

# PROJECT STATECRAFT

## X

# PROJECT UP

*Present To You*

A SERIES OF  
RESEARCH PAPERS.

---

[www.projectstatecraft.org](http://www.projectstatecraft.org)  
[www.projectup.in](http://www.projectup.in)



Veritas et Aequitas



RESEARCH PAPER 1

**Sexual and  
Reproductive  
Health in  
Economically  
Underprivileged  
Regions of India**

RESEARCH PAPER 2

**Peace, Justice,  
Strong  
Institution and  
The role of Local  
Government in  
times of  
Communal Riots.**

RESEARCH PAPER 3

**Barriers to  
the  
education of  
Rural Youth.**

# Issues and Challenges in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHRs) of Young People in India

Saloni Killedar, Project Statecraft

Rijul Alvan Das, Project uP

## The Current State of SRHRs in India

India has more than 50% of the total population under the age of 25. A quarter of our population is below 14 years of age (Kedia et al, 2018). Adolescents (those between 10-19 years of age) make up 20% of our population. Young people ought to be provided with quality education and healthcare, among other things. While a lot is said about education and skill development, young people's health is an issue that demands more attention. Even of the limited attention that the issue of health gets, certain aspects of it are brushed under the carpet. One such aspect in our country is that of sexual and reproductive health. As per the United Nations Population Fund, good sexual and reproductive health implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life, the capability to reproduce, and the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to do so. It is an indispensable part of universal human rights and has been enshrined in various policy documents and international conventions such as ICPD Programme of Action(1994), Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women(1979).Sexual and reproductive health involves features like accessibility, availability, awareness etc. regarding it.

In Indian society, it is considered a taboo to discuss issues pertaining to sex and reproduction. It is highly contextual with regards to the culture and tradition of any geographical area. Hence, topics such as sexual well-being, reproductive healthcare and other allied matters have usually stayed absent from regular policy discourse. Due to the lack of proper support, be it institutional or otherwise, a large proportion of our population is unaware of the necessity of an individual's SRHRs. In a study, it was found that only 15% of people within 15-24 years of age have received sex education (Guttmatcher,2014). This is a serious concern that needs to be addressed since the future demographic structures crucially depend on the actions of the present. It is absolutely imperative that the young people of India have adequate information and access to facilities so that they can exercise their right to well-being.

An essential subset of reproductive health is menstrual health. In India, only 64% of women in urban areas and 45% of women in rural areas use sanitary hygiene products. The current scenario has exacerbated the situation. There is no specific plan on how to tackle the lack of access to menstrual health care. This leads to period poverty which is a state where women don't have access to safe and hygienic sanitary products and are unable to manage their periods because of community stigma and sanctions.

People's mindsets and customs come in the way of getting menstrual health care. Schools and colleges do not provide adequate support regarding information and accessibility of menstrual health products. Availability and accessibility of menstrual products is also an issue. Poor menstrual health can lead to many issues which women are oblivious about. For instance, Dysmenorrhea, which is painful menstrual periods caused by uterine contraction. Primary dysmenorrhea is when women experience recurrent pain, while secondary dysmenorrhea is when there is a disorder in women's reproductive organs. Many women who suffer are unaware of these and do not discuss it candidly because of the prevalent stigma. Additionally, few campaigns have been conducted in order to create awareness about this. However, the few campaigns conducted (by the State and non-profit organizations) to create awareness has failed to reach the vast majority. For instance, a social media campaign of "Padman challenge" was taken up by celebrities to spread awareness about menstrual hygiene, where they uploaded pictures on social media with sanitary napkins. This campaign was ineffective as most of the population lives in rural India who have no idea surrounding the issue of menstrual hygiene.

Due to the stigma around menstruation, women are restricted from entering temples, kitchens, schools, etc.. Some women are forced to stay in secluded places because of mythical beliefs that menstruating women emit some kind of smell and rays. All these social myths can be traced back to a regressive society where men

understood that menstruation is a women's issue and dismissed its importance. However, these barriers are subtly fading because of various NGOs like Sukhibhava Foundation, Not just a piece of cloth etc, who work with rural and urban communities to improve menstrual health practice. Additionally, movies like Padman have made a breakthrough as it addresses real suffering of women where they use unclean clothes or rags repeatedly and stay isolated due to which the likelihood of contracting diseases like cervical cancer, reproductive tract infection etc. increases. This movie succeeded in spreading an appropriate message to the society.

Let's not "whisper" but, rather brazenly sensitize.

## Problems

One of the most fundamental problems that lie in this aspect is a lack of concerted political will. There are a few programs that seek to address these concerns of SRHRs when it comes to young people. One of the most popular programs in this regard is the Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health (ARSH) Clinics set up in 2006. This was amongst the first time that due policy focus was given on young people's SRHRs.[1] However, as research suggests, these have not been as effective as they should have been. While some say that the registration in these clinics was not convenient, others point to the behaviour of staff in these clinics. In addition to these, issues about privacy also arise in a lot of cases (Tiwari et al, 2015) (Population Council, 2014). Another program that specifically focuses on adolescents' health is the Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakaram (RKSK) that was launched in 2014. A heavy focus of the scheme is on the sexual health of adolescents. The scheme is promising since it focuses on issues such as making reproductive services and healthcare accessible to adolescents etc. A feature of this program is to have Adolescent Friendly Health Centres (AFHCs) in every district which would encourage young people to come out and seek guidance, counselling and be informed about their SRHRs. However, due to faulty implementation, it has not reached all parts of the country. Moreover, the scheme calls for youth leadership in decision making. However, young people are often absent in policy discussions regarding the issue.

Lack of awareness is another serious hindrance that ought to be taken care of. The best illustration of the problem is the ineffectiveness of sex education which youngsters receive. A massive challenge to sex education comes from society's orthodox members who consider it to be gross and 'inappropriate' to talk about sex to young people. Often is the case that adolescents are exposed to sex, sexuality etc. by their peers and not qualified medical practitioners and teachers. One of the major reasons for the same is the absence of a comfortable environment at home or school where healthy conversations could take place (Vaidyanathan, 2020). In a survey conducted for adolescents, most participants said the reason they did not consult a doctor for their problems is that they did not find them "serious enough" (IANS, 2018). This shows how ineffective our existing sex education program is since it doesn't equip learners with the tools to correctly analyse what is and what is not serious enough for their health and well-being. The problem also lies with the curriculum on sex education.. School curriculum doesn't have a rights-based approach which would inform people about their rights and responsibilities when it comes to sexual health, reproductive care etc. Consent as a concept is almost absent from the sexual education programs in most schools.

Coupled with a lack of awareness is the issue of child marriage. The legal age for marriage in India is 18 years for girls while it is 21 years for boys. Nearly 27% of girls are married before the minimum age. As a nation, India leads the world charts when it comes to the number of children, mostly girls, getting married (*End Child Marriage*, 2020). Poor socio-economic condition is a primary reason. Intergenerational poverty can lead to early marriage as girls who marry young are unlikely to receive the education required to live an empowered

life, they start a family early with minimum education and exposure, which in turn leads to the cycle of poverty as this is followed by generations. It also implies not having the access to knowledge of safe sexual and reproductive practises. Due to this, a very high proportion of them face the risk of experiencing unsafe practises combined with physical, emotional and sexual violence. Another issue with child marriage is the lack of agency of the woman in the union. Due to this, even if they have the knowledge, they are deprived of their decision making power and freedom of choice.

## Solutions

Awareness and knowledge about SRHRs is an essential component for the holistic growth and development of an individual, particularly young people. It does not just benefit the person, but also enhances the society and nation. This is especially true in countries like India where young people form a large proportion of the entire population. Furthermore, the youngsters of today will drive the population growth as per a report (UN, 2019), since they will be the ones who enter reproductive age brackets in the future. Hence, it is necessary to ensure that they make informed choices about their sexuality, preferences, family planning etc. For this, it is necessary that the hindrances that lie in the realization of SRHRs are obliterated.

In order to achieve that goal, a good place to start would be schools. It is absolutely necessary for young adults to have a comprehensive understanding of the issue. For this, a revised curriculum should be prepared which would address all aspects of human sexuality. This includes information in complete biological processes, along with their emotional and psychological aspects. In addition to this, proper training must be given on consent, gender identity, interpersonal relationships etc. Due focus must also be given on rights such as the right to seek abortion amongst other essentials. However, mere information is not enough; steps must be taken to make sure that the curriculum is implemented across states. We have seen how opposition to comprehensive educational plan by states regarding adolescent sex education has in fact led to bans. For instance, the *Adolescent Education Programme*, released in 2007 by the Central Government, got banned in 12 states because it deemed inappropriate and would promote “risky” sexual behaviour in adolescents (Chowdhury, 2020). Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, sex education must be contextualised so that the following twin objectives are achieved.:

- (i) acceptance in the society
- (ii) effectiveness of sex education

The engagement of all stakeholders in the development and implementation of the curriculum would be highly instrumental in this regard. A need for inclusion of physicians and paediatricians in policies and programs is essential as they can help people, especially the rural poor, who do not have proper access to healthcare facilities. Therefore, prevention programs need to be launched which should include-

- 1) Knowledge related to sexual and reproductive health, and accessibility to education of contraceptives in remote regions.[2]
- 2) Medical and psychological support to adolescent girls who are pregnant. Also, there should be prenatal care which helps women in medical, social, educational, nutritional needs and child care training etc.
- 3) Discussions on sexuality and reproductive issues should be encouraged by the physicians and full access to information and services should be given at the local level

Furthermore, in order to cater to socio-economic issues, public interventions are imperative. Interventions focusing on increasing marriageable age, accessibility to contraceptives and education will make a significant difference in improving the overall sexual and reproductive health. The presence of subnational policies and programs targeting early marriage and early childbearing is essential as issues can be addressed at the grassroots level. Even though child marriage is prohibited by law, there are nearly 1.5 million child brides in the country. Stricter punishments for those who contravene the law should be placed. Additionally, parents should be incentivised to send their daughters to schools instead of focusing on their marriage. In addition to this, continued investments in areas where early marriage and early first birth of the first child birth would yield high benefit-to-cost ratio as it will reduce adverse effect on reproductive health and will lead to a secured future. There is also a requirement for community sensitization, comprehensive sexual education and enrolment of girls completing their entire education.

Another crucial intervention would be that of our government and political forces. One way of showing political will is via budgetary allocations. Implementation of schemes like RKSK requires inputs such as financial resources and a trained and dedicated staff to redress the issues brought by people, among others. Most of the existing policies are implemented and acted upon by people who are not in the demographic group whose issues they seek to solve. Hence, it is essential that young people are adequately represented in the decision making process so that their interest is truly reflected in the programmes. Another important role of the government is to ensure that existing laws and regulations are sternly implemented. Monetary and social benefits along with regular sensitization campaigns could go a long way in alleviating the problem.

Therefore, proper and effective interventions with deep understanding of the root cause of the issue is the key to solving problems pertaining to sexual and reproductive health of the youth.

