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GENERAL STUDIES 2

1.1. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1.1.1. IMPACT OF WEAKENING UNIONISATION ON WORKERS' RIGHTS IN INDIA

Context:

- In recent months, India has witnessed a **wave of protests by workers** demanding **higher minimum wages, broader social security coverage, and an end to contractualisation of jobs**. These agitations, particularly in **the manufacturing sector**, have brought the **role of trade unions into sharp focus**.
- The **weakening of unionisation**, often referred to as **deunionisation**, has raised concerns about the **erosion of workers' bargaining power** and the **dilution of their rights**.



Background

1. Gradual Shift from Trade Unionisation to Deunionisation in India

- The **trade union movement** in India began to take shape in the **early 20th century**, emerging from **colonial labour conditions** and the broader **freedom struggle**. Workers in textile mills, railways, and ports organised themselves into **associations and unions** to demand **better wages, safer working conditions, and legal protections**.
- **First Formal Recognition through Trade Union Act:** The **Trade Unions Act, 1926** provided the first formal legal recognition, defining a trade union as “**any combination, whether temporary or permanent, formed primarily for the purpose of regulating the relations between workmen and employers, workmen and workmen, or employers and employers, or for imposing restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade or business.**” This law established the **legal basis for registration**, while also allowing the state to **impose reasonable restrictions** on union activities.
- **Post Independence Organisation:** After **Independence**, the **Industrial Disputes Act, 1947**, the **Minimum Wages Act, 1948**, and related labour statutes created a **protective framework** for organised workers.
 - The **public sector expansion** under the **dirigisme (state-led economic planning) model** strengthened the **role of trade unions**, which became key actors in **wage bargaining, dispute resolution, and policy advocacy**.
- **Shift after Economic Liberalization:** The **liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (LPG) reforms of 1991** marked a turning point.
 - The shift towards **market competitiveness** and **labour flexibility** reduced the size of **public sector employment** and encouraged **outsourcing, contract labour, and non-standard employment**.
 - As a result, the **informal sector** absorbed a **growing share of the workforce**, while the **formal-sector bargaining power of trade unions** weakened.

2. Constitutional Provisions Establish the Legal Basis for Trade Unions

- **Article 19(1)(c)** guarantees the **fundamental right to form associations or unions**, thereby recognising trade unions as legitimate instruments of collective action.
- **Article 19(4)** allows the State to impose **reasonable restrictions** in the interest of public order, sovereignty, and integrity of the nation.
- The **Directive Principles of State Policy** further emphasise labour welfare:
 - **Article 43** directs the State to ensure a **living wage and decent standard of life for workers**.
 - **Article 43A** promotes **worker participation in the management of industries**, thereby strengthening industrial democracy.
- These provisions collectively reflect the **constitutional commitment to social justice and labour welfare**.

3. Judicial Pronouncements Define the Scope of Trade Union Rights

- In **All India Bank Employees' Association vs National Industrial Tribunal (1962)**, the Supreme Court clarified that although the **right to form associations is fundamental**, the **right to recognition or collective bargaining is not guaranteed**.
- In **Kameshwar Prasad vs State of Bihar (1962)**, the Court recognised peaceful demonstrations as part of fundamental rights but held that **strikes can be reasonably restricted**.
- In **T.K. Rangarajan vs Government of Tamil Nadu (2003)**, the Court ruled that **government employees do not have a fundamental right to strike**, reinforcing regulatory limits on labour actions.
- Thus, judicial interpretations ensure a balance between **labour rights and broader public interest considerations**.

Significance of Trade Unions in the Contemporary Labour Market

1. Collective bargaining and wage negotiation

- Trade unions serve as the **primary institutional mechanism for collective bargaining**, enabling workers to negotiate **wages, working hours, job security, and employment-conditions** as a **unified group** rather than as isolated individuals.
- When unions are strong, employers are compelled to **engage in dialogue** and are less likely to impose **unilaterally disadvantageous terms**.
- By aggregating worker interests, unions help **counter employer dominance** and prevent **exploitative wage practices**, especially in **large-scale industries** where labour supply is high and workers' bargaining power is weak.
- Collective bargaining helps secure **fair wages, overtime rules, and workplace safety standards**, reducing the risk of **undervalued labour** and **abusive working conditions**.

2. Dispute resolution and industrial harmony

- Trade unions play a **critical role in dispute resolution**, participating in **conciliation boards, labour courts, and other statutory forums** to mediate conflicts between workers and employers.

- This **institutionalised negotiation** helps maintain **industrial harmony** and ensures disputes are resolved through **legal and structured processes** instead of **prolonged strikes or violent agitations**.
- In the absence of strong unions, disputes often remain **unresolved or poorly managed**, leading to **spontaneous strikes, lockouts, or confrontations** that harm both workers and employers.
- The lack of **stable channels for negotiation** can create **social unrest and economic instability** in industrial belts, undermining **long-term industrial peace**.

3. Social security and policy advocacy

- Trade unions act as **advocacy bodies** pushing for the expansion of **social security nets**, including **pension schemes, health insurance, maternity benefits, and unemployment protection**.
- They campaign for **legislative reforms, better implementation of labour laws, and inclusive coverage of informal and contract workers**.
- In states with **strong trade union movements**, such as **Kerala and Tamil Nadu**, workers have often secured **higher minimum wage settlements** and **more robust social security provisions** through sustained collective action.
- Unions monitor **government schemes and employer compliance** to ensure benefits **reach workers in practice**, not just on paper, thereby **closing gaps in social protection**.

4. Psychological and structural empowerment

- Trade union membership provides **psychological empowerment and collective identity**, helping workers understand their **rights, legal protections, and negotiation strategies**.
- This reduces fear of **job loss, discrimination or victimisation** and strengthens workers' confidence in asserting their demands.
- Structurally, strong unions act as **checks on arbitrary managerial authority**, ensuring **lay-offs, transfers, and disciplinary actions** follow **transparent procedures and due process**.
- This promotes **organisational fairness and an equitable workplace culture**, while **collective bargaining and representation** enhance workers' **voice, agency, and democratic participation** in the workplace.

Key Challenges and Impact on Trade Unionisation Today

1. Declining Union Density

- The **unionisation rate among the workforce is estimated at 6.3%**, with **only 1.8% in the private sector and 11.8% in the public sector**. This low coverage reflects the **expansion of informal employment**, where **half or more of the workforce** operates outside **formal contracts, statutory protections, and institutionalised collective representation**.

- Informal workers such as **agricultural labourers, domestic workers, construction labourers, and street vendors** are often **difficult to organise** due to **fragmentation, low wages, and lack of stable employer relationships**.
- The **growth of micro-enterprises and small-scale industries** further complicates **unionisation**, as these workplaces often lack the **scale and visibility** needed for collective bargaining.

2. Fragmentation, Political Affiliation, and Credibility Issues

- Trade unions in India are **highly fragmented** along **political lines**, with multiple national and regional federations representing the same workforce. This **fragmentation** leads to **internal rivalries, competing demands, and reduced bargaining strength**.
- Many workers view unions as **extensions of political parties** rather than **independent worker-representation bodies**, leading to **scepticism and low participation**. This **perception of politicisation** further erodes the **legitimacy and effectiveness** of trade unions.
- The **lack of trust** in unions reduces their ability to **mobilise workers** during crises, limiting their impact on **policy and negotiation outcomes**.

3. Legal and Structural Constraints under the Labour Codes

- The **recent Labour Codes** the **Code on Wages, the Industrial Relations Code, the Social Security Code**, and the **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code** introduce several changes that affect unionisation.
- One particularly significant change is the **higher threshold for forming a trade union**: instead of allowing **eight workers** to come together and register a union, the **new regime often requires about 10% of the workforce** in an establishment, making it **harder for small unions** to gain statutory recognition.
- Moreover, the Codes have **reduced the scope of state supervision** by labour departments in some areas, weakening the **enforcement of union rights** and influencing **dispute-resolution dynamics**.
- In practice, this can tilt the balance of power **in favour of employers**, especially in sectors with **large labour supply and weak union presence**. The **weakening of statutory oversight** further undermines **workers' protections**.

