

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC**New Study on the age old Devadasi system**

Few recent studies have found that the practice of Devadasi system of dedicating young girls to temples as an offering to appease the Gods persists not just in Karnataka, but has also spread to neighbouring Goa. More than thirty-six years after the Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act of 1982 was passed, the State government is yet to issue the rules for administering the law.

Highlights of the study:

- Vulnerable population: Special children, with physical or mental disabilities, are more vulnerable to be dedicated as devadasis. Girls from socio-economically marginalised communities continued to be victims of the custom, and thereafter were forced into the commercial sex racket.
- The devadasi system continues to receive customary sanction from families and communities.
- Reporting of cases pertaining to the custom under the Karnataka law is very low, with only four cases filed between 2011 and 2017. The law is used sparingly, and focuses on prosecution (including of the victims themselves) with no framework for rehabilitation.

Loopholes: Despite sufficient evidence of the prevalence of the practice and its link to sexual exploitation, recent legislations such as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012, and Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act of 2015 have not made any reference to it as a form of sexual exploitation of children. Dedicated children are also not explicitly recognised as children in need of care and protection under JJ Act, despite the involvement of family and relatives in their sexual exploitation.

India's extant immoral trafficking prevention law or the proposed Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill 2018, also do not recognise these dedicated girls as victims of trafficking for sexual purposes. The State's failure to enhance livelihood sources for weaker sections of society fuels the continuation of the practice.

Devadasi system: Devadasi system is a religious practice whereby parents marry a daughter to a deity or a temple. The marriage usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty. In recent decades, the practice has been used to push young girls into prostitution. While various state governments have enacted laws to stop such practices, the tradition remains entrenched in some parts of the country, especially some southern states.

INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY**Indian harvest festivals**

The Harvest season is on and festivities have gripped the nation from the north to down south.

Various festivals being celebrated across the Nations:

- Makar Sankranti: The festival of Makar Sankranti is being celebrated when the Sun enters the Makar zodiac and the days begin to lengthen compared to nights.
- Pongal: In South India and particularly in Tamil Nadu, it's the festival of Pongal which is being celebrated over 4 days at harvest time.
- Magha Bihu: In Assam and many parts of the North East, the festival of Magha Bihu is celebrated. It sees the first harvest of the season being offered to the gods along with prayers for peace and prosperity.
- Uttarayan: Gujarat celebrates it in the form of the convivial kite festival of Uttarayan.
- Maghi: In Punjab, Makar Sankranti is celebrated as Maghi. Bathing in a river in the early hours on Maghi is important.
- Saaji: In Shimla District of Himachal Pradesh, Makara Sankranti is known as Magha Saaji. Saaji is the Pahari word for Sankranti, start of the new month. Hence this day marks the start of the month of Magha.
- Kicheri: The festival is known as Kicheri in Uttar Pradesh and involves ritual bathing.

Outside India:

- Shakrain is an annual celebration of winter in Bangladesh, observed with the flying of kites.
- Maghe Sankranti is a Nepalese festival observed on the first of Magh in the Bikram Samwat Hindu Solar Nepali calendar (about 14 January).

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**New quota and basic structure**

President Ram Nath Kovind has given his assent to the bill providing 10% reservation in jobs and educational institutions to the economically weaker sections in the general category. The legislation will be known as the Constitution (103 Amendment) Act, 2019 and it shall come into force on such date as the Centre notifies (Possibly in June 2019). The 10% reservation will be in addition to the existing cap of 50% reservation for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Classes, taking the total reservation to 60%.

124th Constitutional Amendment- This amended two fundamental rights:

- Article 15, which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, caste, sex or place of birth.
- Article 16 which prohibits discrimination in employment in government office.
- It also makes a note of the Article 46, which asks the government to promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the society.

It provides reservation for:

- People who have an annual income of less than Rs.8 lakhs.
- People who own less than five acres of farm land.
- People who have a house lesser than 1,000 sq feet in a town (or 100 sq yard in a notified municipal area).

Debatable problems:

- The major hurdle for the implementation of the recent Act is the legal scrutiny.
- The Supreme Court has ruled multiple times against exceeding its 1992 formula of a maximum of 50% reservation (Indira Sawhney v. Union of India).
- However, there are states like Tamil Nadu that go beyond this limit and the Supreme Court has upheld the state's policy many a time. Presently, the state has a '69 per cent quota system'.

