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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Saurav Suman
Editor-in-Chief
[Bihar Education]
[Department]

Dear Readers, Authors & Colleagues,

It is with immense pride and deep sense of responsibility that I welcome you to the inaugural issue of Academic Score —is a premier, peer-reviewed print journal (Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026). This milestone marks not just the launch of a new academic publication, but the beginning of a scholarly community committed to excellence, integrity, and global knowledge sharing.

Academic Score was conceived with a singular vision: to provide researchers, academicians, and practitioners from diverse disciplines a rigorous, peer-reviewed platform where ideas are challenged, innovations are celebrated, and knowledge transcends boundaries.

In this first issue, we present a collection of carefully reviewed research articles spanning multiple domains. Each submission has undergone our double-blind peer review process, ensuring the highest standards of academic quality. I am grateful to our distinguished reviewers, editorial board members, and authors whose dedication has made this possible.

We invite researchers from all disciplines — sciences, humanities, social sciences, engineering, medicine, law, and beyond — to submit their original work. Academic Score is committed to a rapid, transparent, and fair review process, with a focus on constructive feedback for all contributors.

As we embark on this journey, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed to making Academic Score a reality — our founding editorial board, our technical team, and our supportive academic community. I look forward to growing this platform into a globally recognized journal that upholds the highest standards of scholarly publishing.

With warm regards and scholarly best wishes,

Saurav Suman

Editor-in-Chief, Academic Score

peer-reviewed print journal

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“Bureaucratic Inertia and Policy Implementation Gaps: Lessons from Flagship Welfare Schemes”

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Abstract

To this day, the gulf between the intent and impact of welfare policies remains huge in developing democracies. This paper studies bureaucratic inertia – the systemic resistance to welfare implementation, which slows, distorts or quietly buries it – and its trajectory across flagship schemes in India and comparable developing economies. The paper draws on institutional theory and the street-level bureaucracy literature, combined with empirical case studies of MGNREGS, PMAY, and PDS, to argue that implementation gaps are not accidents but structural outcomes of organizational cultures, incentive misalignment, and accountability deficits. In the paper's conclusion, we offer some policy-relevant recommendations for administrative reform – ones that take human behaviour, rather than just institutional design, seriously.

Keywords: Bureaucratic inertia, welfare schemes, policy implementation, street-level bureaucracy, administrative reform, India

1. Introduction

Opining on the deeply frustrating experience of reading the text of a well-designed welfare scheme and then visiting the village for which the scheme has been designed. The policy paper is clear in all its details including timelines, beneficiaries, funding disbursement methods grievance redress mechanisms. However, on the ground, one observes payment delays, the absence of job cards, dry ration shops, and beneficiaries living just outside the official coverage area of the scheme despite being listed. There is often a difference between what a policy promises and what it can deliver. This gap between the promise and performance of a policy is one of most important and least honestly discussed issues of public administration. The gap created by bureaucratic inertia this paper is concerned with. More specifically, it focus on causes and consequences of this gap. Bureaucratic inertia is a phenomenon which causes administrative systems to resist change, slow things down, and default to routine even when urgency and adaptation is required. Not always the result of corruption or malice. Often, negligence comes from organizational cultures that encourage a greater focus on process than outcome from incentive structures that punish risk-taking and reward compliance from information asymmetries that insulate upper-level administrators from consequences of inaction and from a deep institutional distrust of beneficiaries themselves.

This analysis will take into account a particularly rich and sobering case of India. India has one of the largest welfare architectures in the world. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, PMAY, PDS, Ayushman Bharat, and ICDS are all examples. These show both the ambition and the persistent limits of developmental welfare policy. Furthermore, there is the delivery machinery that is increasingly often unable to fulfil policy promise. These are not at all small programs. Over 150 million registered workers and more than annual expenditure of ₹70,000 crore is MGNREGS alone. Researchers continue to find evidence of delayed wage payments, the presence of ghost beneficiaries, exclusion errors, and unrealized funds. This paper consists of five sections. After this introduction, the following section reviews the theoretical literature on bureaucratic inertia. The chosen flagship schemes and administrative failures are reviewed in Section 3, along with an empirical analysis of them. Part 4 investigates what causes inertia in the Indian administrative system and organisation structure. Section 5 offers reforms and Section 6 draws conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework of Bureaucratic Inertia.

2.1 The Challenge of Implementation in Public Administration.

After the 1973 work by Pressman and Wildavsky, implementation began to be seen as a legitimate field of study. It showed that in spite of funding and political support, a program could fail because of administrative complexity. The central insight that implementation is a political process – not simply a technical one – remains fundamental. The “complexity of joint action” refers to how each agent, approval step, and jurisdictional boundary in a program’s delivery chain creates opportunities for delay, distortion, or failure (Pressman & Wildavski 1973, 87–124). Lipsky’s (1980) theory of street-level bureaucracy further elaborated. Lipsky contended that the genuine policy is not that codified by legislators but is what teachers, social workers, policemen, and ration shop dealers do to citizens during their day-to-day dealings. Street-level bureaucrats have lots of discretionary power which they exercise in ways influenced by their own workload pressures, organizational incentives, and personal biases. When the system is stretched too thin and accountability is lacking, such discretion tends to produce rationing, stereotyping and exclusion – precisely the patterns which we see in welfare delivery failures (Lipsky 1980: 13-25).

2.2 Institutional theory and organizational resistance

When looked at from an institutional perspective, it may be seen as path dependence. Organizations do what they have always done, because the cost of changing on established routines, norms, and role expectations is too high. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), institutional isomorphism offers a useful framework for understanding why public agencies often mimic some procedures of others even in cases when these procedures are known to be dysfunctional. It is because mimicking reduces uncertainty and satisfies external legitimacy demands even if it undercuts internal effectiveness. (pp. 147-160) According to Peters (2001), inertia is arguably the most underappreciated impediment to public sector reform. He distinguishes between two types of institutional inertia. Structural inertia is due to the formal rules, hierarchies, and procedures by which an organization is run. Cultural inertia is due to the informal norms, assumptions, and unwritten codes of behavior under which bureaucrats actually operate. Scott Peters (2001, pp. 78–93) notes that efforts at reform must address both forms of resistance but cultural inertia is far more difficult because it is invisible, diffuse and deeply internalized.

2.3 Central-Externality Issue and Accountability Gaps

Principal-agent theory represents a third theoretical lens. Senior bureaucrats and politicians (the principals) in welfare delivery systems assign field officials and frontline workers (the agents) to implement policies. The agents’ own interests, combined with the large knowledge asymmetries between them and their principals, along with weak monitoring, is the problem. When responsibility is spread throughout various institutions and which levels of government, no one feels accountable for the result, and everyone can plausibly blame someone else when things go awry. (Grindle, 1997, pp. 481-500) This shirking of responsibility is far from accidental. Multi-tier welfare programs are often structurally produced. In other words, central government design a scheme, states adapt it, districts implement it, while panchayat-level officials actually deliver it. At each point of transition from one level to another, interference, lag or dampening can happen.

3. Evidence from flagship schemes and their delivery gaps.

3.1 Persistent Disappointment Despite Hope.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is a leading rural employment scheme globally as it takes a lot. The legal architecture is quite impressive – a right to 100 days of wage employment, a demand-driven design, mandatory social audits, and a computerized payment system to cut corruption. Even after decades of its launch, its implementation failure is being documented systematically. Research conducted by Dutta et al (2012) shows that in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, an overwhelming majority of registered workers get to work for less than 30 days in a year, which is way below the entitlement of 100 days. In the workplace, workers often waited 60 to 90 days for wages that employers were required to pay within 15 days. The social audit mechanism, one of the scheme’s genuinely innovative features, worked well in Andhra Pradesh but was largely cosmetic in other states and became ineffective because of the very officials whose conduct was being audited (Dutta et al., 2012, pp. 32–47).

The administrative roots of these failures are enlightening. Block-level Program Officers were generally overworked, poorly trained and were not held to meaningful performance accountability for approving work orders and making payments. They aimed to preventing mistakes by the administration in chits and not assuring that worker’s entitlement actually get paid. In other words, the scheme was designed around the right of the worker but was administered around the convenience of the bureaucrat.

3.2 Agent’s Federal Award Approval : Issues of Waste, Exclusion and Ghost Beneficiaries

India's first and biggest infrastructure for food security is the Public Distribution System. The National Food Security Act of 2013, Aadhaar linked biometric authentication, and the digitization of ration cards have certainly resulted in substantial reforms. However, the food subsidy system still suffers from inclusion errors and exclusion errors. According to Khera (2011), in some states, 40 to 57 per cent of the subsidized grain meant for the Below Poverty Line households is getting diverted at the supply chain before it is reaching the beneficiaries. At the same time, the stringent requirements of Aadhaar authentication were resulting in exclusion errors among the elderly, migrant workers and individuals with weak biometric data. This was a problem that the administrative system had a structural slowness to acknowledge or correct (Khera, 2011, pp. 17-29). The introduction of technology widely celebrated as a fix on bureaucracy brought about new kinds of inertia. Previously, field officials exercised informal flexibility. Now they hid behind the rigidity of the system. The computer says no became the de facto response to genuine cases of exclusion. Even the existence of manual override mechanisms did not help. It's a pattern that can be noted: digitization does not necessarily reduce bureaucracy, it merely transfers it to another register.

3.3 PMAY aaloky : Housing for Everyone and the Last Mile Gap

The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana has aimed at providing housing to all homeless and incompletely housed families by 2022. However, the record of the scheme has revealed some mixed results. While the central fund releases have taken place quite timely, state-level absorption has not been the same. Moreover, there have been delays in implementation at the district level as well. This delay can be attributed to identification of beneficiaries, incomplete construction, as well as diversion of funds. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG, 2017) study found that in most states sanctioned funds for house construction lay unspent for long periods of time while genuine beneficiaries waited. According to local administrative officials, various documents such as land ownership proofs, caste certificates, and bank account linkages were bottlenecks. However, underneath this excuse related to documentation was a deeper issue – no official was being personally held accountable for the pace of delivery, and since the political dividend from the announcement of the scheme had already been taken, implementation happened at bureaucratic pace (CAG, 2017, pp. 22–56).

3.4 Ayushman Bharat seeks to tackle the healthcare access gap

Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana is the world's largest and most ambitious government-funded health insurance scheme covering around 500 million people. Even with impressive numbers of enrollees, there is a large gap in effective access, studies find. According to Berman and Ahuja (2008), health services delivery in India has a history of absenteeism among public health workers, supply chain failure with respect to drug availability, and informal payments that are not eliminated by officially cashless schemes. The process of empanelment of private hospitals under Ayushman Bharat, meant to enhance accessibility, has created new administrative complexities. Hospitals located in far-off districts found the claims processing system slow and opaque and some unofficially dissuaded Ayushman Bharat patients. Receiving units are often not conscious of their entitlements and have no liaison with the system, so they end up paying out of pocket or go without care. The designers designed the policy. The reforms were not carried out by the bureaucracy.

4. Inertia's Structural and Cultural Foundations.

4.1 Incentive Misalignment Problem : Reinforcing conformity and punishing initiative.

According to comparative public administration literature, government bureaucracies tend to reward risk-averse behaviour and punish initiative, and this finding is very consistent. The performance evaluation systems have largely focused more on following procedures and avoiding audit objections rather than achieving outcomes in IAS and other allied services in India. A district collector that ensures that no fund gets released without due paperwork is administratively safe. The one who bends the rules for speeding up delivery to a genuine beneficiary, however, risks CAG audit objection (Mathur, 2013, pp. 45–67). At the level of the individual, this incentive structure is rational. When combined with many officials, that yields a system that protects itself from risk by protecting itself from action. The outcome may be characterised as defence operation that implies administration of processes and not restriction of outcomes.

4.2 Feedback vacuum and information asymmetry

In general, senior officials and the policymakers in Delhi and state capitals get to know about the failures in implementation through official reports designed by the very system that is to be evaluated. Information from beneficiaries, frontline workers and civil society organizations rarely reaches decision-makers in forms that elicit institutional response. The intention to ignore is not always there, but a lot of times the result of reporting systems that aggregate upwards in ways that systematically exclude bad news. The lack of real-time, independent feedback systems creates a situation where implementation failures can go unnoticed for years at the policy level. Usually by that time they have been institutionalized – that is, built into the day-to-day working of how the scheme is actually administered, regardless of how it was designed.

4.3 The culture of non-accountability

The cultural dimension exists outside the structure of formal incentives. For decades, practices in the Indian administrative system have created such cultures which would lead to upward accountability. That is, to superiors and audit systems and not to citizens. Beneficiaries are not seen as rights-holders with legitimate claims on the performance of the administration. Due to the social structures of caste and class, frontline officials genuinely find it difficult to internalize a service ethic that is oriented towards the poorest citizen they are meant to serve (Banik, 2001, pp. 73–99). I do not mean to compare people. Many frontline workers are personally committed but overworked and underpaid. The issue lies in the organization culture that has never been taken seriously and redesigned to make it accountable to the citizens instead of the superiors.

5. Taking Action to Overcome the Stalemate

5.1 result-oriented accountability

The most basic reform needed is to move from input and process monitoring to accountability for outcomes. It implies setting clear, publicly measurable targets for welfare delivery. These targets should be based on actual receipt of entitlements and not just fund release or beneficiary enrolment. Furthermore, it necessitates linking evaluation of administrative performance to these outcomes. The performance management reforms implemented in the health and nutrition sectors in Tamil Nadu Achieved Results through the application of Performance management systems (Santhya and Jejeebhoy 2003, pp. 31–44)

5.2 Independent review and social Audit.

The social audit model under MGNREGS, where community members check programme records against actual on ground delivery, is one of the most promising accountability innovations of Indian public administration. The difficulty is that social audits have worked best where state governments have actually backed them, and least effective where they have been captured or side-lined by the very administrative machine they are meant to examine. Setting up independent audit institutions with sealed budgets, which report directly to committees of the legislature, would improve this mechanism significantly (Afridi & Iversen, 2014, pp. 523–545).

5.3 Grievance Redressal Prescribes Right to Complain

Efficient grievance redress systems are much more than just resolving complaints. If designed right, these are feedbacks that can unearth systemic implementation failures that become entrenched. Many states in India have adopted the Right to Public Services Acts and this is a step taken in this direction. Enforcement is not solid; moreover, the poorest beneficiaries are not aware. The cost of complaining by those with the weakest administrative voice can be greatly reduced with a serious investment in accessible, time-bound grievance mechanisms digital, telephonic, community-based (Paul, 2002, pp. 15–38).