3. Rise of Contract Labour, Gig Work, and Flexible Employment

- In such arrangements, workers often lack **direct employment relationships with the principal employer**, making it **difficult for unions to organise and negotiate** on their behalf.
- The **outsourcing of core functions and fragmentation of the workforce** further dilute traditional union structures. **Gig and platform workers** often operate through **digital apps and algorithms**, without **stable workplaces, supervisors, or formal employment contracts**.
- This **technological dispersion** complicates the application of **traditional collective - bargaining models** and raises questions about **who an employer is** in gig work.

Global Best Practices

Globally, several countries have adopted best practices to strengthen trade unions and protect workers' rights:

1. **Nordic Model (Sweden, Denmark, Norway):** These countries have **strong tripartite systems involving government, employers, and trade unions**, ensuring **collective bargaining and social dialogue**. High unionisation rates and robust social security systems contribute to low inequality and high worker satisfaction.
2. **United States:** The **National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)** protects **workers' right to organise and bargain collectively**, with **mechanisms for dispute resolution and enforcement**. Despite challenges, the U.S. labour movement has secured significant gains for workers.
3. **International Labour Organization (ILO):** The **ILO promotes the right to organise and collective bargaining through conventions such as Convention No. 87** (Freedom of Association) and **Convention No. 98** (Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining). These conventions provide a global framework for protecting workers' rights.

Way Forward for Strengthening Workers' Interests

To address the challenges facing trade unions and protect workers' rights, several measures can be implemented:

- **Strengthen Legal Frameworks:** Amend the **Labour Codes** to lower the threshold for forming trade unions and ensure robust protection against **employer intimidation**. Strengthen provisions for **collective bargaining and dispute resolution**.
- **Promote High Unionisation:** Encourage unionisation in the **informal sector** and among **younger workers** through **awareness campaigns, education, and outreach**. Support the formation of **smaller unions and federations**.
- **Enhance Social Security:** Expand **social security coverage** to all workers, including **gig and platform workers**, through **universal social security schemes**. Ensure timely and adequate benefits for **unemployment, health, and old age**.
- **Foster Social Dialogue:** Revive **tripartite mechanisms** involving **government, employers, and trade unions** to ensure **inclusive decision-making**. Promote **social dialogue** at the workplace, sectoral, and national levels.
- **Combat Exploitation:** Implement strict regulations against **contract labour** and ensure fair treatment of **informal workers**. Strengthen **labour inspection and enforcement mechanisms**.
- **Empower Workers:** Provide **education and training** on **workers' rights, collective bargaining, and unionisation**. Encourage **worker participation** in union leadership and decision-making.
- **International Collaboration:** Engage with international organisations like the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** to adopt **best practices** and align with **global labour standards**.

Conclusion

While economic transformations have weakened traditional union structures, their relevance remains indispensable in ensuring **fair wages, social security, and dignified work conditions**. Therefore,

revitalising trade unions through inclusive and adaptive strategies is essential for achieving **equitable and sustainable labour governance**.

Q. The weakening of trade unions in India has significantly altered the balance of power in labour markets. Critically examine the causes of declining unionisation and its impact on workers' rights in India. 15 Marks

1.1.2. INDIA'S LEARNING CRISIS

Introduction: The Paradox of Progress

India's education system has achieved a historic milestone, near-universal access to primary education, with a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) exceeding 98%, largely enabled by the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. However, this quantitative success masks a deep qualitative crisis. Data from ASER consistently show that nearly 50% of Grade 5 students cannot read a Grade 2-level text, and many struggle with basic arithmetic. The World Bank describes this phenomenon as "Learning Poverty," referring to the inability to read and comprehend a simple text by age 10.



India, therefore, finds itself in a "low-learning equilibrium," where children attend school but fail to acquire foundational skills. The real puzzle is not the existence of this crisis, but the lack of urgency in addressing it.

Significance: Why Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) Matters

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) is the bedrock upon which all future learning and development depend. Its importance extends across multiple dimensions:

1. Cognitive Foundation for Lifelong Learning

FLN enables children to transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." Without this foundational ability, higher-order cognitive skills and subject comprehension remain inaccessible.

2. Economic Growth and Productivity

Quality education directly impacts economic outcomes. Evidence suggests that each additional year of effective schooling significantly enhances earning potential, making FLN a critical driver of productivity and poverty reduction.

3. Social Equity and Justice

Poor learning outcomes disproportionately affect marginalised groups, including SC/ST communities and first-generation learners. Ensuring universal FLN is essential to break intergenerational cycles of poverty and fulfil constitutional mandates under Articles 21A and 45.

4. Realising the Demographic Dividend

With a median age of around 28 years, India stands at the cusp of a demographic opportunity. However, without adequate foundational skills, this advantage risks turning into a burden of unemployable youth.

5. Strengthening Democratic Participation

An educated and literate citizenry enhances democratic engagement, informed decision-making, and institutional accountability.

6. Global Competitiveness and Viksit Bharat @2047

For India to achieve its vision of *Viksit Bharat @2047*, a skilled and adaptable workforce is essential. High learning outcomes are foundational to innovation, economic resilience, and global competitiveness.

Challenges: Anatomy of the “Missing Urgency”

Despite strong policy intent, urgency around learning outcomes remains weak due to several structural and behavioural factors:

1. Low Salience in Political Economy

- Education reforms, especially improving learning outcomes, produce results over years, often beyond electoral cycles.
- Political actors therefore prioritise visible, immediate gains like infrastructure, subsidies, or welfare schemes that yield quick voter recognition.
- As a result, intangible outcomes like cognitive development and FLN receive lower attention and urgency in policymaking.

2. Invisibility of Learning Deficits

- Unlike physical deficiencies, learning gaps are not directly visible, making them less likely to trigger public concern or administrative action.
- Routine classroom activities such as copying from the blackboard or rote repetition create a false impression that learning is taking place.
- In the absence of regular and reliable assessments, these hidden deficits remain undetected, allowing poor outcomes to persist unnoticed.

3. Information Asymmetry

- Many parents, especially first-generation learners, lack the ability to assess reading or numeracy levels and therefore equate regular attendance with effective learning.
- Limited awareness of benchmarks like those highlighted in ASER prevents them from questioning poor outcomes.
- This weakens bottom-up accountability, as schools face little pressure from communities to improve actual learning quality.

4. Middle-Class Exit from Public Education

- The shift of middle and upper classes to private schools reduces their direct stake in the public education system.
- As a result, influential voices that could demand better quality, transparency, and accountability are largely absent from government schools.
- This weakens systemic pressure for reform, allowing poor learning outcomes to persist with limited scrutiny.

5. The “Ability” Trap

- Poor learning outcomes are often attributed to a child’s innate intelligence or disadvantaged home environment, rather than school effectiveness.
- This shifts responsibility away from systemic factors like teaching quality, curriculum design, and classroom practices.
- As a result, the education system escapes accountability, and necessary pedagogical reforms are delayed or ignored.

6. Weak Accountability Mechanisms

- Hierarchical power dynamics place teachers and administrators in dominant positions, while parents and communities have limited voice or influence.
- This imbalance discourages questioning of teaching quality or learning outcomes, reducing effective monitoring at the local level.
- Consequently, School Management Committees (SMCs) often function as passive bodies, focusing on compliance rather than actively ensuring learning improvement.

7. Policy–Implementation Gap

- Ambitious frameworks like National Education Policy 2020 and NIPUN Bharat Mission outline clear goals for improving learning outcomes.
- However, inadequate last-mile delivery due to capacity constraints, weak monitoring, and limited teacher support prevents effective execution at the school level.
- This results in a disconnect where strong policy intent fails to translate into measurable improvements in learning.

Global Case Study: Lessons from Vietnam

The experience of Vietnam offers valuable lessons. Despite limited resources, Vietnam has achieved learning outcomes comparable to developed nations, as reflected in global assessments like PISA.

Key factors behind Vietnam’s success include:

- **Focused Curriculum:** Emphasis on mastery of core skills rather than broad but shallow coverage.
- **Teacher Accountability with Support:** Teachers are held accountable while being provided professional respect and continuous training.
- **High Societal Salience:** Education is seen as central to national development, creating collective commitment across stakeholders.