The basic structure:

- The idea of basic structure was originally suggested by Justice M Hidayatullah & Justice J R Mudholkar in Sajjan Singh (1965). It has been borrowed from Germany.
- In Kesavananda Bharati (1973), case the Supreme Court held that Parliament can amend the Constitution but does not have power to destroy it — no amendment can change its "basic structure". The court said that under Article 368, something must remain of the original Constitution that the new amendment would amend.
- However, the court did not define what basic structure is, and only listed a few principles — federalism, secularism, democracy — as being part of basic structure. Since then, the court has been adding new features to the concept of basic structure. In subsequent years, courts extended the doctrine even to ordinary legislation and executive actions.

Does it violate fundamental rights?

- From the Poona Pact (1932) between M K Gandhi and Dr B R Ambedkar to the Constituent Assembly debates, reservation was talked about in the context of social backwardness of classes.
- The 124th Amendment makes a departure by extending reservation to the economically disadvantaged. Article 15(4), inserted by the First Amendment in 1951, enables the state to make special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes.
- Article 16(4) permits reservation for any backward class if it is not adequately represented in services under the state.
- Thus, reservation is not a right but, if granted, it will not be considered a violation of the right to equality.

Article 46 and the upper caste:

- Article 46, which is a non-justiciable Directive Principle, says that the state shall promote educational and economic interests of "weaker sections", in particular SCs and STs, and protect them from "social injustices" and "all forms of exploitation".
- While the 124th Amendment mentions Article 46 in its statement and objects, it seems the government overlooked the fact that upper castes neither face social injustice nor are subjected to any form of exploitation.
- Moreover, the Constitution makes provisions for commissions to look into matters relating to implementation of constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Castes (Article 338), Scheduled Tribes (338A) and Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (339), but has not created any commission for the economically backward classes.

Citizenship Bill and Chakma and Hajong communities

Locals in Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram are protesting against the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 because it would serve as a legal basis for legitimising the claims of Chakma and Hajong refugees as the indigenous people of State.

The issue: The Citizenship Bill seeks to grant citizenship to six minority communities — Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians — without valid documents from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan after six years of stay in India. Locals are concerned as this bill seeks to grant citizenship to Chakma and Hajong refugees.

Chakmas and Hajongs were originally residents of Chittagong Hill Tracts in the erstwhile East Pakistan. They left their homeland when it was submerged by the Kaptai dam project in the 1960s. The Chakmas, who are Buddhists, and the Hajongs, who are Hindus, also allegedly faced religious persecution and

entered India through the then Lushai Hills district of Assam (now Mizoram). The Centre moved the majority of them to the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which is now Arunachal Pradesh.

Their numbers have gone up from about 5,000 in 1964-69 to one lakh. At present, they don't have citizenship and land rights but are provided basic amenities by the state government.

Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2019

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2019 has received the assent of the President of India. The bill mainly seeks to do away with the no-detention policy in schools.

Significance: The legislation is significant as it brings accountability in the elementary education system. The proposal received the support of a majority of state governments.

RTE amendment Bill- Key features:

- The Bill seeks to amend the Right to Education (RTE) Act to abolish the "no-detention" policy in schools. Under the current provisions of the Act, no student can be detained up to class VIII.
- As per the amendment, it would be left to the states to decide whether to continue the no-detention policy.
- The bill provides for regular examination in classes V and VIII, and if a child fails, the amendment bill grants a provision to give her or him additional opportunity to take a re-examination within two months. Such children will be provided with two-month remedial teaching to perform better in the re-examinations. If the students still do not pass the exam, the state government may decide to detain them.

Right to Education (RTE) Act:

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (the Act) provides for free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years.

No detention policy :

According to this provision "no child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class". This translates into automatic promotions to the next class every year until Class VII. Instead of exams, schools are supposed to hold Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluations (CCE) for every child.

Need for removal of this clause:

- The provision had attracted criticism with several states and schools complaining that it compromised on academic rigour and learning levels and quality at schools.
- The TSR Subramanian committee for formulation of the National Policy on Education has also suggested that 'no detention' policy should be discontinued after Class V. It had recommended restoration of detention provision, remedial coaching and two extra chances to each student such to move to a higher class.
- A sub-committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education also studied the issue closely and recommended a provisional detention clause at Classes V and VIII. In 2013, a parliamentary panel had also asked the ministry to 'rethink' on its "policy of automatic promotion up to Class VIII".

GOVERNANCE- SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC

Womaniya on GeM

It is an initiative launched by the Government eMarketplace (GeM) to enable women entrepreneurs and self-help groups to sell different products at the platform.

Key features of the initiative:

- The initiative – Womaniya on GeM – seeks to develop women entrepreneurship on the margins of society to achieve gender-inclusive economic growth.
- The initiative would enable women entrepreneurs and women self-help groups to sell handicrafts and handloom, jute and coir products, home décor and office furnishings, directly to various government ministries, departments and institutions.

