

Policy WATCH

Volume XIII, Issue 6
June 2024, New Delhi

Special Issue (COVERING ALL THEMES)

In this issue

**Why the hero of the election
campaign was the Constitution**
by Vinita Gursahani Singh

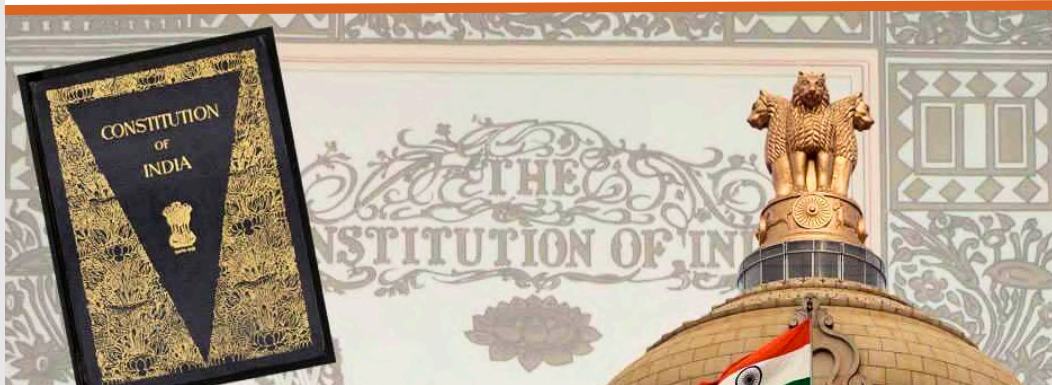
A WIN without a Victory
by Roshmi Goswami

**A state policy for social-
cohesion based on
constitutional values**
by Ravinder Pal Singh

**Equitable and sustainable
development of India: An
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**Community forests in the
Western Indian Himalayan
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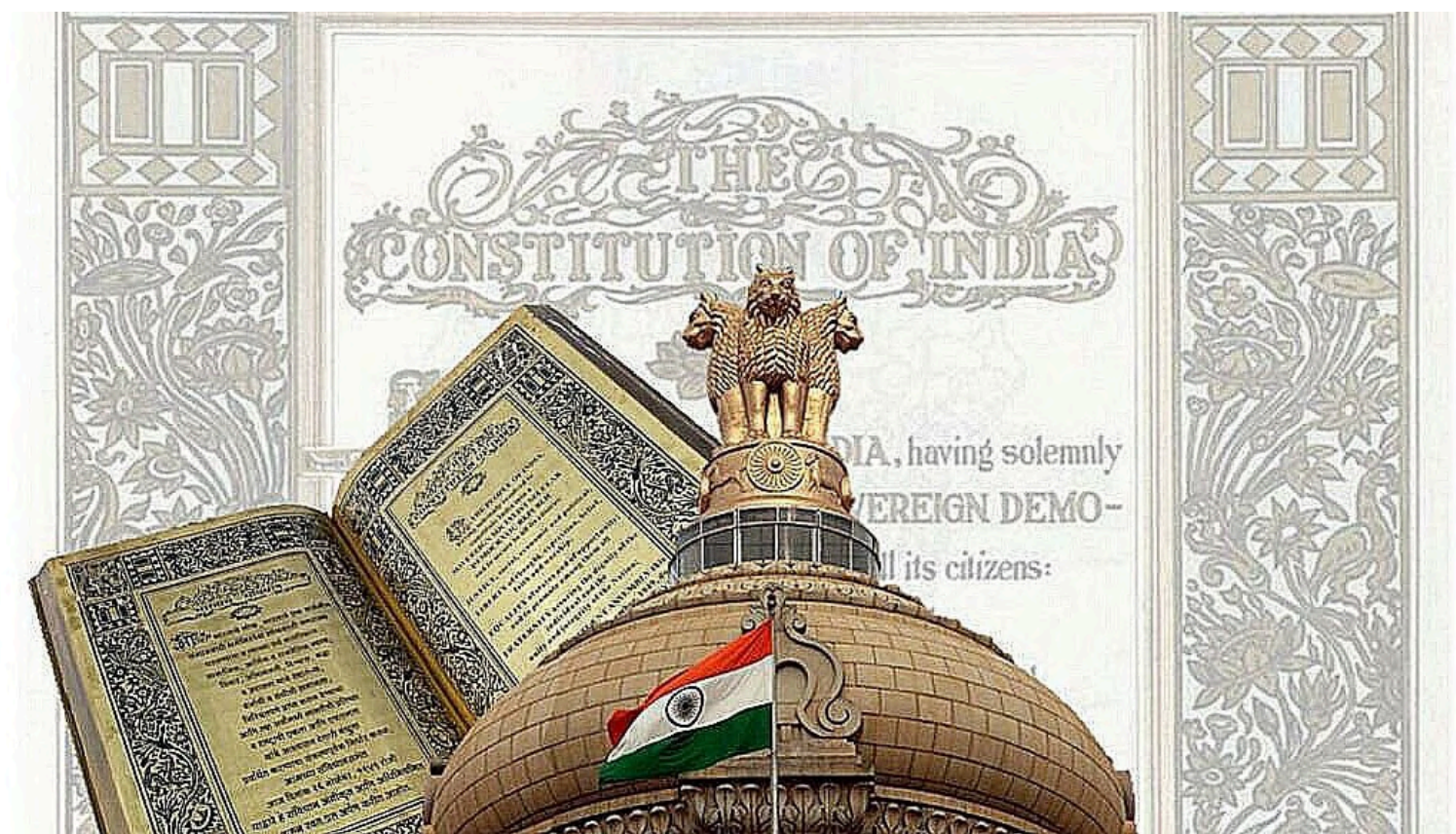
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RAJIV GANDHI
INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

I. Editorial

The Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS) works on five themes:

1. Constitutional Values and Democratic Institutions
2. Governance and Development
3. Growth with Employment
4. Environment, Natural Resources and Sustainability
5. India's Place in the World

We bring out the monthly Policy Watch on each of these themes sequentially and every sixth issue is a Special Issue, where we carry articles from each theme. This is a special issue in which we carry one article on each theme.

The first two articles are on the theme Constitutional Values and Democratic Institutions. The first article is reproduced with grateful acknowledgement from the Times of India. Written by Vinita Gursahani Singh, Managing Trustee of *We, The People Abhiyan*, an NGO dedicated to empowering citizens through constitutional awareness, it uses Google Analytics to show that there was a significantly heightened interest in the Constitution in the run up to these elections. She hypothesised that this may have had an impact on the outcome.

The second article is by Dr Roshmi Goswami, a feminist and human rights activist working all over the Northeast. It describes the situation in Manipur and how the launch of the Bharat Jodo Naya Yatra by Rahul Gandhi brought a healing touch to the extremely divisive atmosphere in that state. Roshmi then links it with the outcome of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and explains how the people express themselves through the democratic process.

The third article is under the theme Governance and Development. It is written by Ravinder Pal Singh who is an International Researcher on Security and Peace. He was at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and various other international appointments, during which he observed closely the deleterious effect on national security when internal divisions (based on religion, ethnicity, region, etc.) are exacerbated for political gains.

Based on this he has developed a proposal for a State Policy on Social Cohesion, giving its rationale in detail. The article, which is a summary of a larger two part paper, also has an action plan for implementation of the social cohesion policy.

Images Courtesy:

Google Images (free to use images)

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The fourth article is on the theme of Growth with Employment. Written by the Dr H.M. Desrada, an environmental economist and former member of the Maharashtra State Planning Board, it shows the dire need to change our growth model so that jobs are also created.

The paper emphasises the need to invest in regenerating the natural resources – land/soil, water, forests – so as to restore the productivity of agriculture and thereby generate more jobs in rural areas and also enhance farmers' and agricultural workers' incomes. It states "India needs a new agrarian revolution—Krishikranti—to provide livelihoods, nutritious food, and good health to everyone". It also states that mere growth in the GDP does not enhance well-being in terms nutrition, health education and skills.

The fifth article is on the theme Environment, Natural Resources and Sustainability in which Mr Jeet Singh, Fellow, RGICS describes two unique experiments in the Western Himalayan Region, of community forest governance initiated by the colonial government in 1930s and 1940s respectively: the Cooperative Forest Societies of Kangra (CFS) and Van Panchayats (VPs) in hilly districts of Uttarakhand.

Though institutions were established to formalise the traditional rights and relationship that villagers had with the forests proximate to them, over the decades, the spirit of community management was lost and these institutions became the lowest rungs of the forest administration. Even the introduction of the Joint Forest Management scheme did not change the power imbalance between the Forest Department and the communities. The article highlights that merely adopting new schemes of rules of forest governance are not enough unless there is a shift in the mindset of the Forest Department which looks at itself as the owner of forests and the community as encroachers.

The sixth article is on the theme India's Place in the World. It is being reproduced from The Hindu. Written by Prof Happymon Jacob of the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, it deals with the paradox that as India's role and prestige appears to be on the rise in several global forums such as the G-20, the BRICS, the QUAD, and so on, worryingly, India's influence is declining in South Asia. He surmises that "the arrival of China in South Asia, the withdrawal of the U.S. from the region, and India's tilt to the Indo-Pacific have shifted the regional balance of power in Beijing's favour."

To correct the situation Jacob suggests that India must revisit some of its traditional conceptions of the region, 'modernise' its primacy in South Asia, and take proactive and imaginative policy steps to meet the China challenge in the region. In addition, he suggests that India should use its soft power to retain its influence in the region. One way to do that is to actively encourage informal contacts between political and civil society actors in India and those in other South Asian countries.

We hope the readers find the above articles enjoyable and informative. We would appreciate any feedback.

Vijay Mahajan

Director, Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies

2. Why the hero of the election campaign was the Constitution

Vinita Gursahani Singh

2.1 Introduction

On June 10, Narendra Modi invoked the Constitution of India as he took his oath as the Prime Minister.

The election campaign for the 18th Lok Sabha was a long one that started before the first phase of polling on April 19.

It was a bitterly fought campaign, with political parties hurling accusations, barbs and pointing out substantive issues.

The campaign was said to have many heroes: BJP's Narendra Modi, Congress's Rahul Gandhi, Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav, Lok Janshakti Party's Chirag Paswan, and Telugu Desam Party's Chandrababu Naidu.

But, the biggest hero of this election campaign was not a person. It was a book that spells out the vision for the people of India, to build a society based on equality, liberty, justice and fraternity.

A book that lays down the structure of government, the roles of different duty bearers. It also defines the role of elections and the Election Commissioner.

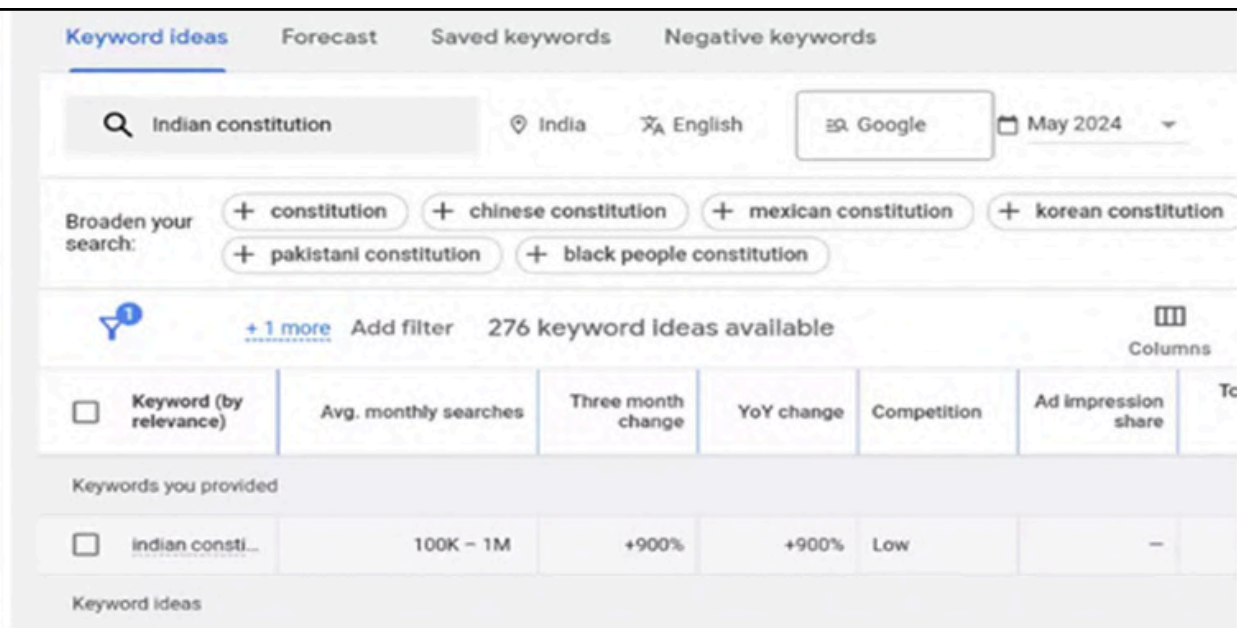
The hero of this election was the Constitution of India. Never before, in any election of recall, was the Constitution so much at the centre of public and political debate.