## Conclusion

We have seen the challenges and possible solutions that pertain to adolescent and young people's SRHRs. With this article, we seek to initiate a discussion in the society on this issue. While there are some positive aspects regarding India's case such as the abolition of 12% tax on sanitary pads, a lot of work needs to be done. This is all the more true given the fact that COVID-19 is ravaging the world, which could potentially undo all that has been done to secure the limited SRHRs that adolescents and young people have.

For starters, there have been reports that a large number of child marriages could follow in the coming decade primarily due to the pandemic. The primary reason for the same is cited to be the economic situation of the family. Due to lack of information, unsafe practises and ill-informed decision making could take place as a consequence. Since India has the largest numbers of child brides in the world, the effects could be more pronounced here. There are already cases of severe domestic and sexual violence in Indian households. Currently, the focus is on mitigating the pandemic which therefore is compromising the attention required for SRHRs. Due to the pandemic, people might not be able to access reproductive services, essential child care etc., which could potentially put millions of people at risk. For this, due public action and government support is required so that this hidden calamity of the pandemic is tackled successfully.

## References

*Body of Knowledge - Improving SRH for India's Adolescents.* (2017, March). <https://www.dasra.org/assets/uploads/resources/Body%20of%20Knowledge%20-%20Improving%20SRH%20for%20India%20s%20Adolescents.pdf>

Brown, S. N. (2002). Media Interventions to Promote Responsible Sexual Behavior. *The Journal of Sex Research.*

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00224490209552123>

Chatterjee, S. (2017, April 7). *The News Minute | News.* The News Minute. <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/young-indians-are-homophobic-misogynist-and-orthodox-says-csds-survey-60003>

Chowdhury, J. (2020, March 9). *Why Is Sex Or Sexuality Education In Indian Schools Still A Taboo? Feminism In India.*

<https://feminisminindia.com/2020/03/09/why-sex-sexuality-education-indian-schools-taboo/>

*End child marriage.* (2020). UNICEF India. <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/end-child-marriage#:~:text=Estimates%20suggest%20that%20each%20year,15%2D19%20are%20currently%20married.>

Indo Asian News Service(IANS). (2018, January 12). *India unprepared for teen sexual revolution, only 20.3 % of unmarried boys use condoms.* Hindustan Times. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/sex-and-relationships/india-unprepared-for-teen-sexual-revolution-only-20-3-of-unmarried-boys-use-condoms/story-0CSiMwuxKPFQ2Yb9oqd0uK.html>

Joar Svanemyr, . A. (2015). Creating an Enabling Environment for Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health: A Framework and Promising Approaches. *Journal of Adolescent Health 56 S7eS14, 56 S7eS14.*

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25528980/>

Kedia, Gutta, Chapman, Mishra, S. S. T. V. (2018, October 5). *Here's what young Indians really want from life.* World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/10/here-s-what-young-indians-really-want-from-life/> [5]

Khan, A. (2003). Adolescent Reproductive Health in Pakistan: Status, Policies, Programs and Issues.

<http://www.hivpolicy.org/bib/HPP000293.htm>

Kothari, G. S. U. M. J. (2019, April 23). *A half-written promise.* The Hindu. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-half-written-promise/article26914712.ece>

Tiwari, V. K., Raj, S., Piang, L. K., Nair, K., Gandotra, R., & Elizabeth, H. (2015). REACH AND EFFECTIVENESS OF ADOLESCENT REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH (ARSH) PROGRAMME IN A STATE OF INDIA: PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES . *Indian Journal of Preventive & Social Medicine, 46(3-4), 9.* <http://ijpsm.co.in/index.php/ijpsm/article/view/94>

Population Council. (2014, August). *Provision of adolescent reproductive and sexual health services in India: Provider perspectives.* [https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2014PGY\\_ARSH-IndiaProviderReport.pdf](https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2014PGY_ARSH-IndiaProviderReport.pdf)

Vaidyanathan, P. (2020, May 6). *Need for Comprehensive Sex Education: Moving Beyond Birds & Bees.* The Quint. <https://www.thequint.com/neon/gender/india-needs-a-comprehensive-sex-education-plan>

Population Council. (2014, July). *Accessing Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics in India: The Perspectives of Adolescents and Youth.* [https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2014PGY\\_AFHC-IndiaReport.pdf](https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2014PGY_AFHC-IndiaReport.pdf)

Muttreja, P. (2020, April 7). *OPINION: Covid 19 and Reproductive Rights of Girls and Women.* Amnesty International India. <https://amnesty.org.in/opinion-covid-19-and-reproductive-rights-of-girls-and-women/>

Lenny Mushwana, L. M. (2015). Factors influencing the adolescent pregnancy rate in the Greater Giyani Municipality, Limpopo Province – South Africa. *International Journal of Africa Nursing Sciences.* <http://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/20063>

Organization, I. L. (2003). Technical and vocational education and training for the twenty-first century: UNESCO and ILO Recommendations. *program and meeting document.* <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000220748>

Sexual & reproductive health. (n.d.). *UNFPA India.* <https://www.unfpa.org/data/transparency-portal/unfpa-india>

Shaohua Chen, Y. W. (2001). China's Growth and Poverty reduction. *Economic Policy and Poverty Reduction Division.* <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17538960701770547>

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2019). *World Population Prospects 2019-Highlights.* United Nations. [https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019\\_Highlights.pdf](https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf)

World Health Organization: WHO. (2019, June 14). *Sexually transmitted infections* [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-\(stis\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-(stis))

# Peace, Justice, Strong Institutions, and the Role of Local Governments in times of Communal Riots

Surbi Tyagi, Project uP

Sanaa Munjal, Project Statecraft

## Abstract

*In contemporary times, conflict, insecurity, weak institutions and limited access to justice pose a great threat to sustainable development. Without peace, stability, human rights and effective governance, based on rule of law, a sustainable future of the world is beyond imaginable. Access to justice for all, as well as effective, accountable and inclusive institutions is seemingly lacking in most societies today. With persecution, injustice and abuse still running rampant leading to a tear in the very fabric of civilization. Heightened levels of armed violence, localised conflicts and instability have disastrous effects on the institutions of democracy. These times thus call for the strengthening of institutions, especially local governments, for the building of social cohesion, promotion of long-lasting peace and effective delivery of justice. Local institutions play a vital role in averting or facilitating communal violence. Strengthening the rule of law, increasing institutional accountability and promoting human rights is key to the process of reducing the flow of conflicts and communal violence.*

*This paper seeks to explore the appositeness of peace, justice and strong institutions in modern democracies. Sustainable Development Goal 16 aims at providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The lack of access to and ineffective implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16 which seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, in turn, renders institutions and local governments weak and incompetent to ensure the promotion of peace and justice. This often results in armed conflicts, communal riots and unstable governments. The paper aims to understand and assess the linkage between strong local institutions and the prevalence of peace and justice. The research focuses on the multifaceted reasons which lead to success and failure of implementation of the SDG 16. In an attempt to promote long-lasting world peace and conflict-free societies, the paper presents suggestions and recommendations to problems thus analysed.*

## Introduction

With the world living in a constant state of conflict and struggle, the paper aims at providing an overview of the role of some specific players, namely peace, justice, and strong institutions, along with local governments. One of the biggest issues that the world and specifically, India grapples with is that of communal violence or riots instigated on the basis of religion, ethnic, or along communal lines. In these dire times, it is essential to regain peace, provide timely justice to the victims, and for the governments and other institutions of the state to facilitate the same. The widespread communalism and the violence between different communities steps on the guiding principles of our country's Constitution. The trauma and harm caused by such instances of violence tend to break and impact society in negative and diabolical ways. The 17 sustainable development goals set up by the United Nations, which are set to be achieved by 2030, include the goal of Peace, Justice, and Strong institutions that are important in a world where threat and conflict looms large, and for a more sustainable world. To fulfill these goals, the role of government and local institutions is imperative, and that will determine our standing and performance while also impacting our fulfillment of the other 16 goals. Further, the role of peacemaking, in relation to that of young people, and the ever-evolving culture of peace stand on a pedestal, along with the role of players like the police and administration who are the real peacemakers but compromise on it at the behest of a political agenda. The prevailing injustices in the society are also the scum of the earth, and a fair intervention by the institutions for timely justice and proper redressal is necessary. In several instances, state and judicial complicity results in wrongful judgments. The local institutions and the machinery are usually at the head of managing such issues and try to prevent the disruption of harmony and peace. Ever since the partition in 1947, ideological governance has taken over which has impacted us both positively and negatively. The local government plays an important role in sustaining the cohesive nature of society, and for the fulfillment of the sustainable development goals and long-lasting peace, prosperity and animosity among communities. The role played by them during communal violence and riots is usually oriented to meet their political motive and depicts their inaction and failure to prevent widespread barbarity and violence. This relation between the key elements and the role played by them in creating a better world is essential for a more sustainable framework and a peaceful society.

## Communal Riots and its Implications

Since Independence, India has continued to grapple with the grave issue of Communalism. It is merely an ideology that ends up creating divisions on various grounds like race, ethnicity, beliefs, values, and most importantly, religion. These divisions produce clashes in our society, and in a democratic and secular country like ours, it is something to worry about. It rises from religious pluralism and results in a threat to not only the national integrity but also leads to heightened tensions, rivalries, and hostilities between different groups and communities.

Our country was built upon the values and teachings of secularity, integrity, democracy, freedom, and a shared vision of a better India. Communalism stains each of these! A lot of differences like caste, class, ethnicity, religion can lead to the feelings of resentment and thus, a rise in communalism, like economic interests and differences, beliefs in societies; politics and ideas of the leaders. (*C.D.J.S.C. 2015, October 25*).

With communalism comes communal violence and riots, and it was a defining feature post-independence. Violence between different communities is never-ending in our country, be it between Hindu's, Muslim's, Sikh's, Christian's, or any other religious group. Media is a significant player, it influences us in stronger manners than subtler tones. The targets are the "enemy" community in the eyes of the other group. It is based on hatred, enmity, and revenge. There has also been a very exorbitant increase in Hindutva politics and

agendas in India in the past few years, and a lean towards more of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Sangh Pariwar which are some of the organizations that have also played a major role in increasing communalism and leading to violence. It also leads to a feeling of anti-nationalism and breaks the cohesive nature of society and further leads to an impact on the mental health and well-being of individuals. Raghotham, S. (2019, March 27), UKEssays. (November 2018), Kulkarni, S. (2020, February 29).

Anti-Sikh Riots 1984: One of the earliest examples of communal violence and riots that tore the nation were the Anti-Sikh Riots of 1984. With a very complicated history, the riots began when the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, under Operation Blue Star ordered a military mission to remove all Sikh militants hiding inside the Golden Temple, Amritsar. It was one of the biggest security missions undertaken by the Army, to subdue the Khalistan movement that was a Sikh political movement for an independent state for Sikh's. The army used tanks and other military equipment to regain control. There was also a media blackout in Punjab. It was followed by the assassination of the then PM Indira Gandhi by her two Sikh bodyguards, four months after Operation Blue Star. Further, it led to the Anti-Sikh riots claiming thousands of lives, with Sikh men beaten, stabbed and burned to death, women raped, and children killed. (Hussain, F. 2018, December 17).