Vietnam’s model demonstrates that outcomes depend not merely on resources but on prioritisation, accountability, and societal commitment.

Key Government Initiatives Addressing the Learning Crisis

1. National Education Policy 2020

- Declares **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)** as an *urgent national priority*.

- Focuses on **early learning, competency-based education, and outcome orientation**.
 - Provides the overall **policy framework** to shift from schooling to learning.
2. NIPUN Bharat Mission
 - Core initiative specifically targeting **universal FLN by Grade 3**.
 - Emphasises **teacher training, assessment reforms, and structured pedagogy**.
 - Directly addresses the **learning crisis highlighted in your article**.
 3. DIKSHA
 - Supports **teacher capacity building and student learning** through digital content.
 - Enables **personalised and remedial learning**, helping bridge learning gaps.

Way Forward: From “Schooling for All” to “Learning for All”

Addressing the learning crisis requires systemic reforms aimed at enhancing both accountability and effectiveness:

1. Making Learning Visible

Community-level assessments and public demonstrations of reading ability can transform learning from an abstract concept into a visible and urgent issue.

2. Pedagogical Reforms

Scaling evidence-based approaches such as Teaching at the Right Level can help tailor instruction to students’ actual learning levels, preventing them from falling behind.

3. Outcome-Based Monitoring

Shift administrative focus from inputs (infrastructure, enrolment) to outputs (learning outcomes), making student performance the primary indicator of success.

4. Strengthening Local Accountability

Empowering School Management Committees (SMCs) and decentralising governance can enhance community participation and oversight.

5. Continuous Teacher Development

Regular training, mentoring, and academic support are essential to improve classroom practices and learning outcomes.

6. Leveraging Technology

Digital platforms such as DIKSHA can support personalised learning and remediation, provided they complement classroom teaching rather than replace it.

Conclusion

The Kothari Commission famously observed that “the destiny of India is being shaped in her classrooms.” Decades later, this remains profoundly relevant. While India has succeeded in expanding access to education, the challenge now lies in ensuring meaningful learning.

Achieving the vision of **Viksit Bharat @2047** and fully realising India's demographic potential depends on a fundamental shift from the illusion of schooling to the reality of learning. Ensuring that every child acquires foundational skills is not just an educational goal, but a national imperative.

Q. Schooling is not synonymous with learning. In the context of India's education sector, critically examine the structural and behavioral barriers that have resulted in a 'low-learning equilibrium' despite high enrolment rates. 15 Marks

1.1.3. DEMOCRACY AT A CROSSROADS: SIGNS OF DECLINE AND THE PATH TO RESILIENCE

Introduction: Democracy at a Crossroads

Democracy has long been regarded as the most legitimate form of governance, embodying the ideals of participation, accountability, and freedom. Over the past century, it has expanded across continents, shaping the political aspirations of societies worldwide. However, recent trends marked by the rise of strong leaders, erosion of institutional autonomy, and proliferation of disinformation have raised concerns about democratic backsliding. The emergence of "illiberal democracies," where elections persist but freedoms recede, further complicates this narrative.



Significance of Democracy: Beyond a Political System

1. Legitimacy through Consent

Democracy derives its moral authority from the consent of the governed. As John Locke argued, political power is justified only when it protects the rights of individuals. This makes democracy inherently accountable.

2. Protection of Rights and Freedoms

Democracy safeguards civil liberties such as freedom of speech, expression, and association, ensuring that individuals can participate meaningfully in public life.

3. Platform for Public Reasoning

Amartya Sen highlights that democracy is not just about voting, but about "public reasoning" the ability of citizens to debate, question, and influence decisions.

4. Peaceful Change of Power

Democracy institutionalises dissent and enables peaceful transitions of power, reducing the likelihood of violent conflict.

5. Intrinsic and Instrumental Value

Democracy is valuable both as a means (ensuring accountability and good governance) and as an end (upholding dignity and participation). In this sense, it is not merely a system, but a way of organising collective life.

Thesis: Signs of Democratic Decline

Despite its significance, several trends indicate that democracy is under strain.

1. Rise of Illiberal Democracies

The concept of illiberal democracy, articulated by Fareed Zakaria, reflects systems where elections exist but freedoms are curtailed. Hungary under Viktor Orbán exemplifies how democratic institutions can be reshaped to consolidate executive power.

2. Centralisation of Authority

The concentration of power in charismatic executives often sidelines legislatures and weakens judicial oversight, reducing institutional autonomy. Leaders may bypass established procedures through ordinances, executive orders, or control over party machinery, diluting accountability. Over time, this erodes the separation of powers, transforming checks and balances into mere formalities rather than effective constraints.

3. Erosion of Institutions

Political and economic pressures can compromise the autonomy of institutions like the judiciary, media, and election bodies, limiting their ability to function impartially. This may lead to selective enforcement, biased reporting, or weakened oversight of electoral processes. As their credibility declines, these institutions lose their capacity to act as effective checks on power.

4. Disinformation and Digital Manipulation

The rapid spread of fake news and misinformation creates a distorted information environment, making it difficult for citizens to distinguish truth from falsehood. Algorithmic bias amplifies sensational or polarising content, reinforcing echo chambers and limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints. External interference in elections further manipulates public opinion, undermining the integrity of democratic decision-making.

5. Declining Political Competition

As Joseph Schumpeter argued, democracy requires real competition among leaders and parties to offer meaningful choices to citizens. When electoral processes are manipulated through misuse of state power, media control, or unfair practices, this competition becomes distorted. Consequently, democracy is reduced to a mere ritual of voting, lacking true accountability and substantive choice.

Challenges Before Modern Democracies

The pressures on democracy are both structural and emerging:

1. Majoritarianism and Social Polarisation

Alexis de Tocqueville warned that unchecked majority rule can override minority rights and interests. This fosters exclusion, identity-based politics, and deepens social divisions. Over time, such polarisation weakens social cohesion and undermines the inclusive spirit of democracy.

2. Rise of Populism

Populist politics often prioritises emotional narratives and simplified “**people vs. elite**” framing over nuanced, evidence-based debate. This can reduce complex policy issues to slogans, discouraging informed deliberation. As a result, the quality of public discourse declines, weakening the deliberative core of democracy.

3. Competing Governance Models

Alternative governance models centred on strong, centralised authority prioritise stability, rapid decision-making, and state control over individual freedoms. Their perceived efficiency in delivering economic or administrative outcomes can make them appear attractive, especially in times of crisis. This challenges the universality of democratic ideals by presenting a competing vision of legitimacy and governance.

4. Crisis of Truth

When citizens no longer agree on basic facts, meaningful public debate becomes difficult and fragmented. Misinformation and competing narratives replace evidence-based discussion, weakening rational decision-making. This erodes the epistemic foundation of democracy, which depends on informed and reasoned citizen participation.

5. Declining Civic Participation

Low voter turnout and limited civic participation reduce the pressure on leaders to remain accountable. Disengaged citizens are less likely to question authority or defend democratic norms. Over time, this allows institutions to weaken from within, as active public oversight diminishes.

Way Forward: Strengthening Democratic Resilience

To ensure that democracy remains robust, a multi-pronged approach is required:

1. Strengthening Institutions

Institutional independence must be safeguarded through transparent appointments, security of tenure, and protection from political interference. This enables bodies like the judiciary and election authorities to act impartially and uphold the rule of law. Strong, autonomous institutions ensure that power remains accountable within a system of effective checks and balances.

2. Promoting Constitutional Morality

B. R. Ambedkar argued that democracy cannot survive on institutions alone without a culture of constitutional morality. It requires citizens and leaders to respect values like liberty, equality, and rule of law in everyday practice. Without this ethical commitment, formal structures risk becoming ineffective or even misused.

3. Combating Disinformation

Effective regulation of digital platforms can curb the spread of misinformation and ensure accountability for harmful content. Promoting media literacy equips citizens to critically evaluate information and resist manipulation. Greater transparency in algorithms helps prevent bias and ensures that public discourse is not unfairly distorted.