2.2 What Google search trends indicate

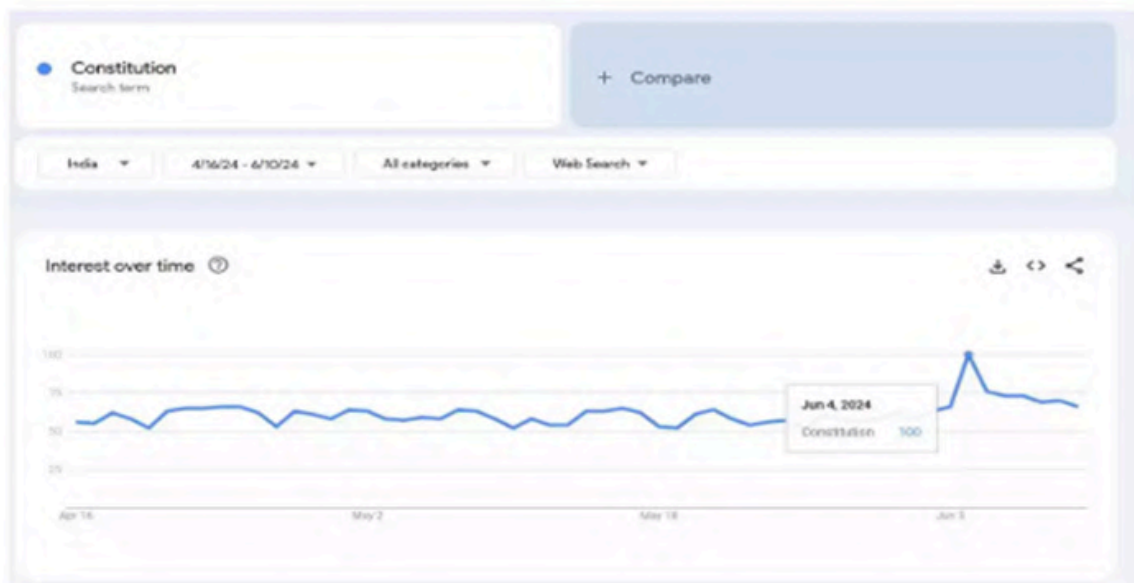
The heightened interest in the Constitution during the election months shows up clearly in Google search trends.

Data from May 2024 shows that average monthly searches for the term Indian Constitution increased 900% over the three previous months.





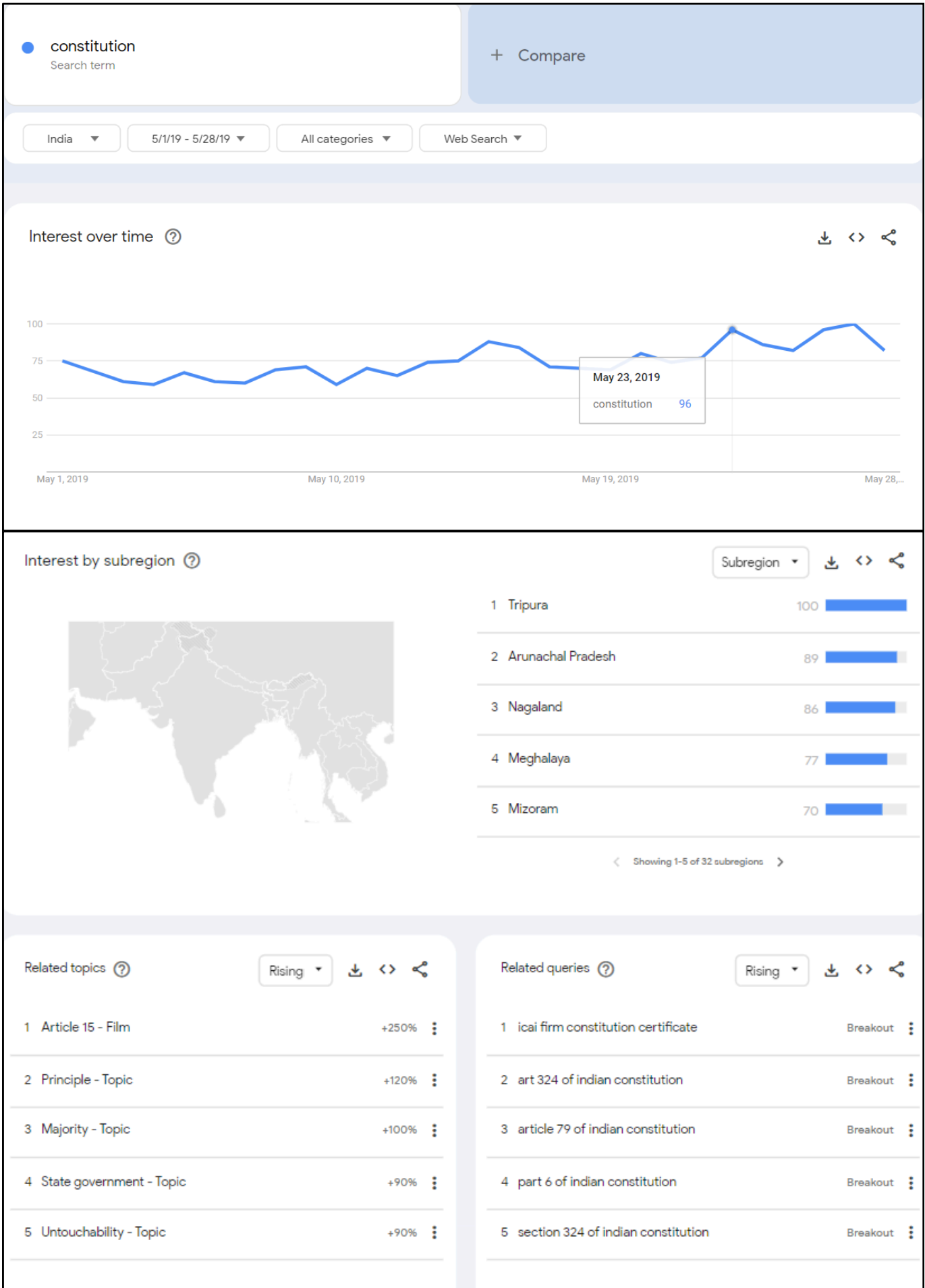
Even more interestingly, on results day (June 4), Google searches for 'Indian Constitution' peaked.



Even more interestingly, on the day of the results day on June 4, Google searches for 'Indian Constitution' peaked. No such activity was evident on the day of the results of the 2019 national election.

This shows a remarkable increase of awareness during these elections of the link between the Indian constitution, elections and the overall democratic process.

No such activity was evident on the day of the results of the 2019 national election, as can be seen from the Google trends diagram below:



2.3 What parties' manifestos showed

A quick study of the manifestos of a few different parties shows that the CPI(M) mentions the Constitution in their document 50 times – which is nearly the number of pages in their 65-page document. The Congress manifesto mentions it 35 times, while the TMC mentions it eight times.

The BJP manifesto mentioned it twice.

2.4 What was said on the campaign trail

A review of the speeches that Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi gave after the election results are also indicative of the importance both of them gave to the Constitution.

“Our Constitution is our guiding light..We are very grateful to the people. The people of the country have reaffirmed their faith in the BJP and the NDA. Today's victory is the victory of the world's biggest democracy, a victory of faith in the country's Constitution, a victory of the 'Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas' mantra, and a victory of 1.4 billion Indians,” Modi said.

On the same day, Gandhi held up a copy of the Constitution, and said, *“Isko bachane ka kaam, Hindustan ke sabse gareeb logon ne kiya hai, mazdooron ne kara hai, kisaano ne kara hai, dalito ne kiya hai, adivasiyo ne kiya hai, inhone is Constitution ko bachaya hai. Ye Constitution Desh ki Awaaz hai! (The work of saving this has been done by India's poorest, labourers, farmers, Dalits and Adivasis. They have saved the Constitution. The Constitution is India's voice.)”*

But it wasn't just the day of the results, speeches revolved around the Constitution right from the start of the campaign.

Facing intense accusations from the Opposition that the BJP planned to change the Constitution if voted to power, the Prime Minister had responded at a rally in Barmer on April 17.

“The Constitution of the country is everything for the (BJP) government and even if Babasaheb Ambedkar himself comes, he cannot abolish the Constitution,” he said in an impassioned speech.



[Source: Image](#)

2.5 The role it may have played in UP

Interestingly, several reports from the ground in Uttar Pradesh in May had pointed out that the talk about the Constitution had struck a real chord with people.

The early cry of the BJP – 400 *paar* (beyond 400 seats) – was used by the SP and BSP to warn about the dangers of the BJP changing the Constitution if they gained such a dramatic majority.

In reality, there was no such indication, with the PM even reiterating that his party stood by the Constitution. But the fear that such a thing could happen was enough to galvanise public discussions.

“*Samvidhan ko bachaana hai (Save the Constitution)*” – was a cry that seemed to echo in chaupals, chai shops and homes. Perhaps it was a factor in the results that showed up in UP.



[Source: Image](#)

2.6 Why it struck a chord with the masses

What could be the Constitutional values that were at stake here? A critical one was choice. Democracy and elections are, at the very basic, a matter of exercising choice. This is a simple principle of the Constitution, intuitively and deeply grasped by people.

The 400 *paar* slogan, seemed to suggest - even proclaim - that the voter did not need to think any more, that the choice was somehow made already. Contrast this with the “*Taanashahi roko, Samvidhan Bachao (End dictatorship, Save the Constitution)*” theme of speeches by several leaders of the INDIA bloc.

The scenario that, if in fact BJP does get 400 seats, democratic choices would become irretrievably restricted, perhaps activated an agency and urgency to choose.

The other important value was the protection of rights. The Constitution is, consciously or unconsciously, perceived as a guarantor of rights for everyone. For marginalised and minority groups, the protections accorded by the Constitution for different languages, religions and social marginalisations are seen as critical to their identity.

The fear that an overwhelming majority would give the BJP the powers to amend the Constitution and take away these protections, could have driven Dalit and Muslim voters away from the NDA alliance and into the arms of the INDIA bloc.

The moot point of importance is that the Constitution emerged as a significant talking point as never before. People debated the values we stand for as a nation, evaluated the performance of political parties through the lens of what the Constitution says - or intends - on a particular matter, and articulated their struggles in the language of the Constitution.

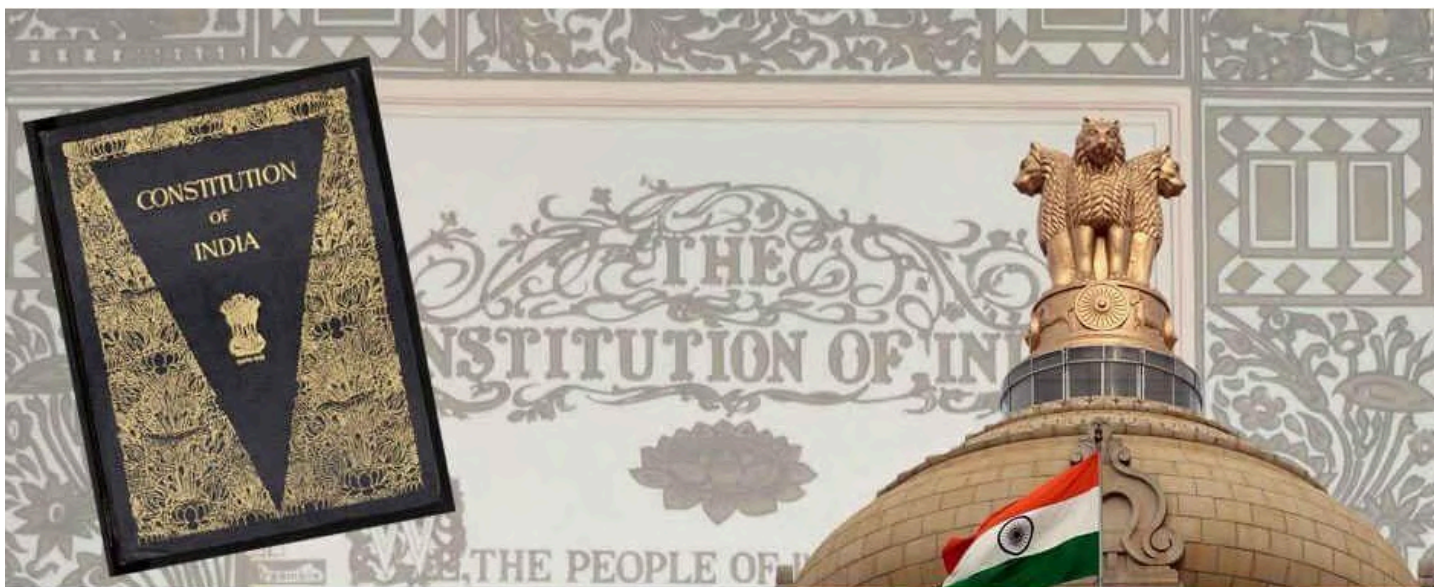
This is an enormous achievement for a democratic country as young as India. It is a huge step in democratic education – which perhaps starts with school books but gets practised in the heat and dust of the villages and cities of India.

Finally, it is a massive celebration of the people of India who, whether educated or not, can instinctively understand the democratic values that our nation stands for.

The author is the Managing Trustee of We, The People Abhiyan, a NGO dedicated to empowering citizens through constitutional awareness.

This article originally appeared in the Times of India on Jun 22, 2024, and is being re-published here with acknowledgment and gratitude.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/the-biggest-hero-of-this-election-campaign-is-not-a-person-it-is-/articleshow/111134709.cms>



Source: Image



3. A WIN without a Victory

Roshmi Goswami



The first call I get as the Election results rolled in and the manipulated exit polls of the Godi media kicked out was from Manipur. It was Hamid the trusted and dependable Pangal taxi driver who has been a constant support and witness to the many challenges of negotiating travels through the buffer zones of his strife torn state during my numerous travels there in the last one year.

