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# WOMEN'S QUOTA, PANCHAYATS TO PARLIAMENT

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Women Issues

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October 05, 2023 01:26 am | Updated 01:26 am IST

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BJP supporters during an event at the party headquarters in New Delhi to celebrate the passage of the women's reservation Bill. | Photo Credit: ANI

The landmark [Women's Reservation Bill](#) — now the [Constitution \(106th Amendment\) Act](#) — that reserves one-third of the total seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women received presidential assent recently. As the first law passed in the new Parliament building during a special session, it portends a new chapter in India's democratic journey.

It comes on the 30th anniversary of the constitutional reforms that reserved one-third of seats in panchayats and municipalities for women. Since then, there have been multiple unsuccessful attempts to extend women's reservation to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. While its final enactment is momentous, it is contingent on the conduct of delimitation and census.

**Editorial | [Legislating change: On the passage of the women's reservation bill in the Lok Sabha](#)**

Nevertheless, it is the right time to take stock of the 30-year experience of [women's reservation in local government](#) and the lessons it offers Indian democracy.

Parliament, 30 years ago, enacted the [73rd](#) and [74th Constitutional Amendments](#) that sought to make panchayats and municipalities "institutions of self-government". It mandated a minimum of one-third of seats and office of chairpersons in panchayats and municipalities to be reserved for women. It also mandated reservation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) based on their percentage population and enabled States to reserve seats for Backward Classes. This has created a system with over 3 million elected panchayat representatives, out of which almost half are women.

The expansion and diversification of the representative base of Indian democracy is the most successful element of these constitutional reforms. While the Union government's 2009 constitutional amendment to increase women's reservation in local governments from 33% to 50% failed, many States have enacted laws that reserve 50% seats for women and also instituted reservations of seats for Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Hence, presently in panchayats and municipalities, there is, at one level, vertical reservation of seats for SCs, STs, and OBCs and a horizontal category of reservation for women that applies across all categories — general, SC, ST, and OBC.

Such a mix of vertical and horizontal reservations recognises the aggravated disadvantage people face due to their location in the intersection of their caste and gender identities. The present women's reservation law, as well as its previous avatar passed by the Rajya Sabha in 2008, adopts a similar model of intersectional reservation for women. However, unlike the case of the 73rd and 74th amendments, the present law does not enable reservation for OBC women.

Beyond representation, has women's reservation in local governments yielded substantive benefits? A 2004 paper by Esther Duflo and Raghavendra Chattopadhyay on panchayats in West Bengal and Rajasthan found that women leaders invest more in public goods and ensure increased women's participation in panchayat meetings.

A more expansive study in 2011 across 11 States by Ms. Duflo and others reaffirmed the finding that women-led panchayats made higher investments in public services like drinking water, education, and roads. However, a 2010 paper by Pranab Bardhan and others found that women's reservations worsened the targeting of welfare programmes for SC/ST households and provided no improvement for female-headed households.

Meanwhile, a 2008 paper by Vijayendra Rao and Radu Ban found that women leaders perform no differently than their male counterparts in south India and instead institutional factors such as the maturity of the State's panchayat system were more relevant. Worryingly, a 2020 paper by Alexander Lee and Varun Karekurve-Ramachandra examining reservations in Delhi found that constituencies reserved for women are less likely to elect OBC women and more likely to elect upper-caste women.

Evidently, the impact of women's reservation is not straightforward. The design of women's reservations in Parliament and State Assemblies should have ideally been informed by its 30-year experience in panchayats and municipalities. Since the role that women play in local governments is different from their role in Parliament, the impact of reservation may play out differently. However, something as vital as a constitutional amendment for women's reservation should have been introduced after widespread discussion and analysis of its experience, instead of being introduced surreptitiously through a "supplementary list" in a hastily organised Parliament session.

**Also read | [Census a must for women's reservation Bill to become reality](#)**

Unlike the 2008 version, the present women's reservation law has tied its implementation with the conduct of delimitation and census, neither of which have a definite date. The constitutional freeze for delimitation, that has been in place since 1976, will end in 2026. If the reallocation of seats between States is purely based on population, the southern States' share in the Parliament will drastically reduce. So, the next delimitation exercise is likely to open up the fault lines of India's delicate federal relations. Hence, coupling women's reservations with a politically fraught delimitation exercise makes its implementation contentious. Hopefully, the near unanimity in the passing of the Bill signals that there will be some consensus on implementing women's reservation in the near future.

***Mathew Idiculla is an independent legal consultant and a visiting faculty at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru***

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# EQUALITY AND IDENTITY: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE FINDINGS OF THE BIHAR CASTE COUNT

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Population And Associated Issues

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October 06, 2023 12:22 am | Updated 12:22 am IST

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The [significance of Bihar conducting a caste survey](#) and [publishing a caste-wise count of its population](#) is quite immense. The survey, which had all the trappings of a census, complete with a two-stage process of house-listing followed by the eliciting of information from the households, has shown that 63% of Bihar's 13 crore population belong to castes listed under the Extremely Backward Classes (EBC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) categories. The socio-economic profiles of the people have also been recorded, but are [yet to be revealed](#). At the national level, it may give a boost to the political demand for a country-wide caste census and [push the judicial discourse towards reconsidering the 50% legal ceiling](#) on total reservation in education and government services. In terms of party politics, it may open a new chapter in the traditional conflict between the BJP seeking to consolidate all sections of Hindus into one massive support base and other parties banking on different sections of the OBCs. At a time when [Hindutva is seen to have trumped parties](#) that banked on OBC assertion, influential social groups may now sense an opportunity to leverage their size to get their interests advanced by the political class. On the legal side, the numbers may be utilised to present the sort of 'quantifiable data' that the judiciary has been asking for to justify the levels of reservation obtaining in various States.

Bihar's exercise marks a precedent on how a caste count should be conducted. The methodology included giving a code to each of the 214 castes in the State's lists of castes. Sub-castes and sects were identified in advance and subsumed under a broader caste name. This meant that the enumerators could assign a code to any caste name given by a respondent. A major reason for the Union government not releasing the caste-related details of its 2011 'Socio-economic and Caste Census' was that the data it yielded was too confusing and unwieldy. As many as 46 lakh castes were named by the people, presumably because they gave castes, sub-castes, sects, clans, and surnames when asked to name their castes. While there are functional and practical advantages to knowing exact caste numbers, it is not to be forgotten that the larger goal of the Constitution remains the attainment of a casteless society. Affirmative action indeed helps address inequities in society. The state must also look for ways to ensure equality of opportunity and equitable distribution of resources without accentuating caste identity.

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## **WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP PLATFORM - NITI AAYOG STATE WORKSHOP ON WOMEN-LED DEVELOPMENT: A RESOUNDING SUCCESS IN GOA!**

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Women Issues

The inaugural edition of the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) – NITI Aayog State Workshop Series on Enabling Women-led Development through Entrepreneurship was organized at CSIR-National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) Auditorium, Goa on 3rd October 2023. The workshop was held in collaboration with the Government of Goa with a focus on the western region of the country.

The workshop recorded over 500 participants, including women entrepreneurs, local self-help groups (SHGs) and clusters, government officials, industry representatives, incubators/accelerators, financial institutions, philanthropic foundations, and more. The primary focus was deliberating on a hub-and-spoke model aimed at extending women-led development to grassroots levels, covering the last mile. Eminent dignitaries, including Dr. Pramod Sawant, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Goa, Dr. V. K. Saraswat, Member, NITI Aayog, and Shri B.V.R Subramanyam, CEO, NITI Aayog, graced this landmark workshop.

