 1915/1969, the court upheld the **exclusive right of the Thenkalai sect** to lead recitations, balancing **sectarian autonomy** with **non-discrimination**.
- **Significance of Judiciary's Role in Constitutionalization of Faith** Progression of religious disputes to **High Courts** and **Supreme Court** has marked transformative phase in **Indian jurisprudence**, as religious institutions have increasingly been situated within **democratic constitutional framework**, thereby limiting perception of absolute institutional autonomy.
- **Affirmation of Constitutional Supremacy in Religious Adjudication:** When such disputes are brought before **constitutional courts**, authority of judiciary to examine intersection between **faith** and **fundamental rights**—including **Article 14 (equality)**, **Article 15 (non-discrimination)**, **Article 21 (life and personal liberty)**, **Article 25 (freedom of religion)**, and **Article 26 (denominational rights)**—is reaffirmed, particularly in matters concerning **temple entry, ritual participation, and institutional representation**.
- **Integration of Temples within Public Law Framework:** Argument that temples constitute purely **private religious spaces** immune from oversight has been weakened, as many institutions are governed under **religious endowment legislations**, thereby bringing their administration within domain of **public law** and enabling legitimate **judicial supervision**.
- **Institutionalisation of Religion:** Increasing frequency of litigation has positioned **law relating to religion** at forefront of **constitutional discourse**, where courts function as structured forums for resolving tensions between **religious practice** and **individual dignity**, without allowing either sphere to dominate absolutely.
- **Harmonisation of Denominational Autonomy:** Judicial engagement has aimed at reconciling **autonomy of religious denominations** with **constitutional morality (adherence to foundational values of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity)**, ensuring that traditional authority remains subject to **rule of law**.
- **Protection of Individual Rights within Religious Spaces:** Through exercise of **judicial review**, deeply entrenched practices have been examined to ensure that rights of individual worshippers are not curtailed in violation of **equality, non-discrimination, or personal liberty**, thereby reinforcing rights-based constitutional order.
- **Restructuring of State–Religion–Citizen Interface:** Continuous constitutional scrutiny has reshaped relationship between **State, religious institutions, and citizens**, embedding governance of faith-based institutions within broader constitutional architecture while maintaining space for legitimate religious freedom.
- **Challenges in Judicial Adjudication of Constitutionalization of Faith** Despite the progressive intent behind the “constitutionalization” of religion, the judiciary faces significant institutional and social hurdles when entering the sacred sphere.

- **Judicial Overreach and Expertise Gap:** Extensive intervention into rituals and doctrines risks **judicial overreach**, as courts may intrude upon domains traditionally managed by religious authorities.
- Furthermore, judges may lack the **theological expertise** required to interpret ancient scriptures, leading to decisions that are legally sound but **religiously contested**.
Inconsistency in the ERP Test: The **Essential Religious Practice (ERP) test** often suffers from **doctrinal uncertainty** due to inconsistent application across different benches.
- Further, varying interpretations of what constitutes an “essential” practice undermine **legal predictability**, making it difficult for religious institutions to anticipate judicial outcomes.
- **Risk of Politicization:** High-profile religious rulings are frequently **politicized**, with actors utilizing court orders to mobilize support or deepen **social divisions**.
- **Conflict Between Morality and Autonomy:** A fundamental challenge lies in balancing **Constitutional Morality** with the **denominational autonomy** guaranteed under **Article 26**. Courts often face accusations of “**secular paternalism**” when pushing for reform, or complicity in discrimination when deferring to traditional customs.
- **Implementation and Enforcement Hurdles:** Even when courts issue landmark directions, the **ground-level implementation** remains problematic. The **execution of judicial orders** is often hindered by **local resistance, social boycotts, or institutional non-cooperation**.

Way forward: Strengthening Constitutional-Religious Harmony

1. Strategic Directions for the Judiciary

- **Consistency in Standards:** Courts should apply **clear and consistent standards** in the **ERP test** to avoid contradictory rulings.
- **Avoidance of Overreach:** Interventions should focus on **core principles** rather than **micromanaging rituals**.
- **Evidence-Based Adjudication:** Greater reliance on **theological and historical evidence** is needed to make decisions **context-sensitive**.
- **Pre-litigation Mediation:** Mechanisms like **expert-committee consultations** should be explored to reduce **adversarial litigation**.
- **Promoting Institutional Mediation:** Courts should encourage **Peace Committees** and mediation for disputes involving shared sacred sites, as seen in the **Thiruparankundram case**.

2. Role of the Legislature and Executive

- **Legislative Review:** Religious endowment laws should be updated to match **contemporary constitutional values** like **financial accountability**.
- **Administrative Training:** **Temple management bodies** should be trained to implement **equality and representation** in daily administration.
- **Neutral Regulation:** The state must ensure that the **regulation of religious practices** is **neutral and non-discriminatory**.

3. Engagement of Civil Society and Religious Institutions

- **Internalising Equality:** Religious institutions should adopt **non-discrimination** in their **administrative decisions**.
- **Inter-sect Dialogue:** Promoting **amicable dispute resolution** can reduce the **polarisation** that leads to litigation.
- **Constitutional Literacy:** Educational curricula should foster a **constitutional-minded citizenry** that respects both **faith and fundamental rights**.