He called to share his joy with someone who he felt would be equally ecstatic about the Manipur results plus talk about the all India scenario and his aspirations. The victory for people like Hamid and millions like him across the length and breadth of the nation is indeed a very personal one for this Election like none other was truly between an individual who had elevated himself to an invincible 'celestial' being versus the People of India.

And while large numbers of the urban educated middle class remained entrenched and slothful in the oblivion of opportunism or the comfortable corporate bubble of 'designer thinking' and designer life styles the 'people' - largely the working class rural janata exercised the power of their one vote to uphold the Indian constitution and draw Indian Democracy back from the brink of the precipice. The contribution of thousands of common people mostly young men and women who came forward as community influencers, organizers, social media activists and volunteers was invaluable in this process of mobilisation.

Being part of the Bharat Jodo Abhiyan (BJA) platform one came in close contact with many of these committed workers silently strategising and giving their all behind the scenes including my two comrades during the Yatra in Manipur - two young professionals from Mumbai and Hyderabad who opted to put their careers and earnings on hold and instead volunteer time for the country.

Finally as BJA one witnessed closely the leadership, vision and encouragement that Yogendra Yadavji provided to veteran as well as young activists across the country. Altogether an extremely humbling experience different from all other civil society engagement that one has been a part of.

In the struggle to uphold Indian democracy the challenges to the process of mobilisation for both civil society platforms as well the political Opposition were almost insurmountable. Everything was stacked against the Opposition and the people - money, muscles, the entire administrative machinery, an obsequious and totally partisan media, corporate patronage, a blatantly regime indulgent Election Commission and in many instances arrests and detentions under flimsy and trivial charges.

Yet people persisted and triumphed and as the glittering jewel in the crown of Hindutva fell in Ayodhya almost retributively to a Dalit leader, the people of India gave the ruling regime a resounding message - a win without a sense of victory! As Yogendra Yadav tellingly put it -“Mr. Modi might have managed the numbers but he lost the iqbal!”

A sense of people’s triumph was palpable at the launch of the Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra at a private ground in the Khongjom area of Thoubal district in Manipur on the 14th of January 2023. In a bull headed display of lack of graciousness and political professionalism typical of the ruling regime, permission to flag off the Yatra from the Hapta Kangjeibung grounds of Imphal was denied at the last minute by Biren Singh’s government by imposing impossible conditions. Days later much to the profound shame of Assam similar but even crasser obstructions accompanied by crude verbal assaults by the State functionaries ensued as the Yatra travelled through Assam.

A slur on the reputation of Assam deeply felt by sections of us Assamese brought up with the age-old ethos of always extending impeccable hospitality towards any guest even an enemy by ensuring that the biggest seat or ‘bor pirah’ is offered to the visitor.

The only saving grace was a statement that 100 plus of us - public intellectuals, academics, artists, musicians, writers, church leaders brought out was graciously received and appreciated by the visitors. Nagaland on the other hand despite being a BJP or BJP indebted state retained its individuality and traditional Naga dignity. The Nagas gracefully received and enabled Rahul Gandhi and the Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra through the state with typical Naga hospitality and distinctive tribal ethos.



[Source: Image](#)

In violence scarred Manipur thousands converged that afternoon at the Khongjom grounds in Thoubal seeking reassurance from a national leader - hoping for Hope and for a hopeful way out of the impasse. As the numbers swelled one could see that pushing the Yatra out of Imphal had clearly boomeranged on Biren Singh for participation in Thoubal also a strong Congress base, exceeded all expectations.

As people waited for Rahul Gandhi's delayed flight to arrive and as we listened to the diverse array of powerful speakers on stage there was something which was refreshingly uplifting. The energy generated in Thoubal was infectious and carried late into the evening to the civil society interactions with Rahul Gandhi(RG) at the Yatra's night halt in Sekmai. I also carried with me a memorandum written in Meitei Lon from the 'warrior women' of Thoubal to be handed over personally to Rahul Gandhi!

In the last one year I have been interacting closely with these 'warrior women' - calling them out on the violence committed by their community but also listening to them. Strong, powerful, wise women deeply reflective and politically astute. During one of our interactions one of them had reflectively announced - 'To solve the complex problem of Manipur layers of analysis and a sharp mind is required plus a deep sense of responsibility.

None of the present leaders of today have these qualities'! We were all surprised and impressed by the contents and tone of the memorandum which was translated and read out to RG by a respected veteran journalist of the state. Among others the women asked whether RG would be open to a discussion and engagement on the unresolved questions around the statehood of Manipur.

The rest of the interaction with the select group of civil society members not aligned to any political group was also very intense and complex. Despite the fact that some of the members had serious clashes with the Congress in the past there was no angst and the discussions were carried through with a high level of political maturity, insightfulness and congeniality. The participation of three local journalists was especially useful.

The same level of openness continued the next day as the Yatra moved into Kangpokpi district. An interaction with a group of civil society members predominantly women was scheduled. In the end it was only the women who came.

Four young Kuki women with whom I have had a year long close association boarded the bus in Motbung and in the short drive to Kangpokpi had the most personal, candid and substantive meeting with Rahul Gandhi.

The politically sharp and articulate young women were able to talk not just about the violations but their own deep fears and insecurities and also lay out the entire gamut of accompanying issues that affected their community due to the near total concentration of power, facilities and infrastructure in the valley and the implications thereof given the divide.

The interaction was understandably emotional as the women were overwhelmed that a national leader was giving them this personal and precious time. Kangpokpi has been one of the worst affected districts reporting the maximum number of brutal violations. The women presented the facts with firmness and complete honesty but with the quiet dignity typical of this region.

There were thousands of people on both sides of the highway cheering or calling out and every now and then RG would just jump off the bus throwing security concerns and restrictions to the wind and be with the people - just to hold their hands, listen to them, show basic human empathy or pay respect at the Wall of Remembrance which meant the world to families whose loved ones were now pictures on that wall.



[Source: Image](#)

This is the empathy that the hurting and grieving people had waited for from the Prime Minister but never got. Thousands of people also waited at the Kangpokpi grounds to listen to RG at the proposed public meeting. But yet again in deference to her rulers in Delhi and without any concern for the sentiments of her own traumatised community, the will of Nemcha Kipgen the local BJP MLA prevailed and permission was denied for the public meeting.

The Manipur election results clearly tell us that on both sides of the divide people understood that there was no state left, the government had completely collapsed, and people were just left to their own devices including to defend themselves. They saw too through the divisive and mercenary agenda of the BJP, the sheer callousness and complete disregard for people. So the people across the seemingly irreconcilable divide united mentally to make a clear political choice. A political choice which definitely has significant implications for the entire NE region. Together with the dramatic and welcome changes in Nagaland, Meghalaya and Assam especially Jorhat, the process of de-saffronisation of the region has perhaps just been initiated.

Roshmi Goswami is a feminist human rights activist and independent researcher known for her pioneering work on women in conflict situations in India. She is a founder member of the National Alliance of Women (NAWO); a bureau member of South Asians For Human Rights; and Working Group member of the Asia Pacific Women's Alliance on Peace and Security (APWAPS). She lives in Shillong and works with various women's groups in Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Assam.

This article was published in The Shillong Times dated June 13, 2024.



Ravinder Pal Singh

4.1 Significance of the study and background

Ever since adoption of the Indian Constitution in 1950s, it was assumed that the State would uphold our country's constitutional values. But it is not sure if any state has made a formal social cohesion policy that disseminates our Constitutional Values through whole of the society?



Source: Image

4.1.1 Background

India's constitutional values emerged from two streams of spiritual and intellectual thought: teachings from the Bhakti movement and political theories of the Enlightenment. Both these streams had expressed serious concerns of exploitative nature of societies; caste or class hierarchies that manipulated the weak through fear, coercion and unjust punishments.

Despots and monarchs subjugated fellow humans, who eked a life of servitude that bordered between misery and survival. These social challenges developed ideas that propagated values of justice, economic relief and equality for all humans; liberty of belief and freedom of worship, religious amity to develop fraternity of communities.¹

The philosophers of the Bhakti movement and Enlightenment also had convergences in finding roots of tyranny of social oppression lay in the nature of man: avarice for wealth; greed for grasping power; to dominate the downtrodden; jealousy and arrogance, etc.

In 18th to 20th Centuries, a modern view emerged in India on secular values to address religious taboos and prejudice, communal intolerance, caste repression, social inequities, opportunism and gender discrimination etc.

These streams of thoughts shaped the values of India's social reformers and thinkers for social justice, which converged with India's freedom struggle from colonial rule. That is how and why the principles India's secular constitution realised that shape of its governance has to be limited by and predicated on: accountability of rulers to the rule of law; equal justice for all; equal respect for all religions, faiths and belief systems that were practiced in India for centuries; sovereignty of citizens is expressed through popular mandate; separation of powers between the Executive, the Judiciary and the Legislature for institutional checks and balances to ensure that no individual or parts of government could acquire absolute powers, which would be just a step away from tyranny.

Independence of India was preceded by the partition of India driven by calls for religious majoritarianism and separatism. Those who wanted to live in amity and harmony as citizens with equal rights, with equal access to justice and equal freedom to worship, despite the differences in cultures, religions, sects and castes, chose to become citizens of India.

The framers of Indian Constitution were sensitive to these differences and choices people make. They were apprehensive of polarization in societies and divisive politics would unleash majoritarianism and an action-reaction spiral of violence, which would undermine stability in the country.

Two recent experiences had contributed to this apprehension: one was the German experience of how easily democratic processes could be usurped by a dictator by arousing passions of communal intolerance, hate and fear. Majoritarian leaders can easily take control the entire society through demagoguery and generating fear of communalism.

¹ Maxim Dias and D Jeevan Kumar, Religion and Socio-secular Engagement, in Discovering New India, A Ravindra and Priyanca Mathur "...the movement of Basavanna, Naryana Guru, Swami Vivekananda and many others have all been motivated by the religious belief of equality and fraternity." Jain University Press Bengaluru. P. 45. In their own time, Guru Nanak, Baba Farid, Kabir and many others Saints of the Bhakti movement, preached Liberty or freedom of worship and Justice.

Political violence is easy to arouse in a society which has religious, linguistic and cultural diversities. Majoritarian politics called for creating Pakistan resulted in riots to partition India. It was the most horrible violence experienced in the history of sub-continent, ever. During the Indian Constituent Assembly debates, the ravages that majoritarian politics can cause in a society and its anti-dote of secular Constitution were discussed.

During the debate on 9 December 1948 Prof. N.G. Ranga stated in the Constituent Assembly: that if a state cannot restrain its majority community from inflicting private punishment, it does not deserve to exist: “ ... *it is true the majority can go mad, and therefore the people have to be protected from their tyranny. A State which is not prepared to restrain its own majorities, who believe in inflicting private punishment upon various people, such a State does not deserve to exist. If the majority is organized and it begins to function through the State itself, then who is to guarantee and uphold the fundamental rights? It might be said that the Supreme Court would be expected to do so. But even the Supreme Court might be set at naught, as it happened in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy....*”



4.2 Introduction

A summary of the two parts of the paper provides a brief for the youth of India to take the country forward to inform, educate and enlighten our people that even though the gift of Constitution was delivered to the country in 1952, the need to explain all our citizens, our Constitutional values and principles, on which our constitutional morality and social ethics are based, remains undelivered.

Unless the younger generations to follow take up the challenge of building social cohesion in our communities by imbibing Constitutional values, the promise of freedom remains undelivered.

Although principle of sovereignty of the people, gives us the right to choose our representatives, but lack of knowledge of our constitutional values and principles, results in this individual choice to be decided by the community's impressions.

Suitability of the representative is assessed on the basis of a candidate's oratorical skills; ability to hoodwink with promises of subsidies, subtle use of religious piety and fear of the 'other' are among the techniques used to mislead the people.

Ever since the founding of our Republic, our people's ability to question the capabilities of our elected representatives or evaluate their sincerity or their performance, has remained neglected.

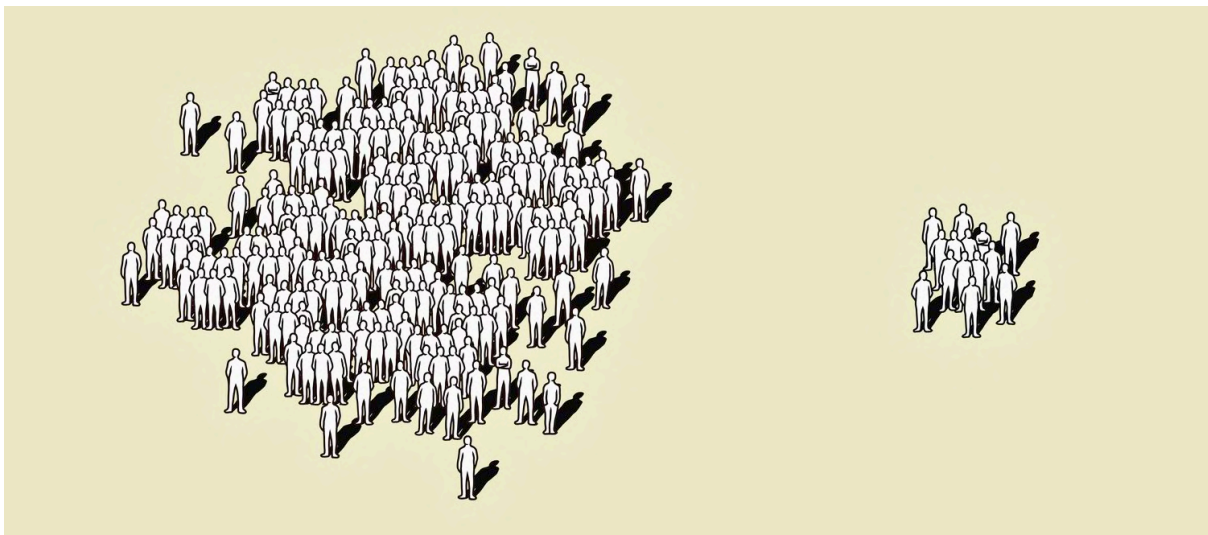
As low levels of public knowledge of unfair electoral practices results in indifference in the society towards low levels of public probity. How long should the people their governments indulge political parties to carry on their mass deception? As long as party in the Government does not realise that such unethical practices are example setting for the society and the generations to follow.