Bhagalpur Riots 1989: The violence and riots began in Bhagalpur, a district in Bihar, after a Hindu religious procession came under a bomb attack, triggered on October 24, 1989. The riots began, and over the next month it was an organized massacre of communities. The mobs burned down villages, mass killings took place, and resulted in a very high death toll on both sides. The two went on a rampage with killings, looting, and destruction of properties. It spread to almost 195 villages, and the death toll was almost between 1000-2000 people. These riots are often known as the forgotten riots of Bhagalpur. *Iqbal, J. (2014, December 31), Chakravarty, I. (2015, August 12).*

Jabalpur Riots 1961: A major riot that broke out in the year 1961 between Hindus and Muslims began in the city of Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. Although the real cause of the violence is unknown, there are various versions of the story. The riot also began and was instigated between Muslim and Hindu entrepreneurs due to an economic rivalry between them. The media reported several stories of police brutality and atrocities. Several people died, according to official reports with several more being reported dead unofficially. *V.G.J.G. (2013, July 15)*

## **SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**

One of the 17 UN sustainable development goals is for more peace, justice, and strong institutions which is Goal 16. Conflict, insecurity, and injustice is a threat to sustainable development. With more conflict and war increasing across the world and a large number of people suffering and with poor access to justice, social services and institutions, the SDG aims at reducing violence, working with governments and communities to end all conflict and insecurity. It is essential to promote the rule of law and human rights, along with reducing the flow of arms and strengthening participation. It is essential to uphold this goal due to several issues the world is grappling with daily, and the fulfillment of the goal would only help the world inch towards a better life for one and all. Examples of the issues include violence against children that affects more than 1 billion children around the world and costs up to the US \$7 trillion a year, with the most corrupt institutions being the judiciary and the police, with the proportion of prisoners held in detention without sentencing being almost 31% of the total. *M. (n.d.), Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions. (n.d.). UNDP.*

India, being one of the largest democracies in the world, has the principles of justice, liberty, and equality enshrined in its Constitution. There are a large number of institutions functioning for smooth administration in the country. There are several policies and frameworks in place for the protection of its citizens and have been made more inclusive, with a grassroots level of governance. However, India is still lagging in several areas for the fulfilment of SDG Goal 16. According to the Niti Aayog SDG Index report, as per the performance indicators of all the states and the Union territories, India's score for the SDG 16, i.e Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions ranges between 53 and 91 for all the States and between 63 and 92 for the Union Territories. *SDG India Index Baseline Report (2018, December 21)*

For a successful fulfilment of the SDGs, governments, and institutions, must be held accountable for their errors and mistakes like corruption, crime, state-sponsored violence, or other related acts. The violence against certain groups based on religion, race, and on any other basis must not take place. Peace and justice, along with access to education, healthcare, and other facilities and things should be available universally, and the needs of the people must be kept above that of the leaders. The governance of sustainable development and the norms within the international policy instruments such as the SDG's is not a technical challenge that is agreed upon the universal norms, but a political process that involves the contestation of who governs what. The SDG calls for a better approach towards management, decision making, and national reporting. SDG 16 requires the states and other institutions exercise their power, with importance given to the participatory processes, and for more local decision making. McDermott, C. L. (2019, December), *Cornerstone Capital Group*. (2019, July 28),

### Peace and Communal Violence

**“Upholding human rights is a crucial element of prevention,” and “Human rights are intrinsically linked to sustaining peace.”**

#### - Secretary-General António Guterres

Peace, harmony, tranquillity or be it some other synonym; these are three words with the same meaning and it is something everyone yearns for, in every situation. It is a sense of security, or a basic need of people amid violence and conflict. The primary task in such situations is peacebuilding. Peace is the opposite of conflict and violence. It refers to the specific relations in particular situations and covers the entire society. The effects of conflict and war are always far-reaching with insecurity or political repression. Many issues are also due to inequality, injustice, and exclusion. Military power cannot resolve such political and social problems. The violence and conflict shatter and impact millions, no country inflicted with violence can achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals and the UN SDGs. It is essential for the world because if we are not in peace, there are several consequences like the loss of life, property, mental trauma, and other issues. People have to live in fear and suffering. Those living in a conflict face this issue every day. It is always better to resolve conflict and issues, along with instability, fear, and other consequences like lack of food, water, economic issues, and other problems that the world grapples with. *Peace and Violence. (n.d.). Council of Europe, Rummel, R. J. (n.d.), Dumasy, T. (n.d.), C. (2019, October 3)*

Young people are the stakeholders in the development, sustainment of peace, democracy, peacebuilding, and governance. The approach needs to be inclusive and integrated and even more empowering. The UN World Population Prospects estimates that there are approximately 1.3 billion youth in conflict inflicted regions and places where it is likely to take place. A culture of peace and sustainable development is one of the priorities, along with more education, rights, peaceful relations, and better governance. *Admin, Y. (2019, March 6),*

*Culture of Peace and Non-violence. (2020, May 29), The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding: Challenges and Opportunities. (2019, September 16).*

There is more social and political marginalization that causes more social contests. In different cultural contexts, there are several challenges and opportunities. It is also necessary that the youth are provided with training opportunities and for them to adapt to the technological trends and act as mediators, mobilizers, peacekeepers, etc. For example, some countries, despite battling internal and external issues, have maintained harmony and safeguarded rules of law, like Mauritius, Senegal, and Tunisia. We need to focus on approaching the UN's regional peace operations and entrepreneurship from the perspective of sustaining it. There needs to be a holistic view of international crimes and atrocities against peace in each and every form.

Athie, A. (2020, May 12)

A major chunk of the law, order, and peace is maintained by administration and police. Although, several communal riots have taken place due to the partisanship by the administration, and their ineffective way of dealing with such communal elements and hatred. With these important institutions being on the wrong side of the spectrum, their role during communal violence has not been very cordial and is communalized. It can be seen in several instances and cases throughout the years and with several examples. The maintenance of communal peace depends on the acceptance of social and political institutions that help in strengthening law and enforcement. This is for meeting the aspirations of the people. Our institutions need to uphold peace and treat communal violence as unnecessary, along with the provisions for better administration. The communalism by the police, those who are the peacemakers at the forefront, is leading to the development of a political culture. It is important to directly follow the law and order and we need to stop buying peace, and everything needs to be done for the safety and security of the country as our priority. Peace is not a compromise; it is essential for the smooth functioning of a country, and amicable living of all of the people. We should not trivialize the situation and turn it into something it isn't. Bhatnagar, C. N. (2020, February 17)

## JUSTICE

**"Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought." - John Rawls**

Justice is based on the concept of righteousness based on ethics, law, religion, equity, and fairness. It is also based on the administration of law, rights of humans and citizens, protection before the law, no discrimination on any basis like gender, race, color, religion, etc., and being socially inclusive. *Justice.* (n.d.). ScienceDaily

Justice is essential for any and every country or institution for several reasons such as that everyone gets the essentials for living a good life and are owed basic things like food, water, shelter, etc. Alongside this, even adequate healthcare is necessary for everyone, with proper services provided for all. Another important factor is of justice protecting people against all forms of discrimination like that based on their sexuality, religion, it also prevents people from racism and there is a need to advocate for practicing all religions safely and freely. It also promotes economic equality, with social justice being the motive to secure economic stability. It also helps in improving educational opportunities. Soken-Huberty, E. (2020, July 12)

There are also several types of injustices prevailing in the society like,

- The way people are treated (interactional injustice)
- Due to the inadequacies in components of the decision-making process (procedural injustice)
- Due to outcomes or certain decisions (distributive injustice).

There have been several instances throughout where denial of justice that are often now used as a rhetorical excuse for interventions by governments acting on behalf of their nationals to obtain reparation for alleged violations of their rights. Such events also lead to the breach of international law and are not related to the administration of justice. It does not only apply to when there is a refusal of redress and a delay in hearing in a complaint but also in cases of the delay, and denial of justice which affects the defendants. Justice in these cases was understood as justice wrongly rendered but not justice being denied. Several judicial decisions provoke hostile attitudes and decisions leading to violence in several forms. Like the decisions that hold certain religious practices as un-Indian, decisions that undermine the rights under Articles 25 and 26 to profess and practice religion, and final decisions that resolve cases involving communal crimes based on politics. Each type of decision has challenged the constitutional relationship between religious and the secular law. *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (n.d.), Ahmad, S. A. (n.d.), C.G. (n.d.-a). Why justice is important.*

The Indian judiciary has always struggled to dispose and wind up cases in time hence providing untimely justice, with cases being estimated at 30 million, and the ratio of the judges per citizen is also as low as 17 judges per million citizens. Limited, M. T. P. (n.d.)

*Example:* The case of the Anti-Sikh riots in 1984 is a grim reminder of justice delayed being justice denied. It is a depiction of India's slow justice delivery system and the failure for taking timely action by the leaders. India is a country facing violence in several forms since partition. The role of the state is crucial in most of the communal riots that take place. It further leads to the denial of justice, something that forms the basis of a democratic society and country. The commission set up for the riots absolved the people in power, and the leaders remained outside the purview of the law. Some leaders like Sajjan Kumar and Jagdish Tytler got elected to the upper house despite having irrefutable evidence against them and were only denied the ticket due to public outrage. The riots were about the state failing to protect the communities and a reality that depicted the same. Another example of the atrocities faced by one community on the behest of the other is the riots of Gujarat in 2002, where again justice has been delayed. Moreover, there is no acknowledgment of the riots by the state government on the crimes committed against the Muslims. Investigators and commissions have pointed out the fact of the complicity of the state institutions in persecution and victimisation, and only when the leaders and those responsible are punished can justice be done. *Communal violence and justice in India. (n.d.), 1984 riots: Justice delayed is justice denied. (2018, December 17), Singh, R. (2020, February 23)*

### Strong Institutions

In communal violence, several causes and multiplicity of factors are involved which contribute to the generation and aggravation of communal riots. Apart from religious animosity, weakening communal ties etc., local institutions and local government also play a significant role in inspiring communal passion in which even the mildest of provocations erupt into irrational violence. A nexus between politicians, local authorities and anti-social elements of the society disrupts the local equilibria of peace.

After a train carrying Hindu pilgrims was torched, allegedly by a Muslim mob, on February 28, 2002, the worst carnage of independent India's history took place which is also known as one of the most obvious examples of state involvement in post independence Hindu-Muslim riots. After the train was torched, the state did not attempt to prevent or stop, revenge killings. State

The police looked the other way, as gangs murdered scores of Muslims with remarkable ease. The statements of NGOs closely associated with the Gujarat state government, run by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata

Party (BJP), openly supported anti-Muslim violence. According to the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), the BJP government did what was necessary: namely, allow Hindu retaliation against the Muslims, including those who had nothing to do with the mob that originally torched the train in Godhra. (Varshney, 2003, pp. 1–3)

From a constitutional perspective, the government, local machinery and local authorities cannot stoke or allow public anger and violence, no matter what the provocation is or whatever its ideological colour. No elected government, or state machinery should behave in a manner that leads to denial of justice and disruption of peace.