Conclusion

The evolution of temple jurisprudence in India signifies that religious freedom is not an absolute right but one that is **tethered to the bedrock of the Constitution**. By entering the “**sanctum**,” the judiciary does not seek to replace faith, but to ensure that faith operates within the framework of **Justice, Liberty, and Equality**. The enduring role of the courts remains to protect the core spiritual essence of religions while purging practices that undermine human dignity.

Q. “Religious freedom in India is not absolute but subject to constitutional morality.” Analyse this statement with reference to recent judicial trends and landmark judgments. 250 Words

Scan to know more about our courses...



IAS 2-Year GS PCM



IAS 10-Month GS PCM



Degree + IAS



Prelims Test Series

3.1. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

3.1.1. THE APPROACHING AI SURGE, ITS GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES

Context:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is emerging as a transformative general-purpose technology comparable to the Industrial Revolution and the Internet revolution. The current AI surge—driven by generative AI, **machine learning**, **big data analytics**, and **advanced semiconductor** capabilities—is reshaping economic systems, governance structures, and global power equations. Its implications extend beyond technology into civilizational change.



Drivers of the AI Surge

1. Rapid Technological Breakthroughs

- Development of **Large Language Models (LLMs)** and generative AI capable of reasoning, coding, content creation, and decision support.
- Integration of AI with cloud computing, **Internet of Things (IoT)**, **robotics**, and **5G networks**.
- Declining cost of data storage and increased computational capacity enabling real-time processing.

2. Massive Public and Private Investments

- Strategic funding by major economies (**US, China, EU**) treating AI as a national priority.
- Tech giants investing in AI research, chip design, and global data infrastructure.
- Governments embedding AI in defense, urban planning, welfare delivery, and digital governance.

Significance and Implications:

1. Productivity Enhancement and Structural Growth

Significance:

- AI as a general-purpose technology transforming production across sectors.
- Automation **improves efficiency, reduces costs, and minimizes errors**.
- Predictive analytics strengthens supply chains, agriculture, finance, and manufacturing.

Implications:

- Higher economic growth and global competitiveness.
- Rise of new models (AI-as-a-Service, platform economies, hyper-personalization).
- Industrial restructuring and creative destruction.
- Pressure on developing nations to upgrade technological capacity.

2. Labour Market Transformation

Significance:

- Automation of routine cognitive and clerical tasks.
- Growth in demand for high-skill AI-related jobs.

Implications:

- Short-term job displacement in low- and mid-skill sectors.
- Shift toward skill-based, digitally adaptive employment.
- Risk of structural unemployment without effective transition policies.

3. Rising Inequality Risks

Significance:

- Concentration of AI infrastructure in few corporations and advanced nations.
- Unequal access to data, chips, and computing power.

Implications:

- Widening global digital divide.
- Technological dependency of developing nations.
- Income polarization and potential social unrest.

4. AI, Strategic Dominance and Digital Sovereignty

Significance:

- AI as a strategic asset in defense, surveillance, and cyber operations.
- Nations asserting control over data and digital infrastructure for autonomy.

Implications:

- Intensified global power competition and techno-nationalism.
- Risk of AI arms race.
- Fragmentation of global digital order into regulatory blocs.
- Trade tensions over data and semiconductor supply chains.

5. Cybersecurity and Information Warfare

Significance:

- AI strengthens cyber defense but also enables advanced cyberattacks.
- Use of **deepfakes** and misinformation tools.

Implications:

- Vulnerability of critical infrastructure.
- Threats to democratic institutions and elections.
- Expansion of hybrid warfare.

- Need for global cybersecurity cooperation and AI governance frameworks.

Challenges of Governing AI

1. Regulatory and Accountability Deficit

- Absence of clear legal frameworks for liability in autonomous failures (e.g., self-driving cars, AI diagnostics). Difficulty in fixing responsibility among developers, deployers, and users.
- Inadequacy of traditional legal principles to address AI-driven harms.

2. Ethical Concerns: Bias, Privacy, and Surveillance

- Algorithmic bias leading to discrimination in hiring, credit, policing, and welfare. Lack of standardized auditing and transparency mechanisms.
- Privacy risks from facial recognition and mass data analytics.
- Tension between data-driven governance and constitutional rights (**privacy, equality, due process**).

3. Societal and Cultural Disruptions

- AI-generated content raising intellectual property and authorship disputes.
- Transformation of work, creativity, and knowledge production.
- Over-reliance on algorithmic decisions reducing human agency and trust in institutions.

4. Social Stability and Public Perception

- Fear of job displacement and widening inequality. Leading to risk of social unrest if transitions are not inclusive.
- Digital literacy gaps across regions and generations.

5. National-Level Capacity Constraints

- Limited semiconductor manufacturing and advanced research capacity. Dependence on foreign AI platforms and technologies and need for effective data protection enforcement.
- Importance of indigenous innovation, AI skilling (**NEP 2020**), and public-private partnerships.

Way Forward

1. Human-Centric AI

- Prioritize human welfare, dignity, and autonomy in AI design. Ensure meaningful human oversight in critical sectors (**healthcare, judiciary, defense**).
- Embed fairness, accountability, and transparency to build public trust. Focus on augmenting—not fully replacing—human capabilities.

2. Inclusive Growth

- Translate AI-driven productivity gains into broad-based economic benefits. Invest in large-scale reskilling and upskilling initiatives.
- Strengthen social safety nets to address job displacement. Promote digital inclusion, with focus on vulnerable groups and developing regions.