The youth of the country should identify ways to the society to strengthen, imbibe and deepen knowledge of our constitutional values and principles. Rising polarisation in the society is widening the existing social divisions of religion, caste and ethnicity. Four broad aims for capacity building on constitutional knowledge are identified:

- Convert prevailing tensions of social divisions to norms of social cohesion;
- Building stability for internal and national security;
- Building Social trust and cooperation for economic development, trade and commerce;
- Uphold Constitution to protect diversity, develop social justice, promote inclusion.

Would strengthening public understanding of Constitutional values and disseminating this knowledge throughout the society, facilitate the above mentioned aims? Would serving the above aims provide inclusive and just governments; stability, security and safety of Indians; enable building trust and ethical business practices for socio-economic growth?

4.3 Majoritarianism and its consequences



[Source: Image](#)

Majoritarian politics assumes the Government has to yield primacy of public preferences to the largest majority, and that it has the right to decide matters that affect the whole of society. Public perception often conflates majoritarianism with electoral majority, which is decided on the basis of popular mandate.

Majoritarianism begins with seizing control of State power through inferiorisation of target community, spread hate and fear to provoke reaction in order to consolidate their majority vote bank.

On acquiring state power, majoritarian politics then begins to undermine Constitutional Values, before it begins its assault on the very principles of Constitutionalism. In its purpose and intent, majoritarianism is unethical and unjust.² It follows and accepts unfair practices, as long as end objectives of power are served.

That is why the framers of India's Constitution in their wisdom, instead of yielding to majoritarian influences, chose secular values to enshrine in our Constitution, namely: liberty and freedom to worship one's faith; equality in opportunities for all; fairness and justice for all under law; amity between different backgrounds to build fraternity among diverse Indian communities. Even to this day, these values offer the best protection to all citizens who hail from different parts of India and endowed with different socio-economic levels.

4.4. Secularism

It is lately being criticized as irrelevant constitutional value, and anti religious value which should be removed as a Constitutional value.

Despite the fact that Indians are deeply religious people, the framers of the constitution found convergence of social reforms with secular civil rights.

And in doing that, the state realised that it was essential to maintain principled equidistance from all religions.³



[Source: Image](#)

Over period of three decades secularism was discussed as a constitutional value, which obligated the State and the Society to hold all religions in egalitarian respect, and to protect minorities against inter-religious communalism of the majority.

Secularism also protects lower castes against intra-religious intra-community caste discrimination and gender injustices within the same religion. As caste not only divides, but denies equality within the same religion, it also discriminates access to equal opportunities. Secularism protects the oppressed both against both inter-community repression and intra-caste oppression. Our constitutional morality assumes that an individual's religion is a personal matter of citizens, to be respected and venerated in private. Whereas, constitutional values and constitutionalism are the public faith of all Indian citizens.



² Ajai Kumar Singh, "Concerning Religion" in Discovering New India, A Ravindra and Priyanka Mathur, "majoritarianism is undemocratic and a retrograde idea" Jain University Press, P.76

³ Rajeev Bhargava, Between Hope and Despair, Bloomsbury 2022. P.122,314

4.5 Social cohesion

There is a need to understand how and why secular constitutional values can build social cohesion in a land of religious, linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversities. Social cohesion obliges the state to minimize socio-economic disparities between communities.

A socially cohesive society is one where all citizens have an equal sense of social inclusion in public affairs; an equal sense of belonging to the nation despite culture differences; recognition of equal measure of civil rights; equal pride and participation in nation building; and equal obligation of loyalty to India's multi-cultural national identity.

Legitimacy of these rights is ensured by constitutional provisions, with which a country builds citizenship solidarity, social relationships and participation in social cohesion initiatives required for common national purpose and nation's security.



Majoritarian politics assumes the Government has to yield primacy of public preferences to the largest majority, and that it has the right to decide matters that affect the whole of society. Public perception often conflates majoritarianism with electoral majority, which is decided on the basis of popular mandate.

Majoritarianism begins with seizing control of State power through inferiorisation of target community, spread hate and fear to provoke reaction in order to consolidate their majority vote bank.

On acquiring state power, majoritarian politics then begins to undermine Constitutional Values, before it begins its assault on the very principles of Constitutionalism. In its purpose and intent, majoritarianism is unethical and unjust. It follows and accepts unfair practices, as long as end objectives of power are served.

4.6 Principles of constitutionalism

Social contract in democratic states are established on the basis of principles of constitutionalism which include, among others: separation of powers in the state to ensure checks and balances so that no branch of the state or a person acquires immense and arbitrary powers.

Which if unchecked, can lead to absolute power to the Executive authority, abuse of power or even authoritarian rule or tyranny. Executive authority has to be balanced by an independent judiciary, the legislature and independent statutory institutions.

The social contract between the society and the state makes the Government responsible for formulating policy; the legislature is responsible for legitimating the policy. Both these branches provide a system of accountable governance to the electorate, on whose trust these powers are exercised.

However as sovereignty is reposed in people's choice, the powers of the government has to be limited by laws, the tenure of the Government has to be limited by the period of popular mandate. That is why rule of law has to be based on constitutional values and principles that obliges the government to respect and uphold individual and community rights. Compliance with these responsibilities or lack of it are ensured and adjudicated by an independent judiciary.

4.7 Constitutional values



[Source: Image](#)

Whereas, constitutional values are fundamental beliefs enshrined in the Preamble and embedded in the Constitution of a country. These are and will remain the principle ethical objectives of the governance of the state and society in dealing with each other.

These aspirational values, rights and ideals guide public affairs of the state, institutions in the country and the conduct of citizens with each other. A study of these Values is important to understand the barriers and limitations in the society to implement policy or decisions in the spirit of Constitutional morality. These Values empower us to enjoy opportunities that we get as citizens as our social contract with the State.

4.8 Protect religion from political opportunism

This part of the paper identifies reasons to separate religion from the State and politicians to maintain the identity of the State in multi-denominational democracies. However, in reality this essential practice is violated equally by politicians and religious preachers who use or abuse pavitrata of religious platforms to deliver recriminations and messages of political or electoral benefits.

This practice not only disrespects sacred religious places,⁴ but deprives the true believers their faith-based right to worship in the sanctity and spirituality that the community's religious space provides. For reasons of opportunism, some politicians forget that India in 20th Century is a constitutional democracy, where every religion has constitutional protection and safeguards. But they continue with this medieval practice of political mobilisation of people of their faith from religious platforms, which deprives the people their right to exercise their independent democratic choice.

Religious beliefs are intensely personal, sacred and connect one's spirit with one's divine faith. It reinforces human spirit, the hearts and minds of believers, who live, work, walk and die by their religious rites and rituals of their beliefs as practiced in their sects.

The intensity of faith in one's religion blinds a community to reasons of democratic choice. This way the community is made ripe and ready for exploitation by preachers and politicians, who easily switch roles and robes for electoral motives⁵ If the states are lax in allowing politicians to interlope these spaces of intense if not blind belief in their faith, unscrupulous politicians can easily mislead the community with impractical promises by converting sacred places into electoral platforms.

If law does not allow priests to double as doctors, and if laws are absent to check politicians doubling as priests, why is the Constitution failing to pass laws to stop this masquerade of mass deception? People follow religion to get relief for one's spirit, if these platforms are used for ulterior motives of elections of politicians who mobilize vote banks on pretensions of piety. Can such people hold public office if they use religious platforms? In languages of the vernacular, they are described as Bahurupiya.

In pursuance of constitutional principle of Liberty, the State is obliged to protect the freedom of worship for the believers irrespective of their religious beliefs, to protect their sacred temples free from politics of opportunism.

As heat and anger of politics does not allow religions to maintain credibility or virtues of their messages to develop a kind and humane spirit. To keep sanctity of religions by legally preventing political parties from spewing spite and hate towards other religions.

To protect religion from politics is an obligation of constitutional morality which requires a legislation that prevents politicians from using religion as a tool for propaganda or hate against others and vice versa.

The stranglehold of Majoritarianism on sacred places of worship, leads to such places being encroached by politicians for propaganda and aggrandizement of their power. In this process, as religions lose their spiritual values, people with strong belief in their faiths, find they are helpless in loss of their places of worship and its sanctity to politicians.

Therefore, the devotees in their helplessness look away when their sacred places are misused by power of politicians. Unless people with deep religious conviction, who truly venerate their faiths need to contest such abuse of their sacred places. Such practices are violation of our country's constitutional morality by politicians who in unethical collaboration with preachers, play upon religious sentiments of the devotees and rituals to control temples.

Unless religious places and persons are legally separated from political practices, the State will be unable perform its constitutional obligation of restoring freedom of worship⁶ Only when the separation of religion and politicians is achieved, can communities in India claim that freedom of their religious places has been truly restored.

⁴ Interview Karan Thapar https://youtu.be/gkSAOYTSgYo?si=J1MgNTHmBgU_WZEf Statement of Shankracharya of Puri in Kolkata on January 2024, which was endorsed by Shankracharya Avimukteswaran and in his interview on 22 Jan 2024. "Both politics and religion have their own rules and their own limits. If politicians interfere in religion to promote one man as a God, it is insanity, that is why it is an act of rebellion against God."

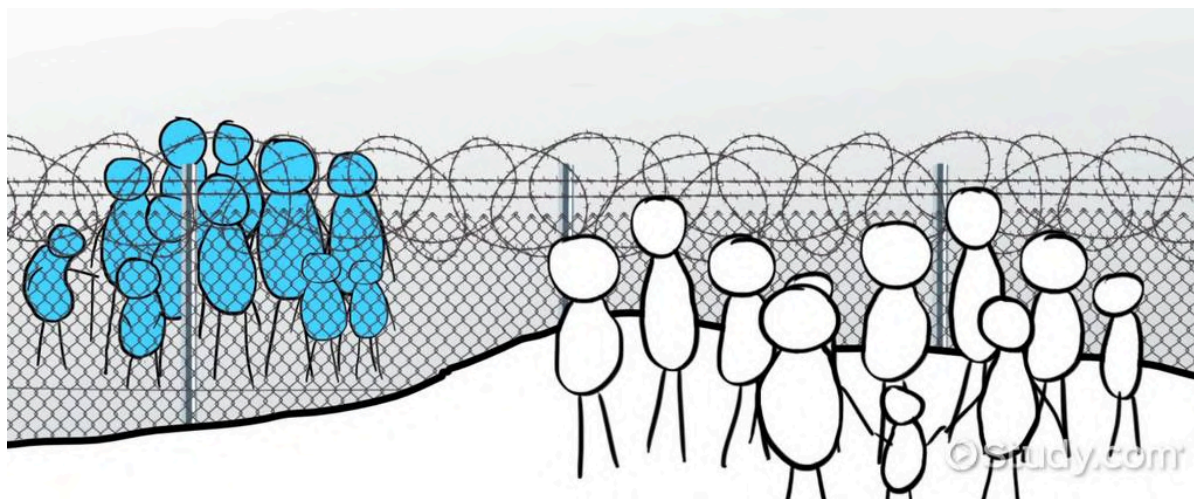
⁵ Jayant B. Dave, "Sannyasins should not Intermingle with Politics," Times of India, 1 June 2024 p. 22.

4.9 Communalism as an instrument of majoritarianism

The state is constitutionally obliged to provide justice, equality in worship and liberty of belief for all religions, backward castes and tribes which have been suppressed for centuries by the conservative religious hierarchies.

Because India's struggle for freedom from colonial rule, was also a struggle for freedom from social injustice, communal prejudice, religious taboos, superstition and caste oppression by religion-based hierarchies.

The Indian society has still to struggle to become a modern democracy for constitutional values to become societal norms. To become a modern state in the contemporary world, India will need to prohibit its politicians from spreading falsehoods and myths to slight other religions.



[Source: Image](#)

India's voting patterns still follow caste and community vote banks, which obfuscates liberty in exercising democratic choice.

India's politicians frequently use primeval or medieval analogies to inferiorize other communities, to desecrate or demolish places of worship of other communities with propaganda that exult vandalism as restoration of religious glory to redress medieval grievances.⁶

As such-like majoritarian practices do not stand the test of country's constitutional morality, restitution of any medieval or colonial grievances must progress through constitutional and judicial processes, rather than regressive practices that impede development of societal ethics.

How far back in history medieval grievances need to be aroused to satisfy Gog and Magog or Yajuj and Majuj of majoritarian politics?