The distinction between the constitutional and the ideological often gets diluted hence hampering the sanctity of the institutions and the people's faith in these institutions. Strong institutions which act in an ideologically neutral way forms the backbone of a strong and long-lasting democracy.

In addition to managing resources effectively and giving people a voice, local governance structures and local institutions nurture political will for sustenance of peace. Effective decentralization allows local governments to serve as a fora for people to engage in dialogue with each other and negotiate local-level issues. When there is an intense local-level competition between groups, for example, local governments and its various institutions provide opportunities for power-sharing. For example in Northern Ireland, power-sharing arrangements between Nationalists and Unionists emerged in local councils well before the Belfast Agreement provided for power-sharing at the national level. Such efforts at local-level conciliation can help build political goodwill for peace at the national level. (International Peace Institute, 2018, pp. 1–3)

With a strong civic structure in place, the state can prevent riots with considerable ease. One such model of strong institutions leading to peacebuilding can be found in the Bhiwandi model. Bhiwandi, a town just outside Bombay, was infamous for Hindu-Muslim riots in the 1970s and in the 1980s with nearly 200 lives being lost in riots during those years. However, the pattern changed with the arrival of a new police chief in 1988 who started an organizational experiment. The chief put together neighbourhood committees (Mohalla Samitis) for the whole town where the two religious communities can meet once a week in normal times, but daily in times of tension, with a police officer presiding (Varshney, 2003). The model was a huge success with Bhiwandi becoming a peaceful town and keeping communal peace even in sensitive times. This example shows how strong institutions play a vital role in averting conflict-ridden situations and have a pacifying impact on elements that attempt to create unrest.

Strong institutions provide infrastructure for peace that links the national and local levels. For local governments to sustain peace, they should be inclusive, effective, and accountable. Local actors, not every time, have the political will to maintain peace. Therefore, there should be adequate mechanisms to hold them accountable. Violence and conflicts have become increasingly localised and urban. This increases the need for strong institutions at the local level. Strong institutions are the key to address conflict dynamics and resolution. Institutions play a vital role in state-society relations allowing the stakeholders of the civil society to engage with decision-makers and facilitate promotion of a people's societies. The institution helps in bringing about the change in the intricate and embedded traditional, religious structures that often play a role in instigating violence. Neutral and inclusionary practices followed by the institution of local governance can go a long way towards the effective implementation of peacebuilding initiatives and interventions. Strong institutions support peacebuilding and delivery of justice in the society through social cohesion, transparency, social accountability, proper grievance and complaint mechanism, and facilitate dialogue and coordination in society and help in reducing conflict (Menkhaus, 2018, pp. 1–3). Strong local governance leads to establishment and re-enforcement of legal systems and norms based on rule of law, independent judicial,

reliable, and accountable institutions, free and fair elections, and universal access to justice. They contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding which guarantee everyone's fundamental rights and freedoms to reduce inequalities and build truly inclusive societies (UNDP, 2016).

### **Role of the Local Governments**

According to UNICEF, local government refers to local-level bodies and institutions created by a constitutional, legislative or executive power for the purpose of carrying out specific functions. (UNICEF, 2019) The local government and its various institutions play an integral role in the delivery of equitable and effective social services such as water and sanitation, health and education. Local governance involves subnational institutions, systems, and processes that provide services to citizens and through which citizens “articulate their interests and needs, mediate their differences and exercise their rights and obligations”.

Local institutions form the bedrock of the delivery of SDGs at the local level. However, in the discussions on ensuring peace and justice which forms a part of SDG 16, the focus is primarily on national governance. What is often overlooked, is the crucial role of the local governance actors in safeguarding the virtues of peace and justice. Local government stimulates strengthening and sustaining inclusive, just and peaceful societies.(O'Mahony, 2018, p. 303)

From building community ties to strengthening the social contract and carrying people forward into a peaceful future, local governments and its various machinery have an important part to play. Local government officials have both the authority and the resources to provide important services that can help make communities more resistant to extremist sentiments. Local governments foster an environment of transparency and accountability which work as a crucial instrument for ensuring peace and justice. It's impossible to imagine fulfilling sustainable development goals or sustained peace without a social contract deeply rooted in local communities. It is at the local level where people's engagement with public institutions is vital and has the most potential of change and with people's trust in government globally is decreasing the need for local government to be vigilant is now more than ever.(United Nations Development Program, 2015)

2019 saw a wave of protest movements sweeping across the world from Harare to Port-au-Prince, Beirut to Bogota, Catalonia to Cairo, and in Santiago, Jakarta, Tehran, Baghdad, and New Delhi. Despite having various reasons and vantage points, all had one trigger in common which was public frustration against an unresponsive State or, more specifically, ineffective state institutions that had lost the public's confidence. (United Nations Development Program, 2020) This provided an opportunity for local government institutions to emerge as strong catalysts in ensuring prevention of conflict, reduction of violence, and strengthening the collaboration between the state and the citizens.

The major role in sustaining and promoting peace is played by the local government institutions during communal riots. Among the state agencies, the role and activities of the police are crucial in the maintenance of law and order in society, especially during communal riots. Security and public safety is a concern in every community as urban violence has attained epidemic proportions in many cities of the world. The vigilance of the local government, police and other law enforcement agencies is the need of the hour. However, in the recent cases of local violence and communal riots, the role of police and other law enforcement machinery has come out to be highly controversial. In fact, during the Bombay riots of 1992-93, the local police faced serious allegations for being instrumental in exaggerating the situation rather than fulfilling their constitutional obligation in fanning down the riots. A riot is generally supposed to be a spontaneous outburst of violence between two communities. However, it is rarely so. Most of the riots are meticulously planned and executed

and at times involve the local authorities. The rioters are very often acting on their own and are instead serving the interests of their political patrons. Communal riots are mostly engineered by the political parties for their gains. The police and other law enforcement agencies do not have a free hand to deal with the riots and are always working under the directions of various political parties making them complicit in the communal riots. (Engineer, 1994, p. 839)

Communal riots have become a distinct feature of communalism in India. The reasons for such riots are supposed to be trivial and superficial but due to the complex and intricate nexus of political representation, control of and access to resources and power, the riots are no longer premised on religious animosity, rather on conflicting political interests, which are often linked to economic interests. In a democratic and secular country like India, it's imperative that local government, various state machinery and political parties remain secular and don't subscribe to any particular religious ideology. However, political parties have always had a hand in instigating and exploiting communal violence to meet their electoral interests. In this process of instigation, the parties also involve the local administration through inaction or biased conduct.

The recent instances of communal violence show multiple and clear political connections. A fact-finding committee set up by the Delhi Minorities Commission to look into the 2020 Northeast Delhi riots accused the Delhi Police of being complicit in and abetting the violence. The riots, which left 53 people dead and 250 injured are said to have been provoked after BJP leader Kapil Mishra made a provocative speech during a rally on 23rd February 2020 in Northeast Delhi where he appeared to threaten vigilante violence if the police failed to clear out anti-CAA protesters from the area after which different groups or mobs quickly fanned out to the local areas, openly carrying various weapons and arms, like petrol bottles, bombs, iron rods, gas cylinders, stones and even firearms. The Delhi Police, in their attempt to safeguard the BJP leader's political interests, had told the Delhi High Court that there was "no evidence" that the speeches by Mishra and two other BJP leaders had incited violence. Many of the victim's testimonies also contain stories of police inaction during the violence describing them as silent onlookers. (Bedi, 2020)

The alleged failure to prevent violence by the police points towards a pattern of deliberate inaction making one question the nature of violence being riots or well-planned state endorsed violence. Instances like these where local authorities and police authorities end up fuming the riots or become part of it cause serious consequences for sustainment of peace and justice. It becomes difficult to ensure peace and extend justice when the peacemakers and law enforcers give direct and indirect patronage to the non-state perpetrators of violence.

Examples like the unwillingness of then Chief Minister of Maharashtra to control the riots as Bombay was burning in 1992 or when police shot down 200 people and colluded with Shiv Sena shows how political leadership and administrative machinery end up becoming indirect perpetrators of violence. In contrast to this is the case of West Bengal. When riots broke out under the tenure of Chief Minister Joyti Basu, his government countered communal propaganda, conducted rallies to spread communal harmony and issued stringent guidelines to its administration and police to do everything in their capacity to control the riots which helped in preventing loss to life and property. These two different scenarios highlight how the determination of political leadership to control riots generate efficiency on the part of the police and other law enforcement agencies, help in averting grave communal discourses. (Engineer, 1994)

Effective governance on the part of political leadership, local government and local administration foster an environment of peace and justice. When the local institutions themselves act on the parochial interest, it leads to denial of peace and justice. With good governance processes, local governments and institutions are

directed, controlled and held to account. Peace requires proper governance, stability and freedom; justice and equity; absence of organized violence; social and communal harmony; interstate, state, regional, and global peaceful relationship among states; prevention of crimes, terrorism, and conflicts; which cannot be attained without proper effective, accountable and transparent governance at the local level. These good governance targets are the focus in SDG 16.6. SDG 16 calls to promote and protect human rights by receiving, investigating and rectifying grievances which can be achieved only through strengthening the good governance of peace and justice institutions.

## Conclusion

The need for peace, justice and strong institutions is urgent. The endless cycle of conflict and violence that plague the world is worrisome. Promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels is the need of the hour in times when the world is ravaged by armed conflicts, communal violence and political insecurity that threatens destructive impact on a country's development. Improper implementation of SDG 16 denies people the right to a sustainable future and the basic standards of living which violates their human rights in major ways. The aim to strengthen government institutions and build conflictless societies requires the involvement of various actors from civic organisations, religious groups and government bodies. Strengthening relationships between business, government, political organisations and civil society help to identify and prioritize goal 16-related issues and promoting collective action towards policy development and strategic partnerships.

The enmity between the people of religious groups needs to be reduced to prevent communal violence. This can be done through a positive portrayal of communities in national and local media. Often media remains at the core of perpetuating hate between communities that leads to communal sparks turning into violent fires. The real duty of the newspapers is to educate, convey events in an unbiased manner, and take people out of the rut of narrow sectarian grooves of thought and perception. Scraping out communal feelings is foremost for instilling feelings of amity and communal harmony in the society and bridge the gap and build mutual trust. Instead of fuelling class consciousness, the sentiments of common nationalism needs to be fostered. The legal provisions to deal effectively with the threat of communal violence need to be strengthened for the administration to act promptly and efficiently. The best way to promote peace and just societies is to follow a pre-emptive and preventive approach in dealing with instances of communal violence. Nexus between enforcing authorities and anti-social elements of the society needs to be broken to have neutral, transparent and accountable governance. Peace committees must be set up to tackle religious tensions and to prevent animosity from turning into a violent confrontation. Promotion of feelings of common interests, natural interdependence and cooperation are important in preventing mob psychology. Ultimately communalism is an ideology and can be neutralized through education. This requires changes in the way history is taught and equipping people to deal with diversity. Humanizing the minds of the people and teaching them values of toleration, respect for diversity and law helps in strengthening social cohesion and averting violence.