3. Balanced Regulation

- Adopt a risk-based and adaptive regulatory framework.
- Ensure algorithmic transparency, data protection, and accountability.
- Avoid overregulation that stifles innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Introduce periodic review mechanisms to keep laws technologically relevant.

4. International Cooperation

- Develop harmonized global standards on AI ethics and governance. Strengthen cooperation on **data governance, cybersecurity**, and autonomous weapons.
- Use multilateral forums (**UN, G20, OECD**) for dialogue and norm-setting. Prevent regulatory fragmentation and an AI arms race.

5. Capacity Building

- Invest in R&D, semiconductor manufacturing, and digital infrastructure. Promote technological competitiveness and self-reliance.
- Strengthen higher education and industry–academia collaboration. Build a skilled AI talent pipeline through education reforms.

Conclusion

The AI surge marks a transformative era, promising unprecedented innovation and productivity while posing risks of inequality and geopolitical friction. Its future impact will hinge on visionary governance, global cooperation, and inclusive policies to ensure AI advances human

Q. The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence presents both unprecedented opportunities and complex governance challenges. Analyse the economic and geopolitical implications of the AI surge. Suggest measures to ensure its responsible and inclusive development, with special reference to India. 250 words

3.1.2. THE SHANTI ACT AND INDIA'S NUCLEAR TRANSITION

Context:

- Parliament has recently passed the **Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act**, which allows **private companies to enter the nuclear power sector**. It repeals the **Atomic Energy Act, 1962** and the **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA), 2010**, and establishes new regulatory and liability frameworks.



- The Shanti Act is aimed at accelerating **India's clean energy transition** and achieving a **100 GW nuclear capacity target by 2047**. However, it has raised concerns over **supplier indemnification, dilution of liability provisions, and possible moral hazard affecting public safety**.

Background: Rationale for the Reforms under the SHANTI Act

The SHANTI Act marks a structural shift from a **closed, state-led model** to a **liberalized, hybrid ecosystem**. The rationale for this overhaul is rooted in several critical factors:

- **Persistent Stagnation in Energy Share:** Despite being a priority for decades, **nuclear power has accounted for only about 3% of India's total electricity generation**. The present nuclear capacity stands at a modest **8.78 GW**, failing to become a primary energy pillar.
- **Historical Failure to Meet Targets:** The sector has a **legacy of missed milestones**; in the 1980s, a target of **10 GW by 2000** was set, but only **2.86 GW** was achieved. Similarly, the 2006 target of **20 GW by 2020** resulted in an actual capacity of only **6.78 GW**.
- **Systemic Bottlenecks and Delays:** These failures stem from **high capital costs, safety concerns, and chronic project delays**. A prime example is the **Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam**; originally scheduled for commissioning in **2010**, it has yet to become operational.
- **Need for Resource Mobilization:** Opening the sector enables **private participation** to expand **capital availability**, attracting the domestic and global investment required to scale operations beyond the limitations of public funding.
- **Access to Advanced Technology:** Private sector entry is intended to accelerate the adoption of **advanced technologies**, such as **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)** and modern safety systems. However, it has been found that SMRs remain an **untested technology** with **potentially higher estimated capital costs** per unit of power.

Core Features of the SHANTI Act

The SHANTI Act represents a significant overhaul of India's nuclear energy policy, positioned as a critical reform to achieve the national target of **100 GW nuclear capacity by 2047** and support the long-term goal of **decarbonization by 2070**.

- **End of State Monopoly:** The Act terminates the **government's exclusive control** over nuclear power. It permits **private companies and joint ventures** to operate plants, generate power, manufacture specialized equipment, and engage in fuel fabrication.
- **Strategic Government Control:** Sensitive **"fuel-cycle"** activities—including **uranium enrichment, management of spent fuel, and thorium processing**—are reserved exclusively for the Central government.
- **Statutory Status for AERB:** The **Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)** is granted **statutory status** to strengthen its authority. It is now answerable to **Parliament** rather than solely to the executive.
- **Graded Liability System:** A clear, tiered financial liability cap is established for operators based on the size of the installation:
 - **Large Plants:** ₹3,000 crore.

- **Medium Plants:** ₹1,500 crore.
- **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs):** ₹100 crore.
- **Nuclear Liability Fund:** For damages exceeding the operator's cap, the Central Government provides coverage through a dedicated fund. The total liability for any single incident is capped at **300 million Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)**, approximately **₹3,900 crore**.
- **Complete Supplier Indemnity:** In a major shift from the **CLNDA 2010**, the "**right of recourse**" against suppliers is removed. Suppliers are now **exempt from civil or criminal liability**, even if an accident is caused by **defective equipment**; all legal liability is channeled solely to the **plant operator**.
- **Legal Consolidation:** The Act omits **Clause 46 of CLNDA**, preventing **victims from using other civil or criminal laws** to seek **additional remedies**. All claims must now be processed specifically through the mechanisms defined in this Act.
- **Oversight of Non-Power Uses:** Beyond energy, the Act provides a structured framework for the peaceful application of radiation in **healthcare (radiotherapy), agriculture, and industrial research**, including a licensing system for these activities.
- **Adjudication Mechanisms:** To manage disputes and ensure timely compensation, the Act establishes the **Atomic Energy Redressal Advisory Council** and a specialized **Nuclear Damage Claims Commission**. The **Appellate Tribunal for Electricity** serves as the **final appellate body**.
- **International Alignment:** The compensation scope is extended to **cover damage** caused in **foreign territories** by an incident in India, aligning domestic rules with global treaties like the **Convention on Supplementary Compensation (CSC)**.