5.4 Support and Empowerment of Frontline Workers

Street-level bureaucrats should be treated as policymakers, not as the lowest level of a hierarchical delivery chain. To properly staff and empower frontline workers will mean adequate training, realistic workload norms, genuine discretion to resolve beneficiary problems, protection from harassment when they act in beneficiaries' interests, and recognition when they perform well. BRAC in Bangladesh, nutrition in Tamil Nadu, and health in Kerala has got very far without a high degree of formalization. These successful operations have been able to invest heavily in the capacities and morale of their frontline workers (Pritchett et al., 2013, pp. 1–30).

6. Conclusion

The cause of bureaucratic inertia is known. It has clear causes, known effects, and valid solutions. Most fundamentally, what it lacks is political will and administrative courage to face it honestly. It is simpler to come up with a new plan than to rebuild the delivery system to effect it. It is said to be easier to announce a program than to hold someone accountable. The political vision behind flagship welfare schemes discussed in this paper is not a failure. In a lot of cases they do represent real policy ambition and real money. The causes for their failures are of an administrative nature: they possess organizational cultures that reward process more than outcome, have incentive structures that insulate officials from being answerable to citizens, and have information systems that shield decision-makers from lived impacts of implementation failure.

It is challenging to fix this. It is not just a matter of administrative reform, but a cultural re-negotiation around what public service means, which is the movement away from the management of paper to the management of welfare. This entails that beneficiaries not be seen as passive recipients of state largesse but as rights-holders with legitimate enforceable claims on the administrative system. In a nutshell, it necessitates humanizing the bureaucracy. Not by making it softer but by making it real accountable to the people it exists to serve. There is nothing fated about the gap separating a

policy document and a village that never heard of it. It is a choice that can be unmade structurally, culturally and politically it is so.

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Digital Literacy as a Tool for Civic Engagement: Evidence from Semi-Urban India

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ABSTRACT

In today's democratic societies, digital literacy has become one of the most important factors of civic engagement. In India, semi-urban areas exist in-between the net-saturated metros with the digitally-barren rural hinterland. The relationship between digital competence and civic engagement in such contexts are layered and analytically rich. This paper examines how varying degrees of digital literacy influence the ability and willingness of semi-urban population to engage with a variety of civic processes – participation in local governance, access to government schemes, online grievance redressal and political awareness and community mobilisation. Based on secondary data, survey-based evidence, and analytical frameworks from political sociology and public administration, the paper argues that digital literacy is not merely a technical skill but a form of civic capital which reinforces or disrupts existing patterns of social exclusion. According to research conducted by a economist, Siddharth Singh, the digital access to technology has increased in semi-urban India since 2016. However, the digital access has not always lead to usage to get meaningful political outcomes. Policy recommendations stress the need to link civic education to digital literacy programmes and close the ongoing digital divide that shapes citizenship.

Keywords: Digital Literacy, Civic Engagement, Semi-Urban India, E-Governance, Digital Divide, Citizen Participation.

1. Introduction

Political theorists are well acquainted with the connection between access to information and democratic participation. Through what are they now achieving this?, he means the medium through which. As a result of the Technologies like Smartphones, Social Media Platforms, Government Portals, and Mobile Apps have changed the way citizens interact with the state and each other over 10 years. This can be seen in the case of India, where the sheer scale, speed and uneven geography of digital adoption has been quite dramatic. Semi-urban India - which typically refers to those towns and census towns with a population of between 10,000 and 1,00,000, often categorized as Class I to Class III towns - finds itself at an interesting intersection. These settlements are connected to the digital infrastructure of a metropolis, but not completely. They are not as disconnected as the remote villages in the countryside. The digital governance initiatives target populations who own smartphones and have access to mobile-internet. Yet, they don't have the literacy in the deep, functional sense that can help them convert their access to ICT into meaningful civic action.

The differentiation of access versus access literacy is central to the argument of this paper. Merely possessing smartphones does not make citizens digitally literate on the one hand, just as being literate does not make one an engaged citizen. In the recent literature, digital literacy is not only the use of digital technology, but also the ability to evaluate information in the world of the internet; the use of e-governance; exercising online rights; using technology as a medium for civic expression and political participation (Mossberger, Tolbert & McNeal, 2008, pp. 1-18). In India's semi-urban areas there remains still an uneven spread of this fuller conception of digital literacy. Section 2 summarizes the theoretical literature connecting digital literacy to civic engagement. The semi-urban digital ecosystem in India is examined in Section 3. Section 4 Analysis of digital citizenship on civic engagement in diverse dimensions. Section 5 discusses the structural

obstacles that mediate this relationship. The recommendations of the policy are discussed in section 6 and the conclusion in 7.

2. Theoretical Framework: Digital Literacy as Civic Capital

According to Putnam (2000, pp. 31–47), civic engagement is fundamentally social capital, arising through various networks of trust, reciprocity, and collective action. This study contends that the authorities should not dictate assertions of public interest. Instead, it suggests that a judicially-developed doctrine of public interest should support all forms of political speech. This could eventually be implemented by the authorities. According to Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 2008, pp. 45–62, the first to empirically demonstrate the relationship between internet use and political participation in the United States were those who regularly used the internet to vote, contact their elected representatives and engage with political news. The American political system was the focus of their context, but the same logic—that digital competence increases the form and frequency of civic action—translates meaningfully to the Indian democratic setting, albeit with significant caveats.

The Indian Government has actively used digital infrastructure for governance. The Digital India campaign, which began in 2015, promotes digital connectivity as a means to empowered citizenship (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology 2019, pp. 4–11). The spread of platforms like MyGov, UMANG, DigiLocker and other state citizen portals extended the effective reach of the state to digitally plugged citizenry. Keniston and Kumar (2004, pp. 17–34) note this very early on; that such top-down models for digital governance presume a level of digital readiness that does not uniformly exist across citizens. This, they suggest, ends up producing a two-tier citizenship, citizens who can access the digital state and those who cannot. This two-tier citizenship is analytically important because it closely resembles structures of social inequality that already exist. The four dimensions of Indian social stratification—gender, caste, class, and geography—influence digital access and digital literacy in different ways (Nair, 2018, pp. 89–104). A Dalit woman living in a semi-urban town in Bihar faces a qualitatively different digital landscape than that of an upper-caste male student in that town, even if both have access to a smartphone. Although the former has the material means, her ability to translate that access into civic participation is constrained not just by skills deficit but by deep-rooted social norms that limit her mobility, agency, and public presence—be it online or offline. According to Norris (2001, pp. 68–85), the essential driving force behind the introduction of the concept of the ‘democratic divide’ is to distinguish between those who use the internet for more than just entertainment and commerce. This democratic divide is not merely a manifestation of the digital divide (access), but a second-order issue of motivation, confidence, and structural enablement. In semi-urban parts of India, there is a visible second order divide—many residents use digital platforms extensively for entertainment (YouTube) and communication (WhatsApp) but seldom use the platforms for any civic reason, be it filing complaints, getting access to welfare entitlements, or engaging with local governance.

According to Van Dijk (2020, pp. 12–29), there are four aspects of access that need to be distinguished to understand inequalities: Motivational access Physical access Skills access Usage access. This report shows that in the Indian semi-urban context, while physical access (ownership of devices and connectivity) is more equal than before, that is, more and more users have access to devices and connectivity, since the Jio-led data revolution of 2016, motivational and skills access is highly unequal. An urban person who does not use e-governance platforms, perhaps because they do not know how to, or believes that digital participation will not yield results, does not escape the digital deprivation if he has a smartphone.

3. The Digital Ecosystem of India’s Semi-Urban Areas

To comprehend the connection between digital literacy and civic engagement in semi-urban India, it is imperative to first identify the current digital penetration and literacy status in the areas concerned. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI, 2022, pp. 7–19) states that the density of internet subscribers in semi-urban areas reached about 52 per 100 persons by 2022, compared to less than 15 per 100 in 2015. The expansion was fuelled mainly by the huge fall in mobile data prices, following the entry of Reliance Jio in 2016, which made data affordable for even low-income households. The NSSO 75th Round Survey published in 2017–18 on Household Social Consumption on Education found that smartphone ownership in smaller towns and census towns was growing. This was especially true since Class II and Class III towns are more than 60 percent with at least one smartphone as per 2018. However, ownership and connectivity statistics grow in a pie of the digital tools. According to IAMAI, digital usage in semi urban and peri urban areas was very skewed towards entertainment (video streaming and social media) and personal communication. Along with these, the civic and transaction uses (government services, banking, grievance portal) accounted for a small fraction of the total usage itself (IAMAI, 2021, pp. 22–38).

Such evidence suggests that while there may be access to technology, it does not translate to citizenship. Launched initiatives the National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) and its successor the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA), which were aimed at bridging this digital gap through training functional digital skills to the citizens of rural and semi-urban areas. As per PMGDISHA (2022, pp 3-9), till 2022 approximately 4 crore people have been trained, most of which are from semi-urban and rural area. Nonetheless, independent evaluations of the two secretariats' training programmes raised questions about quality and durability. primarily aimed at teaching basic operations of devices switching on a phone, using Whatsapp, doing digital payments etc rather than navigating through governance portals, understanding digital rights or using technology for civic expression. The disparity between training coverage and meaningful digital citizenship remained high.

There are significant differences at the state level in semi-urban digital literacy. According to the report, some of the states have relatively higher functional digital literacy in the semi-urban population. For instance, Kerala, Himachal and Maharashtra have such an increased digital literacy. This increased functional digital literacy reflects the increased education in the state. Furthermore, there is also stronger delivery of public services to semi-urban areas in these states. States such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Odisha have quite low levels of functional digital literacy despite having reasonable levels of smartphone ownership (National Statistical Office, 2021, pp. 44-58). State-level differences matter a lot since digital civic engagement is highly dependent on state-level digital governance infrastructure, which encompasses the usability of state portals, availability of local-language interface, and responsiveness of online grievance redressal system.

4. Understanding digital content in Civic Engagement.

4.1 Accessing Government Schemes And Entitlements.

In semi-urban India, access to government welfare schemes offered and managed through digital means is one of the most immediate ways in which digital literacy matters. Numerous schemes run by the central and state governments now require or are significantly facilitated by digital access and basic digital skills. For instance, tracking payments under MGNREGS, knowing the beneficiary status under PM-KISAN, generating an Ayushman Bharat card etc. (One Nation One Ration Card) portability of ration card. The residents of semi-urban areas with functional digital literacy are genuinely able to realise performance efficiencies via these platforms: checking if their payments are in the system without going to a government office or downloading documents without having to pay middlemen or lodge a complaint online. However, for the unskilled, the digital governance has paradoxically increased dependence on intermediaries – cyber café operators, Common Service Centre (CSC) agents, local touts – who charge for what are in fact free services (Bhatnagar, 2014, pp. 73–89). The issue of being a bit connected but not sufficiently connected digitally is especially prevalent in semi-urban settings. Such settings do not have formal institutional support and fail to have employees with sufficient training at well-staffed digital financial institutions (like CSCs).

The paradox of civil engagement is created by digital governance, which increases formal opportunities for civic engagement. But it also creates new barriers for people who cannot navigate digital systems independently. This citizen can formally file his grievance through the CPGRAMS portal. Additionally, the citizen who is compelled to seek out a paid intermediary to file their grievance experiences a much different kind of civic agency.

4.2 Online grievance redressal and local governance.

Governance at the municipal and panchayat levels has increasingly shifted to digital platforms for service delivery and complaint registration. In a number of states, urban local bodies in semi-urban towns – Nagar Panchayats and Nagar Parishads – have launched mobile applications and web portals for citizens. Through this, they can report civic problems like broken roads, water supply failures, illegal construction. Studies in states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh reveal that where digital literacy is higher, citizen use of these platforms is more frequent and the quality of civic feedback to local governments improves (Chaudhuri & Roy, 2020, pp. 112–128). People who can document problems with photos, upload them to the civic complaint portal and follow-up on their status exercise a more informed form of civic voice than those who complain in person or informally. In this context, digital literacy acts as a force multiplier for civic agency. But the same studies say that in small semi-urban towns, awareness of these platforms is often very low. According to a survey of the 12 Class III cities of Madhya Pradesh, less than 18 per cent of respondents were aware of the civic complaint portal of Madhya Pradesh. The usage was less than eight per cent (Chaudhuri & Roy, 2020, 119). A function of digital literacy, awareness itself. People who check out digital content often, and go through local news online, are quite likely to know about such platforms. Far more likely than someone whose digital engagement is limited to WhatsApp messaging.

4.3 Participation Politiques et Consommation d'Information

The consumption of political information and participation maybe the most politically significant dimension of the relationship between digital literacy and civic engagement energy. Semi-urban India accesses political news on social media platforms, finds BBC's research on WhatsApp users. According to the BBC study, more than two-thirds of rap users go to Facebook. Further, the BBC study found that semi-urban India uses YouTube to connect with rap users and updates on election news. During the 2019 and 2024 general elections, the level of political communication conducted through these platforms increased tremendously. Political parties pumped a lot of money into forming WhatsApp groups and uploading YouTube content aimed at semi-urban voters.

Digital literacies influence the quality of political participation that follows from this digital political exposure. A citizen with higher digital literacy will be in a better position to cross-check information, counter misinformation and accept divergent political opinions. People with lower digital literacy are more easily manipulated through viral content, vulnerable to misinformation and political harm, a matter that has already seen evidence in the Indian case (Varadarajan, 2019, pp. 56–78).

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused immense suffering to many families. A recent study in India found that over half of those surveyed lost a job or source of income. 15% of households faced food shortages in April, according to a new report from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The lack of digital literacy in these spaces has direct consequences not just on individual engagement but on the quality of the democratic debate that occurs at the local level. The emergence of digital platforms has witnessed new forms of civic mobilisation emerging in semi-urban India. In several well-documented instances, pressure on municipal authorities on such issues as water supply, road construction and school infrastructure has worked through WhatsApp groups and citizen groups organised via Facebook (Singh, 2020, pp. 88-103). Digital civic mobilisations indicate that where there is a combination of digital literacy, social cohesion, and civic motivation, meaningful democratic action is possible even for resource-poor communities.

