





# **I N D E X**

## **EPW – OCTOBER 2018**

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## **EPW - OCTOBER 2018**

### **1. A TANGLE OF TEMPLE ENTRY AND 'PRAGMATIC POLITICS'**

#### ***What is the background of the issue?***

- The question of the entry of women, between the ages of 10 and 50 years, into Sabarimala temple in Kerala, is as old as the formation of the state itself.
- The resultant differences of opinion have widened the political fault lines following SC's verdict lifting the existing ban on women's entry into the temple during their menstruating years.

#### ***What are the concerns?***

- Arguments against the verdict primarily centre on fears of increased state intervention in religious affairs.
- While these fears are valid in a multireligious country like India, the case of Sabarimala temple and other public temples in Kerala is unlike many other pilgrimage sites in the country.
- The state intervention in Sabarimala goes back to the Travancore–Cochin Hindu Religious Institutions Act, 1950, when the temple's governance was transferred from the Travancore Royal Devaswom Commission to the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB), a statutory body.

- The Kerala state legislature has passed the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Rules, 1965 endorsing the ban of entry of "mature" women, traditionally barred only from the sanctum sanctorum of Sabarimala, into the temple premises altogether.
- This legislation, above all else, is in violation of constitutional morality brought to attention by the Court.

#### ***How religious issues are politicized?***

- While the Indian model of secularism has entailed distance of the state from all religions, the principal political contradiction in India has come to be centred on religion.
- This has been engendered and fuelled largely by political parties and their associates.
- This can be traced back to the Shah Bano case and, more recently, the triple talaq petition.
- Once again, the dichotomy and opportunism of present-day political parties stands exposed for their entirely contrary stands vis-à-vis the triple talaq and Sabarimala cases.

#### ***What lies ahead?***

- Temple entry forms one of the grounds to articulate the concerns of justice.



- The state has, and will be, an important stakeholder in this agenda.
- However gender justice, as a value, seems to have become vulnerable to pragmatic politics.
- It most commonly takes a back seat in the quagmire of vote bank politics and larger demands for religious /communitarian reform.

## **2. HIGH TIME TO END TUBERCULOSIS**

### **What is the issue?**

- The global burden of Tuberculosis (TB) is in decline.
- However, with an estimated 10 million new cases of TB and 1.6 million dying from the disease globally in 2017, we still have a long way to go.

### **What is the background?**

- TB, previously known as “consumption,” is the deadliest infectious disease in the world, with patients facing stigma and incurring devastating socio-economic costs.
- The UN has committed to accelerating efforts and increasing funding towards achieving the agenda of the SDG to end the TB epidemic by 2030.
- India, which accounts for 27% of the world’s TB burden, had set its own target at the End-TB Summit in Delhi earlier this year: TB Free India by 2025.

- However, considering the state of India’s healthcare, this may be an unrealistic target.

### **What are the roadblocks?**

- In 2012, when it declared TB a notifiable disease, India had set up “**Nikshay**,” an online TB reporting system for medical practitioners and clinical establishments.
- However, Nikshay has faced many roadblocks like unawareness, unwillingness to report due to misconceptions, inconsistency in reporting, and lack of incentives for those reporting cases.
- Though the private sector has begun notifying cases, Nikshay’s adoption and use has been slow, unlike in China that has more effectively lowered the incidence rate of TB after launching similar online reporting mechanisms.
- Thus, the GOI has put in place provisions like penalising the non-reporting of TB cases, mandatory for pharmacists to report & maintain records of the drugs dispensed to patients, allowing for self-reporting by TB patients, and providing cash incentives to those reporting cases.
- While the reporting of cases has increased, the corollary reporting on treatment outcomes has not been robust, resulting in cases of relapse,



and multidrug-resistant (MDR) and extensively drug-resistant (XDR) TB.

- The coverage and prophylactic treatment of vulnerable populations, such as children under five living in households with TB and HIV/AIDS patients, has been even slower.

#### **What should be done?**

- With an estimated 1.7 billion or 23% of the world's population having **latent TB infection**, it is important to take steps to prevent the spread & the emergence of new cases from this pool.
- Of the five risk factors for TB mentioned in the WHO's Global TB Report 2018—**alcohol, smoking, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and under nutrition**—it is under nutrition that poses the gravest risk in poor, developing nations like India.
- Thus the prevention and successful treatment of TB is closely linked with the overall improvement in nutrition and health indicators, poverty, and access to healthcare.
- Regular national-level surveys can help countries plan their disease control and prevention programs better.
- The development and spread of new methods and technologies, new vaccines, and new drugs and shorter drug regimens have to be accelerated.