⁶ Interview Rajeve Mehrotra asked Swami Ranganathnanda (died April 2005), the 13th President of Ramakrishna Mission on political parties using religious ideology or faith of the people to wield political power. Swami Ranganathnanda unequivocally stated: "communal political parties and a secular state can never go together. As politics bring the uncouth, trickery and even violent behaviour, the religion must be retrieved from such situations. The centres of religion should function for peace, harmony and teach humanistic attitude."

⁷ op cit. Ajai Kumar Singh, "Concerning Religion" in Discovering New India, A Ravindra and Priyanka Mathur, "in recent years, a trend rooted in religious hatred and division has gained credence in India to justify prejudice and even violence. Violent mobs have been allowed to take law in their own hands. Such acts are rarely condemned by those in power. Sometimes such acts appear to have been encouraged by them." Jain University Press, Bengaluru, p 73.

Part 2

4.10 Action plan to implement social cohesion policy based on constitutional values

Aims and Objectives

The first step is to identify Constitutional values and principles of Constitutionalism that should be imbibed in the society? To build an effective social cohesion policy, the State would need to take a "whole of society approach".

The policy for implementing social cohesion and constitutional values are discussed in the following six progressive stages of:

- i) Agenda Setting and Validation;
- ii) Policy Adoption and Verification;
- iii) Implementation Milestones approved in the Legislature and the Executive Branches;
- iv) Strengthen implementation of Policy by Civil Society Initiatives, Inter-state Cooperation and Political Protocols;
- v) Review, recalibration and Audit;
- vi) Legislations required for professional oversight and accountability consistent with constitutionalism.



[Source: Image](#)

Stage One

a.) Preparatory Stage: Public Initiatives and Activism. To prepare the strategy and content of social cohesion policy requires: Inter-University Network for Constitutional Values to build public opinion, the content and syllabus. To understand public opinion on aims and objectives of social cohesion requires Survey of Public Demand for Social Cohesion. To build champions for social cohesion and constitutional values in public rural and urban sectors and State Assemblies requires a Coalition of Youth and Activists for Constitutional Values.

b) Legislative Initiatives. Legislative authorisation for Social Cohesion policy, budget allocation and review process; Approval of Constitutional Counsellors in the State; Organisation of caucus of Young Parliamentarians and Legislators for Social Cohesion and Constitutional Values in their constituencies.

c) Executive Strategy and Action Plan. Make social cohesion policy; Implement Action Plans in all public and private sector establishments; Financial Planning and Budget, Pilot Projects and Roll Out, Outcome Assessment and Policy Review.

d) Foundation for Social Cohesion and Inter-State Convention to Advance Constitutional Values for implementation of Social Cohesion Policies and sharing of experiences to disseminate Constitutional Values in different partner states of India;

e) Union and State Legislations required for regulations; set up regulatory authority to audit, Assessment of Outcome and Review of Policy and Implementation.

Stages 2 to 10. Legislative and Executive Implementation of Social Cohesion Plan:

On receiving the Legislative authorisation of Social Cohesion Policy, the State Government has to develop a broad coalition of interests to launch Implementation Plan by Ministries of Home Affairs; Education; Finance; Industry and Corporate Affairs; Health; Agriculture, Rural Development; and Public Information.

Discuss six step policy assessment for knowledge creation on content and syllabus making, implementation and dissemination plans for social cohesion based on constitutional values, with inputs from domain experts on: a) Barriers; b) Limitations; c) Opportunities; d) Options; e) Methods; f) Feedback and Review Alternatives.

How the State Assemblies and Governments should facilitate funds, e.g. (state budgets, CSR, crowd funding, individual contributions to support different initiatives. Design a feedback on public demand levels at Local, District and State levels.

How should post-graduation course in Constitutional Values develop at the state and private universities to create a cadre of State Constitutional Counselors (SCC) with career tracks in the Executive, the Legislative Branches, and in the Private sector industries?

Design customized courses for all teachers; for students in all schools from class 1 to 12? Design 3-year college under-graduate course for master trainers for dissemination in urban unorganized sector and in village panchayats.

Appointment of State Constitutional Counselors through a competitive selection in the Executive and Legislative branches.

Conduct Certificate courses for Dept. of Civil and Police services; in the Courts; NGOs; Corporate Offices; Banking; Tourism and Transport services; Public and Private sector Industries? Develop a cadre of Master Trainers for RWAs; factory unions and Panchayats and unorganized sectors?

The States should raise funds for Foundation for Social Cohesion to support for NGOs to offer training in social cohesion values in the under-served segments of society.

Organize inter-State **Convention to Advance Constitutional Values** (CACV) for cooperation between the states to exchange knowledge and implementation experiences in their Social Cohesion Policies in eight segments:

- a) Educational,
- b) Technology for Dissemination,
- c) Financial,
- d) Security,
- e) Protection of Religion from Political Opportunism,
- f) Design and Implementation of State Policy,
- g) Strengths and Limitations of civil society initiatives,
- h) Findings from District levels and below.

Political compact for compliance with constitutional values. A political protocol made between all political parties should lead to a legally binding agreement to advance constitutional values and compliance by all parties against communalism, casteism in selection of candidates, penalties to be imposed on hate speeches during electoral campaigns.

Legislations and Statutory authorities that need to be developed at the State and National levels for professionalization of legislative oversight and accountability consistent with principles of constitutionalism.



[Source: Image](#)

4.11 Conclusion

As natural instincts of man are to subjugate and dominate the other, majoritarian politics seeks to mobilize largest communities to hold political primacy over minorities.

States with multi-cultural and multi-denominational diversities could drift into majoritarianism that begins with inferiorisation of communal or ethnic identities; polarization to consolidate electoral vote banks by building fear, intolerance, resentment and hate towards others.

An alternative for stability could be for the states to develop a policy for social cohesion based on constitutional values. This direction would need to mobilize ordinary public and constitutionalists to reinforce social trust, pluralism and secular values through knowledge creation and dissemination throughout the society.

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At Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), he led the research projects on Arms Procurement Decision-Making processes in China, India, Israel, Japan, South Korea and Thailand. Later in Chile, Greece, Malaysia, Poland, South Africa and Taiwan.

Oxford University Press, UK published this two research volumes in 1997 and in 2001. As founding member and Senior Fellow at the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Ravinder Pal Singh researched on Parliamentary oversight of Security Sector and consultant to NATO Parliamentary Assembly on security sector reforms. He led the UNDP Mission on Security Sector Reforms in Former Republic of Yugoslavia.

He has lectured, researched and published in over 30 countries on security sector reforms; Parliamentary oversight and arms procurement accountability; gender empowerment; defence budget alternatives for the UN Dept. of Disarmament Affairs; United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR); American Association for the Advancement of Sciences; Transparency International on Corruption in Arms Trade; Pugwash Conferences on CSBMs in South Asia; Bonn International Centre for Conversion (BICC); Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Council and Parliamentary Committee Representing the Foreign Affairs of Myanmar.

As Senior Fellow Stockholm University 2003- 2005, Ravinder Pal Singh conducted 2nd Track India-Pakistan dialogue on common security. He contributed a Chapter for Carnegie study: "Getting India Back on Track", and has presented papers at the UN Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) Review Conferences, Geneva.

His current work is on building strategies and processes for Social Cohesion based on Constitutional Values was published by Policy Watch, New Delhi, January 2024



5. Equitable and sustainable development of India: An alternative pathway

H.M. Desarda



[Source: Image](#)

The challenges facing the new government, the country, and its people are immense. After 74 years as a democratic republic, the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India are still not a reality for the vast majority.

Approximately 70% of India's population, nearly 1 billion people, live in sub-human conditions. Pervasive poverty, chronic malnutrition, hunger, disease, lack of water, food, shelter, sanitation, quality education, health services, and social security are the chief causes of misery and destitution for the masses. It is ironic that in independent India, the overwhelming majority of people struggle to eke out a bare minimum livelihood despite the Constitution standing in their name.

5.1 The Growth Model

The root cause of mass deprivation and massive ecological devastation is the growth model pursued by successive governments (both Union and state) of varied ideological hues.

The main pillars of this paradigm are industrialization and urbanization. Ideologically, Russian and Chinese growth models may seem diametrically opposite to those of North America and Western Europe in terms of state or market control of capital.

However, in terms of technology, production processes, consumption patterns, and lifestyles, they are similar. Both systems are resource-squandering and ecologically disastrous, viewing nature and people as commodities for super-profits and power control. Tragically, the ruling elite worldwide perpetuate this status quo.

Third world countries, including India, have followed the same growth model, albeit with a different mix of the two. Thus, the costs and consequences of capitalism and socialism are equally fatal. There is an urgent need to move beyond these "isms," particularly fossil fuels causing climate change. Thinkers like Ruskin, Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Gandhi out rightly rejected growth models based on greed, consumerism, militarism, violence, subjugation, genocide, and ecocide.

According to them and many other thinkers, the dominant growth model is anti-nature and anti-toiling people. The growth mania for profit and resource control has pushed the world to the brink of disaster. The military-industrial complexes and many transnational corporations are threats to the planet and people.

Today, the cumulative consequence of the technologically over-dominant growth model is "jobless growth." Above all, it means alienation from nature and society. Thus, it is not only jobless but also "rootless, ruthless, voiceless, and futureless," as the Human Development Report warned.

5.2 GDP is not well-being

In view of the aforesaid global and Indian reality, the repeated rhetoric of making India the third-largest economy in the world is inane, if not altogether insane. In fact, India is already the third-largest global economy in terms of purchasing power parity. But what does this mean to the 1 billion people who are bearing the brunt of subhuman existence?

It is necessary to look into some recent facts relevant to the well-being of the people. India ranks 134th in the Human Development Index of 191 countries, 114th in the Hunger Index covering 125 countries, and at the bottom (180th) in the Environment Performance Index among 180 countries.

In Air and Water Quality Indices, India's ranking is equally dismal. This means the GDP of a country is not a meaningful indicator of well-being, as emphasized by Nobel Laureates Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen. In short, "more of the same" (mega projects, GDP, growth rate) is not the appropriate approach to tackle the problem of mass deprivation and massive ecological destruction perpetrated in the name of "national development."



The pertinent question is: growth of what? Growth for whom? Fortunately, there are alternatives which are cheaper, quicker, and safer. Of course, they should not be deployed as a mere techno-fix but adapted to societal needs with techniques appropriate to the agro-climatic and demographic conditions, and active participation of the people.

The choice of production and consumption should be guided by care and conservation of ecosystems to provide for the needs of present and future generations.

Low- carbon lifestyles should be the guiding principles of production and consumption of goods and services. Instead of supply, abundance, and dumping, it should be careful demand management, meeting the needs of all and the greed of none.

5.3 Agenda for action

Considering the current Indian scenario, some broad measures are proposed for just, equitable, and sustainable development of India. Let us begin with the resources: natural, human, technological, and fiscal. India's natural endowments, including land, water, flora, fauna, and biodiversity, are substantial.

However, due to neglect and unsustainable distorted resource-use patterns, they have declined, degraded, and been devastated. Moreover, there has been pervasive plunder by colonial rulers to serve their interests. Post- 1947 national governments persisted on the same path to industrialize and create infrastructure.

Today, the paramount task is to stop the further decline and devastation of these precious resources and harness them scientifically to meet the basic needs of the people. Interestingly, the Constitution of India enjoins this as the duty of the State as well as the citizens.

Land (inclusive of all natural resources) and labour (manual and skilled) is the pivot of the production of all goods and services. Ecosystem services are also crucial. Therefore, public policies should address natural and human resources holistically.

Technology, capital, and enterprise should supplement, not supplant, these resources to ensure equity and sustainability. For this, legislative and policy reforms are proposed, including raising the tax-to-GDP ratio to 30%, as seen in many OECD and developing countries. The additional revenue should be earmarked for education, health, and employment.

Land is the basic source of sustenance for all living beings. Currently, 46% of India's workforce is engaged in the agriculture sector. Land should legitimately be owned by those who physically toil on it. "Land to the tiller" was a prime plank of our freedom struggle, and land reform laws were enacted soon after Independence to redeem this promise.

However, the latest data shows that the top 2% of landholders own 26% of the total cultivated land in India. Nearly half of the agricultural land is owned and controlled by 7% of the landed gentry, while 55% of the agricultural workforce is landless. The Green Revolution of the 1960s diverted policymakers' focus from institutional reforms to a technocratic strategy, providing state support to big landowners with resources to invest in costly agricultural inputs and mechanization of farms.



[Source: Image](#)

The consequence of this chemical and industrial farming is the pollution and poisoning of the entire food chain, adversely impacting human, animal, and soil health. To escape this trap, we must provide incentives for organic agriculture, which is labour-intensive and environmentally benign. For ecologically sound farming, the land must belong to those who labour on it. India needs a new agrarian revolution—Krishikranti—to provide livelihoods, nutritious food, and good health to everyone.

To tackle unemployment, expanding, extending, and streamlining public employment guarantees through MGNREGA is crucial. It proved its efficacy during the COVID-19 pandemic. At its peak, over 100 million people were provided work and livelihoods. This must be extended to urban areas, designed to provide work to 50 million urban residents. In brief, a work guarantee of 240 days a year at a minimum wage of Rs 500 per day should be made available to 100 million rural and 50 million urban workers.

This would ensure an income of Rs 10,000 per month for every family opting for work. This guaranteed livelihood would also build massive infrastructure like watersheds and social sector amenities like schools, hospitals, and old age homes. It can effectively drought-proof and flood-control India, providing water to every farmer and other producers of basic goods and services.

Dovetailing natural and human resources with public works is key to providing basics to all. This should be a program to build India in line with Gandhi and Ambedkar's vision and values, creating productive and not parasitic employment by generating durable assets.