4. Encouraging Active Citizenship

As Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued, sovereignty ultimately resides in the people rather than in rulers. This implies that citizens must actively engage in political processes, not remain passive observers. Continuous participation ensures that governance reflects the collective will and remains accountable.

5. Inclusive and Responsive Governance

Persistent socio-economic inequalities can exclude large sections of society from meaningful political participation. This creates a gap between formal political equality and actual access to opportunities and voice. Addressing these disparities is essential to ensure that democracy remains inclusive, representative, and legitimate.

6. Adaptive and Open Society

Democracies must remain open to criticism and reform, allowing policies and institutions to be continuously evaluated and improved. As Karl Popper argued, an open society thrives on its ability to correct errors through reasoned debate. This capacity for self-correction ensures long-term resilience and adaptability.

India as a Case Study: Resilient yet Contested Democracy

India offers a compelling example of how democracy can endure within deep social diversity, while also facing structural and emerging challenges.

1. Constitutional Vision and Normative Strength

The Indian Constitution provides a robust foundation based on justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. It not only establishes institutions but also articulates a moral vision of inclusive democracy. As B. R. Ambedkar emphasised, constitutional morality is essential to ensure that democratic values are upheld in practice.

2. Institutional Continuity and Electoral Vibrancy

India has sustained regular, large-scale elections with peaceful transfers of power, reflecting strong procedural stability. Institutions like the Election Commission have enabled broad-based participation, making Indian elections among the largest democratic exercises in the world.

3. Judiciary and Rights-Based Framework

An active judiciary has played a key role in safeguarding Fundamental Rights and expanding the scope of rights through judicial interpretation. This has strengthened the substantive dimension of democracy beyond mere electoral processes.

4. Diversity as a Democratic Resource

India's linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity has been accommodated through federalism, decentralisation, and affirmative action policies. Rather than fragmenting the polity, this pluralism has often reinforced democratic negotiation and accommodation.

5. Emerging Challenges and Democratic Stress

At the same time, concerns such as institutional pressures, information disorder, and social polarisation highlight that Indian democracy is not immune to global trends of democratic stress. These challenges test the resilience of its institutions and civic culture.

6. Democratic Ethos and Public Participation

The continued engagement of citizens through elections, civil society, and public discourse remains central to sustaining democracy. As Jawaharlal Nehru emphasised, a scientific temper and open debate are essential to preserving the rational and participatory character of democratic life.

Conclusion: Democracy as a Living Ideal

“Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried,” observed Winston Churchill. This reflects not perfection, but enduring relevance.

Democracy today is not in absolute decline but in a phase of stress and transformation. Its true strength lies not merely in institutions, but in the values of participation, accountability, and freedom. As Mahatma Gandhi noted, the spirit of democracy must come from within.

Q. *The contemporary global trend of 'illiberal democracy' poses a significant challenge to the traditional understanding of constitutionalism. In this context, evaluate the resilience of India's democratic institutions in balancing majoritarian impulses with the principles of constitutional morality. 15 Marks*

1.1.4. THE CHALLENGE TO UNIVERSAL ADULT FRANCHISE

Context:

- The principle of **universal adult franchise**, which guarantees every adult citizen the right to vote without discrimination, forms the **moral and constitutional foundation of India's democracy**; however, in rapidly urbanising areas, this right is increasingly being undermined through administrative processes that exclude the poor, migrants, and marginalised groups.
- The ongoing debate around the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls** has exposed a deeper **structural crisis of urban electoral disenfranchisement**, calling for urgent attention from institutions and society.



Background: Understanding Universal Adult Franchise in Urban India

I. Meaning of Universal Adult Franchise

- Universal adult franchise** refers to the right of **every citizen above a prescribed age (18 years in India)** to vote in elections **without discrimination** based on caste, class, gender, religion, or economic status. It reflects the democratic principle of “**one person, one vote, one value**”, ensuring **political equality**.

II. Pre-Independence Roots: A Contested Right

Under colonial rule, the right to vote was severely restricted tied to property ownership, tax payment, and literacy effectively confining political participation to a narrow elite and excluding the vast majority of Indians, particularly the poor, Dalits, and women.

- Government of India Act, 1919 (Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms):** This Act introduced limited franchise but restricted voting to a small propertied class, excluding the overwhelming majority of Indians from political participation.

- **Government of India Act, 1935:** The franchise was widened marginally extending to **approximately 14% of the total population** but continued to exclude the poor, most women, and the landless, reflecting the colonial logic of exclusion.
- **Constituent Assembly Debates (1946–1949):** The Constituent Assembly, under the leadership of **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**, decisively rejected the **colonial tradition of restricted franchise** and adopted **universal adult suffrage** without any qualification of property, literacy, caste, religion, or gender a revolutionary democratic commitment for a newly independent, largely illiterate nation.

III. Post-Independence Evolution: Deepening the Franchise

India's first **General Elections (1951–52)** were a defining moment in world democratic history, as approximately **17.3 crore voters** exercised their right to vote for the first time, making it the **largest electoral exercise** undertaken by any democracy at that time.

- **Expansion of Franchise through 61st Constitutional Amendment Act, 1988:** The voting age was lowered from **21 years to 18 years**, bringing approximately **5 crore additional young citizens** into the electoral fold and significantly deepening the democratic base.
- **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), 1998:** The nationwide introduction of Electronic Voting Machines improved the accessibility and efficiency of elections, particularly for first-time and differently-abled voters.
- **Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) Programme, 2009:** The **Election Commission of India** launched this programme specifically to enhance voter registration and participation among marginalised and underrepresented groups, including urban migrants and slum dwellers.
- **Indrajit Gupta Committee Recommendations:** This led to the adoption of **Electors Photo Identity Cards (EPIC)** to prevent impersonation while ensuring the genuine voter is not excluded.

IV. Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Article 326 of the Constitution of India:** This is the primary constitutional provision that guarantees the right to vote through elections to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies to every citizen of India who is not less than 18 years of age and is not otherwise disqualified.
- **Article 324 of the Constitution of India:** This article vests the **superintendence, direction, and control of elections** in the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**, an independent constitutional body responsible for ensuring free and fair elections.
- **Article 325 of the Constitution of India:** This article explicitly **prohibits the exclusion of any person from the electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste, or sex**, directly reinforcing the non-discriminatory character of the franchise.
- **The Representation of the People Act, 1950:** This legislation governs the **preparation, maintenance, and revision of electoral rolls**, prescribing the qualifications for voter registration and the procedure for inclusion and deletion of names making it the primary statutory framework directly relevant to the SIR controversy.

- **The Representation of the People Act, 1951:** This Act governs the actual **conduct of elections**, including qualifications for candidates, offences, and the resolution of election disputes through Election Tribunals and High Courts.

V. Key Judicial Pronouncements

- **Mohan Lal Tripathi v. District Magistrate, Rae Bareli (1992):** The Supreme Court held that the **right to vote, though a statutory right**, is not an ordinary right, it is a **constitutional right of the highest significance**, and any arbitrary deletion from the electoral roll without due process violates the principles of natural justice.
- **People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v. Union of India (2003):** The Supreme Court recognised the right of voters to know the **criminal antecedents, assets, and educational qualifications** of candidates significantly expanding the quality and substance of democratic participation beyond mere registration to informed voting.
- **Lily Thomas v. Union of India (2013):** The Supreme Court struck down **Section 8(4) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951**, holding that a Member of Parliament or a state legislator convicted of a crime and sentenced to two or more years of imprisonment is **immediately disqualified** reinforcing that the integrity of the electorate and the elected must go hand in hand.

Significance of Universal Adult Urban Franchise in India

In the urban context, **universal adult franchise** assumes greater importance due to the presence of **diverse, mobile, and economically vulnerable populations**, making electoral inclusion essential for equitable governance.