- Unless the global community acts now, with India and other TB-affected countries at the forefront, the 2030 target to eradicate TB will be far from attainable.

### **3. MISNAMING BUILDING OF TOILETS AS 'SWACHHATA'**

#### **What is the issue?**

- Within a span of merely four years (2014–17), the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) has increased household toilet availability from 42% to 64%, with over five lakh villages across 25 states/UTs being declared open defecation free (ODF).
- However, evidence shows that physical access alone is not enough to ensure usage, so much so that even the ODF-certified areas are not de facto ODF.

#### **What are the shortfalls in the scheme?**

- The showy display of ODF certification has overshadowed the fact that the essence of universal water and sanitation coverage is derived from the right to life (Article 21), guaranteed by the Constitution.
- There is no national legislation to protect these rights enabling the states to apply aggressive practices for earning an ODF status.
- This includes revoking of ration cards, electricity services and or shaming/penalising for open



defecation, or diverting funds earmarked for education and communication activities for behavioural change to building more toilets.

- In such a top-down system, violation of rights is rampant, primarily because of the beneficiaries' lack of ownership and the consequent lack of accountability of the service providers.

### **What do the studies reveal?**

- A WaterAid study in 2017 found that almost a third of the functional toilets under SBM failed to prevent human contact with faecal matter.
- From the human rights perspective, sanitation is not only concerned about individual right to use facilities, but also the human rights of other people who can be negatively affected by inappropriate management of sanitary wastes.
- Though the government has launched the ODF Plus Initiative and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation & Urban Transformation for waste management in rural and urban areas, the evidence of coverage is confounding.
- The National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (2017–18) shows 70% of villages as having waste management systems in place

- However, studies by WaterAid in 2017 and WHO/UN Children's Fund in 2015 found about 30% of the rural households and 9% of urban population, respectively, practising safe disposal of faecal waste.
- Nonetheless, the government should be given credit for bringing a socially anathematised issue like "open defecation" to the centre stage of the Indian policy discourse.
- But, this is a missed opportunity as a report by the UN Special Rapporteur, has identified that the SBM "contributes to violating fundamental rights of specific caste-affected groups engaged in manual scavenging."
- It not only cuts across caste, but also gender and persons with special requirements like persons with disabilities, transpersons, and women, particularly with respect to the menstrual hygiene management of the latter, a study by the Aser Centre (2016) found only 62% schools having functional and usable girls' toilets.
- Thus the Swachh Bharat Mission outwits rights-based development with lofty statistics.

## **4. THE LAND CONUNDRUM**

### **Why in news?**

The Agriculture Census 2015–16 establishes that structural constraints continue to exacerbate the agrarian crisis.



### *What are the findings?*

- The provisional results of the census confirm the persisting trend of fragmentation of landholdings and their skewed distribution across size classes.
- It reveals that the total area under farming in India declined from 159.59 million hectares in 2010–11 to 157.14 mn hectares in 2015–16 with a simultaneous rise in the number of operational holdings from 138 mn to 146 mn in the same period.
- Thus, the average size of operational holdings in India declined from 1.15 hectares to 1.08 hectares, reflecting the pressure of the increasing farming population on agricultural land.
- The data also illustrate the extent of fragmentation and the skewed distribution of land across size classes.
- **Proliferation of small and marginal landholdings:** In 2015–16, about 86.21% of the landholdings in the country consisted of small and marginal holdings (0 to 2 hectares), while their share in the operated area was only 47.34%.
- **Caste dimension:** It also reveals that Scheduled Caste (SC) groups operated only about 9% of the total available area and about 92% of those holdings are small and marginal.
- These figures disclose the extent of deprivation as a social group with

respect to the operation of landholdings which had been overlooked by most states.

### *What is its impact on productivity & farmers' income?*

- Recent research using National Sample Survey data, confirms that smallholdings in Indian agriculture still exhibit higher productivity than large holdings.
- However, it also shows lower per capita productivity of smallholdings and widespread incidence of poverty.
- Studies also show that only a small proportion of the small and marginal farmers have had access to institutional credit leading to dependence on middlemen.
- Further, marginal holdings of less than one hectare are too small to provide farmer households with sufficient incomes.
- It is the low level of returns from farming that has led to the persistence of agrarian distress.

### *What should be done?*

- There is an urgent need to consolidate operational holdings through reforms so as to enable the economies of scale to operate in farming.
- However, it would not be an easy process, due to the dearth of accurate land records.