The main thrust of the effort towards neutralising communalism and promotion of peaceful societies is in the sphere of social and political reforms and in bringing about a change in the values and mindsets of the people at large. The incorporation of these and other recommendations and policy suggestions can go a long way in creating a friendly, peaceful and just social environment free from communal riots or any other kinds of violence. Tolerance is the threshold of peace and it needs to be fostered and respected for building a common sustainable future.

## References

*1984 riots: Justice delayed is justice denied.* (2018, December 17). WION. <https://www.wionews.com/opinions/1984-riots-justice-delayed-is-justice-denied-184874>

A. (2020, April 17). *Communalism - Definition, Types, Dimensions & Indian Perspective [UPSC GS-I & Essay Notes]*. BYJUS. <https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/communalism-in-post-independent-india/>

Admin, Y. (2019, March 6). *Young people are shaping peace processes worldwide*. Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2019/03/young-people-are-shaping-peace-processes-worldwide/>

Ahmad, S. A. (n.d.). *Judicial Complicity with Communal Violence in India*. Northwestern Journal of International Law & Business. <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1447&context=njilb>

Athie, A. (2020, May 12). *Human Rights and Sustaining Peace*. International Peace Institute. <https://www.ipinst.org/2017/12/human-rights-and-sustaining-peace>

Bedi, A. (2020, July 16). *Delhi Police abetted, was complicit in February riots, says minorities panel probe team*. ThePrint. <https://theprint.in/india/governance/delhi-police-abetted-was-complicit-in-february-riots-says-minorities-panel-probe-team/462576/>

Bhatnagar, C. N. (2020, February 17). *Stop buying peace!* Times of India Blog. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/india-as-i-see-it-a-soldiers-view/stop-buying-peace/>

C. (2019, October 3). *Why is world peace important?* Change Care Foundation. <https://www.changecarefoundation.org/why-is-world-peace-important/>

C.D.J.S.C. (2015, October 25). *The Causes, Consequences and Steps to Handle Communal Violence*. Olive Greens Institute. <https://www.olivegreens.co.in/blog/the-causes-consequences-and-steps-to-handle-communal-violence>

C.G. (n.d.-a). *Why justice is important*. Why Justice Is Important. <http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p115431/pdf/ch086.pdf>

Chakravarty, I. (2015, August 12). *The forgotten riot: How Bhagalpur 1989 left a memory trace in Bihar politics*. Scroll.In. <https://scroll.in/article/747650/the-forgotten-riot-how-bhagalpur-1989-left-a-memory-trace-in-bihar-politics>

*Communal violence and justice in India*. (n.d.). OpenDemocracy. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opensecurity/communal-violence-and-justice-in-india/>

*Communal Violence: Concept, Features, Incidence and Causes*. (2014, May 2). Your Article Library. <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/society/communal-violence-concept-features-incidence-and-causes/39237>

*Culture of Peace and Non-violence*. (2020, May 29). UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/building-peace-programmes>

Dumasy, T. (n.d.). *Why peace is more important than ever | Conciliation Resources*. Conciliation Resources. <https://www.c-r.org/news-and-insight/why-peace-more-important-ever>

Engineer, A. A. (1994). Communal Violence and Role of Police. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 835–840. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4401054>

*GENERAL*. (1995). <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/communal/>

*Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions*. (n.d.). UNDP. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-16-peace-justice-and-strong-institutions.html#:~:text=We%20cannot%20hope%20for%20sustainable,on%20the%20rule%20of%20law>.

Hussain, F. (2018, December 17). *The 1984 Anti-Sikh riots - history and aftermath*. Deccan Herald. <https://www.deccanherald.com/specials/1984-anti-sikh-riots-history-708615.html>

*India*. (n.d.). Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/India1.html>

International Peace Institute. (2018). *The Role of Local Governance in Sustaining Peace*.

*Investing in Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions – SDG 16 | Cornerstone Capital Group*. (2019, July 28). Corner Stone Capital Group. <https://cornerstonecapinc.com/sdg-16/#:~:text=SDG%2016%3A%20Peace%2C%20Justice%20and,inclusive%20institutions%20at%20all%20levels>.

Iqbal, J. (2014, December 31). *The forgotten riots of Bhagalpur*. | Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2014/12/forgotten-riots-bhagalpur-2014123095759426187.html>

*Justice*. (n.d.). ScienceDaily. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/terms/justice.htm>

Menkhaus, K. (2018). *Local governance and peacebuilding*.

Kulkarni, S. (2020, February 29). *Is India Sitting Atop a Volcano of Communal Violence?* The Quint. <https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/sudheendra-kulkarni-on-communal-violence-northeast-delhi-hindu-muslim-bjp-modi-shah>

Limited, M. T. P. (n.d.). *{twitter.title}*. MyAdvo.In. <https://www.myadvo.in/blog/delayed-justice-the-captivity-of-indian-judiciary/>

O'Mahony, G. (2018). Defining Good Governance and Its Role in Peacebuilding. *International Studies Review*, 21(2), 303–304. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viy070>

M. (n.d.-b). *Peace, justice and strong institutions*. United Nations Sustainable Development. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>

McDermott, C. L. (2019, December). *SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions – A Political Ecology Perspective (Chapter 16) - Sustainable Development Goals: Their Impacts on Forests and People*. Cambridge Core. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/sustainable-development-goals-their-impacts-on-forests-and-people/sdg-16-peace-justice-and-strong-institutions-a-political-ecology-perspective/3A5345A210D52EF76A0C0BF13A8AF22E/core-reader>

*Peace and Violence*. (n.d.). Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/peace-and-violence>

Raghotham, S. (2019, March 27). *Greatest threat to India is communalism, not corruption*. Deccan Herald. <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/comment/greatest-threat-to-india-is-communalism-not-corruption-725462.html>

Rummel, R. J. (n.d.). *WHAT IS PEACE? CONCEPTS, QUALITIES, AND SOCIAL CONTRACT*. Hawaii. <https://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TJP.CHAP2.HTM>

*SDG India Index Baseline Report, 2018*. (2018, December 21). Niti Aayog. [https://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/SDX\\_Index\\_India\\_21.12.2018.pdf](https://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/SDX_Index_India_21.12.2018.pdf)

Singh, R. (2020, February 23). *Repairing the country's 'broken down' judicial system*. TribuneIndia News Service. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/repairing-the-countrys-broken-down-judicial-system-45804>

Soken-Huberty, E. (2020, July 12). *10 Reasons Why Social Justice Is Important*. Human Rights Careers. <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/10-reasons-why-social-justice-is-important/>

*The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding: Challenges and Opportunities*. (2019, September 16). Oxford Research Group. <https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/the-role-of-youth-in-peacebuilding-challenges-and-opportunities>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (n.d.). *Refworld | India: Communal Violence and the Denial of Justice*. Refworld. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a84f0.html>

UNDP. (2016). *Local Governance in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings*. [https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/local\\_governance/local-governance-in-fragile-and-conflict-affected-settings.html](https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/local_governance/local-governance-in-fragile-and-conflict-affected-settings.html)

UNICEF. (2019, July). *LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINING PEACE*. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). <https://www.unicef.org/media/60291/file>

United Nations Development Program. (2015). *GOVERNANCE & PEACE-BUILDING*. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/RBAP-DG-2016-Governance-n-Peacebuilding-Annual-Report-2015.pdf>

United Nations Development Program. (2015). *GOVERNANCE & PEACE-BUILDING*. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/RBAP-DG-2016-Governance-n-Peacebuilding-Annual-Report-2015.pdf>

Varshney, A. (2003). *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (2nd Revised ed.). Yale University Press.

V.G.J.G. (2013, July 15). *HINDU-MUSLIM COMMUNAL RIOTS IN INDIA I (1947-1986)*. SciencesPo. <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/hindu-muslim-communal-riots-india-i-1947-1986.html#:~:text=The%20first%20major%2Dscale%20riot,the%20Hindu%20and%20Muslim%20communities>

# Towards Inclusivity- Rethinking barriers to education in Rural India

Shivangi Kanaujia, Project Statecraft

Harsidak Chawla, Project uP

**Abstract**

*One of the major consequences of the rapid rise of the population of rural areas and lack of opportunities are the disadvantages that rural youth are currently facing. The urban-rural divide is striking in the quality of education that the youth receives, along with limited access to education programs that are directed towards them. Gendered access to education also plays a crucial role in the stratification of the rural society. There are also economic constraints that play a significant role in this process. Overall, the paper focuses on explaining the difficulties that the rural youth face and the long-drawn factors that have contributed to the current state of affairs. Furthermore, the paper presents a critical review of the proposed Draft National Education Policy, 2019, and other related policies, both at the Union and State levels that have played a major role in how the current situation of rural education is being managed.*

**Abbreviations**

ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CBI	Central Bureau of Investigation
CRY	Child Rights and You
DISE	District Information System for Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
ECCE	Early Childhood Children Education
GAR	Gross Attendance Rate
GDP	Gross domestic product
HEI	Higher Educational Institutions
MPCE	Monthly Per Capita Income
NAR	Net Attendance Rate
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NEP	National Education Policy
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NPE	National Policy on Education
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
RTE	Right to Education
SMCs	School Management Committees
SSRA	State School Regulatory Authority
URGs	Under-represented Groups

## 1.0 Introduction

The term 'rurality' doesn't carry one consistent definition and it is perceived as a social construction and based on more abstract characteristics, such as feelings of community and traditionalism, or more concrete features, such as landscape or occupational structures. Statistically speaking, this term carries connotations based on different demographic, geographic, and socio-economic factors such as population density, distance, or economic development. At the same time, rural areas often present great diversity in terms of topography and social, cultural, and economic characteristics as their society is often seen to be traditionally stratified with fixed societal status allotted to each section. Likewise, educational institutions and set up in such areas face unique contextual barriers. However, this doesn't undermine the fact that in many cases educational processes and outcomes move beyond an "urban-rural" dichotomy. (Halfacree, 1993)

Nevertheless, the past few decades have been characterized by a massive worldwide educational expansion, especially in developing countries. Increasingly complex economies demand a better-educated workforce and in a globalized world like ours, nation-states are increasingly prioritizing education as one of their primary agendas under holistic development. However, research on educational stratification suggests that inequality in education within social strata continues and sometimes even widens despite educational growth. One such difference can be perceived between the rural and urban educational setups where a huge attainment gap is being created between rural and city-dwelling children at various levels, undermining the importance of inclusivity in educational discourse.

Historically speaking, education was – and in many ways still is – a selective exercise for the elite few. However, in the 21st century, there has been an emergence of contemporary discourse that seeks to forge a new path away from 'special' or segregated education and call for a radical re-thinking of educational values, outcomes, and processes. (Schuelka, Braun, & Johnstone, 2020) We are in an era where educational participation is viewed nearly as a right for every citizen worldwide. Although, the process of rethinking and implementation, remains a challenge especially for developing nations like India and its rural population in terms of participation of students traditionally marginalized in education.