4.4 Female Participation in Civic Space (Digital Platforms)

In semi-urban India, gender is likely the most important axis of inequality in the digital literacy-civic engagement relationship. The women in semi-urban areas suffer from double disadvantage due to their lower formal education, limited access to devices (most commonly smartphones controlled by males in their families), internet use restrictions from social norms, and limited exposure to digital training programmes. In semi-urban India, the gender digital divide is significant. research conducted by IAMAI on the internet users in small towns, around two-thirds of users are male and up-to-one-third user are female. In fact, the gap was much more extreme when it came to civic or active use of the internet. Women with functional digital skills are showing great levels of digital civic engagement. For example, they do so through Mahila Mandal WhatsApp groups who liaise with gram panchayat functionaries; but also by accessing information regarding Jan Dhan accounts; or filing complaints of domestic violence and sexual harassment on state helpline portals. Initiatives like the Self-Help Group (SHG) digital literacy efforts under NRLM (National Rural Livelihoods Mission) show that when training on digital literacy is designed for women and integrated within trusted community structures, there is an expansion of women's civic engagement (Kannan & Pillai, 2022, pp. 67-81). The research shows that digital literacy for women works better as part of a social empowerment process, rather than be used as a technical intervention alone. This suggests that the link between digital literacy and civic engagement are always embedded in, and shaped by, broader social relations.

5. Social Barriers: Caste, Class and Connectivity

Based on the above discussion we do not bounce into a techno-deterministic mode – more access to digital will mean more participation in civic engagement. The association between digital literacy and civic engagement in semi-urban India is mediated by structural factors that mirror as well as reproduce inequalities. The impact of caste divisions on the digital access and literacy of semi-urban India is often not taken into account in technology policy. Studies of Common Service Centres in North Indian semi-urban areas have found that CSC operators tend to be disproportionately from dominant caste communities and that Dalit and OBC clients face differential service quality including being charged higher prices and lower assistance with complicated transactions (Mohanty 2019: 145-162). Public points of access to digital technology like cyber cafes, CSCs have the potential to connect users but they are not neutral spaces.

The relationship between economic class and digital literacy is obvious in many ways. It's easier for higher income households to afford better devices, faster connectivity, and private digital education. Having the confidence to deal with state institutions – even if it is remotely – is itself a class privilege. People from lower socio-economic backgrounds are often reported to feel overwhelmed with government portals and also feel scared to make mistakes that could cost them their welfare entitlements (Gurumurthy & Bharthur, 2018, 34-50).

Conventional digital literacy training programmes rarely address this psychological barrier to digital civic engagement, which is a aspect of class inequality. Connectivity infrastructure remains highly uneven in semi-urban India. Despite improvements in the mobile broadband coverage, the erratic quality of networks in many Class III towns and census towns remains concerning. Frequent outages, slow speeds and network coverage being spotty in peripheral neighbourhoods is limiting consumer choice. For citizens living in such areas, unreliable connectivity brings about civic frustration. When their repeated and failed efforts to access government sites or complete online transactions lessen the incentive for online civic engagement, more than the preferred extent is the reason behind it (Prasad, 2017, pp. 201–218). Investment in infrastructure should thus be considered as a pre-requisite for, and not just a complement to, digital literacy programmes.

6. Guidelines Suggested.

This paper suggests that the study's analytical framework and evidence lead to the following policy directions. It is imperative that digital literacy training in semi-urban India begins to include not just functional skills like switching on smartphones and making UPI payments, but essential civic digital literacy. This means teaching the public about e-governance, their digital rights, how to identify misinformation, and how to use digital tools to voice their concern. The curriculum development of PMGDISHA and similar programmes should center on civic education. Additionally, it is necessary to radically simplify and localise the design of e-governance platforms. Most of the current government sites are designed for users with high digital literacy and ease of use in English. Incorporating local language interfaces, simpler navigation, and voice-based interaction options would greatly enhance the civic utility of these platforms for semi-urban populations.

The issue of digital intermediaries has arisen when citizens pay CSC agents to access free services from the government. Like the previous two problems, this requires systematic solution-finding through transparency, price regulation and expansion of real self-service options. The accountability mechanisms for CSC operators must be strengthened along with integrating citizen feedback into the performance evaluation of CSC operators. The need of the hour is to ensure that women's digital literacy is taken as a policy priority requiring stand-alone funding along with gender sensitive training designs and delivery mechanisms embedded in the community. SHG networks have existing social contracts with semi urban women making them the most credible institutional channel for this purpose.

Fifth, schools and colleges in semi-urban areas should include a specialized subject for civic education which includes digital citizenship that covers civic rights online, e-governance participation, and responsible digital expression. Including digital civic literacy in school will build an enduring capacity for civic engagement much more than a programme of government.

7. Conclusion

The argument herein supports the claims that digital literacy is far more than a technical competency in semi-urban India. Further, digital literacy is a civic capital that informs whether and how citizens use democratic institutions, tap government services, and engage in political processes. The evidence we have reviewed points to a relationship that is real and significant but also thoroughly conditional: digital literacy enables civic engagement when it is meaningful, contextualised and accompanied by enabling social conditions; it fails to enable civic engagement when it remains superficial, when structural barriers of gender, caste and class intervene and when the e-governance infrastructure itself is poorly designed. Semi-urban India is at an important crossroad. The sharp increase in belonging of internet users and growth of digital infrastructure is an enabling factor. But Internet access does not necessarily lead to engagement, and thus, policy is needed. Unless digital literacy is grasped and treated as a civic issue instead of a technology issue, the democratic promise of digital technology; that more citizens can participate more actively in governance will remain unfulfilled.

India's digital democracy will not be determined in its big city centre, where levels of digital literacy are already to some extent high, but in its sub-urban towns and small cities, where the gap between access and meaningful participation is high and consequential. Closing this gap is not a secondary policy issue; it is central to the quality and inclusiveness of Indian democracy.

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Coalition Politics and Policy Paralysis: A Study of Indian Federal Governance

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ABSTRACT

For more than three decades, Indian federal governance has been characterized by coalition politics. India has been under multi-party coalitions that bring together ideologically diverse parties since 1989 when National level single party dominance collapsed. In almost all instances, such parties have been chosen for electoral arithmetic and not because of programmatic consensus. The present paper argues that while coalition politics are often blamed for governance deficits in India, the reality is not so straightforward. It examines the intersection of coalition governance and policy paralysis in India.

The presence of several actors in coalition governments do not cause policy paralysis; rather, it is the institutional design of Indian federalism, the incentive mechanisms of coalition partners, weak coalition management systems, and lack of legally binding policy coordination that does. This paper utilizes a comparative politics and a public policy framework to analyze major coalition governments at the Centre from 1989 till date. The use of these frameworks suggests that coalition politics causes selective paralysis blocking some classes of reforms while enabling others. Thus, the challenge for Indian democracy will not be to get rid of coalitions but to build up institutional architecture which can make coalition governance more programmatically coherent and administratively effective.

Keywords: Coalition Politics, Policy Paralysis, Indian Federalism, Governance Deficit, Common Minimum Programme, Multi-Party Democracy

1. Introduction

While the V.P. It was in December 1989 that the Singh government assumed office, supported by the Bharatiya Janata Party from outside, and the Left parties from another flank. Who among the observers would have then imagined that this politically awkward, ideologically incoherent arrangement would become the new normal? Nonetheless, that was exactly what it turned out to be. For the next twenty-five years and more, India was ruled by coalition arrangements of varying intensity of stability, ideological coherence and administrative effectiveness. The BJP-led NDA government, which received a single-party majority and was therefore considered by many commentators to be the end of the coalition era, returned to power in 2019 with a majority yet also retained the formal architecture of a coalition. The NDA government by 2024 found itself backed once again by coalition partners to have a majority in parliament. In other words, coalition politics is not an aberration in Indian democracy; it is its structural condition. The Indian party system has been shaped by the fragmentation of the Indian political space. Since the late 1980s, there has been an increasing mobilisation of regional, caste and community identities. Thus, no single national party can regularly command a legislative majority alone.

The splintering illustrates India society's deep social pluralism and the success of democratic politics in inclusion of previously marginalised sections in the political process. That sense is a democratic accomplishment. However, the same fragmentation that reflects democratic advancement also results in serious governance challenges. The literature on coalition governments points to a recurrent set of problems including: difficulty in sustaining a coherent economic policy; the power of veto on sensitive reform by any one partner; high transactions costs in policy coordination; ministerial autonomy fragmenting bureaucratic accountability; and the constant threat of collapse shortening political time horizons, thus discouraging investment in long-term policy (Lijphart 1999: 90-109). As far as India is concerned, these generic coalition governance challenges get compounded by specific features of Indian federalism – the constitutional division of powers between Centre and states, the political incentives of regional parties whose primary accountability is to state-level constituencies rather than national policy goals, and the weak intra-coalition coordination mechanisms. Thus, it is argued

in this paper that the outcome manifests as a particular identifiable pattern of policy paralysis which is neither ubiquitous nor casual, but structured by the specific political logic of coalition bargaining.

2. Coalition Politics and Governance: Theoretical Frameworks

The research literature on coalition governments paints a broadly consistent picture. Coalitions are formed when no party has legislative majority on its own and they require ongoing negotiation between partners with conflicting preferences. This negotiation can have varied governance consequences depending on several factors including ideological distance between coalition partners; institutional rules for coalition formation and dissolution; whether or not there is a binding coalition agreement; and distribution of ministerial portfolios among partners. Lijphart (1999, pp. 34-56) draws a distinction between majoritarian and consensus models of democracy. He argues that for each policy issue there is a wide range of political outcomes in a coalition-based consensus system. This wider range of outcomes is better for policy-making, according to Lijphart. While they are more complex and slower, such systems produce better long-term outcomes than winner-takes-all systems. That is because these systems reduce instability. It includes more interests and generates more legitimate outcomes. His comparative evidence indicated that the governance deficiencies resulting from coalitions are generally exaggerated, particularly in societies with deep social cleavages where majoritarian governance is exclusionary and politically destabilizing.

An advanced analysis of coalition behaviour has been provided by Strøm (1990, pp. 565–598). Specifically, Strøm showed that the willingness of parties to form coalitions and their behaviour in them is a result of the competing motivations of seeking an office, seeking votes, and seeking policy. The primary motive of many small coalition partners in Indian coalition politics has historically been 'office-seeking'. As a result, there have been ministerial allocations and bargains that reflect not the administrative competence of these parties and their leaders, but their electoral bargaining and arithmetic. In addition, there have been dynamics within the alliance which make it such that the coalition partners are more interested in protecting the ministerial fiefdom of their leaders than in ruling the country as a cohesive coalition. Democratic systems have veto players: Tsebelis (1995, pp. 289–325) analyses why policies durably persist or change. Veto players refer to actors without whose agreement a change in the status quo will not occur. The more veto players there are and the greater the ideological distance between them, the more difficult it becomes to change policy. Governments with more than one partner are coalition governments. Such governments provide multiple veto players to avoid passage of laws to which a significant partner objects. The veto player logic often results in policy gridlock on precisely those reforms that are most important. In India, governing coalitions have, at times, involved political parties that have fundamentally opposing positions on economic liberalisation, secularism, and social policy.

Incorporating these frameworks in the Indian case requires taking note of features that distinguish Indian coalition politics from the European case on which much of this theory developed. In India, coalitions tend to come up after elections instead of before. Policy platforms are negotiated after votes have been cast. This reduces the programmatic accountability of coalitions. The principle political base and accountability structure of fellow coalition partners, who are predominantly regional parties, lies within a single state. This creates a systemic mismatch between their electoral incentives and the national policy agenda. According to Sridharan (2004, pp. 477–505), the Indian constitutional architecture invests substantial formal powers in the Prime Minister, generating tension between concentration of executive power and dispersion of coalition power producing unstable hybrid governing dynamics.

3. A Look Into Coalition Governments in Centre

India's coalition era may be divided into three broad phases, each with a distinct character and distinct governance outcome. Between 1989 and 1999, there was a very unstable process. A general election took place every two years in a decade, and every government fell. V.P. Governments. Chandra Shekhar, H.D. Deve Gowda, and I.K. Singh The coalitions formed by Gujral were either minority or thin-majority. The governance in this period was a mixed record: the V.P. The Singh government's adoption of the Mandal Commission recommendations (albeit with important political consequences) was a significant policy choice made by a coalition government; but economic reform was virtually stalled between 1991 and 1996 as the Narasimha Rao government, although nominally a minority government and not a formal coalition, had to manage a complicated legislative arithmetic that constrained the pace and depth of reforms (Kohli, 2006, pp. 1251–1288).

The period between 1999 and 2014, projections on the stable coalition development. The NDA of Vajpayee (1999–2004) and UPA of Manmohan Singh (2004–2014), both completed full/near-full terms. Indian coalitions can achieve a degree of stability which is sufficient for governance. The Vajpayee government aggressively pursued infrastructure development in the form of the National Highway Development Programme (NHDP). It also launched the Golden Quadrilateral project. These policies show that a coalition can take important and long-term decisions. During 2004

and 2009, the government brought landmark legislation such as Right to Information Act, MGNREGS and Forest Rights Act, etc. Such a legislative record, therefore, runs counter to the blanket characterisation of coalition governments as policy-paralysed (Ruparelia 2015, 45-72).

The period from 2009 to 2014 is when the UPA incurred policy paralysis due to the Coalition. The issue of allocation of 2G spectrum, the quota for Coalgate coal block allocation scam, the policy drift on economic reforms amid global slowdown and lack of Prime Minister's Office (PMO) capabilities to overcome the opposition to key legislative-administrative decisions by coalition partners and different factions within Congress party have made for a powerful narrative of governance failure arising from coalition dysfunction. According to Mehta (2010, pp. 1–15), the UPA II was a manifestation of the fundamental failure of political authority in whose coalition no actor had either the incentive or the institutional capacity to impose coherence on the fragmented governance structure. The third phase – 2014 to the present – complicates the coalition paralysis narrative. The NDA's dominance as a single party between 2014-2024 made possible high-impact policy initiatives like Goods and Services Tax, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and JAM trinity which had been stalled during the coalition period. However, it took controversial decisions without wide consultation and legislative deliberation, such as demonetisation decided in 2016 and the initial design of the farm laws in 2020 which was repealed following a prolonged farmers' protest. As the comparison suggests, veto paralysis is what coalitions produce, unilateral without adequate deliberation is what single-party majority governments can produce (Frankel 2020: 331-358).

4. Causative Factors behind Policy Paralysis in Coalitions.

Now that the historical context has been established, the text analyses the mechanisms whereby coalition politics produces policy paralysis in the Indian federal system.