- **Voice for the Marginalised:** Universal franchise acts as a crucial equaliser by enabling **slum dwellers, migrant workers, and informal sector populations** to elect representatives who address basic needs such as **housing, water, sanitation, and livelihoods**, thereby making urban governance more inclusive.
- **Instrument of Economic Justice:** The right to vote translates **political equality into economic demands**, allowing vulnerable groups to seek **better wages, social security, and redistribution of resources**, thus linking democracy with material outcomes.
- **Ensuring Accountable Urban Governance: Urban Local Bodies** such as municipal corporations become truly representative and accountable only when **all sections, including migrants and marginalised communities**, actively participate in elections.
- **Representation of Migrant Population:** With India's urban population projected to reach **around 600 million by 2031 (World Bank)**, ensuring voting rights for **migrant workers** is essential so that governance reflects the needs of those who sustain urban economies.
- **Strengthening Democratic Legitimacy and Social Cohesion:** Inclusive electoral rolls build **trust in institutions** and strengthen the **social contract**, while exclusion of minorities and vulnerable groups leads to **alienation and weakened legitimacy**.

- **Gateway to Other Rights:** Being enrolled as a voter often facilitates access to **welfare schemes, housing benefits, and identity-linked services**, making the right to vote a **foundational enabler of broader socio-economic rights**.

Challenges to Urban Franchise and Democratic Integrity

1. **Exclusion of the Urban Poor through the SIR Process:** The **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls, though intended to ensure accuracy, has in practice resulted in the **exclusion of urban poor, migrant workers, and marginalised communities** due to its reliance on **strict documentary proof of residence**.

- **Massive Deletion Trends:** Recent data illustrates a staggering scale of voter removal across major industrial and metropolitan hubs:
 - **Ghaziabad (UP):** ~36.67% of voters removed, primarily affecting the mobile workforce.
 - **Lucknow (UP):** ~30.88% of names deleted post-revision.
 - **Patna (Bihar):** A massive **16.5 lakh** names removed from draft rolls.
 - **Mumbai (Maharashtra):** Under the 2025 SIR, **14 lakh** names were deleted; approximately 50% of informal housing residents are currently unregistered or removed.
 - **Gulshan Colony (Kolkata):** An extreme case where **90% of voters** were found missing from the rolls.
- **Disproportionate Impact on Marginalised Groups:** Vulnerable groups such as **Dalits, minorities, and informal workers** face a **dual burden**, as they struggle both with **initial registration** and with **higher rates of deletion**, leading to deepened disenfranchisement.

2. **Selective Filtration through Rigid Documentation:** The SIR process results in a **selective filtration of the electorate**, where **documentation requirements exclude the poor and mobile populations**.

- **Rigid Documentation Requirements:** Proofs such as **long-term residence records (e.g., from 2002/2005)** are often **impossible for migrants and slum dwellers** to provide.
- **Migration as a Structural Barrier:** Since **internal migration is central to urbanisation**, requiring stable residence disproportionately excludes **migrant workers**, who form the backbone of urban economies.
- **Informal Settlements and Data Reality:** With nearly **40% of urban population living in slums (World Bank)**, the absence of formal address proof makes **mass exclusion inevitable** under current systems.

3. **Compromised Secrecy of the Ballot:** The principle of **secret ballot**, essential for free and fair elections, faces challenges in urban contexts.

- **Booth-Level Disclosure:** Voting patterns revealed at the **booth level** can, in smaller or dense localities, allow inference of **community-wise voting behaviour**, exposing voters to **pressure, intimidation, or retaliation**.

4. Urban Youth Exclusion and Participation Gap:

- Around **28% of India's urban population is below 18 years**, making them ineligible to vote. When combined with **non-registration and deletions**, this creates a significant **gap between total population and actual electoral participation**, weakening democratic representation.

5. Weak Urban Electoral Infrastructure:

- **Low Voter Registration:** Urban areas record **lower registration rates** due to high mobility, limited outreach in informal settlements, perceived weak link between voting and benefits.
- **Absence of Migrant Voting Framework:** The lack of a **portable voter registration system** forces migrants to remain registered in their home constituencies, leaving many **effectively disenfranchised in practice**.

Global Best Practices in Inclusive Electoral Participation

- **Canada: Proactive Enumeration Model:** Canada follows a **door-to-door enumeration system**, where election officials actively reach out to citizens, especially in **low-income and transient communities**, thereby reducing the burden of registration on individuals and ensuring wider inclusion.
- **Brazil: Compulsory Voting with Accessibility:** Brazil combines **compulsory voting** with targeted outreach in **slums and informal settlements**, resulting in **high electoral participation** and demonstrating that administrative support can overcome structural exclusion.
- **Estonia: Digital and Remote Voting Systems:** Estonia enables **online voter registration and remote voting**, allowing citizens to vote from anywhere, thus ensuring continuous electoral access for **mobile and migrant populations**.

Way Forward: Strategies for an Inclusive Franchise

- **Reform the SIR Process Towards Inclusion:** The **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** must shift from a **documentation-heavy model** to a **proactive outreach approach**, with officials conducting registration drives in **slums, labour markets, and informal settlements**.
- **Simplification of Residence Proof:** Following the philosophy of **former Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan**, an address should be defined as "**where the person resides**," allowing for **self-declaration or community verification for slum dwellers**.
- **Introduction of Totalizer Machines:** To ensure the **Confidentiality of the Franchise**, the Election Commission should adopt Totalizers that aggregate results from several Electronic Voting Machines before declaration.
- **Introduce Portable Voter Registration for Migrants:** Amendments to the **Representation of the People Act, 1950** should enable a **portable registration system**, allowing migrants to vote at their **place of work or current residence** without losing their original registration.
- **Integrate Electoral Rolls with Digital Databases:** Linking voter rolls with **Aadhaar, MGNREGA records, urban local body data, and the National Population Register (NPR)** can enable **automatic and continuous updating**, reducing exclusion.

- **Ensure Due Process Before Deletions:** Legal provisions should mandate that **every voter deletion** is preceded by: **Individual notice, Field verification, Grievance redressal mechanism.** This will prevent **arbitrary mass deletions.**
- **Strengthen Secrecy of the Ballot:** The system should ensure **anonymisation or aggregation of booth-level data** to prevent **inference of community voting patterns**, thereby protecting voter confidentiality.
- **Enhance Role of Civil Society:** **Civil society organisations and academic institutions** should be empowered to **monitor electoral roll processes**, audit deletions, and ensure **transparency and accountability.**

Conclusion

Universal adult franchise is not merely a constitutional guarantee but the **foundation of India's democratic identity**; however, it loses meaning when administrative processes exclude vulnerable citizens from participation. Therefore, it is both a **constitutional obligation and democratic necessity** to reform urban electoral systems, ensure **proactive inclusion**, and protect the **equal right to vote** for every citizen, as the strength and legitimacy of democracy ultimately depend on the **breadth and integrity of its franchise.**

Q. Universal Adult Franchise is the cornerstone of Indian democracy, yet urban electoral processes are leading to increasing disenfranchisement." Examine the challenges and suggest reforms. 15 Marks

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GENERAL STUDIES 3

2.1. ECONOMY

2.1.1 THE COST OF DISINFLATION: COMPARING INDIA, THE U.S., AND THE U.K.

Introduction: The Uneven Cost of Price Stability

The post-pandemic global economy witnessed one of the sharpest inflation surges in decades, driven by supply disruptions, massive fiscal stimulus, and geopolitical shocks such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In response, major central banks including the U.S. Federal Reserve, the Bank of England, and the Reserve Bank of India embarked on aggressive monetary tightening between 2022 and 2023.



By 2025, inflation had moderated across economies. However, the **economic cost of bringing inflation down varied significantly**, raising important questions about the trade-offs involved in monetary policy.

Understanding the Sacrifice Ratio

The concept of the **sacrifice ratio** is central to evaluating the cost of disinflation. It measures the **loss in economic output (or rise in unemployment)** required to reduce inflation by one percentage point.

For example, if lowering inflation by 1% leads to a 2% loss in GDP, the sacrifice ratio is 2. This makes it a practical policy tool to judge how painful disinflation is for an economy.

- A **low sacrifice ratio** indicates that inflation was controlled with minimal economic disruption.
- A **high sacrifice ratio** reflects significant output loss, often accompanied by recession.

The sacrifice ratio captures the core dilemma of modern monetary policy, there is no free lunch. Every attempt to stabilize prices involves balancing inflation control with economic growth. The goal of policymakers is not just to reduce inflation, but to do so at the lowest possible cost to the economy.