## 2.0 Issues shaping the learning experience of rural students

Rural education has been often termed as inferior when compared with urban education. The factors that have majorly compared to this situation are-

- The widespread illiteracy, especially in rural areas.
- Unemployment among educated youth.
- Crisis of ideology.
- Lack of proper guidance.
- Lack of access to organizations and services meant for youth.
- The brain drain of educated rural youth to urban areas
- The dowry system, especially affecting young girls in rural areas.
- The type of education imparted in schools, colleges, and universities does not equip the youth for getting appropriate jobs.

- The level of education affects the earnings by the analogy: the higher the level of education, the higher the proportion of attaining a higher income level.

Though poverty is encountered by much of the rural youth it encompasses numerous developmental challenges and substantially increases the chances of educational problems, the context of school-level education is central to promoting and constraining their development. Poverty is more prevalent in rural areas, and it is long-lasting, intergenerational, and disproportionate. Youth growing up in impoverished rural communities face numerous developmental challenges that can adversely impact their development and adaptation to early adulthood. Like their urban peers, they encounter adversity with regards to family economic hardship, but also added difficulties related to geographical isolation, limited community resources, and conflicting values related to post-secondary educational and vocational attainment. (Irvin et al., 2011, p. 1229)

## 2.1 The Gender Factor

In a deeply stratified society of India, disparities in education often surface in the form of various factors such as caste, religion, and gender, among others. However, even within such disadvantaged communities, a consistent feature of gender disparity in realizing educational goals remains in existence, especially in rural areas. (Bandyopadhyay and Subharmaniam, 2008) In case of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe girls, the gender gap in education is almost 30 percent at the primary level and 26 percent at the upper primary stage and in India's most depressed regions, the probability of girls getting primary education is about 42 percent lower than boys, and it remains so even when other variables, such as religion and caste, are kept constant. (Desai, 2007)

The healthcare of girls in low-income countries - which eventually is linked to their share in the educational sector—has drawn the attention of researchers in a variety of fields. Empirical evidence has shown that girls in low-income countries often have worse health outcomes than their male counterparts. For example, excessive female mortality at young ages has been well documented in low-income countries such as India, China, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. When countries become richer, however, this gender gap seems to close. The literature shows that in developed countries, health, nutrition, and educational outcomes of girls are typically better than or equal to those of boys. (Zhou, 2016)

Between the ages of 15 and 24 years, rural youth are deciding whether to continue studying, to leave school, to leave their natal households, to work, to become engaged in their communities, to form unions, and to have children – and these experiences differ vastly for young men and young women. Many doors open to boys as they become men. Though in many societies, windows of opportunities begin to close for girls. As boys and girls enter adolescence, they bring with them the "investment" made in them since childhood. These may include investment in their human capital – education, health, and nutritional status – and in their social capital – the networks that facilitate opportunities for learning, employment, and status attainment. Opportunities to accumulate both social and human capital are highly gendered and thus male and female youth have often accumulated vastly different amounts of these resources. Although they may not yet be owners or holders of physical assets, they may expect to inherit them or may work to acquire them as they grow older. Young women may stop schooling earlier or leave the labor force to form a union (whether marriage or informal); some begin childbearing. Geographically, this practice is more commonly practiced in states like Punjab and Haryana, as well as in socio-economically backward states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, while this disparity is found marginally lower in Eastern India, and substantially lower in South India. (Husain, 2011)

Education is the key to take advantage of many opportunities available to rural youth, but in many contexts, girls remain disadvantaged in this area, although gender gaps in education are closing most parts of rural India. Parental aspirations may favour boys concerning schooling, while gender priming in terms of expectations may worsen educational outcomes for girls, but the effect of aspirations is context-specific. Expectations about girls' contributions to household work may also limit their schooling. (Doss, Heckert, Myers, Pereira, Quisumbing, 2019)

## 2.2 Economic impediments- Poverty and low Income

The interlinkage of poverty and education remains one of the most important factors in analysing the challenges faced by youth in the education sector. To quote Probe Report 1999 "education is often considered as the investment." Especially in the rural context, under conditions of economic and other deprivations, costs and benefits of this 'invested' are rationally analysed broadly in terms of two aspects-

1. Economic and non-economic expectations of benefit
2. Ability to sustain direct and indirect schooling costs

The absence of any of these could lead to a situation of educational deprivation, often embodied in terms of non-enrolment, irregular attendance, and dropouts. Thus, in order to understand the exact role played by economic factors in determining access to schooling for rural children, it is imperative to detangle the multidisciplinary concept of poverty.

Poverty is both a cause and an effect of insufficient access to and completion of education, especially in the context of rural India (Azim Premji Foundation, 2004) Further, the varying levels of education within different income categories emerge as a pivotal factor in determining their economic opportunities, income, and quality of life. This vicious circle of poverty and low levels of literacy rate can only be broken through the provisioning of quality education.

In itself, poverty is a complex issue that is not only limited to income deprivation but is the physical embodiment of various factors such as- lack of empowerment, lack of opportunity, etc. For any individual or community, this limitation in resources puts them under the threat of exclusion from the right to a dignified life which in turn gets transferred from one generation to the other unless appropriate actions are taken to make them active participants in the education and skill development sector. The 75th round of NSSO reports hints to this kind of relationship where it mentions that the level of education of people is closely associated with monthly per capita expenditure of population.

To further extend this linkage between poverty and education, researchers and data have shown that children affected by low income and poverty are more likely to perform poorly, repeat their grades and eventually drop out of school earlier than children belonging to affluent classes of society ( Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018). Despite the considerable improvement in basic education indicators like Gross Attendance Rate (GAR), Net Attendance Rate (NAR) and others, the NSSO report still shows that the proportion of non-literates is highest in the bottom MPCE (Monthly Per Capita Income) classes and decreases gradually as the MPCE increases (Bandyopadhyay, 2014) (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2017).

Another reason why children from poorer households find it difficult to access school or continue to learn for a sustained period of time is because of their engagement in domestic or productive work in a household or family farm, thereby contributing economically. In rural India, this economic contribution is essentially linked to the nature of agriculture which is the main livelihood of people and is often subsistence-based, and being

rain-dependent it is often characterised by uncertainty. In certain cases, there is also the absence or inadequate livestock holdings leading to a high dependence on wage work. (Chandra, 2019) Developing this point, studies have linked poverty and deprivation in poor households to such instability, uncertainty, indebtedness, food insecurity, etc. leading to higher dropout rates and illiteracy in the family. According to the data available on the CRY website ("Child labour in India", 2015), more than 10 million children in India start working at a very younger age (5-14 years) as per official estimates and 80 percent of them come from a rural background. It further points out that about 75 percent of child labour is engaged in agricultural sector and large numbers of them work solely to help their families because the adults do not have appropriate employment and income thus forfeiting schooling and opportunities to play and rest.

Thus, cost remains a pervasive barrier, not only in the rural context but globally for sections of societies with low household income and even when state and other stakeholders absorb most of the direct cost; some indirect cost and economic impediments remain in the power play when coupled with child labour.

### 2.3 A long road to be covered: Geographic divide between rural and urban areas

While delivery of education in rural and remote areas may have come a long way, especially after the increased emphasis on transportation infrastructure and connecting every nook and corner of the country via land mainly, some of the challenges and opportunities particular to rural education have not changed drastically, while new ones have emerged. One of the several ways of defining 'rurality' has been based on demographic and geographic factors. These areas tend to be located at a significant distance from other populated areas such as advanced in terms of infrastructure (Sreekanthachari and Nagaraja, 2013). This remoteness and accessibility shape, among other things, the capability of residents to communicate and move beyond local services which are further manifested in their decisions regarding higher education and professional career (Anand, 2014). The geographical divide, other than economic costs, leads to certain social and emotional costs of moving from intimate rural communities to considerably unfamiliar urban places, especially for marginalised communities.

### 2.4 Infrastructural Loopholes

The term infrastructure implies basic systems and services, which are necessary for a country, region, or organisation. In other words, it defines a set of the social, economic, and institutional framework of facilities, without which no economic activity can be undertaken. In order for an institution or system to fulfill its goal of effective implementation and thus producing desired results, it is imperative for them to be infrastructurally sound in the first place. Right from a lack of quality teachers and limited educational offerings to teaching and learning environments, schools in rural India face a variety of resource-based problems that eventually affect the overall quality of education. To put it in the words of Amartya Sen, "Primary education in India suffers not only from inadequate allocation of resources but often enough also from terrible management and organisation". To him, 'organisation and governance of primary schools' has remained a neglected subject in much of India (Kumar, Koppa and Balasubramaniam, 2003).

#### Teaching and learning environment

Among the most frequently cited and debated loopholes in the quality of rural education, the small size of schools and classrooms, underpaid teaching staff, and low student-teacher ratios are most common and logically the most important ones. Adding to this, the competencies of the teaching staff are below par—according to DISE (District Information System for Education) data, 18% of teachers in India, in 2016-17, had no professional qualification in teaching. Even when there are teachers allotted to rural schools, high rates

of absenteeism has been recorded among them. This is further asserted in the World Bank study (Ramachandran, Linden, Goyal, & Chatterjee, 2018) which found that one in four teachers are absent at a typical government-run primary school.

The learning environment in rural schools is often compromised when teachers are given various auxiliary tasks such as looking into maintenance of school infrastructure, ensuring the implementation of government schemes like Mid-day Meal, distribution of school supplies, etc (Singh, 2018). This approach takes a toll on the quality of education being delivered as teaching time is being replaced by the time taken to carry out above mentioned tasks. Disillusioned parents and an unmotivated student population add another layer to a deprived learning environment in schools of rural India.

### **Financial resources**

Despite the increase in the number of schools demographically, supply-side factors related to well-equipped classrooms and the presence of other essential facilities leave much room for improvement. Data by the District Information System for Education (DISE) shows only 53% of total government schools, which form the majority of schools in rural India, have electricity connections. Following the norms laid down by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009, many schools in rural areas are yet to provide science-specific resources and playgrounds for sports to their students (Campus Varta, 2020).

Moreover, access to sanitation facilities in school premises poses major impediments in the form of school drop-outs, especially in the case of girls. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2017 data found that only 68% of toilets in government schools are usable. Despite a considerable increase in the number of toilets across schools under the Swachh Bharat Swachh Vidyalaya campaign, the usability of these structures remains questionable. Adding to this, lack of water, lack of lighting and electricity, poor drainage systems, and paucity of funds for maintenance and cleanliness raise serious barriers in uplifting rural education rates. The small size of rural communities also makes the provision of education much more expensive per capita than in urban spaces and implies high fixed costs to maintain small schools with low student-teacher ratios (Alcott et al., 2020). Especially single teacher schools with few students per teacher and building can be significantly more expensive on a per-student basis which in turn hampers the realisation of a sustained and long term quality education goal.

### **Lack of specialised support and extracurricular activities**

Students in rural schools may also have fewer options when it comes to choosing a wide range of education courses and programmes, particularly in secondary education, which may affect their achievement and options for further study. Schools in rural areas struggle to provide additional support and supplementary services, including for particular groups of students. For instance, rural schools may face particular challenges to create inclusive learning environments for students with special needs; especially when it comes to trained specialised staff.