Significance of the SHANTI Act

The **SHANTI Act** is designed to transform nuclear energy into a high-value commercial market, offering massive financial incentives for private industry.

- **Massive Market Scale:** Individual nuclear projects involve huge investments. For example, two **Westinghouse AP1000** reactors in the U.S. recently cost about **\$18 billion each**. The Act opens this **multi-billion dollar** market to private players in India.
- **Profit Without Liability:** The Act allows **private corporations** and **foreign suppliers** to earn significant profits from these projects. Crucially, it ensures they can do so without the risk of facing heavy financial consequences or lawsuits if an accident occurs.
- **Incentivizing Private Investment:** By removing the "**right of recourse**" (**the ability to sue suppliers for defective equipment**), the government has removed the biggest "**risk barrier**" for global companies, making India an attractive destination for **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)**.
- **Business-Friendly Environment:** The Act aims to ensure that private ventures can proceed quickly. It balances regulatory oversight with the need for speed, ensuring that regulations do not become an obstacle to the **profitability** of nuclear power plants.

Critical Concerns: Accountability and Safety Risks

The transition to the **SHANTI Act** framework introduces significant concerns regarding the balance between industrial growth and public protection.

- **Gross Disparity in Compensation:** The total liability cap under the Act (approx. **₹3,900 crore**) is nearly a thousand times smaller than the actual costs of historical disasters. For instance, the **Fukushima accident** costs are projected to reach **₹46 lakh crore**, and the **Chernobyl disaster** cost Belarus alone **₹21 lakh crore**, leaving an area the size of Goa as a restricted "**Exclusion Zone**" for 40 years.
- **Financial Burden on Victims:** Even with international funds from the **Convention on Supplementary Compensation (CSC)**, total available money is unlikely to cover even **1% of potential damage**. Under the Act, victims have **no legal right** to seek **compensation beyond this cap**, potentially forcing citizens to bear the loss of life and property on their own.
- **Issue of "Moral Hazard":** By shielding **private operators and suppliers** from the full financial weight of a catastrophe, the Act creates a **moral hazard**. This insulation from consequences may discourage the industry from maintaining the **highest safety standards** and encourage **greater risk-taking**.
- **Dilution of Absolute Liability:** The Act indemnifies operators for accidents caused by "**grave natural disasters**." This reverses India's established legal principle of "**absolute liability**" for hazardous industries. Since the Fukushima disaster was caused by a tsunami, this exemption is seen as a major loophole that reduces the incentive to build ultra-resilient plants.
- **Prioritizing Corporate Interests:** While the liability cap protects **private nuclear operators** from financial ruin and encourages investment, it effectively shifts the massive socio-economic risk of a nuclear accident away from the corporations and onto the **State and its citizens**.

Additional Initiatives to Promote Nuclear Energy

- **National Nuclear Energy Mission:** Established in the **Union Budget 2025-26** with a **₹20,000 crore** outlay, this mission focuses on the **design and deployment** of Small **Modular Reactors** (SMRs). The objective is to have **five indigenous SMRs** operational by **2033** to accelerate the **clean energy transition**.
- **Indigenous Innovation via BARC:** The **Bhabha Atomic Research Centre** is pioneering the **200 MWe Bharat Small Modular Reactor (BSMR-200)**. This initiative aims to establish a local supply chain and reduce **technological import dependency**.
- **Three-Stage Power Programme:** This long-term strategy ensures **fuel security** by progressing from **PHWRs** to **Fast Breeder Reactors**, eventually utilizing India's extensive **Thorium reserves** for near-infinite energy sovereignty.
- **International Nuclear Alliances:** Through agreements like the **123 Agreement** and partnerships with **Russia and France**, India secures **global fuel supplies** and **advanced reactor technology**, overcoming domestic uranium limitations.

Way Forward: Strengthening the SHANTI Act Framework

- **Strengthening Regulatory Independence:** The **AERB** must be granted full functional autonomy, moving away from the influence of the **Atomic Energy Commission**, to ensure safety is not compromised for commercial speed.
- **Revisiting Liability Caps:** To protect citizens, the **liability caps** should be indexed to inflation or linked to the potential scale of disasters, ensuring that compensation remains realistic in the event of a major accident.
- **Ensuring Contractual Recourse:** While the Act omits statutory recourse, operators must be encouraged to include **stringent indemnity clauses** in private contracts with suppliers to maintain a check on equipment quality.
- **Focusing on Indigenous R&D:** Reliance on high-cost foreign technology should be balanced by accelerating the **Three-Stage Nuclear Power Programme**, utilizing India's vast **thorium reserves** to ensure long-term energy sovereignty.
- **Public Awareness and Transparency:** Given the history of nuclear apprehensions, a robust **public communication framework** is required to build trust regarding the safety protocols of new private-sector-operated plants.

Conclusion

The **SHANTI Act** marks a significant step toward **liberalizing India's nuclear sector** and advancing its **Net Zero 2070 goals**. However, the provisions on **supplier indemnification** and **liability caps** raise serious concerns about **public safety and accountability**. Its success will depend on balancing **ease of doing business** with **strict safety standards and fair compensation mechanisms**.