The construction sector, employing millions, is second only to agriculture. It provides work to 14% of India's workforce, often under inhuman conditions with low wages and no security or safety. Although laws exist to improve these conditions, the nexus between builders and public functionaries perpetuates exploitation. An urgent overhaul of construction design and materials is needed.

Experts like Laurie Baker suggest structures using maximum local materials and skills with a focus on energy efficiency. Materials like steel, cement, plastic, and glass should be minimized or avoided. This approach is cost-effective and ecologically benign. The construction sector, rife with manipulation, fraud, and corruption, needs thorough investigation, regulation, and reform through a high-level commission on construction, covering all infrastructural, industrial, commercial, and residential housing projects.



[Source: Image](#)

Additionally, a permanent “Ecology Commission” should be established to monitor activities and suggest specific designs for constructions across categories like personal dwellings, public utilities, industrial projects, and other mega-projects.

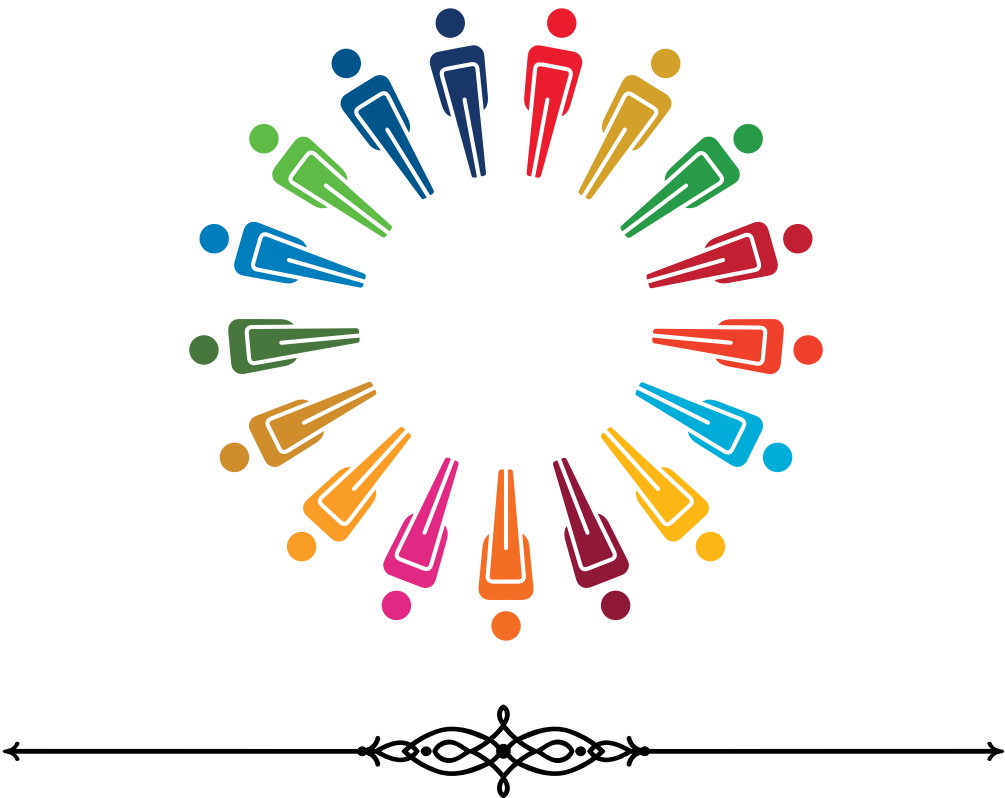
The commission should have statutory powers to monitor, supervise, and protect all natural resources and ecosystems in India. The ecological footprints of all activities should be measured, progressively taxed, and emissions phased out. The energy and transport sectors require total overhaul, with drastic reforms needed in the automobile sector. The main objective is to phase out all fossil fuels by 2030.

Finally, India's policy of modernization, industrialization, and urbanization has been highly centralized and capital-intensive, incongruous with the country's factor endowment. Mahatma Gandhi vehemently opposed this paradigm, advocating an “ecological worldview” rooted in social ethics and the relationship between humans and nature.

He famously categorized it as need versus greed. Globalized greed has created climate catastrophes posing existential threats. India's and the world's growth trajectory requires an alternative approach to economics and politics. A Gandhian pathway can bail us out from the current crisis. The world is on the verge of crossing the 1.5°C threshold stipulated by the Paris Agreement, a frightening scenario. The need of the hour is to live in harmony with nature, requiring radical reforms in our educational and health systems relevant to the 21st century. T

he economic, industrial, and educational systems of the 20th century are inadequate and counterproductive to meeting our current challenges. We have the necessary resources; what we need is a holistic vision and political will.

Dr H. M. Desarda is an ecological economist and a former member of the Maharashtra State Planning Board.



6. Community forests in the Western Indian Himalayan region

Jeet Singh



Source: [Image](#)

6.1 Introduction

The institutionalization of forest governance in India started in the late 19th century, when the then colonial British government enacted the Indian Forest Act, 1878.

Over the next fifty years, the colonial government attempted to take full control of forest land and its resources using policy instruments like formation of the forest department, land settlement, forest rights settlements, commercialization of forest products, categorization of forests, formation of national parks and protected forests.

All these policy instruments disrupted the way people were living in and around forests. Most affected people were forest dwellers, who were dependent on forest and its resources for their lives and livelihoods.

The overall purpose of institutionalization of forest governance by the British government was to commercialize Indian forests and have full control over revenue generated using forests. In many places these policies went against traditional practices of forest dwellers and their customary rights.

As a result resentment against British forest governance grew in various parts of the country. Such strong public resentment against forest policies leading to public protest were recorded in many parts of Western Himalayan regions especially in Kumaon, Garhwal (presently in Uttarakhand) and Kangra (presently in Himachal Pradesh).

Protests in these areas forced the British forest officials to innovate in forest governance in certain areas by involving community members. Cooperative Forest Societies of Kangra (CFS) and Van Panchayats (VPs) in hilly districts of Uttarakhand are two unique experiments of community forest governance initiated by the colonial government in 1930s and 1940s respectively.

Community forest governance through CFS and VPs went through several changes especially after independence. These changes were triggered by many factors including global environmental conventions, influences of multilateral financial agencies, conflicting incentives of the state forest department and forest dwelling communities and increasing market of forest resources. In the 1990s the government of India rolled out an externally funded project called Joint Forest Management (JFM) with an objective to involve communities in forest management.

This project in next 15-20 years opened gates of forest to many genuine deserving forest dwellers. However, the impact of the JFM project on CFS and VPs is way different, as these institutions were already in the hands of community members. This paper is an attempt to understand the impact of JFM on well-established community forest governance institutions- CFS and VPs of western Indian Himalaya.

6.2 Cooperative forest societies of Kangra

On recommendation of Garbett Commission constituted to explore institutional mechanisms to involve common forest dwellers in forest management, the then Punjab government in 1940 announced Kangra Cooperative Forest Society in Kangra district.

The main objective of this scheme was to ensure people's ownership to arrest soil erosion and conserve forest in the Kangra valley (Oliver, 2001). Moreover, it provided incentives to villagers in the form of access to forest resources such as timber, NTFPs, fuel, fodder, grazing ground, stone, slate and water.

The then Punjab government approved the Cooperative Forest Society scheme for five years but the positive impact of the scheme led to extension of the scheme for yet another five year from 1945 to 1950. By 1953 as many as 72 cooperative forest societies were constituted in different villages of Kangra district (Ahel, 2002). Subsequently two CFS were dissolved by the state government due to administrative irregularities. Currently there are 70 CFS and they cumulatively control 10% (23,500 hectare) of the total forest of Kangra district (Sudha, 2001).

The income of CFSs and grants in aid provided by the state to the cooperatives were always contentious issues, which led to institutional instability of the CFS scheme. Yet till 1971, these cooperatives continued to manage their forest effectively (Ahel, 2001). However, after the formation of Himachal Pradesh as a separate state in 1971, this scheme hit many roadblocks.

To review the status of the CFS scheme and work out a future plan various committees were constituted by the Himachal Pradesh government, but none of them resulted in stable institutional mechanisms for cooperative forest societies.

Originally the plan was to share revenue from timber between forest department and CFSs in the ratio of 50:50 and 100 per cent revenue from NTFP was to be owned by the CFSs.

However, the revenue from timber, which was always quite high, went to the forest department. The share of CFSs in timber sale used to be transferred by the forest department as grant in aid (Oliver, 2001).

Moreover, the release of the grant was further at the whims and fancies of the state forest department. Moreover in 1967 the government of Punjab seized the right of CFSs to sell NTFP and handed it over to a separate corporation. In the 1970s itself the financial autonomy of these cooperative forest societies was taken off.

A study by Oliver (2001) observed that CFSs scheme in the 1950s and 1960s worked well. In these two decades the forest under the control of CFSs flourished along with remarkable progress in sale of timber and non-timber forest products. In 1976 the Chief Conservator of Forest Mr. R D Rawal developed an integrated forest management plan for all CFSs.

In his report he observed, “The experiment of Co-operative Forest Societies it is felt has been fairly successful. It will, therefore, be worthwhile if the societies in existence continue to function till the expiry of this report (1982- 83).”

Cooperative Forest Societies in Kangra		
Tehsil	Number of CFSs	Area (Ha)
Kangra	16	8491.2
Palampur	17	2981.8
Dehra	11	4251.7
Nurpur	26	7828.0
Total	70	23556.3

Source: Oliver Springate-Baginski (2001)

The Kangra Cooperative Forest Societies scheme envisioned the role of community members in forest management. The state forest department was always a key stakeholder in this scheme as a technical partner to develop management plans in consultation with villagers and share costs and benefits arising from the sale of forest produce.

However, historically these institutions remain unstable due to the temporary nature of policy/scheme governing CFSs. However, CFSs enjoyed autonomy till 1971 to manage forest within broad guidelines of the forest management plan approved by the state forest department. The functioning of the CFSs declined after 1971 as their financial and operational autonomy was taken off by the state government.



Kangra Cooperative Forest Societies Rules

Main Highlights

Objectives of KFCSS: To arrange for the plantation, improvement, protection and management of society forests as mentioned in the Working Plans, with special reference to preventing erosion and to utilising the forest produce to the best advantage to the members.

Formation of FCSs: A society was formed only when 75% of the land owners and village residents with rights in the forest agreed to the formation of FCS.

Membership: Any resident within the area of a society's operation who is over 18 years of age can become a member on payment of membership fee.

Managing Committee: The managing committee of FCS consists of not more than seven persons including the president, vice president, treasurer and secretary. Secretary was the main executive of the FCSs.

Source of Income of FCSs: Fees charged for access to forest land and its resources by forest dwellers, plus Income received from private land management by FCSs plus Government Grant. After deducting expenses, this gave the Net Distributable Income.

Utilization of funds of FCSs: From net Distributable income mandatory expenditure are as follows: 1% as reserve fund, 10% forest improvement fund, 9% for charitable purposes and 5% for cooperative education.

Forest Working Plan: Preparation of forest working plan by authorized forest officials in consultation with members of FCSs and approved by the general body of the FCSs was a pre-condition of registering FCSs under the cooperative law.

6.3 Van Panchayats in hilly districts of Uttarakhand



Source: Image

The Van Panchayat system is a unique framework to regulate planning, management and monitoring of common forest for villager's use in the mountain districts of Uttarakhand. These forests are crucial for the subsistence economy of mountain people in the state. However, local people had to fight against 39 coercive forest policies of the British colonial government in the early twentieth century to win this system of community managed forest. Unlike in many other parts of the country, Britishers were least interested in revenue from agriculture in the mountain.

They knew thick and healthy forest in the Western Himalayan agricultural zone can yield more revenue for them compared to agriculture. Therefore they started regulating forests in the region from the early nineteenth century.

However, up until the late nineteenth century, these regulations were not directly threatening the life and livelihood of local people. In 1877 the then government demarcated the forest and follow-up regulations from 1893 to 1910 started alienating people from the use of forest and forest products. It instigated local people to revolt against the government and its policies related to the forest and forest products.

The people's revolt intensified in 1916 and continued up until 1921, when the colonial government decided to constitute a grievance committee to resolve the issue. Based on the recommendations of the grievance committee, the then government agreed to hand over forest in the close proximity of any village to its residents. For the management of such forest the 'Kumaun Panchayat Forest Rules' were issued in 1931 under the Article-6 of the Scheduled Districts Act, 1874.

In 1974 the then state government of Uttar Pradesh amended these rules. With the abolition of the Scheduled District Act, 1874 new rules were issued under the Article 28 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927. These rules introduced the forest department as a key regulator along with the revenue department.

The article 28 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927 provides for the constitution of 'Village-forest' under the supervision of the forest department. The department has the right to withdraw rights and concessions granted to villagers through village forest any time.

Therefore, many experts believe that the amendment to the Panchayati forest in 1974 diluted the entire system. However, these Panchayats continued to enjoy rights related to making sub-rules, developing working plans for the forest, distribution of forest products, collection of fee and fine and management of funds.



[Source: Image](#)

With the formation of Uttarakhand as 27th state of India, the entire area where the Van Panchayat system was in place came under the Uttarakhand government. With the motive of implementing the Joint Forest Management (JFM) scheme, the then Uttarakhand government brought yet another amendment to the Panchayat forest in 2001. These amendments were opposed and criticized by villagers and activists. Responding to these voices, the first elected government of the newly formed state released a new set of rules of Panchayati forest in 2005.