Dr Pramod Sawant, Honorable Chief Minister, Government of Goa, stated that the Goa State Vision 2047 will be prepared with help from NITI Aayog. Celebrating the three-year milestone of the Swayampurna Goa initiative, Dr. Sawant emphasized its focus on skill development and the deployment of "Swayampurna Grameen Mitras" for the doorstep delivery of government services in every block and Panchayat. Furthermore, the Chief Minister reiterated the role of women in socio-economic progress, announcing the Swayampurna e-bazaar during Dussehra, aimed at expanding market access through Common Service Centres.

Highlighting NITI Aayog's mandate for cooperative federalism, Dr. V.K. Saraswat, Member, NITI Aayog, emphasized the pivotal role of states in driving the nation's growth. He emphasized three key priorities: maintaining the employment-to-education ratio, promoting women's entrepreneurship, and restructuring the workforce

NITI Aayog CEO, B. V. R. Subrahmanyam, reaffirmed the central government's unwavering commitment to women-led development as the top priority. He underscored NITI Aayog's support in assisting state governments to set up institutions like itself in each state "It need not necessarily be a separate institution; it could be a department or an existing body. But just make it the central point to think and plan for the future. Its staff should not be engaged in any other work," he said while urging states to tap the expertise at NITI Aayog.

A series of new collaborations were announced to support women entrepreneurs. Key highlights are the partnership between the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and NITI Aayog; the launch of Udyam Uplift - an initiative of CAxpert to strengthen compliance among women-led businesses and the launch of the first two cohorts under WEP's Award to Reward(ATR) initiative. The first ATR cohort led by WEP Partners Microsave Consulting and SIDBI titled WEP-Unnati is accepting applications from green entrepreneurs pan-India. The second cohort titled WeNurture would be led by Atal Incubation Centre - Goa Institute of Management.



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# A CENSUS FOR A NEW DEAL

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October 09, 2023 01:41 am | Updated 09:43 am IST

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An enumerator receives information from residents during the second phase of caste survey in Patna. | Photo Credit: PTI

Marcel Proust wrote, “Men, their natures not altering overnight, seek in every new order a continuance of the old.” Caste and religion have remained the master cleavages of Indian politics for most of the last century. The [caste survey, released by the Bihar government](#), with coordinated support from the entire Opposition, can be described as a Proustian political move. It tries to constitute a new political opening through the instrument of an old paradigm.

This unfurling of the contesting flags of caste and religious identity gives the first clear shape to the ideological contours of the 2024 general elections. It also firmly reinforces the role of these twin ethnic identity constructions as the fundamental pillars of political mobilisation.

Many critics have dubbed the move as regressive, cynical, and unimaginative, and a return to the ‘Mandal versus Mandir’ politics we had supposedly left behind in the 1990s. Yet, this framing assumes caste- and religion-based identity politics to be pre-formed packages, whose practices have remained stagnant over the last three decades, even as the political economy has been transformed by liberalisation.

The politics of religion and caste respond and adapt to changes in the larger socio-economic structure. As the political scientists Pradeep Chhibber and Rahul Verma explained in their book *Ideology and Identity: The Changing Party Systems of India*, the majority coalition assembled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was rooted in a novel political constituency formed with the post-liberalisation expansion of the middle class. The leadership of Mr. Modi, for the middle class, promised a firm institutionalisation of their dominant norms (on state intervention, material consumption, and ‘ethno-political’ pride). While middle class anxieties and aspirations have long comprised a key driver of Hindu nationalist mobilisation, their concrete ideological fusion under Mr. Modi’s charismatic appeal is what shaped the present political era. This was Mandir politics 2.0.

**Editorial | [Equality and identity: On the findings of the Bihar caste count](#)**

Similarly, the Bihar caste survey inaugurates not the re-enactment of the old Mandal politics of narrow caste-based patronage, but the coming-of-age of a subordinate class-based politics. This is also Mandal 2.0.

This is new synthesis of a class politics, in the familiar trappings of caste. Primarily, it seeks to tap into the frustrated and deeply felt desire held by large sections of the precariat to achieve middle class status. Such a status constitutes both an economic marker and a prized social status symbol. This precariat is roughly one-half of the country which finds itself sandwiched between the poor and the middle class. They have been facing a stagnant trend of upward mobility inside of an informal economy which offers little substantive protections. An estimated 75 million people, according to the Pew Research Center, slipped back into poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic. The bulk of this precariat, which can be found in rural and urban India across occupations, is composed of lower Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Dalits, and Muslims.

In their book, *Beyond Consumption: India's New Middle Class in the Neo-Liberal Times*, Manish K. Jha and Pushpendra chart the composition of the middle class in terms of different caste groups. Briefly, 5% of upper castes fall in the upper-middle class segment, compared to 3% of OBCs and 1.4% of Dalits. These variations are significant, and sharpen pyramidically. The gaps are also starker in the Hindi belt States of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where upper caste dominance is more entrenched. Such status inequality also tends to be much higher among Hindus than among other religious groups. For instance, Muslim OBCs form a larger proportion of both upper class and middle class segments compared to Muslim upper castes.

The coalition of the precariat depends on the glue of an enlarged ethnic block (such as the OBCs) because it can hardly be forged on abstract or universal ideas. Simply put, the precariat does not possess the “symbolic capital” to do so. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu defined ‘symbolic capital’ as the capacity to “shape the perception of social reality”. This allows certain dominant groups to “impose a particular vision of the world in the name of a universal truth”. Such influence is wielded largely by the Hindu middle class. Meanwhile, members of the precariat, such as the deeply fragmented and underprivileged OBCs, possess few of these social, cultural, and ideological resources. They prefer to articulate their own politics of upward mobility in terms of concrete caste identities, which draw on an alternative symbolic capital of their experience of caste and historical memories of struggle.

It is, of course, important to acknowledge the considerable failures of Mandal politics in the Hindi belt. Unlike in southern India, caste politics in the north made no substantive dent on the political economy, or institutions of power and governance, or even on poverty reduction. It was too focused on building patronage-based short-term electoral coalitions rather than building a broad and durable political constituency, as did the successful Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu. Yet, to be fair to the caste politics of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, unlike in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, it was enacted at a time when their under-privileged support base had relatively modest economic and cultural capital. Thus, the acquisition of political capital (which Kanshi Ram called the ‘master key’ for the acquisition of other resources) required innovative and often unsavoury means.

This time around, a progressive politics of caste seems to have generated a far broader political consensus than Mandal politics ever did. The parties supporting the caste census command a combined vote share in national elections that exceeds the vote share of the ruling BJP, which awkwardly holds on to an ambiguous stand on the issue. These parties include not just the Congress and the INDIA alliance constituents, but also the bulk of unaligned parties such as the YSR Congress Party, the Telugu Desam Party, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi, and the Biju Janata Dal. In all regions of India, caste politics has clearly sustained legitimacy as an instrument of popular mobilisation, “vernacularising the norms” (Lucia Michelutti) and “democratising the social base” of politics (Yogendra Yadav).