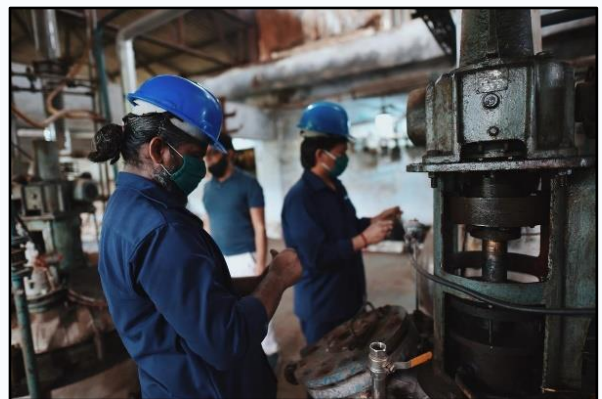
Q. The SHANTI Act seeks to accelerate India's clean energy transition and achieve 100 GW nuclear capacity by 2047. Critically examine whether the reform balances commercial viability with public safety. (250 words)

3.2. ECONOMY

3.2.1. REVISED LABOUR CODES REFORM WAGE STRUCTURES AND EMPOWER WORKERS

Context

- The implementation of the **Four Labour Codes** in India represents a paradigm shift from a **fragmented, colonial-era regulatory framework** to a **cohesive, digitally-driven ecosystem**.
- By consolidating **29 central labour laws**, the reforms aim to balance the "**ease of doing business**" with a "**universalization of social security**."



- At the heart of this transition is a structural intervention designed to foster **financial inclusion**, redefine the **employer-employee relationship**, and ensure that the fruits of economic growth are equitably distributed among the workforce.

Background: The Need for Reforming Labour Codes

Historically, India's labour market was governed by a complex web of overlapping statutes that created compliance burdens for employers and left nearly **90% of the workforce (unorganized sector)** without formal protection. The **Second National Commission on Labour (2002)** recommended consolidation to resolve:

- **Systemic Complexity:** Over 40 central and 100 state laws fostered an inefficient "Inspector Raj."
- **Legal Fragmentation:** Inconsistent definitions of "**wages**," "**worker**," and "**factory**" led to endless litigation.
- **Modern Exclusions:** A total lack of recognition for the burgeoning **gig and platform economy**.

Key Provisions of Labour Codes Redefining Wages and Empowering Workers

The reform is built upon four pillars: the **Code on Wages (2019)**, the **Industrial Relations Code (2020)**, the **Social Security Code (2020)**, and the **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (2020)**.

1. Uniform Definition of Wages

- The **Code on Wages, 2019** introduces a single, universal definition of "**wages**" applicable across all four labour codes, replacing the earlier fragmented and sector specific definitions used under precode laws.
- Under the **earlier regime**, 'wages' were defined inconsistently across statutes such as the **Payment of Wages Act, 1936, Minimum Wages Act, 1948, Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972,** and **Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952**. These definitions often excluded various allowances, leading to a **lower wage-base for social security calculations**.
- Now, **wages** explicitly include **basic pay, dearness allowance and retaining allowance**, while certain components such as **house rent allowance, conveyance allowance, employer's contribution to PF/NPS and statutory bonus** are treated as **exclusions**, subject to a cap.-**rent allowance, conveyance allowance, employer's contribution to PF/NPS and statutory bonus**
- A "**50% rule**" is embedded: **wages must constitute at least 50% of total remuneration**; if allowances exceed 50%, the **excess is added back to wages** for statutory calculations, thereby **raising the wage share and expanding social security contributions.-share and expanding social-security contributions**

2. Universal Minimum Wages and Timely Payment

- The Code mandates a **floor wage** (a **national baseline** set by the **Central Government based on minimum living standards**, below which no State Government can set wages) and **statutory minimum wages** (the **legally lowest remuneration** fixed by the appropriate

government for specific regions or occupations, which must be equal to or higher than the floor wage) applicable to all workers, including permanent, fixed-term, contract, part-time, and gig workers, thereby eliminating earlier sectoral exclusions and wage ceiling thresholds.

- It also **prohibits arbitrary deductions**, requires **timely payment of wages** (often into bank accounts), and removes the earlier wage ceiling threshold that limited coverage, thus **enhancing income security and financial inclusion**.-ceiling threshold that limited coverage, thus

3. Gratuity and Fixed Term Employment Term Employment-Term Employment

- Under the **revised gratuity provisions**, **fixed term employees** become eligible for **gratuity after completing one year of continuous service**, instead of the earlier **five year requirement** under the **Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972**.-term employees-year requirement
- This change recognises the growing share of **fixed-term and project-based employment** and converts **short-term work** into a mechanism for **terminal financial benefits** and **asset creation**, thereby strengthening long-term income security.

4. Coverage of Gig and Platform Workers

- The **Social Security Code** formally recognises **gig and platform workers**, bringing them under the ambit of **social security schemes, insurance and welfare funds** for the first time, unlike the **earlier framework** which largely excluded them from statutory protections.
- It also provides **portability of benefits** across states and employers, which is particularly significant for **migrant and informal workers**, enabling **continuous access to social security entitlements** despite job or location changes.-security entitlements

Significance of the Labour Reforms: Empowering the Modern Workforce

The consolidation of labour laws into four comprehensive codes is not merely an administrative exercise; it is a **structural intervention** aimed at aligning India's economic growth with **social justice** and **financial dignity**.