Significance and the need for such initiatives:

- Nearly 80% women-owned establishments in India are self-financed and more than 60 percent of 8 million units are owned and led by women entrepreneurs from socially-challenged sections.
- Since women tend to invest up to 90% of their earnings back in their families to provide better nutrition, health care and education to their children, their economic empowerment is essential for poverty alleviation which would be made possible through Womaniya initiative.
- Womaniya on GeM will address goals and objectives under United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

About GeM:

- It is an online marketplace to facilitate procurement of goods and services by various Ministries and agencies of the Government.

- The platform offers online, end to end solution for procurement of commonly used goods and services for all central government departments and state governments, public sector units and affiliated bodies.
- It aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement of goods and services and eliminate corruption.

Government e Marketplace is a 100% government owned company setup under the aegis of Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry for procurement of common use goods and services by Government ministries, departments and CPSEs. authentication to get the benefits of the scheme.

Saksham 2019

Saksham (Sanrakshan Kshamta Mahotsav) is an annual flagship event of Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) under the aegis of Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India. Saksham actively involves the Oil & Gas PSUs along with other stakeholders like State Governments,

- To create focused attention on fuel conservation through people centric activities and
- To sensitize the masses about the conservation and efficient use of petroleum products leading to better health and environment.

About PCRA (established in 1978)–

- Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) is a registered society set up under the aegis of Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India.
- As a non-profit organization, PCRA is a national government agency engaged in promoting energy efficiency in various sectors of economy.
- PCRA aims at making oil conservation a national movement. As part of its mandate, PCRA is entrusted with the task of creating awareness amongst the masses about the importance, methods and benefits of conserving petroleum products & emission reduction.
- It sponsors R&D activities for the development of fuel-efficient equipment / devices and organizes multi-media campaigns for creating mass awareness for the conservation of petroleum products.
- To take the message to the people, PCRA uses all possible and effective media for mass communication.
- To give impetus to the oil conservation movement, PCRA utilizes various platforms like the World environment day, World energy day, various festivals etc.
- It functions as a Think Tank to the Govt. of India for proposing policies and strategies on petroleum conservation and environment protection aimed at reducing excessive dependence on oil.
- For the benefit of various target groups of petroleum products, PCRA has developed literature containing simple ready to implement conservation tips and techniques.
- Special low cost green leaflets have also been developed to educate the masses on the ill effects of pollution caused due to incomplete combustion and its impact on health.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

PM Narendra Modi receives first ever Philip Kotler Presidential Award:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was awarded first ever Philip Kotler Presidential Award. He was selected for his outstanding leadership for the nation.

The Philip Kotler Presidential Award recognises and celebrates achievements of organisations, marketing teams, and individuals in different industries around the world. Philip Kotler is a world renowned Professor of Marketing at Northwestern University, Kellogg School of Management.

INDIAN ECONOMY

Raisina Dialogue

The fourth edition of the Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship annual conference on geopolitics and geo-economics, titled 'World Reorder', was recently held in New Delhi.

“Fair Value for Innovation”:

- The United States Chamber of Commerce's Global Innovation Policy Center (GIPC) launched a new innovation initiative at the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi.
- The initiative, titled “Fair Value for Innovation”, would enable breakthrough innovation, and explore how policymakers can harness innovation capital in India and around the globe through research, advocacy, partnerships, and programs.

Raisina Dialogue:

- This is an annual geo-political event, organised by the Ministry of External Affairs and Observer Research Foundation (ORF).
- It is designed to explore prospects and opportunities for Asian integration as well as Asia's integration with the larger world. It is predicated on India's vital role in the Indian Ocean Region and how India along with its partners can build a stable regional and world order.

- **Participants:** The conference is a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral meeting involving policy and decision-makers, including but not limited to Foreign, Defence and Finance Ministers of different countries, high-level government officials and policy practitioners, leading personalities from business and industry, and members of the strategic community, media and academia.
- **Significance of the event:** The Raisina Dialogue was born in 2016, in the belief that the Asian century that the world was talking about was not about any exclusive geographical region. It was rather about the engagement of global actors with Asia and of Asia with the world. So this dialogue took birth as a platform, where the old and the new could work together, to discover their connections, their inter-dependence.

Capital Infusion in EXIM bank:

Cabinet approves Rs. 6,000 crore capital infusion in Exim Bank and an increase in the Exim Bank authorised capital from Rs. 10,000 crore to Rs. 20,000 crore.

EXIM bank: Export–Import Bank of India was established in 1982 under the Export-Import Bank of India Act 1981.