Such a large-scale and pan-Indian consensus is fairly rare, and reflects the expanded range of

possibilities for a progressive politics of caste. Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, which facilitated an unprecedented expansion of the American middle class in the 1930s and 1940s and lifted a working class ravaged by the Great Depression, was a radical institutional solution. It was essentially a political strategy to build a cross-ethnic coalition of working-class white voters, whose precarity had been intensified by the Great Depression. This coalition included low-status recent immigrants of Irish, Italian, and East European descent, mobilised through localised patronage-based politics ('machine politics'). The politics of the New Deal made use of some of these grimy mobilising mechanisms but went beyond it to evolve into an institutional remaking of American capitalism. There was a systemic shift in the economic regime, to the benefit of workers. The popularity of the New Deal made Roosevelt the only President to serve four consecutive terms. This is not to make comparisons, but only to highlight that ethnic and class politics can work complementary to one another. As yet, only at a starting stage, the politics of caste survey emphasises grander notions of equal participation ('*Jitni abadi utna haq*, or rights proportionate to population') and an institutionally negotiated distribution of resources.

**Also read | [Why the caste survey in Bihar worries the BJP](#)**

One reason why Mandal politics eventually devolved into narrow caste formations was the splitting of the stream of farmer politics from the erstwhile bloc of 'Socialist Politics'; and later the rupture of lower OBCs from the Yadavs. Yet, as Anthony Giddens has argued, social actors like ethnicities or castes contain purposive agents, not automatons directed by an external structure or a false consciousness. The political elites such as the Jats in Haryana and the Marathas in Maharashtra have begun to shun exclusivist strategies and gravitate towards a larger OBC platform. This could be seen in the farmer's agitation and the Maratha-Kunbi quota stir, supported by Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar in Maharashtra. It is also possible that sections of the lower OBCs may also re-evaluate the returns, in terms of economic mobility and social prestige, of choosing a political 'Hindu' platform as opposed to an 'OBC' platform.

***Asim Ali is a political researcher and columnist***

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# KARNATAKA PUTS CASTE SURVEY DATA IN COLD STORAGE

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October 09, 2023 12:53 am | Updated 12:53 am IST

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The survey, conducted by the Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission and popularly called the caste census, has been caught in a political crossfire for over five years now. File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

The publication of the caste survey data by the Bihar government has had a ripple effect in Karnataka, with the focus now on the Congress government's move to accept and release the State's socio-economic and educational survey report that was finalised in 2018.

The survey, conducted by the Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission and popularly called the caste census, has been caught in a political crossfire for over five years now. The Veerashaiva/Lingayats and Vokkaligas (the land-owning and politically powerful communities that have for decades held a grip on power in the State) insist that the results not be published, while a large number of backward communities, without political representation so far, want it to see the light of the day.

If published, the survey outcome could alter the power equations in Karnataka besides impacting the backward classes reservation matrix. It is estimated that about 200 of the most backward communities, that have had no political representation so far, could benefit from the move. With the term of the commission's chairman ending in November, the report is expected to be submitted soon.

[Conducted in 2015](#), a first since the last census held in 1931, the [survey has not been submitted to the government](#) since the report was finalised in 2018. Successive governments, including the previous Congress government led by Siddaramaiah during whose term the census was conducted, have dithered on accepting the report fearing a political backlash from the Vokkaligas and Veerashaiva/ Lingayats. Of the 23 Karnataka Chief Ministers, 16 have been from the two communities, and only five, including the incumbent Chief Minister, have belonged to Other Backward Classes.

A selective leak of data from the census revealed that the population of Lingayats and Vokkaligas stood at 14% and 11%, respectively, as opposed to the general perception that it is higher. It was feared that if published and authenticated, this data could possibly reduce the influence of these groups in the political sphere.

An earlier narrative stated that the report could not be submitted to the previous Congress government as the commission's secretary had not affixed his signature. Hence it had become clear that the government, which had asked for the report, did not want to head into the 2018 Assembly elections by antagonising the two communities.

Representatives from the two communities have termed the 162 crore-worth census exercise unscientific and unreliable. They claim that the questionnaires were “misleading” and “aimed at dividing the communities into subjects to deliberately bring down numbers.”

Interestingly, Vokkaligas and Veerashaiva/Lingayats also figure in the OBC list, though their inclusion has been a contested issue. In the late 1970s, Chief Minister D. Devaraj Urs introduced the OBC reservation in which Vokkaligas found a place based on the L.G. Havanur Commission report. In subsequent decades, though the T. Venkataswamy Commission did not include the two communities in the OBC list, the Janata government headed by Ramakrishna Hegde drew a separate list adding the communities to it in 1986. In 1994, the Congress government headed by M. Veerappa Moily also included both these communities in the backward classes reservation list despite the O. Chinnappa Reddy Commission dropping them from the list in 1988.

However, those favouring the publication of the new report have pointed out that the higher population narrative set by the two communities was based on the projected population from 1931.

They argue that the current list of backward classes was last drawn up in 1994, and requires re-categorisation based on the survey outcome. The commission needs to review the list, remove communities that have become ineligible, and add those eligible once in 10 years — an exercise not undertaken in three decades.

Though Mr. Siddaramaiah has publicly asserted the need for caste census data for better representation and poverty alleviation, political compulsions may eventually prevail. Government sources indicate that the report could go into cold storage at least until the 2024 Lok Sabha elections are over.

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# WOMEN WANT CHANGE, SOCIETY NEEDS CHANGE

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October 11, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 01:20 am IST

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'Across the world, women are appreciated by society in supportive and emotional roles, but very seldom in leadership roles' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

The [17th edition of the Global Gender Gap Report](#) of the World Economic Forum (published on June 20, 2023), based on data from 146 countries, has concluded that at the current rate of progress, [it will take 131 years to close the global gender gap](#); it is 149 years in populous South Asian countries including India.

Reservation is the most effective form of affirmative action and equity is the first step to equality. That it leads to inefficiency or incompetency is simply making excuses for not rendering tightly guarded spaces to ousted classes. I strongly contend that women are not inferior to men. Incompetencies, even if they arise, are short term, and are removed soon after opportunity for skill building is made available.

A very astute person once asked me whether we want women to fight women. The answer is 'no'. What women want is a level playing field where the factor of gender which is completely irrelevant but looms large, is removed from the equation.

**Editorial | [Bridging the gap: On India and Gender Gap Report](#)**

The basic premise of advocates against reservation is that it will bring down competence. Alas, this is a completely misplaced notion as statistics show that women perform much better than men in academics, more women graduate from colleges than men, and more women enter the workforce than men. In contrast to this trend, the number of women sharply spirals downwards in leadership positions not because of their incompetence, but because of the hegemony of men.

The inauguration of parliamentary business in September 2023 in the new Parliament building also gave a fresh start to the aspirations of Indian citizens with the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill. After much delay, the Constitution (One Hundred Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023, popularly known as the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023 became a rare piece of legislation in independent India to be cleared overwhelmingly by both Houses. It is indeed a ground-breaking event. While India's founding fathers ensured that India was early to adopt universal adult suffrage, the role of women in shaping the country's political future still remains minimal.



Global trends exhibit a sharp reduction in the age of political leaders. But can a common Indian woman, just by her commitment and ambition, dream of becoming the Prime Minister of India at the age of 37 — like Jacinda Ardern, the former Prime Minister of New Zealand?