Along with academic knowledge, schools and educational institutions need to provide certain social and emotional skills that students need to lead a happy and fulfilling life. Alarming, very negligible efforts are being taken in rural schools towards the mental health of students and even in terms of assisting students for higher studies through counseling. This might be the potential result of limited access to school-based and community-based resources (e.g. counselors, psychologists, social workers), little knowledge of innovative models (e.g. evidence-based practices and data-based decision-making), and a lack of awareness and support in the local community (e.g. social stigma towards seeking help). (Jahan and Selvarani, 2015)

## Digital divide

As per the District Information System for Education (DISE) data, only 28% of schools (18% government schools) have a computer and 9% total schools (4% government schools) an internet connection in rural India. This puts forth a clear picture of the urban-rural divide in the age of digital revolution, due to insufficient infrastructure. Some researchers see this wave of digitalisation as an asset that has opened up significant opportunities for improving the delivery of rural education, by linking students and teachers who are separated geographically. There is, however, still a lot to be done to digitally equip rural schools, especially in remote parts of the country. Although the purchase costs of smartphones and other technical instruments are declining, maintenance costs may be high, and devices may need to be replaced frequently which adds one more complexity in the vicious circle of poverty and education in the rural context.

## Teacher preparation and support

Even when the teacher-student ratio is improved, there may be the case that teachers are unprepared to impart education and learning in rural contexts. For instance, in rural schools, multigrade classes are not uncommon and in that case, it becomes imperative for teachers to decide in what ways students can be grouped effectively based on their abilities. The teachers also have to manage the multidisciplinary demands of an individual present in the class. Similarly, they might have to take up various subjects at a time which may or may not come under the ambit of their expertise. This might occasionally leave them unprepared to adapt lessons to the needs, knowledge, and interests of rural students, for example by giving a rural "flavour" to the curriculum while preparing them for a globalised world and economy at the same time.

Rural teachers and leaders also need to have an understanding of how to work with underrepresented or marginalised groups in rural areas, such as students from disadvantaged backgrounds or indigenous and ethnic minorities. For students belonging to a background of conservative values and beliefs, the school can be a challenging place, and thus school staff needs to be aware of how to support them in such cases, which can be observed as lacking in the present system of education in rural India.

## 3.0 Education policies in India- A critical analysis in the context of barriers to Rural Education

### 3.1 Draft National Education Policy, 2019

The National Education Policy (NEP), formulated by the Government of India, is devised and implemented to promote education amongst India's people, covering education from elementary to colleges in both rural and urban India. The first NEP was formulated and announced under the leadership of Indira Gandhi for a "radical restructuring" and equalised educational opportunities in order to achieve national integration and greater cultural and economic development. (National Informatics Centre, 1968) This policy is proposed to be revised and enhanced as per the Draft National Education Policy, 2019, and to bring fundamental changes in the education system, especially with regard to autonomy, governance, and quality of learning experience. Some of the salient features of the policy include:

- Universalising pre-primary education by 2025 and providing foundational literacy/numeracy for all by 2025.
- Instead of 10+2 Curriculum structure, the policy proposes 5+3+3+4 structure in an effort to optimise learning for students based on the cognitive development of children of the 3-18 years age group.
- Promoting multilingualism by implementing a three-language formula in schools with special emphasis on regional languages.

- A new independent State School Regulatory Authority (SSRA) to be created
- Establishing three types of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs): Research Universities, Teaching Universities and Autonomous degree-granting colleges
- Proposes to increase the class of compulsory education up to grade 12 (age-18). (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Draft National Education Policy, 2019)

Many policymakers are weighing the draft on a positive scale for its proposal of covering children of 3-18 years, instead of the present 6-14 years under the RTE (Right to Education) Act as well as its focus on inculcating culture-centric knowledge. On the other hand, researchers have also subjected the document to strict scrutiny against the backdrop of systemic inequalities in the educational sector and diverse stratification of Indian society.

At the school level, the Draft NEP duly emphasises on the development of a "solid foundation in reading, writing, speaking, counting, arithmetic, mathematical and logical thinking, problem-solving" in response to the "severe learning crisis" that the National Achievement Survey of NCERT talked about. However, it focuses narrowly on the issue by defining learning in terms of measurable learning outcomes (Chavan 2019) and the supply/input side shortcomings, shortage of teachers, and other critical systemic issues leading to failure of children to learn at school are ignored. Most importantly, it has failed to pay attention to the divisive stratification of school education- a multilayered hierarchy of access-and an unequal schooling regime. (Raina, 2019)

The draft also introduced the term Under-represented Groups (URGs) as a substitute for less privileged classes, castes, tribes, regions, communities, and the disabled. Closer scrutiny to the usage of this terminology in the draft indicates that the attitude towards economic disparities of the country is naïve and lacks inclusivity. For instance, the draft mentions the following as the justification for ECCE (Early Childhood Children education): "quality pre-school education is strongly correlated with higher incomes and rates of homeownership, and lower rates of unemployment, crime, and arrest ... ECCE gives the best chance for children to grow up into good, moral, thoughtful, creative, empathetic, and productive human beings" (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Draft National Education Policy, 2019, pp 46). This clearly shows that the draft fails to take into account single-parent households, or those working in the unorganised sector (which is the case in many rural households). (Roy, 2019)

Further, the draft also lacks clarity on the solution to teacher education-related issues that plague the teaching and learning of early literacy in many Indian classrooms and no fundamental reform is proposed to revamp the accountability structures for schools. Instead, the NEP provides school management committees (SMCs) that are already mounted to ineffectuality following their mandate under the Right to Education Act. One of the main reasons for immediate attraction to NEP is its language policy which has undoubtedly polarised the media and policymakers. As per The Hindu ("Crisis Defused: on Hindi Imposition", 2019), the government seems to have beaten a hasty retreat on the compulsory imposition of Hindi in the face of opposition through this policy. The draft works with the assumption that children have the potential to acquire multilingual skills and these need to be encouraged at the earliest (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Draft National Education Policy, 2019, pp 49). There are also suggestions for supporting education in home languages and mother tongues, tribal as well as sign languages (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Draft National Education Policy, 2019, pp 80–81). One cannot help but wonder at the challenges of teacher availability, institutional readiness, and the necessary qualified staff required for the task. Secondly, amidst the promotion

of regional languages, the draft undermines the importance of English which manifests itself in almost all professional opportunities and by ignoring the fact that not everyone belongs to an English background especially rural India, the Draft NEP 2019 has laid out a "language trap", which will create social inequality and impede economic growth. (Roy, 2019)

Finally, in terms of proper implementation, the draft fails to chalk out a clear and comprehensive path for state governments to apply various clauses of the Draft NEP in their respective states. The draft has recommended double public funding to 6% of the GDP and to increase overall public expenditure on education to 20% from the current 10% which is not feasible in the near future especially due to the outbreak of the pandemic and severe global economic recession ahead.

### 3.2 Non-formal Education Scheme:

The Non-Formal Education (NFE) Scheme was introduced in 1979-80 by the central government to support the formal system in providing education to all children below the age of 14 years. The scheme was introduced because the National Policy on Education (NPE) had recognized that the formal schooling system could not reach all children. Therefore, a large and systematic programme of non-formal education would be required to educate school dropouts, children from habitations where no schools are present, working children, and girls who can not attend whole day schools. The NFE scheme is run by state governments, which set up NFE centres.

### 3.3 Operation Blackboard

The scheme of Operation Blackboard was launched in 1987 in pursuance of the National Policy of Education—Programme of Action, to provide minimum essential facilities to all primary schools in the country. This is a large operation launched after an external evaluation of the scheme which indicated a lack of training of instructors in using teaching material and lack of uniform facilities which are provided without modification according to local needs as some of the drawbacks of implementation.

Continuation of ongoing Operation Blackboard to cover all the remaining primary schools, especially in the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes areas; Expanding the scope of Operation Blackboard to provide three teachers and three rooms to primary schools, wherever enrolment warrants them.

#### Failure of the policy:

The state government has miserably failed to execute Union government-sponsored Operation Blackboard, according to the 2003 report of the special committee of Bihar legislative assembly ("Major bungling in Operation Blackboard: Report", 2003). The committee feels that a large scale bungling has been going on with regard to this scheme. The committee has recommended a time-bound (one year) CBI or vigilance inquiry to probe into the Operation Blackboard scheme scam.

According to the report, the state government received a sum of Rs 21,300.54 lakh out of which Rs 5,748.28 lakh was earmarked for teaching and learning material and Rs 15,552.26 lakh earmarked for teachers' salary during the period ranging from 1987-88 to 1997-98.

### 3.4 Mahila Samakya (MS):

Mahila Samakya, a scheme that aims at Education for Women's Equality was launched in 1989, in pursuance of the goals of the New Education Policy (1986). The scheme tries to emphasize education as an agent of change in the status of women. The programme was originally launched in 10 districts of Karnataka, Gujarat

and Uttar Pradesh, with the assistance from The Netherlands, and was later extended to Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. The programme was conceived as an empowerment programme for socially and economically marginalized rural women.

The role of Sayoginis or women functionaries at the village level is highlighted. They have to assist in group formation and provide issue-specific knowledge to these groups. Activities to be conducted are chosen in the context of their potential impact on the lives of women and in response to articulated local demands.

### 3.5 District Primary Education Programme

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched in November 1994. The programme was launched to operationalise strategies to achieve Universal Elementary Education at the district level rather than imposing the same rule. This was evident through educational programmes were decentralized through this scheme. It emphasizes decentralized management, community mobilization, and district-specific planning based on contextual and research-based inputs available to each district.

#### Failure of the policy:

Educational planning in India was always constrained by a lack of financial resources. With the launch of DPEP, there was a relaxation of constraints in terms of financial resources. The districts were told that participating districts will be provided with Rs 350 to Rs 400 million over a period of 7 years under the programme. This amount was not large when compared to the Rs 600 million spent over every district per annum by the government of India during the 1990s.

External assistance under DPEP had reduced efforts from both the central and state governments. Under DPEP, the central government can ask the states to go for external assistance, so that they can reduce the amount provided for the state government. In the case of the state government, it reduced the effort from their part to mobilize additional resources. Another advantage state governments enjoyed was that this external assistance was provided as grants and not as loans.

The state government considered this as a programme sponsored by the Centre with plenty of resources coming to the states through the central government. Both the Centre and States failed to realize that this will bring in more long term burdens to the people of India.

A negative consequence of DPEP was that the stakeholders started to believe that the government does not have adequate funds to improve primary education in India and that the only way out was to go for external assistance from international organizations. This has led to a situation where both rich and poor states compete to enter into the DPEP system to get external assistance for primary education. This developed into a situation where state governments across the country started to depend on external funds as a source for improving primary education in India.