- Updating of land records and titling would also be required before any attempts at consolidation of holdings.
- Cooperative farming or organising small and marginal farmers into producer companies would also be a possible solution to overcome the problem of fragmented landholdings.
- However, the state would need to play an active role as a facilitator in the consolidation process, especially to enable socially marginalised groups to gain more access to land.

## 5. THE ALL-PURPOSE MIGRANT WORKER

### Why in news?

- In recent weeks, Gujarat's migrant workers, particularly those hailing from UP, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh, experienced mob violence which led them to flee the state in panic.
- This recent case in a series of such cases over the years, in a nutshell, captures the dismal lives of poor migrant workers in almost all the prominent cities and towns.

### What are the problems of migrant workers?

- **Poor living conditions:** Poor migrant workers in India face even more precarious work and living conditions than their local counterparts.
- Whether it is benefiting from welfare schemes or their bargaining power for

negotiations for wages, they are in a much more vulnerable position.

- **Lack of representation:** As labour activists have pointed out, many of these workers do not have any presence as far as local government and services are concerned.
- The migrant workers too prefer to join welfare associations based on regional identity for security and protection.
- It must be noted that Kerala government has shown the way by a series of measures for migrant labour in the state.
- The construction industry, for example, which has a huge percentage of migrant labour, has a welfare board with a ₹ 1,000 crore corpus, and the government has announced a survey of migrant workers' living conditions, and assistance in procuring health insurance and legal aid.
- **Stereotyping & violence:** When it suits the interests of the powerful, these workers are left to fend for themselves, and face mob anger and violence even as industries and services are run on their labour.

### What should be done?

- It must be emphasised that all citizens have the basic right to move anywhere in the country, and that their constitutional rights and duties are to be equally protected.



- Above all, the migrant workers must not be seen to be simply providers of labour and services, to be wooed and discarded at will.
- Whether seasonal, temporary, or for longer periods, migrant workers face exploitation and insecurity.
- It is this aspect along with the right to free movement that requires greater public and policy intervention.

## 6. RECOGNISING THE EMPTY BOWLS

### Why in news?

- The FAO report on the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018 finds global hunger to have risen for three consecutive years since 2015, despite years of positive inventories in the global cereal market
- This puts a question mark over the political commitment behind the SDG of zero hunger by 2030.

### What are the findings?

- 29 out of the 37 countries identified by the FAO to be in need of external food assistance due to conflicts/displacement/weather shocks, are in Africa.
- While the lack of internal governance drives localised food insecurity, the widespread lack of access galvanises attention towards the modalities of international assistance to mitigate starvation.

- According to the UN's World Food Program, international food aid had shifted from program-based assistance to emergency aids, when the incidence of global food emergencies doubled from an average of 15 a year in the 1980s to 30 in the 2000s.
- However, satiating a chronically hungry, growing population with emergency aid alone is potentially untenable, because such assistance is "reaction" to starvation, rather than its "prevention."
- Evidences show that the entrenched commercial interests of MNCs in the export of surpluses have impeded local/triangular purchases of food aid.
- The latter could have enabled an efficient distribution of food within the developing countries.

### What are the other concerns?

- The hunger-affected countries also cannot overlook their own political lethargy to identify hunger as "chronic/endemic."
- When IFPRI's 2017 **Global Hunger Index** ranked India 100th out of 119 countries, NITI Aayog trashed the estimate for "showing India's hunger level in very poor light" by placing "disproportionate value to child under nutrition."
- However, over the past eight months, reportage of alleged starvation deaths has come in from various states due to entitlement failure.



### *What should be done?*

- Ensuring steady access to food for intended beneficiaries by carrying out policies of income redistribution, which respond to objectives of social justice rather than economic efficiency.
- It also means considering food to be a human right, which must be upheld by governments through public commitments.
- Whether free markets can create such conditions for benefits to “trickle down” to the hungry people is a matter of contention, given the deep pockets of inequality present.
- Given this, chronic starvation cannot be understood, let alone prevented, if they are detached from the realities of power.
- The formulaic solutions for ending hunger, such as more aid and better development programs are impressive, yet their implementation remains largely a political decision.

## **7. RECENT DOWNFALL OF THE INDIAN RUPEE**

### *What is the issue?*

- The exchange rate of the Indian rupee has always been an emotive issue in India and has often tended to have generated more heat than light.
- The current episode of the downfall of the rupee is no exception.