Across the world, women are appreciated by society in supportive and emotional roles, but very seldom in leadership roles. The world hates and denigrates ambitious women. Take, for example, the case of Hillary Clinton. There is not an iota of doubt that her political experience and acumen trumped Donald Trump's competencies. However, America, the world's so-called top democracy, chose an inexperienced Mr. Trump over her to lead them.

Historical evidence points out that but for a few Taleb's black swans, all women who have assumed leadership roles did not get there by sheer industry, competence and intelligence. They were allowed only for the convenience of men who were disqualified from assuming these positions, or, if it served some political agenda. In the Indian political arena women leaders were, most often, convenient choices. Their initial acceptance was the perception that they could be conveniently removed, but their inherent acumen belied those designs.

Historical evidence also shows that most women who make it to leadership positions have a mix of privileges — of higher education, the support of influential mentors or families, or belong to upper classes or castes. If there is a survey, I am sure that the figures will show that the percentage of women legislators who have had university and higher education is almost cent per cent, versus such a percentage of male legislators.

Despite these privileges, women also take longer to assume leadership positions. Even Indira Gandhi, who had the highest elitist advantage and was politically active from an early age, was not fielded as the Prime Minister on Jawaharlal Nehru's death in 1964, and had to wait till Shastri's death in 1966 to assume the prime ministerial role. Rajiv Gandhi, on the other hand, by virtue of being the son, and even though not politically active earlier, was immediately fielded after Mrs Gandhi's assassination. The question thus is, whether an Indian woman shorn of nepotistic advantages can be in a top leadership position in good time.

The deepest cut is that the handful of privileged women who assume leadership are not supportive or empathetic to the aspirations of those women who do not even have access to basic needs such as nutrition, education and financial independence. They reel under the misconception that they have become leaders by virtue of their own efforts and sacrifices, ignoring the personal advantages they possess.

The archives bear testimony to this attitude. During the Round Table Conference held in the 1930s in London, a letter was written on November 16, 1931 by Sarojini Naidu and Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz presenting a joint manifesto by the All India Women's Conference, the Women's Indian Association, and the Central Committee of the National Council of Women in India. They demanded neither discriminatory nor favourable treatment on the basis of gender in legislative representation, thereby rejecting reservation. Incidentally, Sarojini Naidu had the advantage of being educated at the King's College London and Cambridge with a scholarship from the Nizam of Hyderabad.

Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz, a Muslim League member, on the other hand advocated, along with Radhabai Subbarayan, a minuscule five per cent reservation for women. While Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz studied at Queen Mary's College, Lahore, Radhabai Subbarayan had the privilege of attending Somerville College, Oxford. Both the women were from elite backgrounds, affluent families and upper classes.

Thus, the biggest block is the regressive views on gender equality held by men and women.

This has been seen even in otherwise progressive men as seen when C. Rajagopalachari opposed Radhabai Subbarayan's choice to fight from a general seat.

Mulayam Singh's accusation in Parliament in 2010, that the previous avatar of the women's reservation Bill would only champion the cause of educated, urban and elite women, failed to recognise that the core objective of the Bill was to create space for women who did not have the good fortune of belonging to privileged and elite classes. A report in the leading daily said that political analysts felt — and rightly so — that the stand of Mulayam Singh and Lalu Prasad Yadav did not stem from their concern for women, but because "it would reduce the space for men who dominate elections in our patriarchal society".

Why do women have to wait so long to close the gender gap? The present Bill is the first step towards actualising gender parity. One only wishes that its implementation would be based on a readjustment of seats on the basis of the 1991 Census, as it is done in the case of Scheduled Caste seats by the Delimitation Commission, rather than waiting for the delimitation exercise pegged on the next Census, whenever it is held.

It is time to quickly set right historical wrongs. Women want change. Society needs change. And there is no reason why it should be late.

***Vibha Datta Makhija is Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India***

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## THE DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND DAIRYING, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA LAUNCHED THE 'A-HELP' PROGRAMME TODAY AT JHARKHAND

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Women Issues

The Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Government of India launched the 'A-HELP' (Accredited Agent for Health and Extension of Livestock Production) programme in the State of Jharkhand today. Minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Co-operative, Govt. of Jharkhand, Shri Badal Patralekh was the chief guest of the programme. This program was launched in the gracious presence of Secretary, Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying, GoI, Smt. Alka Upadhyaya, Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Co-operative, Govt. of Jharkhand, Shri Aboobacker Siddique P., Sr. General Manager, National Dairy Development Board Shri Lalit Prasad Karan were also present.



Minister, Shri Badal Patralekh emphasized the importance of role of women in the overall development of the state's livestock sector. He spoke about the 'A-HELP' program, which aims to empower women by engaging them as Accredited Agent who contribute significantly to disease control, animal tagging, and livestock insurance. He highlighted that the new scheme would enhance access to veterinary services at the farmer's doorstep and empower Pashu Sakhis. Shri Badal Patralekh said that this endeavour serves as an exemplary integration of women's power, fostering socio-economic progress.

Smt. Alka Upadhyaya participated in the event virtually. She highlighted the pivotal role played by livestock and women in the comprehensive development of the livestock sector and congratulated the State Govt. for being one of the States with a growing livestock sector. She further added that this new band of community-based functionaries, named Accredited Agent for Health and Extension of Livestock Production (A-HELP) has been formulated to fill the void between local veterinary institutions and livestock owners and provide primary health services

and will serve as Livestock Resource Persons and Primary Service Providers.

The Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD) is embarking on a novel initiative named as “A-HELP” (Accredited Agent for Health and Extension of Livestock Production) and has already initiated across different States/UTs including Bihar, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Jharkhand. The Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD) has launched the novel initiative through an MoU signed between DAHD and the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) under the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Govt. of India.

During the launch event, A-HELP Kits were distributed to Pashu Sakhis, and the event witnessed substantial participation, with more than 500 attendees, including progressive farmers and Pashu Sakhis. This initiative signifies a significant step forward in promoting livestock health, extension services, and women's empowerment in the region, potentially leading to improved livestock productivity and rural development.



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# A KEY STEP BY BIHAR TO PROMOTE BETTER SOCIAL JUSTICE

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October 13, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 12:08 am IST

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Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar at an all party meeting on the caste-based census survey report, in Patna | Photo Credit: ANI

There are certain dates which acquire greater significance by a stroke of history, and October 2, 2023 is one such date — a day when the Bihar government released the data for a caste-based survey, known as the Bihar Jaati Adharit Ganana. Let us remember not to forget.

A caste-based census would provide accurate and up-to-date data on the distribution and socio-economic status of the various castes and communities in India. This data is essential for evidence-based policy formulation and implementation. It can help policymakers identify marginalised and disadvantaged groups and design targeted interventions to uplift them. India has a long history of caste-based discrimination and oppression. A caste-based census can help in recognising and quantifying the extent of historical injustices and disparities that exist in society. Acknowledging these disparities is a critical step towards addressing them.

With accurate caste-based data, the government can develop more effective and targeted welfare programmes. These programmes can be tailored to the specific needs of different caste groups, ensuring that the benefits of government schemes reach the most vulnerable sections of society. Regular caste-based census data can help track the progress of different caste groups over time. This allows for the evaluation of the effectiveness of policies and programmes aimed at social justice and affirmative action. It will also enable the government to make necessary adjustments to policies when needed. Caste-based data can help ensure fair representation of marginalised communities in government, education, and employment. Reservations and affirmative action policies are often based on caste, and accurate data is crucial to determine the appropriate level of representation required. A caste-based census promotes transparency and accountability in government efforts to promote social justice. It allows citizens to hold the government accountable for the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

Without accurate data, there is a risk of caste certificates being misused for personal gain or political purposes. A caste-based census can help verify and authenticate the caste status of individuals, reducing the likelihood of fraud and ensuring that benefits are directed to those who genuinely need them.