The U.S. Experience: A Rare Soft Landing

The U.S. Federal Reserve raised interest rates aggressively from near zero in early 2022 to 5.25–5.50% by mid-2023 through 11 consecutive hikes. Despite this, the U.S. economy **avoided a recession**, defying conventional expectations.

Reasons for Success:

- **Rapid easing of supply chain bottlenecks:** Pandemic disruptions in shipping, logistics, and production gradually normalized. As ports cleared, freight costs fell and availability of goods improved, reducing supply-side price pressures and helping inflation decline without cutting demand sharply.

- **Decline in global energy prices:** Cooling crude oil and gas prices lowered fuel, transport, and production costs across sectors. Since energy feeds into almost all goods and services, this had a broad disinflationary effect.
- **Strong labour market and consumer demand:** Low unemployment and steady incomes kept consumption resilient. This allowed economic growth to continue even as inflation fell, preventing a recession.

Outcome: Inflation was brought down **without a significant fall in economic output**, meaning the economy did not suffer a recession or major job losses. This led to a **near-zero sacrifice ratio**, making it a rare example of a “**soft landing**” where price stability is achieved without harming growth.

However, even though inflation slowed, **prices did not fall back to earlier levels**. Instead, they stabilized at a higher level, meaning households continue to face **permanently higher costs of living**, especially for essentials like food, housing, and fuel.

The U.K. Experience: High Cost of Disinflation

The Bank of England acted early, beginning rate hikes in December 2021 and sharply increasing interest rates from 0.1% to 5.25% by August 2023. However, **inflation remained stubbornly high despite this proactive tightening**, indicating deeper structural issues in the economy.

Structural constraints played a key role:

- The U.K.’s **heavy dependence on imported energy** made it highly vulnerable to rising global oil and gas prices.
- The **European gas price shock**, triggered by geopolitical tensions, sharply increased energy costs for households and industries.
- At the same time, **labour shortages** led to rising wages, which further pushed up service-sector inflation.

As a result, the economy could not absorb the impact smoothly:

- It slipped into a **recession in late 2023**, indicating a contraction in economic activity.
- **Unemployment increased**, reflecting weakened business conditions.
- Yet, **inflation remained above the central bank’s target even by 2026**, showing incomplete success.

This combination of **high economic cost and limited inflation control** led to a **high sacrifice ratio**, meaning the U.K. paid a steep price in terms of lost output without fully restoring price stability.

India’s Position: A Calibrated Trade-off

The Reserve Bank of India raised the repo rate from 4% to 6.5% between May 2022 and February 2023 to curb inflation, and then adopted a cautious pause with gradual easing.

Outcomes:

- Economic growth moderated from over 8% to about 6.5%, indicating a slowdown but not a contraction.
- Inflation declined sharply to around 2% by mid-2025.

- Importantly, **India avoided a recession**, maintaining macroeconomic stability.

Why the sacrifice ratio appears low:

- **Slower monetary transmission:** Interest rate changes take longer to affect borrowing, spending, and investment in India.
- **High food share in CPI (~46%):** Food inflation is largely driven by monsoon, supply conditions, and MSP policies rather than interest rates.
- **Government interventions:** Measures like buffer stocks, subsidies, and supply management helped contain prices.

Limitations of the Sacrifice Ratio

While the sacrifice ratio is a useful tool in macroeconomics, it has important limitations:

1. **Estimated after the fact (ex-post, not predictive):** The sacrifice ratio is usually calculated only *after* disinflation has occurred, using historical data on GDP loss and inflation decline. Policymakers cannot know its exact value in advance, making it an **imperfect guide for real-time decision-making**.
2. **Assumes a stable inflation-output relationship:** It relies on a predictable link between inflation and output, often derived from the Phillips Curve. However, this relationship can shift due to structural changes, globalization, or supply shocks, making the ratio **unstable and context-dependent**.
3. **Ignores distributional impacts:** The sacrifice ratio measures aggregate output loss but does not capture **who actually bears the cost**. In reality, the burden is uneven workers may face unemployment, small firms may shut down, and certain sectors (like construction or MSMEs) may suffer more than others.

Thus, while the sacrifice ratio offers a useful broad estimate of the cost of disinflation, it fails to fully capture the complexity and evolving nature of real-world economic conditions. This becomes particularly evident when examining the practical challenges faced by central banks today.

Monetary Policy Challenges and Emerging Pressures

1. Limited Effectiveness Against Supply Shocks

A significant portion of recent inflation across economies has been driven by **supply-side factors** such as rising energy prices, disrupted supply chains, and geopolitical tensions. Interest rate hikes primarily curb demand, but they **cannot directly resolve supply constraints**, making monetary policy less effective in controlling such inflation.

2. Divergent Growth–Inflation Trade-offs

The impact of tightening varied across economies:

- The U.S. managed a **soft landing**, controlling inflation without a recession.
- The U.K. faced a **sharp trade-off**, with inflation control leading to recession and unemployment.

- India achieved a **balanced outcome**, reducing inflation while sustaining growth, though at a slower pace.

This highlights how structural differences shape policy outcomes.

3. India's Emerging Currency Pressure

India is now facing **exchange rate depreciation**, with the rupee weakening significantly. This increases the cost of imports especially crude oil leading to **imported inflation** and external sector vulnerability.

4. Policy Dilemma for the Reserve Bank of India

The RBI faces a complex trade-off:

- **Cutting rates** may support growth but risk further currency depreciation.
- **Raising rates** may stabilize the currency but dampen growth.
- **Maintaining status quo** may contain risks but delay economic recovery. This creates a **policy trilemma** with no easy solution.

5. Structural Limitation of Monetary Policy

In India, nearly half of inflation is driven by **food prices**, which depend on monsoon, supply conditions, and government policies rather than interest rates. This limits the RBI's ability to control **headline inflation**, reducing the overall effectiveness of monetary policy.

Way Forward: Towards a Balanced Policy Framework

1. Strengthening Supply-Side Measures

Inflation in economies like India is often driven by **supply constraints rather than excess demand**. Therefore, improving **agricultural supply chains** (storage, logistics, cold chains) can reduce food price volatility. Investing in **energy diversification** such as renewables can lower dependence on imported oil. Reducing import reliance overall helps insulate the economy from global price shocks.

2. Enhancing Monetary Transmission

For policy rate changes by the Reserve Bank of India to be effective, they must quickly influence borrowing and spending. This requires **strong financial markets**, efficient banking systems, and better **credit delivery mechanisms**, ensuring that interest rate changes reach businesses and consumers in a timely manner.

3. Coordinated Policy Approach

Monetary policy alone cannot control inflation effectively. It must be supported by **fiscal policy** for instance, reducing taxes on essential goods or managing supply bottlenecks. Instead of broad stimulus (which can fuel inflation), governments should use **targeted subsidies** to protect vulnerable sections without distorting the overall economy.

4. Managing External Vulnerabilities

To reduce exposure to global shocks, countries should **build adequate foreign exchange reserves**, which help stabilize the currency during volatility. At the same time, promoting **exports**

and domestic production while reducing unnecessary imports can improve the balance of payments and strengthen economic resilience.

5. Flexible Inflation Targeting

Inflation targeting should account for **country-specific realities**. In India, where food has a large share in the inflation basket, strict adherence to targets without considering supply shocks may harm growth. A **flexible approach** allows policymakers to balance inflation control with growth and stability objectives.

Conclusion: Different Paths, Different Costs

The experience of the U.S., the U.K., and India demonstrates that while inflation control is a common objective, the **cost of achieving it varies widely across economies**. Structural factors, external dependencies, and policy choices shape outcomes. Going forward, central banks must adopt **context-specific, flexible strategies**, recognizing that the path to price stability is neither uniform nor costless.