4.1 Allocation of Portfolios and Autonomy of Minister

The ministerial portfolios characteristically allocated to partners in Indian coalitions are the primary form of coalition glue – the currency through which political support is bought and retained. There are several governance implications of this portfolio allocation logic. Ministers from coalition parties frequently view their ministries as fiefdoms that should be managed for their party and state. Their ministries do not serve the objective of aligning with the government's broader policy agenda (Kapur & Mehta, 2006, pp. 49–78). The autonomy of public servants gives rise to a fractured executive in which separate ministries pursue contradictory policy directions. Many examples can be cited from the UPA I and II governments. The Commerce Ministry was pursuing trade liberalisation. The Agriculture Ministry was resisting agricultural trade reform. The Petroleum Ministry was negotiating international energy agreements. The Power Ministry was blocking domestic energy pricing reform. Fragmentation among bureaucratic elites isn't just an administrative inefficiency. It can also produce genuine policy paralysis when ministerial pushback blocks reforms requiring inter-ministerial action.

4.2 Coalition Partners Veto Politics

In addition to the autonomy of ministers, coalition partners also exercise formal and informal veto power that keeps some kinds of reform off the table. Reforms like changing labour laws, the privatisation of public sector companies, cutting down on agriculture subsidies etc., are especially vulnerable in a coalition because they have visible short-term costs for identifiable constituencies which no partner will allow. The most documented instance of this phenomenon is the Left parties' veto over economic policy in UPA I. As the CPI(M) and CPI are supporting UPA government from outside. They used their implicit threat of withdrawal of support to block privatisation. They constrain financial sector reform and delay the Indo-US nuclear deal for almost two years (Panagariya 2008, pp. 89–115). The nuclear deal affair gives us an analytical insight because it shows how a coalition partner with a particular ideological commitment in this case, opposition to strategic alignment with the US can hold the government's entire agenda hostage on issues that are far beyond the partner's core electoral interest.

Regional parties are known to brandish their coalition vetoes but in an entirely different form. They generally over issues with direct relevance to their states rather than the party's national ideological commitments. Regional coalition partners have used the demand for special category status, state-specific infrastructure projects and exemptions from national policies that may have a detrimental impact on state-level political constituencies to extract concessions from the Centre. Some of the demands by the states reflect genuine federal interest, for instance, the states demand resources and autonomy from the centre. Yet, the bargaining process through which they are demanded often creates policy distortions and fiscal concessions, which harm national policy coherence (Sinha, 2005, pp. 68–92).

4.3 The Common Minimum Programme of 4.3. Are Cooperation Mechanisms an Illusion?

The Common Minimum Programme has been the standard instrument for coalition policy coordination in India, particularly in UPA governments. The CMP is basically a negotiated document containing a set of common policy priorities which the coalition partners intend to adopt. It lays down the framework for the coalition to govern collectively. The actual implementation of CMP's governance coordination mechanism was not effective. CMP documents tended to be drafted at a high enough level of generality – with language carefully calibrated to disguise real policy differences rather than solve them. The phrases “pro-poor policies”, “balanced development”, “consultative governance” gave little scope for operationalisation for specific policy decisions and left the real negotiations open to case-by-case basis as decisions are made (Mahajan, 2011, pp. 156–173) The CMP was also devoid of enforcement mechanisms. The coalition partners carried out violations of letter or spirit of the CMP when they blocked bills, demanded reversals in policy or went their own way. There was no institutional mechanism to enforce compliance. In most of the cases the CMP's commitments would be left unenforceable in ordinary circumstances since the ultimate sanction – withdrawal of support and government collapse – was an instrument of mutual destruction that partners were loath to use except in extremis.

4.4 Federal Dynamics and Centre-State Policy Coordination.

The policy paralysis literature often fails to recognize that Indian federalism adds more complexity to coalition governance. Numerous significant reforms to national policies will require not only coalition agreement at the Centre but also – crucially – cooperation from state governments which are largely controlled by opposition parties or coalition partners at the Centre whose state-level priorities diverge from the national agenda. GST's implementation requiring constitutional amendment and all states agreement showcase centre-state policy coordination potential and limitation. The council which brought Union and state finance ministers together constituted a true institutional innovation in Indian fiscal federalism. However, embedded in its design was a veto structure (requiring a broad consensus among the states) that slowed and complicated implementation of the GST (Rao 2018, pp. 34-51). More generally, when the coalition partners of the Centre control the major states, their state-level political interests often conflict with Centre's policy agenda. A party that controls a major state while supporting the Central government can obstruct, delay and dilute Central policies that may threaten its state-level political interests through the use of state-level executive power. This creates a form of vertical policy incoherence which compounds the horizontal incoherence of coalition bargaining at the Centre.

5. Coalitions can block and enable selective paralysis

A critical analytical refinement to the policy paralysis narrative is the recognition that coalition-induced paralysis is selective, not general. Not all Indian coalition governments have been inactive. In some policy domains, they have been very active. And yet, in others, they have been paralysed and this is not random. Coalition governments often become especially impotent on reforms with concentrated costs and diffuse benefits. In these situations, the politically organised losers are physically present within the coalition, while the beneficiaries are not. The reform of labour laws, liberalisation of agricultural markets, privatisation of public sector units that are making losses and cutting subsidies to middle-class constituencies all fit this bill. Reform measures have been blocked, delayed or diluted by coalition vetoes in successive government. The organised interests opposed to them—trade unions, farmer lobbies, public sector employees—are often directly represented within coalition arrangements Bardhan (2010, pp. 57–74).

In contrast, coalition government managed to legislate in areas with a politically wide net benefit and less politically costly domain. The RTI Act, MGNREGS, the Forest Rights Act, the Right to Education Act, and the National Food Security Act were all passed by coalition governments. In fact, some people claim that coalition politics made possible these major social legislation measures through competition among the coalition partners (Ruparelia, 2015, pp. 78–95) to showcase pro-poor credentials. This selective pattern of paralysis is very important for evaluating coalition governance. The conventional criticism that coalitions are detrimental to economic reform is somewhat true empirically but is not complete analytically. Some kinds of social legislation can be enabled by coalitions when certain kinds of economic reform cannot. The desirability of this trade-off depends on prior commitments regarding the most urgent policy changes and for whose benefit an inherently political, rather than a technocratic, question.

6. Comparative Findings: Coalition Governance Elsewhere

By comparing the features of Indian coalition governance with other nations, we can identify which characteristics are generic to coalition governments and which are unique to India. Germany's grand coalitions are a useful contrast. Germany's coalition formations tend to be successful due to the parties having clearly defined pre-election policy platforms. Further, the coalitions are governed by detailed written coalition agreements that specify the exact commitments in operational detail. Most importantly, the coalitions enjoy a well-established institutional architecture of inter-ministerial coordination. Coalition agreements in Germany carry political weight, and public written documents can have economic

consequences when one party violates them. According to Saalfeld, this results in coalition governance that is more programmatically coherent and administratively coordinated than Indian model but one that is not without its tensions and compromises (2008: 89–114).

Italy's past coalition instability presents a cautionary parallel for India's first coalition phase. Between 1945 and 1994, Italian governments spent, on average, less than twelve months in office, a pattern that encouraged policy drift and administrative paralysis and helped produce chronic fiscal imbalances and governance failures. The Italian case suggests that the key variable is not coalition per se but coalition institutionalisation – the extent to which coalition governance is reinforced by stable rules, norms, and enforcement mechanisms (Pasquino, 2008, pp. 34–56).

Israel's system of proportional representation and a highly fragmented party system creates coalition dynamics that are similar, in some respects, to those of India. This includes the disproportionate power of the smaller but key parties that can hold governments to ransom based on narrow but intense preferences. The Israeli instance highlights the danger of forming coalitions after elections. In a highly fragmented system, small parties with extreme views on one issue obtain veto power very disproportionate to their share of the vote (Hazan & Rahat, 2010).

The governance quality of coalition governments largely depends not on whether they are coalitions, but on how coalition governance is institutionalised – the strength of coalition agreements, inter-party coordination, rules governing portfolio allocation, and accountability structures disciplining coalition behaviour. This is what the comparative cases show us.

7. Suggestions for improving coalition governance.

As per the analysis that the paper develops, there are a certain set of institutional reforms that can enhance Indian coalition governments' governance performance without undertaking the politically infeasible task of reversing the social and political fragmentation that makes coalition politics structurally necessary. India requires more robust and operationally specific coalition agreements. The lack of specificity in the Common Minimum Programmes of the UPA era needs to be remedied through detailed publicly available coalition agreements on the German model. Such documents must specify the policy commitments in sufficient operational detail to enable effective governance as well as expose parties to political costs in case of non-compliance. Agreements of this type won't eliminate coalition bargaining but will push it to the pre-governance stage, thereby reducing the scope for constant renegotiation that characterises Indian coalition management.

The Cabinet Secretariat should be given a clearer and stronger coordination role which will empower it to highlight and escalate conflict between two or more ministries/departments to the Prime Minister (Kapur & Mehta 2006, pp. 112–128). Electoral reforms should address the electoral incentives that make coalition partners unresponsive to national governance which are national performance. The holding of Lok Sabha and the state assembly elections together, a proposal which has gained traction in recent years, would reduce the constant electoral pressure that shortens the government time horizon of coalition partners and disrupts the national policy for the electoral advantage of some populist measures at the state level (2018: 14–28).

One important piece of advice for improving the governance of coalitions is parliamentary reform. Strengthening the deliberative function of the Lok Sabha could improve quality of coalition governance. In addition to this, creation of transparent forums for inter-party negotiation on policy is possible through the implementation of parliamentary reform. Revisions should offer coalition partners opportunities for meaningful input in committee systems on the formulation of bills before they reach the floor. This would reduce the incentive for floor-management disruption.

8. Summing Up

The coalition system of governance in India is not the disaster its critics claim nor the achievement its defenders suggest. The Indian democratic governance has a poorly understood practice. But this practice has a very complicated and identifiable structural formation. Further, this identifiable structural formation has many consequences. Moreover, this consequence is useful. Most importantly, the dependency on institutional context is extremely useful. Also, the specific configuration of parties together with interests identifies the structural formation. The policy paralysis of Indian coalition governments is real but selective, concentrated in areas where organized interests within coalitions oppose reform, and absent in areas where coalition dynamics create competitive pressures for social legislation. The significance of this selectivity is that it changes the policy question from how to prevent coalitions from forming to how to design the governance institutions of coalitions such that their veto dynamics can be harnessed more effectively, allowing coalitions to support a wider range of collective action.

Over the years, Coalisation Politics has emerged as an integral part of India's democracy. The mobilization of backward castes, minorities, regional identities, and tribal communities that gave birth to coalition politics also endowed India with a democracy of genuine breadth and popular legitimacy. The challenge is to build governance institutions worthy

of that democratic achievement. The diversity that coalition politics represents has to be translated into coherent public policy that is for the common good and does not serve the assembled interests of coalition partners. It is a political will and institutional design challenge but not a reason to wish coalition politics away.

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Social Media Algorithms and Political Opinion Formation Among Indian Youth

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ABSTRACT

A major change is stirring in the hostels, canteens, and bedrooms of India. The biggest youth cohort across the globe is Young Indians. These young Indians are not merely forming their opinion through newspapers, public meetings or family conversations. The most important opinion maker now is the Instagram, YouTube, Twitter/X and WhatsApp feeds that they see, which are algorithmically curated. This study takes a look at how social media algorithms shape the way political opinions are formed by Indian youth. The relationship is argued to not be simply empowering or simply manipulative, but structurally biased in ways that – favour emotional over rational engagement; reinforce existing beliefs over exposing users to contrary evidence; and privilege certain kinds of political communication – visual, provocative, identity-affirming – over others. With the theoretical frameworks of thought from political communication, algorithmic studies, and empirical data from the Indian context, the paper traces how recommendation systems, filter bubbles, engagement-maximising content design, and targeted political advertising work together to produce a distinctive political epistemology among young Indians. The epistemology is less a matter of deliberate political reasoning, than the cumulative weight of algorithmically delivered digital experience. Reflections on the importance of this knowledge change for Indian democracy and the prospect of regulatory and pedagogical intervention conclude the paper. Social media networks and their algorithms affect political opinions among the Indian youth as they work as filter bubbles and creates issues of digital democracy and political communication.

Keywords: Social Media Algorithms, Political Opinion Formation, Indian Youth, Filter Bubbles, Digital Democracy, Political Communication.

1. In Algorithm as Political Actor Essay Introduction

Social media algorithms are seen as neutral pipes, like any infrastructure, deliver content from producers to consumers without censorship and political consequence, to the end users as content producers. The temptation shouldn't be given in. Algorithms are biased. They are designed systems that make consequential choices: on what content to amplify and what to suppress, on what users to connect and what to distance, on which emotions to trigger and which to leave sleeping. When algorithms make choices, they exert political power which is real, significant and mostly not visible to those affected by it. In this paper, we define Indian youth as citizens aged between 18 and 35 years who constitute 34% of the population in India and an even larger percentage of active social media users. Algorithmic curation has serious political ramifications for such youth. This generation became politically aware during the rise of digital media. Therefore, their main exposure to political information occurs through platforms whose logic is fundamentally commercial. Moreover, this logic is designed to maximise engagement, time-on-platform, and advertising revenue. It is not designed to create informed citizens or healthy democracy.

The social media landscape in India has features that are relevant for this study. WhatsApp has over 500 million users in India. It functions not as a broadcast social medium, but as a private messaging network. Political content moves through closed groups that lack algorithmic curation. However, there is social pressure to conform, as well as assumptions of credibility based on inter-personal trust. YouTube has more than 450 million users in India and is arguably the single most important platform for the formation of political opinion among young Indians. Its power

lies in its recommendation algorithm working alongside the affordances of video that have proven emotionally compelling. Instagram and Twitter/X have different, but complementary roles: the former shapes political aesthetics and identity signalling among the urban youth; the latter is the battleground for elite political discourse and media agenda-setting (IAMAI, 2023, pp.14-29). This paper continues in the following order. Section 2 lays out the central conceptual framework for the work. Part 3 examines the precise mechanisms by which algorithms influence political participation among Indian youth. Section 4 looks at the utilization of algorithmic dynamics by political actors. The impact on democratic deliberation is discussed in section 5. Section 6 presents some possible regulatory and educational responses and Section 7 offers conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework of the new media: gatekeeping to algorithmic curation.