The Uttarakhand Panchayati Forest Rules, 2005 are currently in force with some changes in 2012. These rules also recognize van panchayat as 'village forest' as defined in the section 28 of the Indian Forest Act, 2020. The new rules have reduced the autonomy of these panchayats substantially and confined them as self-help groups (forest users).

These rules provide for the development of composite plans by the divisional forest officer. Van Panchayats have to develop micro-plan in accordance with the composite plan developed by the forest department for their forest with the help of grass root forest officials. It has also made the forest guard an ex-officio secretary of the Van Panchayat.



[Source: Image](#)

Van Panchayats in Uttarakhand		
District	No of Van Panchayats	Total Area under Van Panchayats (in Hectare)
Chamoli	1509	327047.5
Almora	2324	77693.25
Bageshwar	822	38782.92
Champawat	654	33649.77
Dehradun	170	6571.275
Nainital	413	32992.49
Pauri	2450	55813.57
Pithoragarh	1621	123609.7
Rudrapur	509	18379.64
Tehri	1290	14164.86
Uttarkashi	406	3983.989
Total	12168	732688.9

Source: Department of Forest, Govt of Uttarakhand

The Van Panchayat system in its history of around 90 years has seen many changes. Policy level changes do have bearing on the performance of Panchayats and productivity of the forest. I have not come across any study comparing all policy changes in the Van Panchayat system and their impact on the ground. However, it is clear that over the years, the Van Panchayat system lost its autonomy along with loss for forest productivity.

Uttaranchal Panchayati Forest Rules, 2005

Main highlights

Legal status: Rules issued under the sub-section 2 of the section 28 (read with section 76) of the Indian Forest Act, 1927.

Duties of Users:

- Provide help in forest fire control in case of incidence of forest fire in the concerned village forest.
- In case of any forest offence such as encroachment, illicit grazing or illicit felling, its intimation shall be immediately given to the Management Committee.
- Provide support for protection of old plantations established earlier or plantations carried out by the Management Committee

Composition of management committee of Van Panchayat:

- The management committee of VP shall consist of nine members. Four seats shall be reserved for women out of whom one shall be from scheduled caste or scheduled tribe. One seat out of the remaining five seats shall be reserved for the male members of the scheduled castes or the scheduled tribes. The post of Sarpanch (head of VP) will be held by men and women on rotational basis

Role of the Forest Department:

- To Prepare Composite Management Plan for all van panchayats
- To help VPs to prepare micro plan and approve the same –
- To help VPs to prepare annual implementation plan and approve the same
- The local forest guard serves as secretary of management committee of VP.
- Manage distribution of forest produce amongst the users and regulate its sale.
- Regulate and approve sub-rules framed by van panchayats.



[Source: Image](#)

Management Plan for Van Panchayats:

- The divisional forest officer shall prepare a Composite Management Plan for all the village forests/ panchayat forests within his/her control for a period of five years. The plan will be approved by the conservator of forests.
- It is obligatory on the part of Van Panchayat to prepare a micro plan on the basis of guiding principles given in the composite management plan approved by the conservator of forests. The micro plan will be prepared with the assistance of concerned deputy ranger/forester or forest guard. The micro plan will be finally approved by the sub-divisional forest officer.
- Based on the micro plan the van panchayat will prepare annual implementation plan, which will be finally approved by the forest range officer.

Exploitation and Utilisation of Forest Produce:

- No forest produce shall be exploited unless the ecological requirements of the area are ensured by village forest/panchayat forest.
- All customary rights of the holders such as collection of fallen fuelwood, lopping of branches of trees, cutting of grass shall continue to be governed under the provisions of micro plan.
- After fulfilling the above mentioned two requirements, forest produces may be disposed on prior permission from divisional forest officer for the bonafide domestic use of right holders or the local cottage industries or the village industries or for the work of public utility
- After fulfilling above three requirements on the approval of forest range officer and direction of divisional forest officer can dispose forest products for commercial sale.

6.4 Impact of JFM on time tested CFSs and Van Panchayats

In accordance with the National Forest Policy, 1988 the government of India issued notification for the Joint Forest Management scheme in 1990 to share management responsibility with local communities. The original intention of this scheme was to involve local community members in regeneration of degraded forest around villages and support their forest based livelihoods. The rationale of the Joint forest Management (JFM) was to enhance collaboration between officials of state forest department and villagers and thereby share the onus of protection and management of degraded forest.



[Source: Image](#)

The JFM scheme was further amended in 2000 by issuance of an updated guideline by the central government. These guidelines attempted to give a solid legal backing to Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) constituted at the village level for the management of forest. It provided for registration of all JFMC under the Society Registration Act, 1860. All village adults can become members of JFMC and they elect an executive committee of president, vice-president, joint secretary, treasurer and a few members.

The committee also has provision of some ex-officio members such as officials of forest department and NGO representatives. The guideline provides for appointment of forest officials as member secretary of all JFMCs. The main tasks of the JFMCs include forest protection, forest conservation and sale of non-timber forest products. The income of the JFMCs is further shared by the state forest department and JFMC. This guideline further provided for 50% reservation for women in general membership and 33% reservation in the executive committee of JFMC.



Source: Image

In the updated JFM guideline of year 2000, the provision of developing a micro plan for all JFMCs was an attempt to modernize forest governance and bring scientific approach in forest conservation, protection and harvesting.

The officials of the forest department have the responsibility of preparing a micro plan for JFMC in consultation with villagers. However, the micro plan has to be approved by the designated senior forest official before its adoption by the general body of a JFMC.

The government of India further updated the guidelines of JFM in 2002. This guideline tried to further fine tune its previous guidelines by providing for a formal memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the state forest department and JFMC. This guideline also stresses on issues pertinent to collection and sale of NTFPs and capacity development for sustainable harvesting.

According to the data of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) there are 1,18,000 JMCs across the country managing 22 million hectare of degraded forest. The ministry further claims that the JFM has helped in stabilizing and increasing the forest and tree cover in India.⁸

⁸ <https://moef.gov.in/moef/wildlife-wl/forest-3/index.html#:~:text=Most%20of%20the%20State%20Forest,of%20hectares%20of%20degraded%20forestlands>

6.4.1 Difference between JFM and previous Community Forest Management Schemes

The Van Panchayat system in Uttarakhand is the oldest formally institutionalized community forest governance mechanism in the Western Indian Himalayan region. It started in 1931 in Kumaun region of Uttarakhand and expanded to the British ruled hilly region of present Uttarakhand.

Following the provisions of the Van Panchayat, the British government on demand of people started the Cooperative Forest Society scheme in Kangra district of then Punjab province in 1940. In comparison to Van Panchayats the CFSs scheme has always been a temporary arrangement under the aegis of the state forest department. However, in terms of the principle of community forest governance both of these institutions shares a common foundation.

The idea of Van Panchayat system in Uttarakhand and CFSs scheme in Himachal Pradesh was to believe in traditional knowledge, skills, practices and governing skills of local villagers in maximising both social and ecological benefits of forests. In initial phases both of these institutions had significant organizational autonomy to take decisions, resolve grievances, distribute forest resources and develop management plans. Moreover, these institutions were also enjoying functional and financial autonomy to recruit required staff for forest conservation/protection and manage funds as per requirement of the forest and local communities.



[Source: Image](#)

The incentive of villagers both in Uttarakhand and Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh as governance stakeholders of Van Panchayats and CFSs has been to promote their livelihoods such as agriculture and livestock. For both of these occupations, villagers are heavily dependent on forests. Moreover, villagers are strongly connected with their forest for other bonafide use of forest products and cultural engagements. This complex web of incentives has always motivated villagers to protect and conserve their forest through Van Panchayats⁹ and CFSs.¹⁰ Maximisation of co-benefits by Van Panchayats and CFSs was acknowledged by a number of assessments carried out by forest departments of respective states.

⁹ Agrawal Arun and Gautam N. Yadama, 1997, 'How do Local Institutions Mediate Market and Population Pressures on Resources? Forest Panchayats in Kumaon, India', Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Development and Change Vol. 28 (1997), 435±465. #Institute of Social Studies 1997.

¹⁰ Springate-Baginski, Oliver. 2001. 'A Boat that Cannot Reach Either Bank': Lessons from a Long-Term Analysis of the Cooper Analysis of the Cooperative Forest Societies of Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh, India. HIMALAYA 21(2).

The founding principle of the Joint Forest Management program is significantly different from Van Panchayats and CFSs. The JFM program does not fully believe in the skills and capability of forest dwellers. Therefore it constitutes JFMC under strict guidelines prescribing dos and don'ts.

Moreover, it empowers the state forest department to fully control and influence decisions of JFMC by having their officer as member secretary in each JFMC.

The JFM has introduced the idea of a micro plan for the management of community forest, which is a progressive step. However, it is the state forest department which prepares and approves it. The general body of JFMC has no right to change the micro plan of their forest without approval of a designated senior forest officer.

Overall the JFM delegates some of its responsibility and puts the onus of forest protection and conservation on local communities. However, the original idea of Van Panchayat and CFS was to delegate full autonomy to forest dwellers to govern their forest.

6.4.2 Impact of JFM on Autonomous Community Forest Governance



Source: Image

Before JFM, examples of formal community led forest management were limited and scattered. Prominent among them are Van Panchayat in Uttarakhand, Cooperative Forest Samiti in Kangra and village forest constituted in different parts of the country under the Indian Forest Act, 1927.

A training handbook for JFM developed by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) acknowledges these pre-existing systems of community forest governance.

However, this manual encourages JFM officials to have dialogue with such institutions and build consensus for their integration with the JFM.¹¹

¹¹ Joint Forest Management A Handbook For Front Line Staff of Forest Department & JFMC members, <https://ifs.nic.in/Dynamic/pdf/JFM%20handbook.pdf>

The JFM project was implemented across the country and its implementation was further supported by multilateral financial institutions. The strong central policy push and interest of multilateral institutions led to state level adoption of JFM.

In this process, some states aligned their existing system of community forest governance with the guidelines of the JFM. The aligning of existing institutions with the JFM in many states diluted time tested decentralized forest governance. In western Indian Himalayan region Van Panchayats of Uttarakhand lost their organizational, functional and financial autonomy.

In order to align the nearly 70 year's old van panchayat system with the newly developed JFM, the government of Uttarakhand changed its Van Panchayat rules in 2001. These rules were well within the framework of JFM.

Further in order to incorporate updated JFM guidelines of 2002, the state government further made changes in its van panchayat rules in 2005. Overall, the state government reduced autonomous van panchayats to JFMC. However, it continued to call it Van Panchayat instead of JFMC.

The updated Van Panchayat rules in Uttarakhand in order to align this institution with JFM introduce the state forest department as regulator as well as key beneficiary of forest resources. It provides for a forest official as member secretary of Van Panchayat and micro plan of the Van Panchayat to be prepared and approved by the state forest department.

Insertion of such provisions in the Van Panchayat governance took away their freedom to decision making, forest conservation and protection. It has also taken away the freedom of Van Panchayat to distribute forest resources on its own. While the functioning of Van Panchayat is fully in control of the forest department, the onus of protection of forest and accountability remains with villagers and Van Panchayat.



[Source: Image](#)

6.5 Ecological and social outcomes of JFM in Uttarakhand

The Joint Forest Management program has been implemented in the name of Van Panchayat in Uttarakhand since 2001.

Large numbers of Van Panchayat were constituted in the state after the roll out of JFM in the state.

There are a number of studies which show that till 1991 van panchayat forests were in much better condition compared to nearby reserve forests (Agrawal and Yamada, 1997; Agrawal and Ostrom, 2001; Somanathan, 1997; Ballabh and Singh, 1988).

The website of MoEFCC claims that the JFM has helped in stabilizing and increasing forest in India.¹² This section of the paper is an attempt to use official data to see patterns of changes in selected ecological and social outcomes especially after 2001.



6.5.1 State of forests in Uttarakhand

Nearly 70 per cent of the state's geographical area is categorized as forest. Of this nearly 13% forest is under the control of 12,000 van Panchayats. These Van Panchayats are only in hilly districts of Uttarakhand.

The hill district of Uttarakhand includes Chamoli, Rudrapryag, Tehri, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarkashi, Champawat, Pithoragarh, Almora, Nainital and Bageshwar.

Comparison of Forest Cover Hill Districts- Uttarakhand (Figures in sq.km.)			
	2001	2021	Difference
Dense Forest	14213	13384	-829
Open Forest	3750	5253	1503
Total Forest	17963	18637	674
Scrub	513	283	-230

Source: Forest Survey of India, ISFR, 2001 and ISFR, 2021

¹² <https://moef.gov.in/moef/wildlife-wl/forest-3/index.html#:~:text=Most%20of%20the%20State%20Forest,of%20hectares%20of%20degraded%20forestlands>

A comparison of India State of Forest Report for 2001 and 2021, data shows that the forest cover has increased by 674 sq km in these two decades. The ISFR report attributes this positive change to plantation activities in the state.

However, the data also suggests that the quality of forest has degraded significantly in these 20 years. It shows that the dense forest (high dense forest and moderate dense forest) has decreased from 14,213 sq km in 2001 to 13,384 sq km in 2021. In other words 829 sq km dense forest of the state has degraded to open forest.