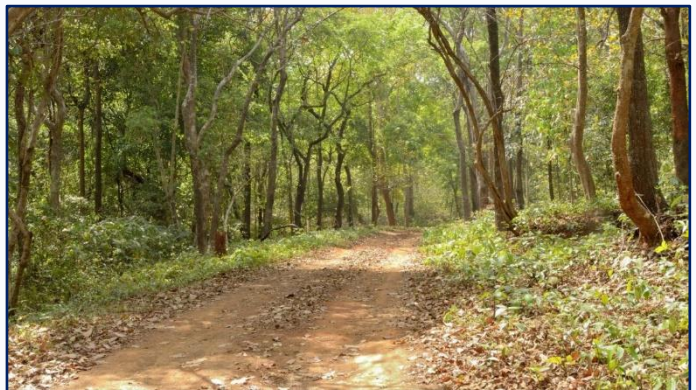
Q. The cost of disinflation varies significantly across economies depending on structural and policy factors. Discuss this statement using the experiences of India, the United States, and the United Kingdom. 15 Marks

2.2. INTERNAL SECURITY

2.2.1. INDIA'S POST-LWE (LEFT WING EXTREMISM) TRANSFORMATION

Introduction

- India's prolonged engagement with **Left Wing Extremism (LWE)** is now approaching a decisive phase, with the Union government recently declaring the country as nearly **"Naxal-free"** following sustained counter-insurgency efforts.
- However, **security success alone is not enough**; the real challenge lies in transforming these regions through **inclusive governance, trust-building, and sustainable development**.



Understanding Left Wing Extremism (LWE)

A. Concept and Nature of LWE

- **Left Wing Extremism (LWE)**, commonly known as **Naxalism or Maoism**, is a **socio-political as well as armed movement** that aims to **overthrow the existing state structure through violent revolution**.
- **Ideological Inspiration**: It draws ideological inspiration from **Mao Zedong**, advocating that **political power should be captured by peasants and the working class** to dismantle what it perceives as **exploitative socio-economic systems**.

- **For instance;** Incidents like the **2010 Dantewada attack**, where **76 CRPF personnel were killed**, showed the scale and intensity of the threat.

B. Ideological Framework: The Maoist Doctrine

- At its core, LWE is rooted in **Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (MLM)**, which provides its **theoretical and strategic direction**.
- **Protracted People's War (PPW):** This strategy emphasises a **long-term revolutionary struggle**, where insurgents gradually **encircle urban centres by consolidating control over rural areas**.
- **New Democratic Revolution:** The movement envisions the creation of a **"People's Government"**, replacing the existing parliamentary democracy, which they consider to be **dominated by elite interests**.
- **Rejection of Electoral Politics:** Unlike other left-oriented political parties, LWE groups **reject participation in democratic elections**, viewing them as a **compromise with capitalist and bourgeois systems**.

C. Socio-Economic Context: Conditions Supporting LWE

- **The Red Corridor Phenomenon:** LWE historically spread across a belt known as the **"Red Corridor"**, covering parts of **Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal** (a region spanning parts of **central and eastern India**).
- These regions are typically **forest-rich, mineral-rich but economically underdeveloped**, creating conditions for insurgency.
- **Marginalisation of Tribal Communities:** The movement has capitalised on the **grievances of Adivasi populations**, particularly related to **land alienation, forest rights, and displacement due to mining and industrial projects**.
- **Governance Gaps and State Absence:** Inadequate access to **basic services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure** has created a **governance vacuum**, which extremist groups exploit to gain influence.
- **The Resource Curse Paradox:** Despite being **rich in natural resources**, these regions remain **economically backward**, leading to a sense of **relative deprivation and injustice among local populations**.

D. Operational Structure: Functioning of LWE Groups

- LWE organisations, particularly the **CPI (Maoist)**, operate through a **well-structured and multi-layered framework**.
- **PLGA (People's Liberation Guerrilla Army):** This is the **armed wing** responsible for carrying out **guerrilla warfare**, including **ambushes on security personnel and IED-based attacks**.
- **Jan Adalats (People's Courts):** These are **parallel judicial mechanisms** used by Maoists to deliver **swift and often violent forms of justice**, thereby establishing **control and fear among local populations**.
- **Front Organisations and Urban Networks:** LWE groups maintain **overground support structures**, which assist in **logistics, recruitment, legal advocacy, and ideological dissemination**, particularly in urban areas.

How India Effectively Managed LWE?

1. Strong Security Strategy and Proactive Operations

- **Shift to an Aggressive, Intelligence-Based Approach:** The government moved from a **defensive policy** to a **proactive and zero-tolerance strategy** under the **SAMADHAN doctrine**, focusing on eliminating top Maoist leadership.
 - Continuous **intelligence-led operations in remote “no-go areas”** replaced earlier limited engagements.
- **Strengthening Security Forces and Capacity:** Deployment of forces like the **Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)** and specialised units such as **CoBRA battalions** improved operational strength.
 - Use of **modern tools such as drones, surveillance systems, and better training** made operations more effective.
- **Clear Impact of Security Measures:** Maoist leadership has weakened significantly, with the **Politburo reduced to minimal active members**, and **violent incidents declining sharply**.
 - More than **500 cadres have been eliminated since 2024**, contributing to the declaration of India being nearly **“Naxal-free” by March 2026**.

2. Infrastructure Push to Break Geographical Barriers

- **Reducing Insurgents’ Terrain Advantage:** The government expanded **road networks and mobile connectivity** in dense forest areas to reduce insurgents’ control over difficult terrain. This helped replace the **governance vacuum with visible state services**.
- **Strengthening Security Infrastructure:** Construction of **over 600 fortified police stations and dozens of helipads** improved rapid response and mobility of forces. These measures helped security forces **avoid IED threats and act quickly during attacks**.
- **Shrinking of the Red Corridor:** Due to rapid infrastructure development, LWE influence reduced from **over 180 districts to only a few isolated pockets by 2026**.

3. Development Approach to Address Root Causes

- **Focusing on Socio-Economic Issues:** The government recognised that **poverty, land alienation, and lack of development** were major causes of extremism. Efforts were made to improve **livelihoods, infrastructure, and welfare services**.
- **Constitutional and Financial Provisions:** **Article 275(1) grants** and **Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) allocations**, further strengthened by the **16th Finance Commission’s devolution framework**, provided the fiscal architecture to **close last-mile service delivery gaps** at the panchayat level.
- **Key Government Programmes**
 - **Aspirational Districts Programme** improved **health, education, and nutrition indicators**.
 - **Integrated Action Plan (IAP)** enabled quick local development through flexible funding.
 - **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)** improved connectivity in remote areas.
 - **PM-JANMAN (Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan)** aimed at **upliftment of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**.

- **Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan (DAJUGA)** focuses on **holistic tribal development**.
- **ROSHNI and other skill development and livelihood schemes** provided **employment opportunities to youth**.
- **Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan:** This initiative focused on **capacity-building of frontline government functionaries** operating in difficult terrains, ensuring that field-level governance delivery improved qualitatively in tribal hinterlands.

4. Governance Reforms and Administrative Strengthening

- **Improving Ground-Level Governance:** Deployment of **Prime Minister's Rural Development Fellows (PMRDFs)** strengthened administration in difficult areas.
- Special area-based plans like **Jungle Mahal (West Bengal), Saranda (Jharkhand), Malkangiri (Odisha), and Bastar (Chhattisgarh)** ensured **focused interventions in high-conflict zones**.
- **From Temporary Presence to Continuous Governance:** The state shifted from **short-term interventions** to **regular and reliable service delivery**, improving trust among people.

5. Surrender Policy and Rehabilitation of Cadres

- **Encouraging Insurgents to Join the Mainstream:** The government provided **financial incentives, skill training, and rehabilitation support** to Maoists who surrendered.
- **Reducing Insurgent Strength:** Over **8,000 insurgents have surrendered in the last decade**, including **1,225 in 2025**, weakening the recruitment base.

6. Financial and Legal Crackdown on Support Systems

- **Targeting Funding and Networks:** Agencies like the **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** and **Enforcement Directorate (ED)** acted against **illegal funding, extortion, and front organisations**.
- **Breaking the Insurgency Ecosystem:** Strong legal action and asset seizures reduced access to **money, weapons, and logistical support**, weakening Maoist groups.

7. Use of Technology for Precision and Intelligence

- **Adoption of Advanced Technology:** Use of **drones, satellite mapping, and AI-based monitoring** helped in **real-time intelligence gathering**.
- **Improving Operational Efficiency:** Security forces shifted from broad operations to **precise, targeted strikes**, reducing insurgent mobility and surprise attacks. This led to major successes, including **large-scale elimination of insurgents in joint operations**.