- **Enhanced Financial Inclusion and Social Security:** By **raising the wage share** in total remuneration, the codes increase **employer contributions to provident fund (PF), pension and gratuity**, leading to **higher long term savings and retirement security** for workers.-share-term savings and retirement security
 - **Furthermore, gratuity after one year** for **fixed term employees** transforms **short term contracts** into **structured income security mechanisms**, reducing vulnerability during job transitions.-term employees-term contracts-security mechanisms
- **Formalisation of Informal and Gig Work:** Extending **minimum wages, social security and welfare benefits** to **gig, platform and unorganised workers** helps **formalise large segments of the informal economy** and integrate them into the **formal financial and social security architecture**.-security architecture
 - Additionally, **portability of benefits** reduces the risk of exclusion when workers migrate across states or switch between formal and informal engagements.

- **Income Redistribution and Inclusive Growth:** The **redistribution of economic value from capital to labour** through higher wages and contributions strengthens **workers' purchasing power**, which in turn stimulates **domestic demand and consumption led growth**.-security contributions strengthens **-led growth**
 - Unlike capital income that may flow into financial markets or external assets, **labour income tends to circulate within the domestic economy**, generating **multiplier effects** on employment and local demand.-income that may flow into financial markets or external assets,
- **Regulatory Simplification and Transparency:** Consolidating 29 laws into **four codes** reduces **compliance complexity**, improves **transparency**, and creates a **more predictable regulatory environment** for both workers and employers.
 - The introduction of **single registration, single licence, and single return** mechanisms streamlines administration and reduces opportunities for **regulatory arbitrage and non-compliance**.

Multidimensional Impact of Labour Reforms: Workers, Employers, and the Economy

The transition to the unified labour codes generates a cascading effect across different stakeholders, shifting the focus from mere regulation to a **sustainable economic partnership**.

- **Impact on Workers: Higher wage share and gratuity eligibility** directly enhance **income security, savings and long term social protection**, especially for **fixed term, contract and informal workers**.
 - By establishing **universal minimum wages and timely payment**, the codes reduce wage-arbitrariness and **protect vulnerable workers** from exploitation and delayed remuneration. This formal recognition of the **gig economy** ensures that even non-traditional workers have a stake in the formal social safety net.
- **Impact on Employers: The 50% wage rule and expanded gratuity coverage** increase **statutory liabilities** for large firms, particularly those with **high reliance on fixed term and contract workers** (e.g., IT services, construction, manufacturing).
 - However, this increase in cost is balanced by **simplified compliance and digital-first processes**, which reduce administrative friction, minimize "Inspector Raj" interference, and improve **labour-management predictability rule**.
- **Macroeconomic and Structural Impact: Greater financial inclusion of workers** expands the **formal savings base**, deepens **financial markets**, and supports **long-term investment** in infrastructure and human capital.
 - By **reducing labour-market segmentation** and integrating gig and informal workers into social-security nets, the codes contribute to **social stability and resilience** against economic shocks.
 - The resulting boost in **purchasing power** creates a self-sustaining cycle of **consumption-led growth**, ensuring that economic progress is broad-based and inclusive.

Key Limitations of the New Labour Codes

Despite the transformative potential of the reforms, several structural and operational hurdles persist that could undermine the goal of universal worker empowerment.

1. Implementation and Enforcement Bottlenecks

- **Uneven Adoption:** While the Central Government has notified the codes, effective implementation remains inconsistent across **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**, the informal sector, and remote geographical regions.
- **Capacity Constraints:** Weak **inspection capacity** and a lack of awareness among the grassroots workforce often lead to non-compliance.
- **Diluted Oversight:** The transition from "Inspectors" to "**Inspector-cum-Facilitators**" and the shift toward web-based inspections are perceived by some as a softening of enforcement, potentially allowing safety and wage violations to go unchecked.

2. Ambiguities in the Wage Definition and Legal Friction

- **Calculation Uncertainty:** The absence of a clear statutory definition for "**total remuneration**" makes applying the **50% wage-rule** technically complex, leading to compliance uncertainty and high **litigation risks**.
- **Interpretive Disputes:** Ongoing disputes over which specific allowances fall under "exclusions" versus "wages" may lead to **delayed benefit accrual** for workers as companies await judicial clarifications.

3. Trade-Union Resistance and the Political Economy

- **Perception of Bias:** Major **trade unions** have launched nationwide strikes (such as the **Bharat Bandh in February 2026**), arguing that the codes favor **corporate flexibility** (e.g., easing hiring and firing norms) over long-term job security.
- **Erosion of Bargaining Power:** Restrictions on the **right to strike** and the requirement for extended notice periods are viewed as a dilution of collective bargaining rights, overshadowing the pro-worker social security gains.

4. Coverage Gaps and Operational Challenges

- **Gig Economy Hurdles:** While **gig and platform workers** are formally recognized, operationalizing their inclusion remains a logistical challenge. Current rules requiring a minimum of **90 days of engagement** to qualify for benefits may exclude a significant portion of the transient workforce.
- **Exclusion Thresholds:** Raising the employee threshold for **standing orders** and **retrenchment permission** (from **100 to 300 workers**) leaves employees in smaller establishments more vulnerable to arbitrary dismissals.
- **Digital Divide:** Registration for benefits via the **e-Shram portal** requires **Aadhaar-linked documentation**, which often excludes the most marginalized migrant workers who lack stable digital identities.