To understand what is genuinely new about algorithmic political communication, it helps to place it within the longer history of media and political opinion formation. The classical gatekeeping theory by Lewin (1947) and White (1950, pp. 383–390), held that editors, journalists and broadcasters acted as gatekeepers deciding what information went to the public. Human agents with ethical principles, organizational accountability, and a commitment to precision and public interest exercised the gatekeeping function. Although biased, commercially constrained and often politically compromised, the gatekeepers were nonetheless in principle accountable to professional standards and legal frameworks. Algorithms for social media opportunity gatekeeping are qualitatively different. These systems are not controlled by accountable human agents but operated by optimization systems that are designed to maximize behavioral metrics like clicks, shares, watch time, reactions. The algorithm's editorial judgment neither follows journalistic standards nor pays heed to public interest. Rather, the objective of the algorithm is mathematically designed to keep users engrossed in the platform for a long time. Content that evokes strong emotions such as anger, fear, moral outrage, and solidarity with one's group almost always outperforms content that informs complicates or challenges. This is because emotional responses to content drive engagement behaviours more reliably than cognitive responses do.

Sunstein (2017) developed the idea of the echo chamber – an information environment where one predominantly encounters views that support one's own views – to describe an effect of algorithmically curated media (pp. 59–85). Within echo chambers, citizens find themselves amidst a distorted picture of political reality wherein the views of their own group appear commonplace and reasonable, opposing views appear extreme and unreasonable, and common factual ground necessary for democratic deliberation progressively shrinks. Pariser (2011) proposes the related concept of the filter bubble (pp. 9–30). The filter bubble is that information environment created by algorithmic curation which effectively filters out content the algorithm predicts will not be engaging for a user. The echo chamber is a social phenomenon, where people only listen to or pay attention to messages which echo their existing thoughts and beliefs. The filter bubble, however, is an individual phenomenon. Each user will inhabit a slightly different algorithmic universe. Their universe will have been shaped by the cumulative history of their digital activity to date. The political impact of filter bubbles has been interpreted not only as partisan polarisation but also epistemic fragmentation: different citizens not only hold different political opinions but inhabit different factual realities, making political communication across difference more and more difficult.

According to Zuboff (2019, pp. 63–97), these dynamics are better understood by reference to the concept of surveillance capitalism – that is to say, to an economic logic through which the behaviours of user are extracted and monetized for the purpose of predicting and modifying future behaviour. Zuboff argues that social media isn't a communications medium but a behavior modification machine. The political opinions that crystallize through algorithmic social media are not freely formed deliberative judgments. Instead, they are the outputs of a system designed to render individuals maximally susceptible to targeted influence. Theoretical frameworks need modification when applied to the Indian context. The Indian social media ecosystem is an explosive mix of linguistic diversity, low baseline news literacy, a large population of first-generation internet users, and a political environment where communal identity, caste consciousness and hyper-nationalism are emotively very salient- just the sort of emotive triggers that algorithmic engagement-maximisation is designed to exploit (Rao 2020: 23-45).

3. Mechanisms of Algorithms to Influence Political Opinions.

3.1 Recommendation Platforms and the Radicalisation Pathway

Social media sites influence political insight mostly through their recommendation algorithm, which is the strong mechanism available. On YouTube Which is the biggest platform with the most political consequences for Indian

youth There is a recommendation system that decides which video will play next after a user has finished watching one video. The "up next" feature - which is designed to maximise watch time using an algorithm - has been well documented for pulling users up a gradient of increasingly extreme content via small recommendation steps.

The reasoning is simple. More emotional content receives higher engagement metrics; That is, longer watch times, more comments, more shares. The algorithm recognizes that by promoting more drastic content, engagement will increase and does so. A youth in India who watches a political controversy video is recommended more and more partisan, more and more emotive, and eventually, more and more extreme content, not necessarily because these are what the youth is looking for but because the algorithm is efficiently delivering these in order to seek engagement maximisation (Ribeiro et al. 2020, pp. 1–14).

In India, the radicalisation trajectory is well documented in the area of communal politics. According to a study conducted by the Centre for Communication and Change India, once individuals start viewing the content of mainstream political news channels, the YouTube algorithm begins to progressively lead them toward increasingly communally inflammatory material in a rather short span of browsing time. (Banaji & Bhat, 2019, pp. 44–67) The algorithms do not encourage communalism; they encourage engagement. But the Indian political environment is such that communal content is highly emotionally charged, and therefore, highly engaging. The algorithms are thus incentivised towards communalism, and the outcome is distressingly regular.

3.2 WhatsApp and the architecture of the private circulation

WhatsApp is uniquely positioned in India's political information ecosystem. WhatsApp is unlike Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, which have centralized recommendation algorithms which curate content. Rather, WhatsApp is a messaging app in which content moves through social networks of groups and individuals. WhatsApp cannot be considered an algorithmic medium in the normal sense of the term. Nevertheless, WhatsApp's design features (the ease of forwarding messages, the impossibility of users verifying original sources, the social trust in receiving content from known contacts, the end-to-end encryption preventing external fact-checking) create a kind of political epistemology that in some ways is more powerful and difficult to counter than algorithmic curation. Political fakes on WhatsApp are subjectively deemed more credible because the person forwarding it has endowed their social endorsement onto it, as contrasted with the same information encountered on an anonymous social media feed (Jaiswal & Gupta, 2021, pp. 34–49).

Thirty-three per cent of young Indians (18-29 years) believe that WhatsApp is the most important platform for political information and participation influence. Political parties, both at the national and state levels, have put significant money into WhatsApp group management as a political communication strategy, using networks of activists to seed politically targeted content into community groups. The outcome is a political communication architecture that unites the intimacy and credibility of a person with the scale and reach of mass media – and with minimal accountability (Banerjee, 2021, pp. 112–134).

3.3 Micro-targeting and personalisation of political advertising

Political actors in India, beyond the circulation of organic content, have increasingly begun to resort to data-driven micro-targeting. This refers to the use of demographic and behavioural data. It is to deliver customised or personalised political advertisements to select user segments. The advertising system of Facebook (also Instagram's advertising system) allows political advertisers to target users using very detailed combinations of demographic characteristics, stated interests, location and inferred psychological profiles. The 2014 and 2019 BJP campaigns were the first campaigns in India to use data-driven political communication at scale, combining extensive social media advertising with ground communication on WhatsApp, resulting in highly segmented messages being tailored at scale for voters (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020, pp. 23–48). In the 2024 general election, the practice matured still further, with all the major political parties investing a lot of money in data-based digital political communication. Users receive personalised political messages without knowing that they are personalised, without being able to compare what others are seeing, and without any accountability mechanism that would enable any fact check or rebuttal.

Since many young Indian voters are first-time voters forming their initial political attachments, exposure to micro-targeted political advertising during the critical period of political socialisation is likely to have disproportionate effects on long-term political orientations. The findings of political psychology studies show that the initial political experiences and the first political opinions of young adults are particularly difficult to change. This is referred to as

the principle of political primacy. (Greenstein, 1965, pp. 65–84) As a result, there is a possibility that the political views formed by algorithmic curation in youth may last longer than average.

3.4 Engagement Metrics and How They Distort Political Discourse

The way social media engagement is structured – such as likes, shares, comments and reactions – privileges data of political content. Posts that appeal to someone's emotions, affirm their identity, outrage their moral sense, or mock their political opponents for laughs perform better than those that are analytical, nuanced, or compromise-seeking. This is not a culturally loaded judgment. Rather, it is a finding that has been empirically replicated from one platform and political context to another (Brady et al., 2017, pp. 7313–7318). In the political context of India, this engagement bias has several implications. Political content that draws on Hindu-Muslim tension, nationalist sentiment, caste identity, and anti-establishment anger does especially well by engagement metrics – not necessarily because it reflects the reasoned political views of Indian youth, but because it provokes the kinds of emotional responses that engagement-maximising algorithms are designed to reward. Those who generate content that is engagement-optimised gain algorithmic amplification while those generating analytically careful but emotionally muted content receive algorithmic suppression.

Eventually, political discourse becomes progressively adjusted to emotional provoke rather than substantive reasoning. Further, the most clamorous, extreme and emotionally inflammatory voices are systematically enhanced above those who engage with complexity and subtlety. Young Indians whose primary political education occurs through this discourse are not exposed to a neutral cross-section of political opinion but to an algorithmically selected sample biased toward emotional intensity and political polarisation (Rao, 2020, pp. 67–83).

4. Political agents and the exploitation of algorithms.

The association between algorithms and political opinion formation is strategic as well as technological. Political players in India are better able to understand the algorithmic dynamics and use them for strategic ends. It consequently magnifies the political impact of algorithmic design.

The BJP's IT Cell, the digital communication wing of the Congress party, and the social media arms of major regional parties employ digital communication professionals with an understanding of platform algorithms that govern algorithmic amplification of content in various formats, emotional registers, and timing strategies. The political memes factories create content for WhatsApp and Twitter that is designed for a particular emotional effect – pride, anger, fear, group solidarity – that stimulates sharing (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020, pp. 67–89). The asymmetrical political impact of this algorithmic misuse. Political parties equipped with bigger digital communications budgets and sophisticated data infrastructures are in a better position to exploit algorithmic dynamics than parties with fewer resources. This gives a structural advantage to political actors that have resources. Incumbents who have state resources and patterns of donors win an upper hand over challengers and civil society voices. The uneven algorithmic reach that results is a form of political inequality that cannot be dealt with by existing campaign finance and electoral regulation (Varadarajan, 2019, pp. 78–101).

Another example of gaining advantage over algorithms is troll networks. When a team of users like, share, or comment on a set piece of content, they manipulate its engagement metrics. This engages the algorithm to boost the content and expands its organic reach by far beyond the staged audience. The platforms themselves and independent researchers have documented the use of coordinated inauthentic behaviour – networks of human or automated accounts manipulating engagement metrics – in the Indian political context. In 2021, Twitter stated that it had pulled down more than 1,100 accounts as a part of coordinated inauthentic behaviour linked to Indian political actors (pp. 4–12). Political actors strategically exploit digital algorithmic platforms to warp the political information environment in India. We believe this means that the resulting environment is not merely biased because of the algorithms but is also deliberately constructed. This means that the political content encountered by young Indian social media users results not merely from algorithmic selection but also from strategic political design. Most importantly, neither is transparent to the user.

5. Consequences for debate in a democracy.

The analysis given in the preceding sections provokes serious questions about the quality of deliberation amongst Indian youth. Citizens who can analyse political information critically, citizens who can consider different political perspectives, citizens who can tell fact from fiction, and citizens who can form political opinions through reasoned deliberation as opposed to emotional triggering, are the lifeblood of a democracy. The requirements that define

meaningful social discourse get systematically undermined by the algorithmic curation of social media and the political usage of the same. The immediate impact is the aforementioned epistemic fragmentation: the gradual splitting of the political reality of citizens living in distinct algorithmic filter bubbles. The political negotiation becomes hard when different groups of young Indians have different information about the same events as that leaves no common facts to argue on. Political competition degenerates from competition of ideas supported by evidence to competition of narratives supported by algorithmically curated affirmation (Sunstein 2017, 112–134). Political misinformation becoming normalised is the second consequence. The rapid spread of social media, where WhatsApp messages are circulated within minutes and viral YouTube videos reach millions within hours, far outstrips fact-checking. Young Indians face political misinformation on social media that is rarely corrected in time for the correction to set in before their false belief is consolidated. Political psychologists have shown that correcting political misinformation is much less powerful than first exposure. More importantly, when corrections are attempted in a highly polarised context, rather than clarifying matters, the corrections may strengthen false beliefs (backfire effect) (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010, pp. 303–330). A third consequence, probably the most politically significant, is the growing identity-based political polarisation. By increasingly thrusting emotional, identity-affirming content upon us, social media algorithms are progressively strengthening the salience of group identities – religious, caste, regional, national – in political cognition. Consuming algorithm-driven content changes political inclinations of young Indians into an orientation where voting choice is heavily influenced by group loyalty and not by proper evaluation of policies or issues. The polarisation based on identity that is being developed is resistant to factual based correction because it is not fundamentally about facts but about belonging (Rao, 2020, pp. 89-107). Evidence from surveys conducted in India supports this. According to the CSDS-Lokniti Youth Survey 2022, social media was the main source of political information for over 60% of young Indians within the 18–34 age group. Furthermore, those who relied primarily on social media for political information exhibited stronger partisan identity, lower tolerance for political opponents, and higher susceptibility to political misinformation than those who relied primarily on traditional media (Lokniti-CSDS 2022, pp. 34–52).

6. Efforts By Regulation and Education.

Policymakers have not recognized the true scope of the problem, nor have they considered the constraints of regulatory activity. Corporate algorithmic systems are technological and rapidly evolving and are designed that way to resist regulation. Regulators face jurisdictional limits due to cross-border nature of digital platforms. The conflicting forces of censorship and free speech, cannot be wished away, they continue to grapple with the issue. A regulatory vacuum must not be permitted. India's IT Rules 2021 mandated that social media intermediaries appoint grievance officers, takedown content etc. These rules regulate content and not algorithmic systems which amplify content (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, 2021, pp. 2–18). The more important regulatory challenge is to tackle algorithmic design itself accountable for the engagement-maximisation logic that systematically promotes emotional political content without regard to its truth or democratic value.

There are several regulatory approaches worth considering. Requiring algorithmic transparency requiring platforms to disclose the factors that determine what political content is recommended would allow independent researchers, journalists, regulators, and others to audit algorithms for bias in political communication. If libraries of advertisements obtain a mandate to publicly disclose all political ads and their targeting parameters, micro-targeted political communication will become less opaque and be made accountable.

A non-musical deep and deep device to empty the racket to create a new thread in the great great device, to add another thread as the first one fell into the noise. Do you think it will be okay in the event of an emergency, in a hospital, and in another place where people will use it? Goodbye! Implementing these reforms would require considerable political willpower and careful design, but the regulatory costs of not doing so – a democracy where citizens form political opinions in algorithmically manipulated filter bubbles – is arguably greater.

Educationally, media literacy and most importantly algorithmic literacy needs to be made a core component of civic education in India's schools and universities. By knowing how social media algorithms work, and that filter bubbles distort what they see, and by cross-checking information from different sources, youth become much less vulnerable to algorithmic manipulation than those who naively consume social media content (Hobbs, 2017, pp. 23–41). Several state governments are incorporating media literacy into school curriculums, but these efforts are disjointed and under-resourced.