8. Strengthening Local Governance and Tribal Rights

- **Empowering Gram Sabhas and Tribal Communities:** Implementation of the **PESA Act and Forest Rights Act (FRA)** gave **greater control over land and forest resources** to tribal communities.
- **Reducing Alienation and Building Trust:** This approach countered the Maoist narrative of **state exploitation** and strengthened **local self-governance**.

- **Recent Progress:** States like **Jharkhand notified PESA Rules in 2026**, making **Gram Sabha consent mandatory** for land-related decisions.

9. Digital Inclusion and Countering Extremist Influence

- **Expanding Digital Connectivity:** Large-scale installation of **mobile towers and internet services** connected remote areas to the mainstream. Over **2,500 mobile towers were installed in areas like Bastar and Abujhmad**, reducing communication gaps.
- **Improving Access and Awareness:** Enabled **Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT), online education, and communication**, reducing dependence on insurgent systems.
- **Positive Impact on Youth:** Increased connectivity helped reduce **radicalisation** and improved **school enrollment**, including in **Eklavya Model Residential Schools**.

10. "Clear-Hold-Build" Strategy for Long-Term Stability

- **Ensuring Permanent Control and Development:** The strategy focused on **clearing insurgents, holding areas with security forces, and building infrastructure and governance systems**.
- **Role of Forward Operating Bases (FOBs):** Establishment of **FOBs** ensured both **security presence and development activities**.
- **Operation Kagar (2025) as a Turning Point:** Since the **launch of Operation Kagar in 2025**, around **45 new FOBs were established in the Sukma-Bijapur region**, leading to a **70% drop in IED incidents** and completion of long-pending road projects.
- **Outcome:** This approach transformed **"Red Zones" into "Growth Corridors"**, supporting the declaration of a **"Naxal-free India" in 2026**.

Key Challenges Still Persisting in LWE-Affected Areas

1. Security Transition and the Emergence of Power Vacuums

- **Localized Vulnerabilities:** The withdrawal of **CAPFs** threatens to leave a security void, potentially allowing **splinter cells** or organized crime to seize control of local illicit economies.
- **Fragility of Control:** Following the 2026 "Naxal-free" declaration, the MHA reclassified **35 regions** as **"Legacy and Thrust"** districts, signaling that state authority remains brittle.
- **Policing Deficits:** Despite building **656 fortified police stations**, high **vacancy rates** and a lack of specialized training for local civilian police remain major structural risks.

2. Governance "Software" Gaps

- **Infrastructure vs. Service:** While physical buildings exist, **absentee administration** prevents effective service delivery and democratic deepening.
- **Staffing Crisis in Education:** Recruiting specialized teachers for the **179 EMRS schools** who are willing to reside in former "Red Zones" is a persistent hurdle.
- **Functional Paralysis:** Day-to-day operations in the **6,025 post offices** and **1,804 bank branches** are severely hampered by chronic employee absenteeism.

3. Resource Exploitation

- **Crony-Capitalist Threats:** Post-2025 stabilization has seen an immediate surge in **mining clearances**, threatening the traditional **'Jal-Jungle-Jameen'** rights and tribal ecology.

- **Underutilized Development Funds:** Despite collecting over **₹80,000 crore** via the **District Mineral Foundation (DMF)**, audits reveal these funds are rarely used for community-owned bio-economies.

4. Reintegration Hurdles

- **Livelihood Sustainability:** Transitioning the **8,000+ surrendered Maoists** (including **1,225 in 2025**) into the formal economy is structurally weak, risking their return to crime.
- **Training-to-Employment Gap:** Placement rates for former cadres remain low despite the establishment of **46 ITIs** and **49 Skill Development Centres** under the **Kaushal Vikas Yojana**.

5. Implementation Lags in Grassroots Sovereignty

- **Legal Bottlenecks:** The effective operationalization of the **PESA Act** and **Forest Rights Act (FRA)** is stalled, with many claims in districts like **Kanker** remaining legally contested.
- **Bureaucratic Delays:** Targeted initiatives like **PM-JANMAN** for **75 PVTGs** face delays in land entitlement, fueling dormant resentment among Adivasi populations.

6. The Persistence of Sophisticated Urban Networks

- **Ideological Resilience:** Neutralized guerrilla squads have been replaced by **urban logistical networks** that exploit localized grievances like labor and land disputes.
- **Slow Judicial Prosecution:** While the **NIA** has frozen funding channels, prosecuting the "**urban nexus**" under anti-terror laws remains a remarkably **slow judicial process**.

7. Fiscal Sustainability of Logistical Networks

- **Maintenance Overhead:** Sustaining **15,000 km of roads** and **9,200 mobile towers** in topographies like **Abujmad** requires massive, recurring financial and security overhead.
- **Digital Empowerment:** Ensuring this connectivity serves **tribal empowerment** rather than state surveillance remains an unresolved challenge in 2026.

8. Judicial Backlogs and the Reconciliation Crisis

- **Undertrial Alienation:** Thousands of tribal youths remain in prison due to slow conflict-era trials, creating a crisis of faith in the rule of law.
- **Requirement for Redress:** With violence down by **88%**, clearing **localized judicial backlogs** is now a prerequisite for a genuine politics of reconciliation.

Way Forward

- **Shift from Security-Centric to Governance-Centric Approach:** The focus must move from "**area domination**" to "**people-centric governance**", ensuring continuous administrative presence. Security gains should be seen as an **opportunity for deeper transformation**, not the final goal.
- **Strengthening Local Economies and Livelihoods:** Promote **forest-based economies** through fair procurement and local processing of **Minor Forest Produce (MFP)**.
 - Encourage **agroforestry, small-scale industries, and MSMEs** with financial and technical support.
 - Develop **eco-tourism and community-based enterprises**, ensuring **local ownership and benefit-sharing**.

- **Improving Governance: Through Convergence and Accountability** Adopt a structured framework like **AIEEEE (Accountability, Innovation, Evidence, Equity, Empathy, Efficiency)** to ensure effective policy implementation.
 - Strengthen convergence of schemes like **Aspirational Districts Programme, PM-JANMAN, DAJUGA, and Tribal Sub Plan (TSP)**.
- **Enhancing Infrastructure and Service Delivery:** Ensure universal access to **roads, electricity, digital connectivity, education, healthcare, and banking services**.
 - Improve **nutrition systems, women’s self-help groups (SHGs), and grassroots institutions**.
- **Ensuring Rights-Based and Dignity-Centred Governance:** Recognise citizens as “**rights-bearing stakeholders**”, not mere beneficiaries.
 - Ensure proper implementation of **Forest Rights Act, PESA (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act)**, and constitutional provisions like **Article 275(1)**.
- **Reforming Justice and Policing Systems:** Promote **humane policing practices** and strengthen **community policing models**.
 - Fast-track **undertrial cases**, provide **legal aid**, and establish **accessible grievance redress mechanisms**.
- **Harnessing Youth and Sport as Pathways:** The example of **Salima Tete** (captain, Indian women's hockey team from Simdega) and **Mamta Hansda** (Indian women's senior football team from West Midnapore) — both products of **IAP-funded sports infrastructure** — powerfully demonstrates that **targeted investment in youth creates national-level human capital** from the most marginalised geographies.
 - **Higher education scholarships, residential schooling, and skilling programmes** aligned to local economic realities must systematically complement sports pathways to build comprehensive **youth aspiration infrastructure**.
- **Sustained Political and Administrative Commitment:** Continuous engagement by **political leadership and bureaucracy** is essential to maintain momentum.

Conclusion

India’s journey from the “**red corridor**” to a **peaceful future** marks a significant achievement, but the **final victory lies in building trust, dignity, and opportunity** for its people. A truly successful post-LWE India will be one where **governance replaces fear, inclusion replaces alienation, and development reaches the last citizen**.

Q. India’s success in controlling Left Wing Extremism (LWE) marks a shift from a security challenge to a governance challenge. Critically examine this statement in the context of recent developments and outline the way forward for sustainable peace. 15 Marks

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