- It provides direct financial assistance to exporters of plant, machinery and related service in the form of medium-term credit.
- Underwriting the issue of shares, stocks, bonds, debentures of any company engaged in exports.
- It provides rediscount of export bills for a period not exceeding 90 days against short-term usance export bills discounted by commercial banks.
- The bank gives overseas buyers credit to foreign importers for import of Indian capital goods and related services.
- Developing and financing export oriented industries.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES**Crocodile Census by Odisha**

Recently Crocodile Census was done by the Govt. of Odisha.

Findings:

- The population of the saltwater or estuarine crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) has increased in the water bodies of Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park and its nearby areas in Kendrapara district.
- 1,742 individuals have been recorded in this year's annual reptile census.
- The increase in population was primarily due to the far-sighted measures of the government.

Crocodiles in India: There are three species of crocodilians—saltwater Mugger and Gharial.

Mugger:

- The mugger crocodile, also called the Indian crocodile, or marsh crocodile, is found throughout the Indian subcontinent.
- It is listed as vulnerable by IUCN.
- The mugger is mainly a freshwater species, and found in lakes, rivers and marshes.

Gharial:

- The Gharial or fish eating crocodile is native to the Indian subcontinent.
- It is listed as a Critically Endangered by IUCN.
- Small released populations are present and increasing in the rivers of the National Chambal Sanctuary, Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, Son River Sanctuary and the rainforest biome of Mahanadi in Satkosia Gorge Sanctuary, Orissa.

Saltwater Crocodile:

- It is the largest of all living reptiles. It listed as least concern by IUCN. It is found throughout the east coast of India.

Crocodile conservation programmes in India:

The Gharial and Saltwater crocodile conservation programme was first implemented in Odisha in early 1975 and subsequently the Mugger conservation programme was initiated, since Odisha is having distinction for existence of all the three species of Indian crocodilians. The funds and technical support for the project came from UNDP/ FAO through the Government of India.

- 'Baula' project at dangamal: 'baula' is the odia term for saltwater crocodile. Dangmal is in Bhitarkanika sanctuary.
- Mugger project at Ramatirtha: the Ramatirtha center, in Odisha, is meant for mugger crocodiles.
- Gharial project at Tikarpada, Odisha.
- Captive breeding of crocodiles at Nandankanan, Odisha.

Odisha celebrates 1st Turtle Festival in Puri

First Odisha Turtle Festival was held recently in Puri to create awareness and promote ideas on conservation of olive ridley turtles. This was organised by Cox & Kings Foundation in association with Humane Society International/India and Action for Protection of Wild Animals (APOWA).

Turtles in India:

- There are five species in Indian waters — Leatherback (Vulnerable), Loggerhead (Endangered), Hawksbill (Critically Endangered), Green (Endangered) and Olive Ridley.
- In India, sea turtles are protected under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972.
- The Olive ridley turtles are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world, inhabiting warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
- The Olive ridley is the most numerous among the sea turtles found in India and is well known for its arribadas, or annual mass nestings when thousands of turtles migrate to the breeding ground to nest simultaneously.
- Recognized as Vulnerable by the IUCN Red list.
- International trade in these turtles and their products is banned under CITES Appendix I.
- ‘Operation Kachhapa’: Conservation of the Olive Ridley Sea Turtle was launched by the Wildlife Protection Society of India in collaboration with the Orissa State Forest Department and the Wildlife Society of Orissa and other local NGOs.
- To reduce accidental killing in India, the Orissa government has made it mandatory for trawls to use Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs), a net specially designed with an exit cover which allows the turtles to escape while retaining the catch.

MISCELLANEOUS**IMBEX 2018-19:**

- It is India-Myanmar bilateral army exercise. IMBEX 2018-19, is being held in Haryana. It is the second edition of the IMBEX.
- Main Objective of IMBEX 2018-19 is to train the Myanmar delegation for participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations under the UN flag.

‘Roadeo’:

- The traffic police authorities of Pune are planning to introduce a robot named ‘Roadeo’ which would move around city roads, functioning as a quasi-traffic policeman and cautioning commuters about traffic rules and offences.
- It is a first of its kind initiative in the entire country. If this pilot project turns out to be successful it would go a long way in easing the traffic management burden and reducing the workload of overburdened policemen.

Sita Rama Lift Irrigation Project:

- The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has given its approval for the Sita Rama Lift Irrigation Project of Telangana.
- The Sita Rama Lift Irrigation Project aims to divert Godavari river water to irrigate 2.72 lakh hectares in three districts of Telangana.

First human rights TV channel Launched:

- The world’s first television channel dedicated to human rights has been launched in London by the International Observatory of Human Rights (IOHR).
- It would be a web-based channel and would deliver human rights issues to audiences in over 20 countries across Europe, Latin America and the Middle East.
- The Human Rights Channel aims to deliver hidden stories ignored by mainstream media into people’s living rooms.