Way Forward: The Path to 'Viksit Bharat'

To ensure that the transition to the new labour codes results in genuine empowerment rather than administrative friction, a multi-pronged strategy is required:

- **Harmonized Federal Implementation:** As "Labour" is a subject on the **Concurrent List**, there is an urgent need for the **rapid notification of rules** by all State Governments. This uniformity is essential to prevent **regulatory arbitrage**, where businesses might migrate to states with more relaxed enforcement, thereby creating a "race to the bottom" in worker protection.

- **Leveraging Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** The success of these reforms hinges on **strengthening the e-Shram and EPFO portals**. Enhancing **digital literacy** among the workforce will ensure that workers—especially migrant and informal labourers—can directly track their contributions and claim benefits via **Aadhaar-seeded accounts**, effectively eliminating exploitative middlemen.
- **Institutionalizing a "Just Transition":** To mitigate the impact of automation and the gig economy's volatility, the government must prioritize the **establishment of a National Re-skilling Fund**. This fund should facilitate **continuous skill development**, allowing workers to transition smoothly within a rapidly evolving, tech-driven job market without facing income loss.
- **Support Ecosystem for MSMEs:** Recognizing that Small and Medium Enterprises are the largest employers, the government should consider **providing temporary subsidies or tax breaks**. These fiscal incentives would help small businesses absorb the **increased statutory liabilities** of the new wage structure without compromising their financial viability or reducing their workforce.
- **Strengthening Social Dialogue:** To resolve the deadlock with trade unions, a **continuous tripartite dialogue** between the government, employers, and labour representatives is necessary. **Transparent communication** can help bridge the trust gap, ensuring that the codes are viewed not as a threat to rights, but as a modern tool for **inclusive prosperity**.

Conclusion

India's labour codes are not merely a regulatory cleanup; they are a **social contract for the 21st century**. By prioritizing **income security** and **dignity of labour**, the reforms transition the Indian worker from a "**variable cost**" to a "**valued stakeholder**." The long-term success of this framework will lie in its **effective enforcement**, ensuring that the "last mile" worker is the primary beneficiary of India's growth story.

Q. Discuss the merits and demerits of the four 'Labour Codes' in the context of labour market reform reforms in India. What has been the progress so far in this regard? (Answer in 250 words)

Scan to know more about our courses...



IAS 2-Year GS PCM



IAS 10-Month GS PCM



Degree + IAS



Prelims Test Series

4.1. ETHICS

4.1.1. THE MINEABLE SELF – HUMAN LIFE AS THE NEXT BIG COMMODITY

Context:

Recently, a conceptual shift in global capitalism has been highlighted through a detailed analysis of how **human selves, stories, and social relations** are being transformed into a **new global commodity**, cutting across **media, technology, finance, identity politics, and artificial intelligence ecosystems**.



Evolution from Industrial Capitalism to Sociality Extraction

Historical transition from traditional **industrial capitalism** to contemporary era is marked by profound shift in focus of value extraction.

- **Marxist Surplus Value Theory: Industrial capitalism** is noted for **marked predilection** for **creation and exploitation** of **surplus value**. As theorized by **Marx**, **surplus value** is value generated beyond **value of labour** required to produce **commodities**, which floats into mysterious form of **profit** for **owners and managers of capital**.
- **Shift in Horizon of Extraction:** Today, **human beings** have become new object and horizon of capitalist extraction. New object is identified as **sociality itself**, shifting focus from **physical labour to core of human relationships**.
- **Exhaustive Extraction of Social Bonds:** This new form of mining targets every domain of human connection, including **friendships, love lives, family connections, classmates, children, fellow workers, and neighbours**.
- **Functional and Digital Networks:** Extraction extends to **digital lives, political allies, and even food and drug suppliers**, rendering all sociality resource for profit.
- **Creative Destruction of Social Guardrails:** This process represents new feat of **creative destruction**, where traditional ideas of **privacy, intimacy, and trust** are rendered obsolete to facilitate extraction without permission or limit.

Mineable Self and Major Drivers of the Mineable Self

The **mineable self** refers to the **self treated as a commodity** that can be **mined, packaged and monetised** through stories, sociality and digital identities. Transformation of **self into newest form of raw material** is driven by **three fundamental structural changes** in global market:

- **Global Hunt for Portability and Characters:** Allure of global market has captured market in characters, leading to global hunt for stories from **Mexico to Nepal and Spain to Indonesia**.

- Every form of **local mythology and folklore** is trolled by publishers and prize committees in search of **portability** and "**vaguely universal themes**."
- New character types such as **aliens, cyber-monsters, and post-blobs** are sought to fulfill global appetites.
- **Redefinition of Locality:** Locality is no longer bound by **parochial or proximate** but acts as **prismatic refraction of global issues**.
- **Narrative First Responders** (persons with cameras in war zones act as **photojournalists**) put global narrative system on alert.
- **Syndicated news services** perform **triage on local incidents**, stoking furnace of global media and creating new geography that transcends **global-local antonyms**.
- **Multiplication of the "I" and the "Me":** Right to have story is extended to **ordinary humans, banks, nations, and corporations**.
- In **twilight zone of AI**, bots like **Siri and ChatGPT** compete to display human-like emotions and vulnerabilities, challenging human monopolies over **affect, judgement, and intuition**.