6.5.2 Forest Fires

Forest fires in Uttarakhand are a serious environmental issue. It destroys thousands of hectares of forests every year. The forest department of Uttarakhand has identified four major reasons for forest fire- deliberate attempt to set fire, agriculture related, accidental or carelessness of people and natural reasons because of increase in temperature.¹³



Source: Image

Uttarakhand Forest Fire Incidents	
Year Range	Number of Fire Incidents
2006-2010	859
2011-15	1,982
2016-2020	18,246
2021-2024 (May 15, 2024)	36,391

Source: Compiled from FSI: <https://fsiforestfire.gov.in/index.php>

Numbers of incidents of forest fires have exponentially grown in the last two decades. The data of forest fire managed by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) reveals that during 2006 to 2010 only 859 incidents of forest fire were recorded, which has increased to 36,391 incidents during 2021-2024.

The forest fire management plan of Uttarakhand government reveals that the total affected forest area in 2011 was 231 hectare which has increased to 3,553 hectare in 2021.

6.5.3 Fodder and grazing dependency



Source: Image

Livestock is one of the main occupations of people in the mountain district of Uttarakhand. They normally keep cattle, Buffalo, Sheep and goats. Very few people also have horses and mules. According to the Livestock census in 2003, the total livestock population in hilly districts of Uttarakhand was 33.48 lakh. Sixteen year later the census conducted in 2019 counted 28.45 lakh livestock in these 9 hilly districts of the state. In other words the livestock population in the hills of Uttarakhand had decreased by more than 15% during 2003 and 2019.

Livestock	Livestock Census Hilly Districts of Uttarakhand			Fodder Requirement (MT per Year) Hilly Districts of Uttarakhand		
	2003	2019	Difference	2003	2019	Difference
Cattle	15,77,672	11,35,830	-4,41,842	37,07,529	26,69,201	-10,38,329
Buffalo	5,88,963	3,68,983	-2,19,980	20,76,095	13,00,665	-7,75,430
Sheep	2,69,064	2,70,800	1,736	1,26,460	1,27,276	816
Goat	9,12,539	10,69,836	1,57,297	4,28,893	5,02,823	73,930
Total	33,48,238	28,45,449	-5,02,789	63,38,977	45,99,964	-17,39,013

Source: Directorate of Animal Husbandry, Govt. of Uttarakhand

¹³ GoUK, 2022, Rajya Stariya Vanagani Prabandhan Yojana, Department of Forest, Govt. of Uttarakhand

Using the formula to calculate fodder consumption by various types of livestock, we observed that the fodder consumption in 2003 was 63.38 lakh MT which had decreased to 45.99 lakh MT in 2019. The decrease in livestock population is directly proportional to decrease in fodder consumption.

Further, it can be concluded that people's dependency on livestock for occupation has decreased significantly. And therefore their dependency on forest for fodder and grazing has also decreased.

6.5.4 Firewood dependency

The 54th round of National Sample Survey (NSS) on Common Property Resources in India released in 1998-99 had observed that 87 percent households in hilly region of Uttarakhand were collecting firewood from forest (NSSO, 1999).

We don't have any such updated comprehensive survey on fuel wood collocation to compare. However, the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS) has been recording data of households using clean fuel which includes LPG, electricity and other non-wood, non-coal cooking fuel.

Household (in %) using Clean Cooking Fuel (Hilly districts of Uttarakhand)			
District	2002-04	2019-21	Difference
Almora	38	36	-2
Bageshwar	33	35	2
Chamoli	31	37	6
Champawat	24	40	16
Pauri	36	48	12
Pithoragarh	48	46	-2
Rudrapur	33	35	2
Tehri	34	35	1
Uttarkashi	19	33	14
Average	32.88	38.33	5.45

Source: DLHS, 2002-04 and NFHS, 2019-21

The fuel wood dependency for cooking in hilly districts of Uttarakhand is still very high. According to the DLHS-2 and NFHS-5 data the use of clean fuel for cooking in hilly districts of the state has marginally increased from 32.88 per cent in 2002-04 to 38.33% in 2019-21.

According to these surveys, during this period only 5.45 people switched from firewood to clean fuel. Though the dependency on firewood is still high, it has decreased in the last few decades.



6.5.5 Climate induced distress migration

People in the mountains are moving out of their traditional occupations. The livestock census discussed above in this paper reveals that now less people are dependent on livestock for their livelihood. The data presented in the table below also suggest that nearly 11 percent of people who migrated from hilly districts of the state migrated because of failure of their traditional occupation- agriculture.

Moreover, 48.43 percent of people who have migrated from hills are in search of livelihoods. The high rate of outmigration for livelihoods has eventually decreased people's dependency on forests and its resources.

District wise main reasons for migration from gram panchayats (in%)						
District	In search of livelihood/employment	Lack of basic infrastructure	Decline in agriculture productivity	Wildlife destroying agriculture	Problem related to Health and education services	Other
Rudraprayag	52.9	4.43	4.27	5.11	24.31	8.96
Tehri	52.43	3.07	6.17	4.26	26.08	7.97
Uttarkashi	41.77	2.29	7.14	4.04	23.48	21.27
Chamoli	49.3	4.93	4.73	3.09	30.56	7.38
Pauri	52.58	3.03	5.35	6.27	27.04	5.74
Champawat	54.9	5.46	6.31	6.65	16.91	9.76
Pithoragarh	42.81	4.97	4.66	4.08	29.65	13.84
Almora	47.78	3.81	8.37	10.99	20.36	8.7
Bageshwar	41.39	4.32	2.18	3.42	23.58	25.1
Average	48.43	4.03	5.46	5.32	24.66	12.08

Source: Department of Rural Development, Palayan Aayog, Govt of Uttarakhand

The Palayan Aayog constituted by the government of Uttarakhand in its survey observed that more than 48 percent people who migrated out from hilly district are in search of livelihoods. Moreover about 11 percent migrants can be directly attributed to factors related to climate change. 5.46 percent migrants acknowledged that their agricultural productivity in hills has gone down and 5.32 per cent migrants attribute their outmigration to wild animal destroying agriculture. Various reports suggest that degradation of forest resulting in unexpected movements of wildlife in and around human settlement leading to human-wildlife conflicts.



Source: Image

6.6 Conclusion

The idea of Joint Forest Management (JFM) is to integrate community members in forest conservation, promote their livelihoods and share the onus of forest protection. It has created an institutional mechanism for participatory forest management.

The JFM committee at village level provides space for ordinary forest dwellers to participate in local level decision making. Further the federations of JFMCs provide a marketing network for sale of NTFPs collected by forest dwellers.

However the state forest department still controls environmental governance of JFMCs and their federations through strict JFM guidelines and micro plans to regulate day to day governance transactions of JFMCs.

While the JFM has opened gates of forest to many forest dwellers, it has adversely affected relatively more democratic and autonomous community forest governance institutions namely Kangra Cooperative Forest Societies and Van Panchayats in the Western Indian Himalayan Region.

State governments of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh had decided to align their existing community forest governance institution with JFM.

This decision proved to be counterproductive for both of these time tested successful institutions. The JFM has taken away the organizational, functional and financial autonomy of Van Panchayats in Uttarakhand.

This paper has analyzed changes in selected social and ecological outcomes of environmental governance in Uttarakhand after alignment of Van Panchayat with JFM in 2001. It observed that the biotic interference of local community members in forest has decreased.

More precisely the demand for fodder, fuel and other livelihood support has decreased in the last more than two decades.

Minimizing biotic interference is the goal of conventional forest regeneration approaches. Therefore, as per the conventional approach, the decreased biotic interference in forests of Uttarakhand would have improved the condition of forest in the state.

However, data shows that in the last two decades we lost over 800 sq km of good dense forest in the state. Moreover, the incidents of forest fire have been increasing exponentially.

JFM has centralized the governance of the time tested Van Panchayat system in Uttarakhand in the name of participatory forest governance. Such extreme changes in governance of Van Panchayats and CFSS have adversely affected various social and ecological outcomes.



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7. The paradox of India's global rise, its regional decline

Happymon Jacob



[Source: Image](#)

One of the deeply perplexing paradoxes of contemporary Indian foreign policy is that a globally rising India is also a regionally declining power. While India's global rise is a function of growth in absolute power, peer accommodation and a conducive 'chaotic' international situation, its waning regional influence is caused by diminishing relative power (vis-à-vis China), loss of primacy in South Asia, and fundamental changes in South Asian geopolitics.

India's aggregate power has grown over the past two decades — evident in robust economic growth, military capabilities, and a largely young demography. Its inclusion in key global institutions such as the G-20, as an invitee at G-7 meetings, and active participation in multilateral groups such as the Quad, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation further highlight its geopolitical significance and its powerful presence globally, even if it is not a member of the United Nations Security Council.

There is a lot more peer accommodation of (except from China of course) of India's claims to be a globally significant power. India's global rise is also aided by growing international attention on the Indo-Pacific, a theatre that is pivotal to global strategic stability, where India has a central position, geographically and otherwise.



7.1 Extraneous factors

Despite this global rise, paradoxically and worryingly, India's influence is declining in South Asia. When compared to India's influence in the region during the Cold War or in comparison to China's influence in the region today, India's power and influence in the region has sharply declined. This comparative decline, not an absolute one, caused by several extraneous factors, will have an impact on India's global position over time.

Paradoxically, again, some of the factors that have led to the decline of Indian influence in the region are also the reasons behind India's global prominence. Consider the following. The American withdrawal from the region and China filling that power vacuum have been disadvantageous to India.

But that is, at the same time, a major reason why the United States and its allies are keen to accommodate India's global interests including in order to push back China in the region. In the case of the Indo-Pacific, while interest in the Indo-Pacific has increased, India's global prominence as an indispensable Indo-Pacific power, New Delhi's focus on the great power balance in the Indo-Pacific may have stretched New Delhi a bit too thin in the continental neighbourhood.

If India's global rise stems from the growth in absolute power and the geopolitical choices made by the leading powers of the contemporary international system, India's regional decline is a product of the dynamics of comparative power, and geopolitical choices made by the region's smaller powers. To that extent, overlooking the balancing acts by the region's smaller powers to focus on the great power balancing might become counterproductive.

7.2 The rise of China and what India must do

But the rise of China explains India's regional decline more than anything else. Today, India is more powerful than it has ever been in nearly two centuries. And, yet, it is, comparatively speaking, the weakest it has ever been in history vis-à-vis China.

Faced with a rising superpower next door for the first time, India is facing stiff geopolitical competition for influence in South Asia. China's rise will, therefore, mean that India may no longer be the most consequential power in the region.



[Source: Image](#)

The arrival of China in South Asia, the withdrawal of the U.S. from the region, and India's tilt to the Indo-Pacific have shifted the regional balance of power in Beijing's favour. Sensing this new power equation, South Asia's smaller powers, India's neighbours, are engaged in a range of strategies: balancing, bargaining, hedging and bandwagoning.

India's smaller neighbours seem to find China as a useful hedge against India, for the moment at least. It is also important to keep in mind that a great deal of this regional balancing results from shifts in the regional balance of power, not merely from insufficient Indian outreach to the neighbourhood.

While the presence of a rising superpower at its doorstep for the first time is at the heart of this paradox, the growing obsolescence of South Asia as a geopolitical construct adds to India's diminishing hold on the region. For India, meeting the challenge posed by this paradox is essential as China's rise in South Asia will mean that India may no longer be the most consequential power in the region.

To begin with, New Delhi must revisit some of its traditional conceptions of the region, 'modernise' its primacy in South Asia, and take proactive and imaginative policy steps to meet the China challenge in the region.

First of all, we must accept the reality that the region, the neighbours and the region's geopolitics have fundamentally changed over the decade-and-a-half at the least. Not willing to acknowledge there is a problem will only make matters worse.

Second, New Delhi must focus on its strengths rather than trying to match the might of the People's Republic of China in every respect — the latter is a fool's errand. Fashioning a new engagement with the region that reflects India's traditional strengths and the region's changed realities is essential. Reclaiming the Buddhist heritage is one such example.

Third, India's continental strategy is replete with challenges whereas its maritime space has an abundance of opportunities for enhancing trade, joining minilaterals, and creating new issue-based coalitions, among others. New Delhi must, therefore, use its maritime (Indo-Pacific) advantages to cater to its many continental handicaps. Doing so could involve including India's smaller South Asian neighbours to the Indo-Pacific strategic conversations. Many of them are maritime states but not serious players within the Indo-Pacific project. India and its partners (the U.S., Japan, Australia, the European Union, and others) must find ways of engaging and partnering with Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bangladesh as part of their larger Indo-Pacific strategy. In other words, New Delhi should try to wean them away from the China-led regional grand strategy by making them a key part of the Indo-Pacific grand strategy where India and its partners hold significant advantage over China.



[Source: Image](#)

Fourth, there is today an openness in New Delhi to view the region through a non-India centric lens. This also means that New Delhi is no longer uneasy about external powers in its neighbourhood as it used to be during the Cold War.

As a consequence, there is a desire to join hands with external friendly partners both in the Indian Ocean and South Asia so as to deal with the region's common challenges. This openness in New Delhi, and the desire of the external actors to engage the region, must be utilised to address the difficulties arising out of New Delhi's regional decline.

7.3 Tap soft power

Finally, New Delhi should make creative uses of its soft power to retain its influence in the region. One way to do that is to actively encourage informal contacts between political and civil society actors in India and those in other South Asian countries. For instance, there is a need to encourage informal and unofficial conflict management processes in the region especially when and where the Indian state is hesitant about being involved directly in a conflict — Myanmar is a case in point.

The dichotomy between India's global rise and regional decline has profound implications for India's global aspirations. It is a legitimate question to ask whether a country that is unable to maintain primacy in its periphery will be able to be a pivotal power in international politics.

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[Source: Image](#)





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