However, it is important to note that the idea of conducting a caste-based census in India has

been a subject of debate and controversy. Some argue that it could perpetuate and deepen caste divisions, while others believe that it is necessary to address historical injustices and promote social justice. The decision to conduct such a census involves careful consideration of these arguments and a balanced approach to address the complex issue of caste-based disparities in India.

Caste discrimination in India is a deeply entrenched social issue that has persisted for centuries. Several factors highlight the need for committed government intervention to address this problem. First, historical injustice. Caste discrimination has its roots in centuries of historical oppression and marginalisation. It has resulted in the social, economic, and educational backwardness of certain caste groups. Government intervention is necessary to rectify these historical injustices.

Second, constitutional mandate. The Indian Constitution recognises the existence of caste-based discrimination and inequality and provides for affirmative action measures (such as reservations in education, employment, and politics) to uplift historically disadvantaged groups. The government has a constitutional obligation to implement and enforce these provisions.

Third, human rights. Discrimination based on caste is a violation of human rights. The government has a responsibility to protect the human rights of all its citizens, which includes the right to equality, dignity, and non-discrimination. Committed government intervention is necessary to ensure that these rights are upheld.

Fourth, social cohesion. Caste discrimination perpetuates social divisions and hinders social cohesion. It creates a sense of inequality and injustice among marginalised groups and can lead to social unrest. Government intervention is essential to promote social harmony and unity.

Fifth, economic development. Caste discrimination often leads to economic disparities, with certain caste groups facing limited access to education and employment opportunities. Government intervention through affirmative action policies can help bridge these gaps and promote economic development for all.

Sixth, education. Discrimination can hinder access to quality education for marginalised caste groups. Government intervention is necessary to ensure that educational opportunities are accessible to all, irrespective of caste, and that discrimination within educational institutions is eliminated.

Seventh, employment. Discrimination in employment can limit job opportunities for certain caste groups. Government intervention is required to enforce anti-discrimination laws and promote fair employment practices, including affirmative action in the public sector.

Eighth, political representation. Dalits and other marginalised caste groups have historically been under-represented in political positions. Government intervention is needed to promote their political participation and representation, which is crucial for addressing their concerns.

Ninth, awareness and sensitisation. The government can play a significant role in creating awareness about the harms of caste discrimination and promoting social sensitivity and inclusivity through educational programmes and campaigns.

Tenth, legal framework. Government intervention is crucial to strengthening and enforcing anti-discrimination laws and policies aimed at eradicating caste discrimination. Without a committed government effort, these laws may remain ineffective.



In conclusion, caste discrimination is a deeply ingrained problem in India that requires sustained and committed government intervention to address. Such intervention is not only essential to rectify historical injustices but also to uphold the principles of equality, justice, and human rights for all citizens, regardless of their caste or social background.

Manoj Kumar Jha is Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Rashtriya Janata Dal

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# WOMEN'S QUOTA — RHETORIC AND REALITY

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October 12, 2023 02:08 am | Updated 02:08 am IST

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi in group photograph with Union Minister Smriti Irani and women MPs after the passage of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam (women's reservation bill) by the Rajya Sabha in the special session of the Parliament on September 21, 2023. | Photo Credit: PTI

The celebration of the passing of the Women's Reservation Bill by both Houses of Parliament glosses over certain realities about this conditional legislation. The conduct of a census in the country followed by a delimitation of constituencies based on this census are the conditions for this legislation to take effect. Once it is accepted that reservation for women in legislative bodies is a progressive measure, there is no legal or political justification to prolong its implementation.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha, Home Minister Amit Shah justified these conditions saying that there could be legal challenges against the legislation if it is passed without relying on criteria fixed by way of a process of delimitation.

No doubt, a legislation should be based on a solid foundation, and have valid reasons for existence.

In the case of the Women's Reservation Law, the reality is that about half of the population are women and they are under-represented in Parliament and State legislative bodies. Reports show that, of the maximum allowed 550 seats in the Lok Sabha, only 82, i.e., 15% are represented by women, and out of the 250 members in the Rajya Sabha, only 31, i.e., 12% are women. The Global Gender Gap Report places this in a macroscopic context by showing that India ranks 141 out of 185 in its list.

Article 81 (2) (a) of the Constitution states that the number of seats in the Lok Sabha for a State should have a co-relation with the population of the State and "so far as practicable", the criteria should be the same for all States. Article 170, concerning the legislative Assemblies of States, also takes population as the basis for designing constituencies.

However, delimitation in India is a contentious issue. It acts as an incentive for population expansion with scant regard to development and family planning. This was why a full-fledged delimitation was kept in abeyance in India since 1976. It is now expected to be carried out after the Census which will only be held by 2026 at the earliest.

But, as scholar Nilakantan R.S. predicts, this "demographic detonation" will cause "another big

fork in the future allocation of political power and associated resources between the north and south". In his book *South vs North* (2022), Mr. Nilakantan has demonstrated how South India has performed well in sectors such as health, education, economy etc. in comparison to the North.

South Indian States reduced their population by scientific means whereas North Indian States in general and States such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in particular have failed to do so. The South Indian States have raised concerns about this proposed delimitation. This could lead to two outcomes: the delimitation would get prolonged by years which in turn will defer the materialisation of the women's quota law, or it might happen based on population which in turn could translate to undue advantages for certain States in the North.

These are situations that the relevant provisions in the Constitution, namely Articles 81 and 170, failed to foresee. Thus, Parliament has committed an egregious folly in fusing women's reservation with delimitation.

Articles 330 and 332 of the Constitution deal with the reservation of the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) in the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assembly of States respectively. Though these Articles mention the relationship between reservation and the population of the SC and ST groups, such a parameter is irrelevant to women's quota. That their share in the total population is almost 50% is undisputed. Further, there cannot be a drastic variation in their population from one constituency to the other, as it could happen with SC or ST.

A census to understand the population of women for the purpose of reservation is also unwarranted. The criteria, process and purpose of the Women's Reservation Bill are qualitatively different from those of the delimitation exercise. And, reservation for women in local bodies, which materialised through the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of the Constitution, and came into effect in 1993, was not contingent on any delimitation exercise for that purpose. Parliament, however, has lost sight of these aspects.

How far a constitutional Amendment can be done by way of contingent legislation is an issue too, as certainty is regarded as one of the hallmarks of modern constitutions. In *Hamdard Dawakhana vs Union of India* (1959), the Supreme Court hinted that in conditional legislations, for the statute to take effect, there could be a further dependence on the executive or even on the legislature of the future day, among other things.

Such enactments might be needed on various occasions for multiple reasons. But, by amalgamating the demand for women's reservation with the uncertainty of a future delimitation process, that too in the case of a constitutional amendment, Parliament has made populist rhetoric at best or committed a constitutional blunder at worst. The secrecy maintained on the subject till the commencement of the special session was also thoroughly undemocratic, which in turn, prevented the exposure of the follies of the legislation.