Public service media can supply an algorithmically neutral alternative to commercial social media – this deserves attention. Despite their widespread reach, Doordarshan and All India Radio struggle to a great extent to build appealing digital platforms or experiences to compete for the attention youngsters. The solution to “fake news” isn’t strangling the messenger but empowering the receiver. A new public media strategy that provides high-quality accessible political information through digital channels, free from engagement-maximisation distortions of commercial social media, could partially offset the algorithmic political environment commercial platforms have created.

7. Conclusion

The argument that is built up in this paper is not technologist determinist Social media algorithms do not work in a way that generates political stances directly. It creates an environment where a person’s political stance is formed but such an environment is created in a manner that gives special powers to certain social or political cognition. Rather than being passive recipients of algorithmic influence, young Indians are critical and creative users of digital platforms. Despite efforts to alleviate this issue, the cumulation of biased algorithms has led to the emergence of various political issues. As a result, more studies are being done to see how this social media platform contributes to different political issues. The stakes of this analysis for Indian democracy are high. India is by far the largest democracy on earth and has youth numbering more than 600 million people below the age of 25 who shall decide the Indian democracy’s character for many generations to come. The ways in which young citizens shape their political opinions, the extent to which they develop democratic reasoning values and habits, and their resilience to political manipulation through digital media are not mere academic questions. The future of self-rule in India is in question. We must not view and treat the algorithmic shaping of political opinion formation as a technical policy problem for regulatory experts. Coming together, educators, civil society organisations, media bodies, political parties and citizenry are required for what is a first-order political and pedagogical task. The algorithm has gained a political status. Will Indian democracy take the grave situation with the seriousness it demands?

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सूचना का अधिकार अधिनियम 2005 का एक विश्लेषण

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सारांश : सूचना का अधिकार अधिनियम (RTI Act) 2005 भारतीय लोकतंत्र में एक महत्वपूर्ण मील का पत्थर है। यह अधिनियम नागरिकों को सरकारी जानकारी प्राप्त करने का अधिकार प्रदान करता है, जिससे सरकार के कार्यों में पारदर्शिता और जवाबदेही सुनिश्चित होती है। RTI अधिनियम का मुख्य उद्देश्य सरकारी प्रक्रियाओं को अधिक पारदर्शी बनाना और नागरिकों को सरकारी निर्णयों और गतिविधियों में सहभागी बनाना है। इस अधिनियम के तहत, प्रत्येक नागरिक को अधिकार है कि वे किसी भी सार्वजनिक प्राधिकरण से जानकारी मांग सकते हैं और उन्हें 30 दिनों के भीतर उत्तर प्राप्त होगा। यदि सूचना जीवन या स्वतंत्रता से संबंधित है, तो यह समय सीमा घटाकर 48 घंटे कर दी जाती है। सूचना का अधिकार अधिनियम सरकारी अधिकारियों को नियमित रूप से सूचनाओं का प्रकटीकरण करने के लिए भी बाध्य करता है, जिसमें उनकी कार्यप्रणाली, बजट, योजनाएं और नीतियां शामिल होती हैं। RTI अधिनियम की उत्पत्ति एक लंबी और संघर्षपूर्ण प्रक्रिया का परिणाम है, जिसमें नागरिक समाज संगठनों, सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं, और पत्रकारों का महत्वपूर्ण योगदान रहा है। 1990 के दशक में पारदर्शिता की बढ़ती मांग के परिणामस्वरूप यह अधिनियम अस्तित्व में आया।

Keywords: उत्तरदायित्व, पारदर्शिता, सूचना, नागरिक, कार्यप्रणाली, डिजिटल।

2005 में इसे भारतीय संसद द्वारा पारित किया गया और 12 अक्टूबर 2005 से इसे लागू किया गया। इस अधिनियम का व्यापक प्रभाव हुआ है। इसने भ्रष्टाचार को उजागर करने, सरकारी कार्यों में पारदर्शिता बढ़ाने और नागरिकों की भागीदारी को प्रोत्साहित करने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है। RTI अधिनियम ने सरकारी तंत्र में सुधार करने में महत्वपूर्ण योगदान दिया है और नागरिकों को अधिक जागरूक और सक्रिय बनाने में मदद की है। हालांकि, इस अधिनियम के कार्यान्वयन में कई चुनौतियाँ भी हैं। सूचना आयोगों में संसाधनों की कमी और लंबित मामलों की संख्या, RTI आवेदकों को प्रताड़ना और धमकियों का सामना करना, और ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में जागरूकता की कमी कुछ प्रमुख चुनौतियाँ हैं। फिर भी, RTI अधिनियम भारतीय लोकतंत्र को सशक्त बनाने की दिशा में एक महत्वपूर्ण कदम है और इसकी सफलता इस बात पर निर्भर करती है कि नागरिक इसे कितनी प्रभावी रूप से उपयोग करते हैं और सरकार इसके कार्यान्वयन को सुनिश्चित करने के लिए क्या कदम उठाती है। अधिनियम की उत्पत्ति RTI अधिनियम 2005 की उत्पत्ति एक लंबी और संघर्षपूर्ण प्रक्रिया का परिणाम है, जिसमें नागरिक समाज संगठनों, सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं, और पत्रकारों का महत्वपूर्ण योगदान रहा है। 1990 के दशक में पारदर्शिता की बढ़ती मांग के परिणामस्वरूप यह अधिनियम अस्तित्व में आया। 2005 में इसे संसद द्वारा पारित किया गया और 12 अक्टूबर 2005 से लागू किया गया।

प्रमुख प्रावधान

सूचना का अधिकार अधिनियम (RTI Act) 2005 भारतीय नागरिकों को सरकारी कार्यों और सूचनाओं तक पहुंचने का एक सशक्त माध्यम प्रदान करता है। इस अधिनियम के तहत प्रत्येक नागरिक को किसी भी सार्वजनिक प्राधिकरण से सूचना प्राप्त करने का

अधिकार है। अधिनियम में स्पष्ट रूप से कहा गया है कि सरकारी विभागों, सार्वजनिक उपक्रमों और सरकारी सहायता प्राप्त गैर-सरकारी संगठनों से संबंधित सभी सूचनाएं नागरिकों को प्रदान की जानी चाहिए। सूचना का अधिकार अधिनियम के तहत सूचना प्राप्त करने की प्रक्रिया को सरल और प्रभावी बनाया गया है। नागरिकों को अपने अनुरोध पर 30 दिनों के भीतर सूचना प्राप्त करने का अधिकार है। यदि मांगी गई सूचना जीवन या स्वतंत्रता से संबंधित है, तो यह समय सीमा घटाकर 48 घंटे कर दी जाती है। यह समयबद्धता सुनिश्चित करती है कि नागरिकों को त्वरित और सटीक जानकारी मिल सके। अधिनियम के तहत सार्वजनिक प्राधिकरणों को नियमित रूप से अपनी कार्यप्रणाली, बजट, योजनाएं, और नीतियों का प्रकटीकरण करना होता है। यह प्रावधान सरकारी कार्यों में पारदर्शिता बढ़ाने और नागरिकों को अद्यतित जानकारी प्रदान करने में सहायक है। इसके अलावा, यदि किसी नागरिक को मांगी गई सूचना नहीं मिलती है या वह दी गई जानकारी से संतुष्ट नहीं होता है, तो वह प्रथम अपील और द्वितीय अपील कर सकता है। यह अपील की व्यवस्था नागरिकों को उनके अधिकारों की रक्षा करने और सरकारी तंत्र की जवाबदेही सुनिश्चित करने में मदद करती है। सूचना का अधिकार अधिनियम के तहत सूचना आयोगों की स्थापना की गई है, जो सूचना की मांग और अपीलों का निपटारा करते हैं। केंद्रीय और राज्य सूचना आयोग इस कार्य को प्रभावी ढंग से संचालित करते हैं।

हालांकि, आयोगों की कार्यक्षमता में सुधार की आवश्यकता है, ताकि लंबित मामलों की संख्या कम हो सके और समय पर न्याय मिल सके। सूचना का अधिकार अधिनियम ने सरकारी तंत्र में पारदर्शिता, जवाबदेही और नागरिक सहभागिता को बढ़ावा देने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है। इसके प्रावधानों ने नागरिकों को सरकारी नीतियों और कार्यक्रमों की जानकारी प्राप्त करने में सक्षम बनाया है, जिससे सरकारी कार्यों में पारदर्शिता और सुधार हुआ है। अधिनियम के सफल कार्यान्वयन के लिए जागरूकता बढ़ाने, संसाधनों की उपलब्धता सुनिश्चित करने, और प्रशासनिक सुधारों की आवश्यकता है। इस प्रकार, RTI अधिनियम के प्रमुख प्रावधान नागरिकों को सशक्त बनाने और सरकारी तंत्र को अधिक पारदर्शी और उत्तरदायी बनाने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाते हैं।

कार्यान्वयन की स्थिति

सूचना का अधिकार अधिनियम (RTI Act) 2005 के कार्यान्वयन की स्थिति भारत में विभिन्न राज्यों में भिन्न-भिन्न है। कुछ राज्यों ने इस अधिनियम को प्रभावी ढंग से लागू किया है, जबकि अन्य में इसके कार्यान्वयन में कई चुनौतियाँ सामने आई हैं। केंद्रीय और राज्य सूचना आयोगों की भूमिका इस प्रक्रिया में महत्वपूर्ण है, लेकिन उन्हें कई बार संसाधनों की कमी और लंबित मामलों की संख्या के मुद्दों का सामना करना पड़ता है। केंद्रीय सूचना आयोग और राज्य सूचना आयोग RTI अधिनियम के कार्यान्वयन के प्रमुख स्तंभ हैं। इन आयोगों के माध्यम से नागरिकों द्वारा दायर की गई अपीलों और शिकायतों का निपटारा किया जाता है। हालांकि, कई बार आयोगों में लंबित मामलों की संख्या अधिक होने के कारण मामलों का निपटारा समय पर नहीं हो पाता। इसके अलावा, कुछ आयोगों में स्टाफ की कमी और अपर्याप्त संसाधनों के कारण भी कार्यान्वयन की गति धीमी रहती है। कुछ राज्यों, जैसे कि महाराष्ट्र, तमिलनाडु और केरल, ने RTI अधिनियम को सफलतापूर्वक लागू किया है। इन राज्यों में नागरिकों की भागीदारी और जागरूकता अधिक है, जिससे अधिनियम का प्रभावी उपयोग हो रहा है। वहीं, कुछ अन्य राज्यों में, विशेषकर पूर्वोत्तर और ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में, RTI के प्रति जागरूकता की कमी और कार्यान्वयन में असफलता देखी गई है। RTI अधिनियम के कार्यान्वयन में प्रशासनिक और प्रणालीगत चुनौतियाँ भी महत्वपूर्ण हैं। कई सरकारी विभागों और अधिकारियों में अधिनियम के प्रति असहयोगिता और निष्क्रियता देखी जाती है। कुछ मामलों में, अधिकारियों द्वारा जानबूझकर सूचना को छुपाने या देशी से प्रदान करने की शिकायतें भी सामने आई हैं। इसके अलावा, RTI आवेदकों को प्रताड़ना और धमकियों का सामना करना पड़ता है, जिससे वे डर कर अपने अधिकार का उपयोग नहीं कर पाते। इसके बावजूद, RTI अधिनियम ने कई सकारात्मक बदलाव भी लाए हैं। इसने सरकारी कार्यों में पारदर्शिता और जवाबदेही बढ़ाई है। भ्रष्टाचार को उजागर करने और सरकारी योजनाओं और कार्यक्रमों में सुधार करने में RTI अधिनियम की महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका रही है। सरकार और नागरिक समाज संगठनों द्वारा किए गए जागरूकता अभियान और प्रशिक्षण कार्यक्रमों ने भी RTI के कार्यान्वयन में महत्वपूर्ण योगदान दिया है। इन अभियानों के माध्यम से नागरिकों को RTI के उपयोग और इसके महत्व के बारे में जानकारी

दी जाती है, जिससे वे अधिक जागरूक और सक्रिय बनते हैं। अंततः, RTI अधिनियम के सफल कार्यान्वयन के लिए सरकार, सूचना आयोगों, और नागरिकों के सामूहिक प्रयासों की आवश्यकता है। संसाधनों की उपलब्धता, स्टाफ की पर्याप्तता, और जागरूकता बढ़ाने के प्रयासों से इस अधिनियम को और अधिक प्रभावी बनाया जा सकता है।

प्रभाव

RTI अधिनियम का व्यापक प्रभाव हुआ है। इसने भ्रष्टाचार को उजागर करने, सरकारी कार्यों में पारदर्शिता बढ़ाने, और नागरिकों की भागीदारी को प्रोत्साहित करने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है। कई महत्वपूर्ण मामलों में RTI के माध्यम से प्राप्त सूचनाओं ने सरकारी तंत्र में सुधार करने में मदद की है। यह अधिनियम नागरिकों को सरकारी नीतियों और कार्यक्रमों की जानकारी प्राप्त करने में सक्षम बनाता है, जिससे वे अधिक जागरूक और सक्रिय नागरिक बनते हैं।