The Great Chain of Storytelling

Mining of self is optimized through systematic narration and audience acquisition:

- **Right to Story:** Every individual is encouraged to claim narrative of **heroism, victimhood, or redemption**. Professional assistance is provided by **influencers, coaches, and writing apps** to refine these narrations for market consumption.
- **Monetization of Virality:** Lucky virality of trivial self-narrations has powered careers of numerous **YouTube stars**.
- **Convergence of Slogans:** Current market operates on twin beliefs that **every self has story** and **every story deserves audience**, leading to drilling of every living "mineshaft" for extractable data.

Technological Catalyst: OTT Streaming and Deconstruction

Over-the-Top (OTT) streaming (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney) is identified as single biggest force in story market.

- **Infrastructure Disruption:** OTT technologies rely solely on Internet, colonizing markets previously held by **big studios** and bypassing traditional distribution models.
- **Rise of the Ordinary:** Story economy is powered by rise of "**unknowns**"—mid-market actors appearing extraordinarily ordinary—highlights global trend toward **democratization of self**, though phenomenon is not entirely positive.
- **The Unstable Composite:** Classical individual is replaced by **unstable composite** of **credit scores, actuarial charts, algorithmic storehouses, and consumer profiles**. Unified or continuous anchor in singular person is no longer required.
- **Sources of the Selfie:** Shift is noted from **Charles Taylor's "Sources of the Self"** to "**sources of the selfie**," where **photobombing celebrities** signifies **democratization** through lens-based equality.

Case Study: The Streaming Market in India

Netflix CEO Reed Hastings claimed in 2018 that Indian market would bring **100 million subscribers**. This case highlights scale of **narrative colonization** where ordinary life is woven into streaming content to drive global subscription models.

Ethical Implications of the Mineable Self

Mining of human essence for commercial profit raises profound ethical concerns regarding dignity and autonomy:

- **Dehumanization through Commodification:** Transformation of sacred human bonds—such as friendships and family connections—into **marketable raw material** reduces human existence to economic utility.
- **Erosion of Moral Agency:** Replacement of unified personhood with **unstable composite of algorithmic storehouses** and **credit scores** diminishes capacity of individuals to act as independent moral agents.
- **Informed Consent Deficit:** Systematic mining of **deepest affinities** and ephemeral social ties is often conducted without permission, violating fundamental principles of **autonomy and digital consent**.
- **Exploitation of Human Vulnerability:** Active search for narratives of **heroism, victimhood, or martyrdom** incentivizes commodification of trauma and suffering for global entertainment.
- **Artificial Displacement of Human Affect:** AI mimicry of human intuition and vulnerability creates **ethical crisis** where artificial bots potentially manipulate human emotions for profit-driven outcomes.

Way Forward: Strategies for Digital Sovereignty

- **Institutionalizing Sociality Sovereignty:** Robust legislative frameworks must be formulated to ensure that **deepest affinities and social ties** cannot be mined as resource without explicit permission or limit.
- **Regulating Narrative Extraction Markets:** Strict oversight of **OTT platforms and news syndicates** is required to prevent exploitation of local volatility and trauma for global commercial gain.
- **Protecting Identity and Personhood:** Measures should be taken to prevent reduction of individuals to **unstable composites** of algorithmic storehouses, ensuring legal right to unified and continuous identity.
- **Governing AI Emotional Mimicry:** Global ethics standards must be developed to govern **AI emotional mimicry**, preventing artificial entities from monopolizing human affect and intuition for profit.
- **Restoring Values of Privacy:** Cultural and legal shifts are needed to re-evaluate **creative destruction**, restoring social value of **privacy, intimacy, and trust** against encroaching digital commodification.

Conclusion

Emergence of **mineable self** signals profound transformation where human stories and social ties serve as primary **access codes** for capitalist extraction. While technology offers tools for **self-narration**, it simultaneously facilitates deconstruction of individual into **marketable raw material**. Preservation of **human-centric sociality** and unified identity against **unbounded mining** remains defining challenge for contemporary digital civilization.

Q. *The commodification of human stories raises serious ethical concerns regarding exploitation of trauma, emotional labour, and intimacy. Discuss the ethical implications of treating human life as a mineable commodity. 250 Words*

Scan to know more about our courses...



IAS 2-Year GS PCM



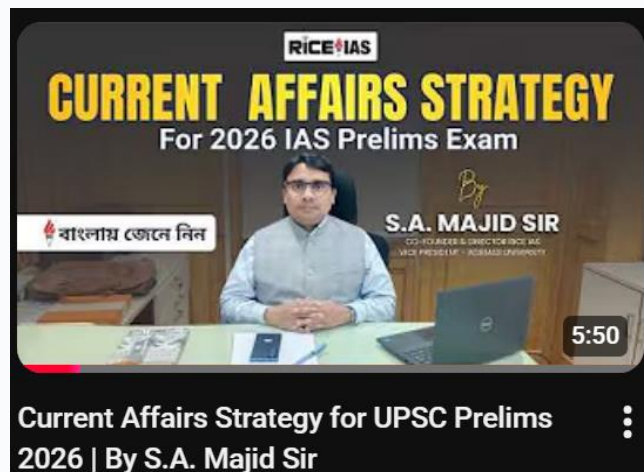
IAS 10-Month GS PCM



Degree + IAS



Prelims Test Series



[Click here to watch this video](#)