Therefore, with regard to the future of the women's quota in the legislature, one can only have the pessimism of the intelligence and optimism of the will, as Antonio Gramsci famously put it, in a different context.

***Kaleeswaram Raj is a lawyer at the Supreme Court of India***

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# THE POLITICS OF A CASTE CENSUS, ITS IMPACT ON SECULARISM

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October 21, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 02:12 am IST

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‘Such a census might open a Pandora’s box of claims and counter-claims relating to positions and power’ | Photo Credit: Getty Images

By consistently championing the issue of having a caste census, various Opposition party leaders of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), from Nitish Kumar to Rahul Gandhi, have set the agenda on this one issue at least — which they have otherwise failed ever since Narendra Modi emerged on India’s national political scene. From demonetisation to the idea of simultaneous elections, it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has established a monopoly over agenda-setting in India’s political discourse. In response to the INDIA coalition’s persistent demand for a caste census, Mr. Modi has argued that he only believes in poverty as being the only caste and that serving the poor is his sole priority. The irony in Mr. Modi’s claim is that the poor have no ascriptive identity either in caste or religion or race and is indeed a variation of a Marxian argument. Its more elegant expression was found in the slogan, “the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win....” It is the political reality of India that has forced Mr. Modi to fall back subconsciously on this famous reasoning, which is the irony of our time.

According to scholars who work on Indian poverty, there are two kinds of poverty, i.e., economic and institutional. Caste plays a pivotal role in the perpetuation of institutional poverty because, historically, it determines occupation and skills. In the modern Indian economy, most occupations are network driven in which caste plays decisive roles in driving those networks, which is why a caste census is vital. This is also why Rahul Gandhi’s observation that such a census ‘is like the X-ray of India’ makes some sense. By not recognising that caste has bred poverty, Mr. Modi is turning a blind eye to a deeply painful reality of Indian society. It is not just Mr. Modi, but even the trickle down approach of the Nehruvian model, which economist Sukhamoy Chakravarty used to describe as the Nehru-Mahalanobis model of development did not recognise either. Therefore, non-recognition of the organic relationship of caste and poverty has been a long neglected fact of Indian policy thinking.

However, the reason why Hindutva seems reluctant to have a caste census is because it believes it might open a Pandora’s box of claims and counter-claims relating to positions and power — about who got what, when and how. Such a census would serve as the enduring source for divisive politics and trigger a never-ending process of social engineering that would upset Hindutva’s apple cart of Hindu majoritarian unity, which it has stitched together after

decades of hard work through intense grass-root campaigns.

Utilising the politics of religious polarisation, Hindutva forces are within striking distance of fulfilling their political dream of Hindu majoritarian unity, which appeared almost Utopian in the mid-1970s. On the other hand, secular political groups are also aware of the divisive potential of a caste census. For them, it is the most potent weapon among others to contain the growing electoral influence of Hindu majoritarian forces.

Looking at caste-based politics in Uttar Pradesh, it was argued that assertions of caste identities would help in a secularisation of the Indian polity. This appeared to have borne fruit during the period when the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) were coalition partners, and the Bharatiya Janata Party was contained in Uttar Pradesh. However, there has been no guarantee of its continuation as subsequent political developments since 2014 have shown, where there has been an unprecedented resurgence of Hindutva politics in the heartland. While secularisation could be a possibility, there is also an alternative possibility in which caste fragmentation or caste-inspired social engineering and Hindu majoritarianism could grow in tandem, creating a new model for competitive Hindutva politics. Therefore, the prospect for the revival of secular politics owing to a caste census is rather limited. It is a gamble from the point of view of a resurrection of secularism in India. It might contain the pace of Hindutva politics but is not the ultimate outcome that may lead to the establishment of a Hindu majoritarian political culture or a similar variant of state.

The last time that a caste census was carried out was in 1931, a time when organised right groups were marginal players during India's freedom movement. After Independence, there was a possibility for a caste census to be resumed in 1951. It is plausible that in the non-resumption of caste census in 1951, the right might have played a crucial role. Because, as Bruce Graham, author of a most definitive work on the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) has argued, the right was deeply embedded in secular political formations, particularly in the Congress party. It will not be far-fetched to argue that there might be some overlap in the reasons behind why the word "secular" despite some effort was not included in the Indian Constitution, and the reason why a caste census was not resumed in 1951. Embedded right groups might have played their part at the time in their concerted resistance to India's secular project. The present-day resistance only echoes the same old reasoning but is much louder in volume, and more organised.

***Shaikh Mujibur Rehman teaches at Jamia Millia Central University, New Delhi***

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# WOMEN, MARRIAGE AND LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION

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October 26, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 12:29 am IST

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'The labour market entry of women is influenced by a range of individual and societal factors' | Photo Credit: The Hindu

Women's labour market participation is often concomitant with enhanced economic prospects and better household decision-making power. From a macroeconomic standpoint, a diminished level of women's labour force participation rate (LFPR) has significant consequences for women's intra and inter-household bargaining power, as well as the overall economic progress of the nation. "There are still large differences between women and men in terms of what they do, how they're remunerated and so on," said [Claudia Goldin](#), who was awarded [this year's Economics Nobel](#) "for having advanced our understanding of women's labour market outcomes". Goldin's comprehensive analysis of the economic history of women has presented new insights into the many aspects of gender disparities in the labour market. Additionally, her research has shown the underlying factors that have contributed to these gaps throughout history, and the persisting inequalities that exist in contemporary times.

Globally, however, the level of female labour force participation remains relatively low. World Bank estimates (2022) show that the worldwide LFPR for women was 47.3% in 2022. Despite the remarkable advancements observed in the global economies, there has been a persistent decline in the labour force participation rate (LFPR) of women in developing nations. The estimations also indicate that female labour force participation in India between 1990 and 2022 has decreased from 28% to 24%. This fall has impeded their growth and hindered their ability to achieve their maximum capabilities. A significant disparity in labour market participation based on gender continues to persist worldwide.

Economist Goldin (1994) highlights this as the LFPR of adult women exhibits a U-shaped pattern during the course of economic growth. Further, she added that "the initial decline in the participation rate is due to the movement of production from the household, family farm, and small business to the wider market, and to a strong income effect. But the income effect weakens, and the substitution effect strengthens at some point."

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The issue is made considerably dire when married women express a desire to participate in the labour market. After marriage, there is a tendency for women's LFPR to decrease due to many



variables. These factors encompass women's limited educational attainment, less mobility as a result of increasing family obligations, and societal disapproval associated with women in employment outside the domestic sphere. The institution of marriage amplifies domestic obligations for women while concurrently imposing many social and cultural impediments that affect their participation in the workforce.

Multiple factors contribute to the diminished labour force involvement of married women or their proclivity to exit the labour field after marriage. The labour market entry of women is influenced by a range of individual and societal factors, perhaps impacting married women to a greater extent than their unmarried counterparts. Several variables contribute to limited labour participation for women, such as their religious and caste affiliations, geographical location, the wealth of their household, and prevailing societal norms surrounding women's employment outside the house.