### *What could be the reasons for the downfall?*

- **Dollar Strengthening:** There is a view that the depreciation of the rupee has been the result of a general appreciation of the dollar due to the tightening of monetary policy by the Fed in recent times.
- Other policies like loose fiscal policy and increasingly protectionist trade measures are also helping the rise of the dollar.
- **Nominal and Real Rates:** It is possible that in real terms, the present slide of rupee may be partly due to a correction of a phase of nominal and real appreciation it experienced in 2016.
- **Outflow of Short-term Capital:** In general, emerging markets are facing outflows of capital due to increased tension about trade wars, external imbalances and commodity prices.
- This is prompting many global investors to look for a “safe haven” in the US.
- In case of India, expectations about rupee depreciation, and rising instability of its financial and banking sectors & average corporate performance in the last few quarters may also be responsible for the withdrawal of FIIs from the Indian market.
- **Widening CAD:** The rapid rise of current account deficit (CAD) in the



last three quarters (\$14.2 billion) largely attributable to the rapidly growing deficit in merchandise trade is yet another factor.

### ***Is Oil the Villain?***

- There is a strong negative correlation between the international oil prices and India's oil trade balance.
- As the **Economic Survey 2017–18** pointed out, a \$10 per barrel increase in the price of oil reduces growth by 0.2–0.3% points, increases WPI inflation by about 1.7 % points and worsens the CAD by about 9–10 bn dollars.

### ***What is the impact on the economy?***

- Rupee depreciation benefits exports by making domestic goods cheaper in terms of international currency.
- However, by raising domestic prices of imports, rupee depreciation can also lead to inflationary pressures.
- It increases prices of all imported goods, including oil and other intermediate goods, and thereby, can adversely affect the competitiveness of the country.
- The net effect will depend on import intensity and the price elasticity of demand for India's exports.

### ***What are the conclusions?***

- First, the recent downfall of the rupee was predominantly triggered by global factors.

- Second, India's huge dependence on oil imports and significant propensity for gold and electronic imports have turned out to be its Achilles heel.
- Third, while the situation demands serious attention, it is not as bad as in 2013.

### ***What is the way ahead?***

- The RBI decided not to react to exchange rate depreciation and kept the policy rate unchanged in line with its philosophy of flexible inflation targeting.
- Although this does not seem to be a doomsday situation, India for long has been caught up with the tensions of the impossible trinity.
- According to it, a country can have at the most two of the following three objectives, namely a fixed exchange rate, monetary policy independence and flexibility of capital accounts.
- Hence the rupee will continue to be under pressure whenever the mood of global capital market changes, for it happened in 2013 and it can happen in 2018 as well.

## **8. SAFETY OF FISHERFOLK AT SEAS -POINTS FOR CRITICAL INTERVENTION**

### ***What is the issue?***

- Over 240 fisherfolk were missing after cyclone Ockhi hit India's south-western coasts.



- Lack of adoption of safety measures points to gross negligence of safety of fisherfolk at sea.

### **What is the global scenario?**

- Across the globe, marine capture fisheries remain one of the most hazardous occupations.
- The ILO estimates that over 24,000 fisherfolk die every year, besides suffering damages to craft and gear.
- Evidence in some northern countries suggests that the risks of fatal accidents while fishing have reduced by about half to an average with the implementation of safety programmes.
- However, the adoption of these measures in India is found to be low.

### **What is the government stand on the issue?**

- The recent National Policy on Marine Fisheries by the Ministry of Agriculture that safety-at-sea measures will be adequately strengthened and implemented.
- It also points to the fact that regional cooperation in safety of fisherfolk is necessary as the upper Indian Ocean, especially the Bay of Bengal, witnesses high number of adverse weather events.

### **What should be done?**

- **Equipment for Safety and Rescue:** States like Kerala have made the possession of life jackets, lifebuoys,

life rafts, and firefighting appliances in mechanised boats mandatory for registration.

- Besides, carrying vitaminised energy & drinking water, in a watertight container is also mandated.
- **Early Warning Systems and Communication:** The IMD's weather forecasts to needs to be passed on quickly to ensure faster rescue operations and other adaptive mechanisms.
- **Challenges:** Fishing vessels do not have the Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) number whichn is mandatory for very high frequency (VHF) radio for communication at sea.
- A distress alert transmitter (DAT) is also recommended in all fishing boats to seek help from the coastguard when fisherfolk are in trouble.
- **Issues:** However, false alarms, misuse, non-use and misleading messages were often reported which creates troubles for the rescue teams.
- Another recommendation is the automatic identification system (AIS), which was introduced as collision avoidance tool for ships.
- The Kerala government, in collaboration with ISRO, has come forward to equip the fishing vessels with high frequency communication systems (NavIC).
- **"C mobile,"** a private initiative, operating in the Neendakara coast of



Kerala, is exclusively meant for fisherfolk for facilitating their communication needs.