### 3.6 National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (School Meal Programme)

This scheme was launched on 15th August 1995 to give a boost to Universal Elementary Education. The scheme primarily aims at increasing enrollment, retention, and attendance of students in primary classes by supplementing the nutritional requirements of children attending these primary schools. It is an ambitious scheme that has been operationalized throughout the country in a very short period. The scheme provides a nutritious and wholesome cooked meal of 100 gms of food grains per school day, free of cost, to all children studying in classes I to V. The scheme has registered rapid growth in school enrolments and also retention of

students. The attendance of students also increased because many parents send their children to schools in the hope that they will get at least one full meal in a day. The scheme has become fully operational from 1997-98, covering nearly 110 million children in primary classes. The drawback of this scheme is that in many schools, the children attend the classes only till the meals are served. Once the meals are served, they tend to leave school. To overcome this problem, in many schools the classes are now conducted during the morning hours and the meals are served only to those students, who attend the schools on that particular school-day and not to all those, who have enrolled in the school.

### **Failure of the policy-**

Twenty years after the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education or popularly known as the mid-day meal scheme was launched in August 1995, the scheme seems to have failed to achieve its twin goals: to increase enrolment in primary education in government schools while ensuring nutrition level of children.

The latest audit report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India indicates that enrolment in government schools where the mid-day meal scheme is in force has been declining in the last five years. This indicates that the strategy of the scheme to lure children to primary education by ensuring food is not working.

On the other hand, the CAG report finds that children are not getting the recommended basic minimum quantity of food. It has hampered the nutritional level of children, the second primary goal of the scheme. Under the mid-day meal scheme, each child is entitled to cooked meals with a minimum of 300 calories and 8-12 grams of proteins and adequate quantities of micronutrients.

### **3.7 Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA):**

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan launched in March 2002, is a time-bound integrated approach, where the central government and the state government together will implement this scheme in partnership with the local government and community. The scheme aims to provide useful and quality elementary education to all children between 6 and 14 years of age by 2010. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is an effort to recognize the need for improving the performance of the school system and to provide community-owned quality elementary education as a mission. The scheme also envisages bridging gender and social gaps that exist in our country today.

However, factors like absenteeism of teachers, lack of monitoring, and corruption have contributed greatly to the failure of implementation of this scheme.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

The preceding discussion on the barriers to education in rural India followed by a review of major educational policies and programmes in the country has revealed that education plays an integral role in defining the living standard of individuals and as a tool, it enables them to make informed life decisions which lay down the foundation of overall human development in a country. However, despite the tremendous progress in literacy rate during the last two decades, millions of people in India remain illiterate or are not able to reach a level of education that might help them in professional aspects where affected stakeholders are economically weaker sections and females of rural India. As the paper underlines various barriers to rural education, it also focuses on loopholes and areas of improvement in education policies.

A major focus should be to create a viable, cost-effective, inclusive, and sustainable model to impart education in rural areas that is holistic and is free from unnecessary bureaucratic interference. The government should focus on regulating improved investment in this sector including effective provisions for disadvantaged sections of the society, defeating prevalent socio-cultural prejudices. Only an improved quality of education will be able to break the vicious stereotype of inferior rural education in India and bring the youth of these areas out of "capability deprivation". Unless the policies are not backed by strong social realities further translating into effective action, bridging this gap of the rural-urban educational divide will remain an elusive goal for India.

## References

- Alcott, B., Banerji, M., Bhattacharjea, S., Nanda, M., & Ramanujan, P. (2020). One step forward, two steps back: transitions between home, pre-primary and primary education in rural India. *Compare*, 50 (4), 482-499.
- Anand, Abhay. (2014, April 2). Geographical divide in higher education. Retrieved from <https://university.careers360.com/articles/geographical-divide-in-higher-education>
- ASER Centre. (2019). Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 'Early Years'. Retrieved from <http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202019/ASER2019%20report%20/aserreport2019earlyyearsfinal.pdf>
- ASER Centre. (2019). ASER 2019 'Early Years'-National Findings. Retrieved from <http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202019/ASER2019%20report%20/nationalfindings.pdf>
- Azim Premji Foundation. (2004). The Social Context of Elementary Education in Rural India. Retrieved from <http://righttoeducation.in/sites/default/files/TheSocialContextofElementaryEductaioninRuralIndia.pdf>
- Bandyopadhyay, Madhumita. (2014). Education, Poverty and Exclusion. *National University of Educational Planning and Administration*, Occasional Paper no. 45.
- Bandyopadhyay, Madhumita, & Subhramaniam, Ramya. (2008). Gender Equity in Education: A Review of Trends and Factors. *Consortium for Researchers Educational Access, Transition and Equity*, No. 18.
- Campus varta. (2020, May 7). Barriers in The Growth Of India's Rural Education System. Retrieved July 14, 2020, from <https://www.campusvarta.com/campus-updates/barriers-in-the-growth-of-indias-rural-education-system/>
- Chaudhari, Kaushik, & Roy, Susmita. (2008). Gender gap in educational attainment: Evidences from Rural India. *Education Economic*, 17(2), pp 215-238.
- Chandra, Ritu. (2019), Education and the Poverty Trap in Rural Areas. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2019/03/Education-and-the-Poverty-Trap-in-Rural-Areas-final-by-Ritu.pdf>
- Chavan, Madhav. (2019, June 5). Fixing the education system. Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/national-education-policy-draft-hindi-imposition-5>
- Child Labour in India. (2015, 11 June). Retrieved from <https://www.cry.org/media/child-labour-in-india-decreasing-at-a-snails-pace>
- Desai, Sonalde, & Kulkarni, Veena. (2008). Changing Educational inequalities in India in the context of Affirmative action. *Demography*, 45(2), pp 245-270.
- Desai, Sushrut. (2007). Gender Disparity in Primary Education: The Experience in India. *UN Chronicle*, 45(4). Retrieved from <https://unchronicle.un.org/article/gender-disparity-primary-education-experience-india>
- Doss, Heckert, & Myers, Pereira, & Quisumbing, C. J. E. A. A. (2019, December). Gender, rural youth and structural transformation: evidence to inform innovative youth programming. Retrieved from

[https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41187395/04\\_Doss+et+al\\_2019+RDR+BACKGROUND+PAPE R.pdf/cb007332-880e-c000-aa82-e47d0a4d5a98](https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41187395/04_Doss+et+al_2019+RDR+BACKGROUND+PAPE R.pdf/cb007332-880e-c000-aa82-e47d0a4d5a98)

Dr. Jahan, K. Kanar. , & Dr. Selvarani, D. Christy. (2015). Higher Education in India: Issues and Challenges. *International Conference on Humanities, Literature and Management (ICHLM'15)*. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8ffa/aea9b3c52850e63faf56eef306912080fcf1.pdf>

Educational Programmes taken by the Indian Government in Rural Areas. (2014, April 12). Retrieved from <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/sociology/educational-programmes-taken-by-the-indian-government-in-rural-areas/34970>

Halfacree, K. (1993). Locality and social representation: Space, discourse and alternative definitions of the rural. *Journal of Rural Studies* , Vol 1/9, 23-37.

"Crisis Defused: on Hindi Imposition". (2019, June 4). Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/crisis-defused/article27429380.ece>.

Husain, Zakir. (2011). Gender disparities in completing school education in India: explaining geographical variations. *Journal of Population Research*, 28(4), pp. 325-352.

Irvin, M. J., Meece, J. L., Byun, S., Farmer, T. W., & Hutchins, B. C. (2011). Relationship of School Context to Rural Youth's Educational Achievement and Aspirations. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 40(9), 1225–1242. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-011-9628-8>

Johari, A. (2015, December 23). Why over one lakh rural women in Bihar sent postcards to Prime Minister Modi. Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/article/775839/why-over-one-lakh-rural-women-in-bihar-sent-postcards-to-prime-minister-modi>

Kumar, Sanjay, & Koppar B. J., & Balasubhramaniam, S. (2003). Primary Education in Rural Areas: An Alternative Model. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(34), pp. 3533-3536.

Mid-day meal has failed to attract children to government schools, says CAG audit. (2015, December 31). Retrieved from <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/health/mid-day-meal-has-failed-to-attract-children-to-government-schools-says-cag-audit-52267>

“Major bungling in Operation Blackboard: Report”. (2003, September 5). Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/Major-bungling-in-Operation-Blackboard-Report/articleshow/167576.cms>

Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. (2017). Annual Report 2016-17. Retrieved from [https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/HRD%20AR%202016-17%20SE.pdf](https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/HRD%20AR%202016-17%20SE.pdf)

Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. (2019). Draft National Education Policy, 2019. Retrieved from [https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/Draft\\_NEP\\_2019\\_EN\\_Revised.pdf](https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/Draft_NEP_2019_EN_Revised.pdf)

Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. (2018). Educational Statistics at a Glance. Retrieved from [https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/ESAG-2018.pdf](https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/ESAG-2018.pdf)

Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (2020). Annual report 2019-2020. Retrieved from [https://rural.nic.in/sites/default/files/AnnualReport2019\\_20\\_English.pdf](https://rural.nic.in/sites/default/files/AnnualReport2019_20_English.pdf)

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India. (2018). NSS 75<sup>th</sup> round- Key Indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India. Retrieved from [http://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/NSS75252E/KI\\_Education\\_75th\\_Final.pdf](http://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/NSS75252E/KI_Education_75th_Final.pdf)

National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). (2009). Eighth All India School Education Survey. Retrieved from [http://ncert.nic.in/pdf\\_files/8th\\_AISES\\_Concise\\_Report.pdf](http://ncert.nic.in/pdf_files/8th_AISES_Concise_Report.pdf)

National Informatics Centre. (1968). National Policy on Education, 1968. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20090731002808/http://www.education.nic.in/policy/npe-1968.pdf>

Raina, Jyoti. (2019). What is in it for School Education? Draft National Education Policy, 2019. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 54(37), pp 15-17.

Ramachandran, V., Linden, T., Goyal, S., & Chatterjee, P. G. (2018). *Getting the Right Teachers in the Right Schools- Managing India's Teacher Workforce*. World Bank Group.

Roy, Kumkum. (2019). Examining the Draft National Education Policy, 2019. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 54(25).

Singh, Jaivir. (2018, November 26). Why Rural India still has poor access to quality education?. Retrieved from <https://www.financialexpress.com/education-2/why-rural-india-still-has-poor-access-to-quality-education/1393555/>

Sreekanthachari, J. G., & Nagaraja, G. (2013). An overview of rural education in India. *Advance Research Journal of Social Science*, 4(1), pp 115-119.

Srivastava, Nisha, & Srivastava, Ravi. (2010). Women, Work and Employment Outcomes in Rural India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45(28), pp 49-63).

Schuelka, M. J., Braun, M. A., & Johnstone, C. J. (2020). Beyond access and barriers: Inclusive education and system change. *Forum for International Research in Education*, pp. 1-7.

T. (2003, September 7). Operation Blackboard failed: House panel. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/Operation-Blackboard-failed-House-panel/articleshow/170125.cms>

Tilak, Jandhyala B. G.. (2002). Determinants of Household Expenditure on Education in Rural India. *National Council of Applied Economic Research*, Working Paper No. 18.

*Why the DPEP failed to achieve the objectives?* (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://entrance-exam.net/why-the-dpep-failed-to-achieve-the-objectives/>

Zhou, H. (2016, September 29). The gender gap among school children in poor rural areas of western China: evidence from a multi-province dataset. Retrieved from <https://equityhealthj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12939-016-0442-5>