When women decide to resume their professional careers upon marriage, they tend to exhibit a preference for some employment opportunities that offer enhanced flexibility and are situated in close proximity to their residences. Women also encounter gender-asymmetrical professional costs as a result of several societal constraints, resulting in gender disparities in premarital career selections, income inequality, age at marriage, and decisions about fertility decisions. It has been observed that women of the upper strata tend to adhere to stringent societal standards by predominantly assuming domestic roles. Conversely, women from the lower strata are more inclined to engage in the labour market, primarily driven by economic constraints that stem from poverty.

When analysing the female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) based on the Usual Principal Status (UPS) and Usual Principal and Subsidiary Status (UPSS) categories in India's NSSO Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) survey (25 to 49 years), it becomes apparent that married women show a considerably lower employment proportion under the UPS status when compared to the UPSS status. The data show that marriage significantly influences women's labour market outcomes.

In 2022-23, there has been a notable decrease of 5% in the female labour force participation rate among married women aged 25 to 49 years, with a decline from 50% in 2004-05 to 45% in 2022-23. The decline in the female labour force participation rate (LFPR) is primarily concentrated within the age group of 25-29.

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Further, married women exhibit lower levels of labour force participation when compared to their unmarried counterparts. The examination of the influence of educational achievement on the rate of married women's involvement in the labour force shows that women lacking literacy skills demonstrate a greater inclination to participate in the labour force after getting married, as opposed to their well-educated counterparts. Empirical analysis that relates to the allocation of female labour across diverse industry sectors in India demonstrates that agriculture remains the prevailing sector in terms of female employment.

Literature on female LFPR has underscored the noteworthy impact of social and cultural elements on women's choices about their entry into the labour market. This analysis primarily examines the relationship between women's marital status and their labour market outcome in the Indian labour market. The findings indicate that married women exhibit the lowest levels of labour market participation as compared to widowed, divorced and unmarried women. The economic impact of married women's non-participation in the workforce in India is considerable, given their substantial representation among the working-age population. It is imperative to look

at suitable solutions in order to promote women's empowerment in the phase of high economic growth. The absence of adequate day-care services frequently acts as a disincentive for female labour force participation. Therefore, it is imperative to enhance the quality and accessibility of day-care services/crèches for employed women across various socio-economic strata, encompassing both formal and informal sectors.

The government has enacted initiatives such as the National Creche Scheme for The Children of Working Mothers. The implementation of such schemes is imperative in both the public and private sectors. This is particularly important in increasing the involvement of married women in the labour field. The implementation of work settings that prioritise the needs and well-being of women, the provision of secure transportation options, and the expansion of part-time job possibilities would serve as catalysts for the greater participation of women in the labour market within India.

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# UNHEALTHY URBAN INDIA MUST GET INTO STREET FIGHT MODE

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies incl. Migration & Smart Cities

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October 26, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 12:33 am IST

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'Walking and biking on many Indian roads is not only hazardous but also nearly impossible, as sidewalks are overwhelmed by building and human waste, parked vehicles or street hawkers' | Photo Credit: The Hindu

India's urban population is estimated to reach 675 million in 2035, the second highest in the world. Although there is widespread recognition that cities have been fuelling India's rapid rise to economic superpower status, almost all are failing their inhabitants in terms of delivering on health, environmental and equity targets.

India's urban inhabitants experience multi-scalar health risks including the world's highest levels of air and noise pollution, limited greenery, lack of access to sidewalks and parks that limit active lifestyles, archaic modes of transport that contribute to air pollution, pernicious access to nutritionally dense unhealthy foods and unprecedented exposure to toxic chemicals and heavy metals. This concatenation of exposures dramatically magnifies health risks for heart disease and diabetes, referred to as cardiometabolic disease, especially when combined with a lack of physical activity. Of all behaviours well known to mitigate the development of cardiometabolic disease, physical activity is by far the most effective deterrent. Not surprisingly, the cities of India are amidst an epidemic of historic proportions in these disorders.

Addressing the diverse and multi-scaled social, environmental, and infrastructure risk factors that contribute to cardiometabolic risk in cities, by transforming the design of the built local environment as well as provisioning systems, represents a new paradigm for public health. Globally, there are seven key physical provisioning systems that provide food, energy, mobility-transportation, housing, green infrastructure, water and waste management that lie at the core of human health, well-being, equity and sustainability. Dysfunctional provisioning systems consume more than 90% of the world's water and global CO2 emissions and facilitate an estimated 19 million premature deaths annually. The socio-spatial-political design of urban provisioning systems in India, many of which are legacies of a colonial past, manifests in and exacerbates social inequalities in cities, by class, race, age, migrant and disability status, translating to vast disparities in health risks and outcomes. Based on the primal importance of India's cities for its future, a new narrative for improving health and well-being in cities is needed. This is reflected in several high-level policy frameworks, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework, the New Urban Agenda, and the Health in All Policies

approach.

Investments such as clean energy and electric mobility which are underway in India offer a once in a lifetime opportunity to improve health through their immediate and dramatic impact of air pollution levels, while also helping meet India's climate and equity goals. While these developments are extraordinarily important, the magnitude of their impact on health outcomes is at risk of being limited, if not simultaneously accompanied by changes in other provisioning systems such as food, mobility and green infrastructure.

Indeed, studies show that even small changes in the latter systems may have a large catalytic effect on health and productivity and serve as double-duty or triple duty interventions. For example, making way for safe walking and biking lanes, pavements and no-car zones, can help not only improve physical activity and reduce sedentary lifestyles but also reduce the risk from air pollution. Regular physical exercise has been to effectively mitigate the impact of other risk factors such as poor diets, particularly those rich in calories and saturated fats. The dietary ingestion of excess calories without adequate physical expenditure fuels a vicious cycle of insulin spikes, excess fat deposition that together with inflammation sets the stage for heart disease. In this regard, it is well known that exercise may not only help expend excess calories, promoting weight loss and reducing diabetes risk but also act as an effective bulwark against heart disease.

Walking and biking on many Indian roads is not only hazardous but also nearly impossible, as sidewalks are overwhelmed by building and human waste, parked vehicles or street hawkers. Health impact studies indicate that the health and economic benefits of increasing mobility and active transportation vastly exceed that which may be divined by transitioning to electrifying transportation alone.

Studies that have modelled the economic and health impact of the clean energy transition in the transportation sector are currently based almost entirely on the reduction in air pollution and its associated health impact. Ensuring that the transition to electric cars also paves the way for active transport options such as walking paths and bicycling lanes may not only provide a mechanism to connect the "last mile" but the health and consequent economic benefits of active transportation accrue on top of the benefits of reducing air pollution, making such investments even more economically viable.

Thus, increasing active transportation by any means must be a critical component of a clean energy policy. Similarly, policies that encourage fresh fruits and vegetables and limit sugars and salt in beverages, which may have the largest impact on health outcomes such as obesity, Type 2 diabetes (T2D) and cardiovascular disease, may help contribute to not only better health outcomes but also economic productivity. Urban policies are powerful public health interventions that can serve to promote population health. Health is, unfortunately, an afterthought in most national urban planning policies and mostly non-existent in national urban policy documents from lower and middle-income countries.

Unhealthy diets, reduced physical activity and air pollution in cities in India pose a greater risk to morbidity and mortality than most other risk factors combined including drugs, tobacco, alcohol and accidents. These need to be dealt with on a war footing if India is going to make progress in its fight against cardiovascular disease, obesity and T2D. This will necessarily entail a street fight.