- **Basic Survival Skills:** Though most fishermen have basic swimming skill, the migrant workers from non-coastal areas, must also be prepared with these basic survival skills.
- **Need for Awareness Generation:** A strong and vibrant extension system is needed to create awareness of safety measures among fisherfolk.
- Ensuring access to institutional facilities like credit and insurance could be a key instrument to inculcate safety-sensitive behaviour.
- **Translating Policy into Action:** The GOI must adopt long-term strategies for protection of fisherfolk living in coastal zones , supplemented by research on both engineering and social aspects of fisherfolk safety.

#### **What lies ahead?**

- The fisheries sector has an important role in Indian economy in terms of employment generation, nutritional security, foreign exchange earnings and livelihood generation for a population of about 15 million.
- Achieving higher growth in fisheries with a concern for fisherfolk can yield rich social benefits in terms of avoiding loss of men and material at sea.

- Thus, a judicious blend of promotional and protective measures, aided by institutions in awareness generation and enforcement structure is the need of the hour.

## **9. EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF DISCRIMINATION AMONG DALITS AND MUSLIMS**

### **Why in news?**

A recent study named Social Attitudes Research, India (SARI), has quantified experiences and perceptions of discrimination among people from disadvantaged groups of, Dalits and Muslims.

### **What are the important findings?**

- It's noted that under-reporting of victimisation is a problem especially in cases of violence against Dalits, Muslims, Adivasis, and women..
- Under-reporting of victimisation may be especially high in a political climate in which incidents such as lynchings of Dalits and Muslims go unpunished.
- **Cross cultural comparison:** The U.S National Research Council reviews research that finds that asking black Americans about experiences of discrimination can produce underestimates.
- This is because respondents may not know whether negative outcomes, such as failure to get a promotion or



to be allowed to rent a flat, are due to social group membership, or some other reason.

- It also suggests that before the civil rights movement, black Americans may have under-reported discrimination because they were not socialised to recognise and condemn it.
- Similarly, SARI data suggests that reporting of experiences of discrimination may be higher in Maharashtra which has had a strong Dalit movement, than in the states.

#### **What should be done?**

- More research is needed to develop ways to capture experiences of discrimination in quantitative surveys.
- Evidence also suggests that greater efforts must be made, starting now, to improve Dalits' and Muslims' experiences with schools and government officials, as these are the that help create a more just society.

### **10. DO RAILWAY TRACKS SERVE THE PUBLIC GOOD?**

#### **Why in news?**

- Responses to railway accidents very often enter into what could be seen as the slippery domain of the counterfactual involving the blame game.

- Thus, in the context of the recent railway tragedy near Amritsar that claimed 60 lives, such a blame game was quite prominently indulged in by some interested parties.
- The counterfactual provides the ground for some people to fix responsibility on others while at the same time escaping from any responsibility themselves.

#### **What are the different perspectives?**

- Some renowned literary persons, who have been influenced by Gandhian thought, view the railway track as piercing through the land and thus creating a deep crack in its heart.
- Whereas scholars riding the postcolonial standpoint, hold the imperial state responsible for constructing railway lines that cut through the mountains.
- The railway tracks and therefore the railways, that are seen as a public good, stand on private land that once belonged to peasants.
- The land near railway tracks is public land . In many towns and semi-urban towns, local people have treated the use of this land as a matter of customary right for Dussehra celebrations.



- As has been the case, people in India seem to have treated the occupation of land near the railway tracks as a matter of customary right.
- Compared to military establishments in India, the railways administration has been quite flexible, if not generous, in making concessions to those who occupy the land.
- On the other side, the railway coaches on the tracks also carry the middle class whose attitudes towards those who reside by the side of these tracks are often morally offensive.
- These commuters who otherwise suffer from hardships in the local trains treat the slums at the side of the tracks as everyday sources of disgust and repulsion.

### ***What's the reason for trespassing?***

- In case of commuters in Mumbai who are anxious to reach their workplaces on time, they underestimate the speed of the train when crossing the railway tracks.
- Media reports suggest that in Mumbai alone nearly 20,000 people were killed and an equal number were fatally injured in the last four years.
- It is their structural location to the land and the nagging sense of anxiety produced by the working conditions that leave them no choice to escape the risk.
- Similarly, it is not as if the railway engine leaves the tracks and chases human beings, or runs berserk into the residential localities or the mob that gathers near the tracks.
- Tracks run on scientific logic, whereas human reason is taken over by the force of anxiety and excitement.