चुनौतियाँ

सूचना का अधिकार अधिनियम (RTI Act) 2005 के कार्यान्वयन में कई चुनौतियाँ हैं, जो इसके प्रभाव को सीमित करती हैं। सबसे पहले, सूचना आयोगों की कार्यक्षमता एक बड़ी चुनौती है। केंद्रीय और राज्य सूचना आयोगों में संसाधनों की कमी, कर्मचारियों की अपर्याप्त संख्या और वित्तीय बाधाएँ आम समस्याएँ हैं। इसके परिणामस्वरूप, अपील और शिकायतों का निपटारा समय पर नहीं हो पाता और लंबित मामलों की संख्या लगातार बढ़ती जा रही है, जिससे नागरिकों को समय पर न्याय नहीं मिल पाता। इसके अतिरिक्त, RTI आवेदकों को कई बार प्रताड़ना और धमकियों का सामना करना पड़ता है। कुछ मामलों में, आवेदकों को उनके सवालों के कारण शारीरिक हमलों, सामाजिक बहिष्कार, या कानूनी कार्रवाइयों का सामना करना पड़ता है। इन परिस्थितियों में, कई नागरिक अपने अधिकार का उपयोग करने से डरते हैं। यह भय और असुरक्षा का माहौल RTI के प्रभावी उपयोग को बाधित करता है। ग्रामीण और पिछड़े क्षेत्रों में RTI के प्रति जागरूकता की कमी एक और प्रमुख समस्या है। कई लोग अभी भी RTI अधिनियम और इसके उपयोग के बारे में जानकारी नहीं रखते। जागरूकता की इस कमी के कारण, RTI का प्रभाव सीमित हो जाता है और नागरिक अपने अधिकारों का उपयोग नहीं कर पाते। प्रशासनिक बाधाएँ भी RTI के कार्यान्वयन में महत्वपूर्ण चुनौती हैं। कई सरकारी विभागों में सूचना प्रदान करने की प्रक्रियाएँ जटिल और समय-साध्य हैं। अधिकारी कभी-कभी जानकारी प्रदान करने में अनावश्यक देरी करते हैं या जानकारी को गलत तरीके से प्रस्तुत करते हैं। कुछ मामलों में, जानबूझकर जानकारी छुपाई जाती है या अधूरी जानकारी दी जाती है, जिससे नागरिकों को सही और पूरी जानकारी नहीं मिल पाती। अंततः, सूचना का वर्गीकरण भी एक महत्वपूर्ण चुनौती है। RTI अधिनियम के तहत सभी सूचनाएँ सार्वजनिक नहीं की जा सकतीं। कुछ सूचनाएँ, जैसे कि राष्ट्रीय सुरक्षा, गोपनीयता, और संवेदनशील सूचनाओं से संबंधित, वर्गीकृत होती हैं और इन्हें सार्वजनिक करने की अनुमति नहीं होती। यह वर्गीकरण कभी-कभी विवादास्पद हो सकता है और सूचनाओं की उपलब्धता को सीमित कर सकता है। इन चुनौतियों के बावजूद, RTI अधिनियम ने भारतीय लोकतंत्र में पारदर्शिता और जवाबदेही को बढ़ावा देने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है। इसके सफल कार्यान्वयन के लिए सरकार, सूचना आयोगों और नागरिकों के सामूहिक प्रयासों की आवश्यकता है। संसाधनों की उपलब्धता, जागरूकता बढ़ाने के प्रयास और प्रशासनिक सुधारों से इन चुनौतियों को कम किया जा सकता है और त्ज अधिनियम को और अधिक प्रभावी बनाया जा सकता है।

निष्कर्ष

सूचना का अधिकार अधिनियम (RTI Act) 2005 भारतीय लोकतंत्र को सशक्त बनाने की दिशा में एक महत्वपूर्ण कदम है। इस अधिनियम ने नागरिकों को सरकारी कार्यों और नीतियों में पारदर्शिता और जवाबदेही सुनिश्चित करने का एक प्रभावी उपकरण प्रदान किया है। RTI अधिनियम के माध्यम से नागरिक सरकारी सूचनाओं तक पहुंच प्राप्त कर सकते हैं, जिससे सरकारी तंत्र में पारदर्शिता बढ़ी है और भ्रष्टाचार में कमी आई है। RTI अधिनियम ने भ्रष्टाचार को उजागर करने, सरकारी योजनाओं में सुधार, और नागरिकों

की भागीदारी को प्रोत्साहित करने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है। यह अधिनियम न केवल सरकारी अधिकारियों को अधिक जिम्मेदार और उत्तरदायी बनाता है, बल्कि नागरिकों को भी अपने अधिकारों और कर्तव्यों के प्रति अधिक जागरूक करता है। सामाजिक और आर्थिक न्याय को प्रोत्साहित करने में RTI का योगदान उल्लेखनीय है, क्योंकि इसके माध्यम से गरीब और हाशिए पर खड़े वर्ग सरकारी योजनाओं और कार्यक्रमों का लाभ उठा सकते हैं। हालांकि, RTI अधिनियम के कार्यान्वयन में कई चुनौतियाँ भी हैं। सूचना आयोगों में संसाधनों की कमी, कर्मचारियों की अपर्याप्त संख्या, और वित्तीय बाधाएँ प्रमुख समस्याएँ हैं। इसके अलावा, RTI आवेदकों को प्रताड़ना और धमकियों का सामना करना पड़ता है, जिससे वे डर कर अपने अधिकार का उपयोग नहीं कर पाते। ग्रामीण और पिछड़े क्षेत्रों में जागरूकता की कमी भी एक बड़ी बाधा है। प्रशासनिक बाधाएँ और सूचना का वर्गीकरण भी RTI के प्रभाव को सीमित करते हैं। इन चुनौतियों के बावजूद, RTI अधिनियम ने भारतीय लोकतंत्र में एक महत्वपूर्ण सुधार लाया है। इसके सफल कार्यान्वयन के लिए सरकार, सूचना आयोगों, और नागरिक समाज संगठनों के सामूहिक प्रयासों की आवश्यकता है। संसाधनों की उपलब्धता, जागरूकता बढ़ाने के प्रयास, और प्रशासनिक सुधारों से RTI अधिनियम को और अधिक प्रभावी बनाया जा सकता है। RTI अधिनियम की सफलता इस बात पर निर्भर करती है कि नागरिक इसे कितनी प्रभावी रूप से उपयोग करते हैं और सरकार इसके कार्यान्वयन को सुनिश्चित करने के लिए क्या कदम उठाती है। यदि इन चुनौतियों का समाधान किया जा सके, तो RTI अधिनियम भारतीय लोकतंत्र को और भी अधिक सशक्त और पारदर्शी बनाने में सहायक हो सकता है। इस प्रकार, RTI अधिनियम 2005 भारतीय लोकतंत्र के लिए एक मील का पत्थर है, जो नागरिकों को उनके अधिकारों का पूर्ण उपयोग करने और सरकारी तंत्र में सुधार लाने की दिशा में महत्वपूर्ण योगदान देता है।

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[जौनसार-बावर की सामाजिक संरचना: जाति व्यवस्था, परंपराएं और आर्थिक गतिविधियां]

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सारांश

जौनसार बावर, उत्तराखंड का एक जनजातीय क्षेत्र है, जो अपनी विशिष्ट सांस्कृतिक पहचान और परंपराओं के लिए जाना जाता है। इसे 1967 में जनजातीय क्षेत्र घोषित किया गया था। इस क्षेत्र में अनुसूचित जाति और अनुसूचित जनजाति दोनों निवास करती हैं, जहां जातिगत विभाजन और सामाजिक असमानताएं स्पष्ट रूप से देखने को मिलती हैं। शोध पत्र में जौनसारी जनजाति की सामाजिक संरचना, जाति व्यवस्था, धार्मिक मान्यताओं, महिलाओं की स्थिति, शिक्षा और आर्थिक गतिविधियों का समाजशास्त्रीय अध्ययन प्रस्तुत किया गया है। इस क्षेत्र में राजपूत और ब्राह्मणों का प्रभुत्व है, जबकि अनुसूचित जातियां, जो यहां के मूल निवासी हैं, सामाजिक और आर्थिक रूप से पिछड़ी हैं।

विवाह परंपराओं में बहुपति और बहुपत्नी विवाह का प्रचलन है, और महिलाओं की स्थिति पुरुष प्रधान समाज में अत्यधिक सीमित है, जहां उन्हें संपत्ति और अधिकारों में कोई विशेष स्थान नहीं मिलता। कृषि, पशुपालन और बागवानी इस क्षेत्र की मुख्य आर्थिक गतिविधियाँ हैं।

इस शोध का निष्कर्ष यह है कि जौनसार बावर की जनजातीय संरचना और परंपराओं के बावजूद यहां जातिगत और लैंगिक असमानताएं व्याप्त हैं, जिन्हें सुधारने के लिए शिक्षा, आर्थिक और सामाजिक प्रोत्साहन की आवश्यकता है।

शब्द कुंजी – जौनसारी जनजाति, महासू, खस, स्याणा, जजोड़ा, मरोज, ठारिया की पूज, ठोडे.

प्रस्तावना

भारत में अनेक जनजातियाँ निवास करती हैं, जो भिन्न-भिन्न सांस्कृतिक, सामाजिक और धार्मिक परंपराओं को संजोए हुए हैं। इन जनजातियों का अध्ययन उनकी विशेषताओं और सामाजिक संरचनाओं को समझने का एक महत्वपूर्ण साधन है। उत्तराखंड के देहरादून जनपद के अंतर्गत स्थित जौनसार बावर क्षेत्र एक ऐसा ही जनजातीय क्षेत्र है, जिसे उसकी विशिष्ट सांस्कृतिक पहचान के आधार पर 1967 में जनजातीय क्षेत्र घोषित किया गया। इस क्षेत्र की सांस्कृतिक धरोहर, ऐतिहासिक महत्व और भौगोलिक विविधता ने इसे समाजशास्त्रीय अध्ययन के लिए महत्वपूर्ण बना दिया है। जौनसार बावर मुख्य रूप से टोंस और यमुना नदियों के बीच बसा है और यहां 39 खतों के अंतर्गत 350 से अधिक गांव हैं। यहां की जनसंख्या में अनुसूचित जाति और अनुसूचित जनजाति की मिश्रित आबादी है, जिसमें ब्राह्मण, राजपूत, वैश्य और अन्य जातियां शामिल हैं। क्षेत्र की सामाजिक संरचना में स्पष्ट रूप से जातीय विभाजन और परंपरागत नियमों का पालन देखने को मिलता है, जो समाज के हर स्तर को प्रभावित करता है। यह विभाजन खासतौर से अनुसूचित जातियों और महिलाओं की सामाजिक और आर्थिक स्थिति पर प्रभाव डालता है, जिन्हें समाज के निचले पायदान पर रखा गया है।

जौनसारी समाज में पाई जाने वाली जाति व्यवस्था, धार्मिक परंपराएँ, पारिवारिक संरचना और विवाह प्रणाली इस शोध का मुख्य केंद्र हैं। यहां बहुपति और बहुपत्नी विवाह जैसी प्रथाएँ भी प्रचलित हैं, जो इस क्षेत्र की सांस्कृतिक और सामाजिक विशिष्टता को रेखांकित करती हैं। इसके साथ ही महिलाओं की स्थिति, जो मुख्यतः परिवार में सीमित अधिकारों और संपत्ति पर नियंत्रण के अभाव के रूप में प्रकट होती है, का विश्लेषण भी किया गया है। यह शोध जौनसार बावर के सामाजिक और सांस्कृतिक जीवन के विभिन्न पहलुओं को उजागर करने के साथ-साथ जातीय असमानताओं और लैंगिक असमानताओं की गहन पड़ताल करता है। सामाजिक और आर्थिक पिछड़ेपन के कारण अनुसूचित जातियों और महिलाओं की स्थिति में सुधार की आवश्यकता है, जिसके लिए शिक्षा, आर्थिक सशक्तिकरण और सामाजिक जागरूकता के उपाय आवश्यक हैं। इस शोध के अंतर्गत जाति व्यवस्था, धार्मिक विश्वास, पारिवारिक संरचना और आर्थिक गतिविधियों का समाजशास्त्रीय दृष्टिकोण से अध्ययन प्रस्तुत किया गया है, जिससे जौनसार बावर की जटिल सामाजिक संरचना को समझने में मदद मिलेगी।

उद्देश्य

1. जौनसार बाबर की सामाजिक संरचना का समाजशास्त्रीय अध्ययन: जौनसारी जनजाति की सामाजिक संरचना, जाति व्यवस्था, धर्म, और महिलाओं की स्थिति का विश्लेषण करना।
2. सामाजिक संस्थाओं का विश्लेषण: परिवार और विवाह जैसी सामाजिक संस्थाओं की संरचना और उनके कार्यप्रणाली का अध्ययन करना।
3. आर्थिक गतिविधियों का अध्ययन: क्षेत्र की आर्थिक गतिविधियों, जैसे कृषि, पशुपालन और बागवानी, पर शोध करना।
4. जाति व्यवस्था का अध्ययन: जौनसार बाबर में जातिगत स्तरीकरण और जातीय नियमों के प्रभाव का विश्लेषण करना।

शोध प्रविधि

शोध प्रविधि के रूप में अन्वेषणात्मक अनुसंधान विधि का उपयोग किया गया है तथा आंकड़ों (डाटा) के एकत्रीकरण के लिए द्वितीयक स्रोत का उपयोग किया गया है।

जाति व्यवस्था

जौनसार बाबर क्षेत्र, जो उत्तराखंड के देहरादून जिले में स्थित है, एक जनजातीय क्षेत्र के रूप में जाना जाता है, लेकिन यहां पर भी एक सुस्पष्ट जाति व्यवस्था विद्यमान है। अनुसूचित जनजातियों के साथ-साथ अनुसूचित जातियां भी इस क्षेत्र में निवास करती हैं। यहां जातीय विभाजन स्पष्ट रूप से दिखता है, जहां एक ओर खस राजपूतों और ब्राह्मणों जैसी बाहरी जातियां समाज के ऊपरी पायदान पर हैं, वहीं दूसरी ओर स्थानीय अनुसूचित जातियों जैसे सुनार, बढई, लोहार, जोगड़ा, कोल(कोल्टा), तूरी आदि को निचले सामाजिक दर्जे में रखा गया है। इन जातियों को मूल निवासी माना जाता है, लेकिन उनकी आर्थिक और सामाजिक स्थिति आज भी कमजोर है, जिसका प्रमुख कारण खस जाति द्वारा किया गया ऐतिहासिक शोषण और दासता है। जाति व्यवस्था की कठोरता इस क्षेत्र में आज भी बनी हुई है, जहां जातीय नियमों का कड़ाई से पालन किया जाता है। उदाहरण के लिए, अंतर्जातीय विवाह का निषेध, धार्मिक स्थलों में प्रवेश की सीमाएँ, और जातिगत अलगाव का पालन समाज के विभिन्न स्तरों पर होता है। महासू मंदिर, जो इस क्षेत्र के धार्मिक और सांस्कृतिक जीवन का केंद्र है, यहां की जातीय संरचना को दर्शाता है। मंदिर की प्रबंधन व्यवस्था में राजपूत और ब्राह्मण जातियों को उच्च भूमिका दी जाती है। मंदिर के विभिन्न कार्यों में, जैसे ठाणी (मंदिर के सेवक) और भंडारी (मंदिर के प्रबंधक), केवल इन उच्च जातियों को शामिल किया जाता है। अनुसूचित जातियों को इस प्रकार के धार्मिक और सांस्कृतिक कार्यों में भाग लेने से वंचित रखा जाता है, क्योंकि उन्हें “अशुद्ध” माना जाता है। यह स्थिति यहां की पारंपरिक जाति संरचना और सामाजिक पदानुक्रम को दिखाती है, जहां देवता और भक्तों के बीच संबंध भी जातिगत विभाजन के आधार पर तय होते हैं।