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# WOMEN CAN MAKE THE WORLD BETTER

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Women Issues

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October 28, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 08:49 am IST

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Claudia Goldin, at a press conference after being named the Economics Laureate for 2023 | Photo Credit: Getty Images via AFP

Economic history has long been chronicled through a male lens, emphasising the contributions of men and their viewpoints. Just look at the [Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences](#). It has been awarded to 90 men since 1969 — and just three women. The first, [Elinor Ostrom, won in 2009](#) for explaining how local communities, most of them in developing countries, govern themselves. The second, [Esther Duflo, won in 2019](#), for her experimental work in alleviating global poverty. [Claudia Goldin](#) was the third woman awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2023 [for her work explaining why women earn less money than men](#) even when they do the same work.

Economics science is focused on studying systems for producing economically valuable goods and services efficiently. Natural and human resources are measured by economists in money terms. Claudia Goldin was awarded for her work explaining why women earn less money than men even when they do the same work. A woman's work in the family contributes to the well-being of humans in society: it does not add to the growth of the economy and GDP. Ms. Goldin's research reveals that women, who also attend to the caring work required for families at home, are considered less valuable in economic enterprises because they cannot commit to continuously working full time for their employers, which men can.

Patterns of economic growth have shifted globally. Long-term employment in industrial forms of establishments is becoming harder to find even in rich countries. More employment is being generated now in the gig economy and the informal sector. Even in large industrial establishments, jobs are on short-term contracts. These trends in the future of work are a special challenge for India, which has the largest numbers of youth in the world. They are finding fewer opportunities for dignified work with adequate income and social security even though the Indian economy is among the fastest growing in the world.

Moreover, India, which ranks 132 out of 191 countries in human development, needs to invest more in care-giving services. Sadly, care-giving work is not valued in the money economy. The millions of women providing domestic services, and millions more who are providing care in communities as ASHA workers (Accredited Social Health Activist) and anganwadi workers in primary health and education, are very poorly paid.

The Indian Prime Minister has called upon the G-20 to support human-centric development

going beyond GDP. The vision of globalisation so far has been “One Earth, One Economy, One Future”. India has called for a different vision at the G-20: Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: “One Family, One Earth, One Future”. GDP is a monetary measure of only the economic component of a society. GDP does not value care-giving work. Therefore, to pursue its ambitions to become a “\$10 trillion-dollar GDP” economy, policymakers, even in India, want to pluck women out of their families and from informal work, and push them into more efficient, industrial-form establishments to contribute to GDP.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), to be achieved by 2030, cover a range of environmental, social, and economic problems that must be solved simultaneously to make progress more inclusive and sustainable. The G-20 has assessed that, at the midway point to 2030, the global progress on SDGs is off-track with only 12% of targets on track. Clearly, we must change our approach for achieving the SDGs.

Many wise men have advised that we cannot solve complex systemic problems with the same ways of thinking that have caused them. The prevalent paradigm of public policy is for domain experts to determine best solutions in their respective areas, and for government organisations and non-governmental organisations to deliver them on scale. However, educational solutions that work in Kerala will not suit Bihar; water management systems that suit Rajasthan will not fit Uttarakhand. Moreover, environment, livelihood, health, and infrastructure solutions must mesh with each other in their local contexts. Therefore, complex problems must be solved bottom up, not top down. Local systems solutions cooperatively developed by communities are the only way the goals of the SDGs can be achieved.

The masculine view of the economy is a production machine driven by competition. A feminine view of the economy is a society of human beings who care. Mainstream economics, so far dominated by men, has created a Tragedy of the Commons. Nobel Laureate Ostrom showed how local communities, often with women at their centre, cooperatively govern their local resources equitably and sustainably. Ms. Ostrom proposed a different paradigm, based on cooperation, equity, and sustainability, for realising the Promise of the Commons, which is the urgent need of this millennium.

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A paradigm change is required in economics. Paradigm changes always require a power shift which is difficult because people with power will not let go. Money gives power; political authority gives power; and formal education and science (PhDs and Nobel Prizes) give power too. In fact, this is the basis of a caste system of power in all societies. Those with the power of money, authority, and formal higher education are the upper castes in the hierarchy. They form coalitions among themselves, ostensibly to make life better for the common people who, they say, cannot govern themselves and must be developed.

It is time for the powers above to humbly listen to the people and learn from them, rather than teaching them ways that have led humanity to grave problems of environmental degradation and economic inequities. The global, male dominated, money-driven, system of institutions of business and society needs an overhaul. Women must be given freedom, not just to be promoted within male-dominated institutions, but rather to shape better, family-spirited institutions for governance. Moreover, local communities must be given more powers for designing and implementing inclusive and sustainable solutions to their problems. Without such fundamental institutional reforms, the vision of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: “One Family, One Earth, One Future” will soon fade along with the G-20’s banners.

**Arun Maira is the author of *Shaping the Future: How to Be, Think, and Act in the New***

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# 16TH URBAN MOBILITY INDIA (UMI) CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION 2023 CONCLUDES TODAY

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies incl. Migration & Smart Cities

The 16<sup>th</sup> Urban Mobility India (UMI) Conference & Exhibition 2023, the premier event dedicated to the advancement of sustainable urban mobility solutions, concluded on a high note with its valedictory session. Shri Manoj Joshi, Secretary, Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, Shri Vikas Kumar, Managing Director, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Ltd, were among the dignitaries present at the event.



While speaking at the valedictory session, Secretary MoHUA, Shri Manoj Joshi, reflected on the key themes, discussions and exchange of ideas that took place throughout the event. He stressed upon the need of Transit Orientation Development (TOD) and challenges around it.

During the session, Shri Joshi underlined the importance of smart cards as a convenient and efficient means of payment for commuters. He said that the government is working on adoption of National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) which has potential to enhance the interoperability of various modes of urban transport.

Highlighting the importance of effective fare collection system, Secretary Shri Manoj Joshi said that the good fare collection is paramount for a viable transport system. He also talked about harnessing the potential of real estate around roads for better financial viability of these projects.

The financing and viability of urban transport projects were explored in depth. Shri Joshi stressed the need for innovative funding mechanisms and public-private partnerships to meet the growing demands of urban transportation infrastructure.

The transition to electric vehicles (EVs) was another significant topic. Shri Manoj Joshi highlighted the importance of EV adoption to reduce emissions and encouraged urban areas to invest in EV infrastructure.



In the valedictory session, awards were presented to the winning state / city authorities for “Excellence/ best practice projects in Urban Transport” in the following categories recommended

by the Awards Selection Committee and accepted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs:

[Click here for the List of Awardees](#)

### **About 16<sup>th</sup> Urban Mobility India (UMI) Conference & Exhibition 2023:**

The event was organized by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs through the Institute of Urban Transport (India) and with the support of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Ltd. from 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2023 at the Manekshaw Centre, Parade Road, Delhi Cantt., New Delhi. It brought together leaders, experts, and stakeholders from across the globe to discuss and collaborate on the future of urban transportation.

The exhibition, comprising of display of best practices in urban transport in India and abroad, latest urban transport technologies, services and in other related fields, is an important part of the UMI Conference organized every year. 2023 UMI exhibition was inaugurated by Minister of Housing & Urban Affairs and Petroleum and Natural Gas Shri Hardeep Singh Puri on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and continued on all the 3 days of the conference. Around 22 exhibitors from Metro Rail Companies, public and private sectors participated.

### **RKJ/M**

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