जौनसार बाबर की जाति व्यवस्था न केवल सामाजिक बल्कि धार्मिक और सांस्कृतिक क्षेत्रों में भी प्रभावी है। इस व्यवस्था के तहत, जातियों के बीच सामाजिक दूरी और पदानुक्रम का स्पष्ट विभाजन है, जहां उच्च जातियां देवताओं के करीब मानी जाती हैं और निम्न जातियों को देवता से दूर रहना पड़ता है।

परिवार और विवाह

जौनसार बाबर क्षेत्र की पारिवारिक संरचना मुख्य रूप से संयुक्त परिवार पर आधारित है, जिसमें परिवार के सभी सदस्य एक साथ रहते हैं और घर का सबसे बड़ा सदस्य या भाई परिवार का मुखिया होता है, जिसे स्याणा कहा जाता है। यह स्याणा घर के सभी प्रमुख निर्णय लेने के लिए जिम्मेदार होता है और परिवार के सदस्यों की आर्थिक और सामाजिक जरूरतों का ध्यान रखता है। इसके अलावा, परिवार की सबसे वरिष्ठ महिला, जिसे घरयाई कहा जाता है, घर की देखभाल और भोजन की व्यवस्था करने के लिए जिम्मेदार होती है।

परिवार के सदस्यों को अलग-अलग जिम्मेदारियाँ सौंपी जाती हैं, जैसे कि गाय और भैंस की देखभाल करने वाले सदस्य, बकरी पालने वाले, और खेती-बाड़ी का काम करने वाले। यह पारंपरिक व्यवस्था जौनसार बाबर की कृषि और पशुपालन पर आधारित अर्थव्यवस्था के अनुरूप है, जहाँ खेती और पशुपालन परिवार की आर्थिक रीढ़ होती है।

विवाह की प्रथाएं

जौनसार बाबर की विवाह प्रणाली भी विशिष्ट है, जहाँ बहुपति विवाह (एक महिला के कई पति), बहुपत्नी विवाह (एक पुरुष की कई पत्नियाँ), और समूह विवाह जैसे विविध प्रकार के विवाह देखे जाते हैं। विशेष रूप से, जजोड़ा विवाह का उल्लेख महत्वपूर्ण है, जो तीन प्रकार के होते हैं बेवा का जजोड़ा, बोड़ोदी का जजोड़ा, और बाजदिया का जजोड़ा। इन विवाहों में सामाजिक और आर्थिक स्थिति के आधार पर वैवाहिक प्रक्रिया की धूमधाम और परंपराएँ अलग-अलग होती हैं। जौनसार बाबर के विवाह में सामूहिक परिवार व्यवस्था और समुदाय-आधारित विवाह प्रणाली की झलक मिलती है, जहाँ परिवार और समाज के अन्य सदस्य विवाह की पूरी प्रक्रिया में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाते हैं। वर और वधू के परिवारों के बीच साईं (रुपए का प्रतीक) का आदान-प्रदान विवाह के तय होने का प्रतीक होता है।

महिलाओं की स्थिति

जौनसार बाबर में महिलाएं एक पितृसत्तात्मक समाज में रहती हैं, जहाँ उनका अधिकार सीमित होता है। संपत्ति और परिवार के अन्य महत्वपूर्ण संसाधनों पर महिलाओं का अधिकार नहीं होता है। हालांकि महिलाएं घर के भीतर महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाती हैं, लेकिन

सामाजिक और आर्थिक रूप से उन्हें पुरुषों के अधीन माना जाता है। महिलाओं की शिक्षा और अधिकारों को यहां उतना महत्व नहीं दिया जाता, और वे सामान्यतः घरेलू कार्यों और कृषि में सहयोग करने तक सीमित रहती हैं।

महिलाओं को अपने परिवार और ससुराल के अलावा अन्य किसी गांव में जाने की स्वतंत्रता भी बहुत सीमित होती है, जो इस क्षेत्र के पारंपरिक और सामुदायिक नियमों के आधार पर निर्धारित होती है। हालांकि महिलाओं की भूमिका महत्वपूर्ण होती है, उन्हें निर्णय लेने में बहुत कम स्वतंत्रता प्राप्त होती है।

त्यौहार एवं परंपराएं

जौनसार बावर क्षेत्र अपनी समृद्ध सांस्कृतिक धरोहर और अनोखी परंपराओं के लिए जाना जाता है। यहाँ के विभिन्न त्यौहार और रीति-रिवाज स्थानीय जनजातियों के जीवन का अभिन्न हिस्सा हैं। अधिकांश त्यौहार कृषि और प्रकृति से जुड़े हुए हैं और इनमें देवताओं के प्रति आस्था का गहरा प्रभाव देखने को मिलता है।

बूढ़ी दिवाली (दियाई):

जौनसार बावर में दिवाली एक विशेष रूप में मनाई जाती है जिसे 'बूढ़ी दिवाली' या 'दियाई' कहा जाता है। यह हिंदू दिवाली से लगभग एक महीने बाद आती है। त्यौहार के दौरान गांव के पुरुष एक जगह पर लकड़ियों का ढेर जलाते हैं जिसे 'डिम्सा' कहते हैं। इसके चारों ओर नृत्य करते हुए और पारंपरिक वाद्य यंत्रों के साथ गीत गाते हैं।

मरोज (माघ का त्यौहार) यह त्यौहार माघ के महीने में मनाया जाता है और इसमें बलि देने की परंपरा है। इस समय पर परिवार के सभी सदस्य, जो विभिन्न स्थानों पर निवास करते हैं, एकत्र होते हैं। यह त्यौहार लगभग एक महीने तक चलता है और विवाहित महिलाओं को मायके से 'माघ का बांटा' (बकरे का सूखा मांस और चावल) दिया जाता है।

ठोड़े (ढोऊड़ा नृत्य, धनुष युद्ध का खेल)

ठोड़े एक पारंपरिक खेल है जिसमें एक व्यक्ति अपने पैरों को ढककर उनका बचाव करता है, जबकि दूसरा व्यक्ति धनुष से तीर चलाकर उसके पैरों को भेदने की कोशिश करता है। इस खेल को धनुष युद्ध के रूप में जाना जाता है और यह क्षेत्र की परंपराओं का हिस्सा है।

जात्रा मेला

जात्रा मेला एक प्रमुख मेला है जो धार्मिक और सांस्कृतिक उत्सव के रूप में मनाया जाता है। इसके अलावा, चैत की आंठो, नौ राते, पायंता, और जागड़ा जैसे कई अन्य त्यौहार भी यहाँ मनाए जाते हैं जो कृषि, ऋतु परिवर्तन और देवी-देवताओं की पूजा से संबंधित होते हैं।

धार्मिक विश्वास

जौनसार बावर का समाज धार्मिक आस्थाओं में गहराई से जुड़ा हुआ है। यहाँ के लोग मुख्य रूप से अपने क्षेत्रीय देवी-देवताओं की पूजा करते हैं।

महासू देवता

जौनसार बावर का मुख्य देवता महासू देवता है, जिनके चार भाई पवासिक, चालदा, वासिक, और बाँठा हैं। इन देवताओं को क्षेत्र का शासक माना जाता है, और धार्मिक, सामाजिक, और राजनीतिक दृष्टि से इन्हें सर्वोच्च स्थान दिया जाता है।

देवशाही

जौनसार बावर में देवशाही की प्रथा है, जहाँ देवताओं को अपने जीवन का प्रमुख संचालक माना जाता है। महासू देवता के अलावा, सिलगुर देव, विजट देवता, गुरुवा, सिगोरमे, भूत देवता, और कुकुरसी देवता जैसे स्थानीय देवी-देवताओं की भी पूजा की जाती है।

अनुष्ठान और मान्यता:

देवताओं से संबंधित कई अनुष्ठान किए जाते हैं, जिनमें मुख्यतः मानता चढ़ाई जाती है। इसमें जातर, घांडवा, कटवा बकरा, और छतर चढ़ाने जैसी प्रथाएं शामिल हैं। ठारिया की पूज एक प्रमुख अनुष्ठान है, जो गाँव की समृद्धि और सुरक्षा के लिए किया जाता है। जौनसार बावर का धार्मिक और सांस्कृतिक जीवन स्थानीय देवताओं और पारंपरिक अनुष्ठानों के इर्द-गिर्द घूमता है। त्यौहार और धार्मिक मान्यताएँ यहां के सामाजिक ताने-बाने का महत्वपूर्ण हिस्सा हैं, जो समाज को एकजुट रखने और उनकी आस्थाओं को जीवित रखने में सहायक होती हैं।

आर्थिक गतिविधियां:

जौनसार—बावर क्षेत्र एक आदिवासी इलाका है, जहां की आर्थिक गतिविधियां मुख्य रूप से कृषि, पशुपालन, बागवानी, और पर्यटन पर आधारित हैं। क्षेत्र की 95 प्रतिशत आबादी कृषि पर निर्भर है। यहाँ की अर्थव्यवस्था का आधार खेती—बाड़ी और पारंपरिक खेती की पद्धतियों में निहित है।

कृषि:

कृषि इस क्षेत्र की प्रमुख आर्थिक गतिविधि है। जौनसार—बावर में कृषि को दो प्रकार की भूमि में विभाजित किया गया है: सिंचित भूमि, जिसे 'ग्यारकी' कहा जाता है, और असिंचित भूमि, जिसे 'उखड़ी डोखरे' या खेत कहा जाता है। यहाँ की खेती पहाड़ी क्षेत्र की भौगोलिक परिस्थितियों के अनुरूप होती है। गेहूँ, धान, मक्का, मंडुआ, और जौ जैसी फसलें यहां उगाई जाती हैं। इसके अलावा,

नकदी फसलों में आलू, अदरक, मटर, और टमाटर जैसी फसलें उगाई जाती हैं। ये फसलें न केवल स्थानीय बाजार में खपत होती हैं, बल्कि इन्हें अन्य क्षेत्रों में भी निर्यात किया जाता है, जिससे किसानों को अतिरिक्त आय प्राप्त होती है।

पशुपालन:

कृषि के साथ-साथ पशुपालन इस क्षेत्र की अर्थव्यवस्था का एक महत्वपूर्ण हिस्सा है। जौनसार-बावर के लोग गाय, भैंस, बकरी, और भेड़ों का पालन करते हैं। इससे उन्हें दूध, खाद, ऊन, और कृषि कार्यों के लिए बैल जैसी आवश्यकताएं पूरी होती हैं। पशुपालन और कृषि आपस में गहराई से जुड़े हुए हैं, जहां पशुओं से प्राप्त खाद का उपयोग खेतों में किया जाता है।

बागवानी:

जौनसार-बावर का पहाड़ी क्षेत्र बागवानी के लिए भी अनुकूल है। यहाँ के लोग सेब, अखरोट, आड़ू, और कीवी जैसी फसलों का उत्पादन करते हैं। यहाँ की जलवायु और मिट्टी इन फलों के उत्पादन के लिए उपयुक्त मानी जाती है। बागवानी क्षेत्र के लोगों के लिए एक अतिरिक्त आय का स्रोत प्रदान करती है और यह एक महत्वपूर्ण व्यावसायिक गतिविधि के रूप में उभर रही है।

पर्यटन:

जौनसार-बावर प्राकृतिक, भौगोलिक और ऐतिहासिक रूप से एक आकर्षक स्थल है, लेकिन आदिवासी क्षेत्र होने के कारण यहाँ का पर्यटन अभी तक पूरी तरह से विकसित नहीं हो पाया है। क्षेत्र में सम्राट अशोक के शिलालेख, पुरातात्विक स्थलों, देववन की व्यास गुफा, और महासू देवता का मंदिर जैसे ऐतिहासिक और धार्मिक स्थलों के कारण पर्यटन की अपार संभावनाएँ हैं। अगर इसे ठीक तरह से विकसित किया जाए तो यह स्थानीय लोगों के लिए रोजगार के नए अवसर उत्पन्न कर सकता है।

निष्कर्ष

जौनसार बावर की जनजातीय क्षेत्रीय विशिष्टता और सांस्कृतिक धरोहर के बावजूद, यहाँ की सामाजिक संरचना और व्यवस्था में कई विषमताएँ देखने को मिलती हैं। यह क्षेत्र अनुसूचित जनजाति और अनुसूचित जाति के विभिन्न समुदायों का मिश्रण है, जिसमें जाति व्यवस्था और लैंगिक असमानता प्रमुख मुद्दे हैं।

जाति व्यवस्था के संदर्भ में, जौनसार बावर में जातिगत विभाजन और पदानुक्रम की स्पष्ट संरचना देखी जा सकती है। खस राजपूत और ब्राह्मण, जो बाहरी जातियाँ हैं, वे सामाजिक और धार्मिक प्रमुखता में हैं, जबकि स्थानीय अनुसूचित जातियाँ जैसे सुनार, बढई, और जोगड़ा, कोल आदि आर्थिक और सामाजिक रूप से पिछड़ी हुई हैं। इसके परिणामस्वरूप, जातिगत विभाजन और सामाजिक असमानता की गहरी जड़ें यहाँ विद्यमान हैं। विशेष रूप से, अनुसूचित जातियों के सदस्य आज भी शोषण और असमानता का सामना कर रहे हैं, और उनके सामाजिक और आर्थिक स्थिति में सुधार की आवश्यकता है।

महिलाओं की स्थिति पर दृष्टि डालें तो, जौनसार बावर में पुरुष प्रधान समाज होने के कारण महिलाओं की सामाजिक स्थिति भी अत्यंत कमजोर है। महिलाओं को संपत्ति पर अधिकार नहीं है, और उनकी शिक्षा और सामाजिक गतिविधियों पर भी कई सीमाएँ हैं। उनके ससुराल और मायके के बाहर यात्रा की स्वतंत्रता पर प्रतिबंध है, जो उनकी सामाजिक स्थिति और विकास में एक महत्वपूर्ण बाधा बनती है। जौनसार बावर का विकास केवल आर्थिक और भौगोलिक संसाधनों का उपयोग करके ही नहीं किया जा सकता, बल्कि जातिगत और लैंगिक असमानताओं को समाप्त करके भी इसे संभव बनाया जा सकता है। अनुसूचित जातियों और महिलाओं के लिए शैक्षिक, सामाजिक, और आर्थिक प्रोत्साहन और सुधार की दिशा में ठोस कदम उठाने की आवश्यकता है, ताकि इस क्षेत्र का समग्र सामाजिक विकास हो सके और एक समावेशी और समान समाज की दिशा में आगे बढ़ा जा सके।

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