

Gist of EPW October Week 4, 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. [India's Hunger Pangs](#)
2. [A Letter from a Governor](#)
3. [How Modern Are the Public Institutions in India?](#)

India's Hunger Pangs

Context:

In Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2020, India was ranked 94 out of 107 countries, even behind Pakistan (ranked 88), Myanmar (ranked 78), Bangladesh (ranked 75), Nepal (ranked 73), and Sri Lanka (ranked 64). The article analyses the issue of India's poor performance and suggests the way forward.

Global Hunger Index:

- Global Hunger Index ([GHI](#)) measures hunger in terms of child undernutrition, child mortality and undernourishment of the people.
- In order to measure hunger, GHI uses four indicators namely the share of people with insufficient calorie intake, the share of children below five years with low weight to height ratio (wasting) and low height for age ratio (stunting) and child mortality rate.
- India's score in GHI, which stands at 27.2% is far behind the scores of the 17 top-ranked countries which have scored below five, including that of BRICS nations like Brazil and China which have secured third and fifth ranks respectively.

Trends in India's GHI score:

- The poor performance of India once again has put forward the failure of the government in providing sufficient food to a large section of the population despite a significant rise in the stocks of cereals.
- Trends in GHI scores show that there has been an increase in the gap between India and its neighboring countries in many cases.
 - For example, the reports of GHI for the years 2000 and 2020 represent that the improvement in the GHI score of India is only 0.1%. It stood at 27.2% in 2020.
 - In contrast to this, the improvement in Pakistan's score is by 33.9% and stands at 24.6%. Improvement in Bangladesh's score is by 40.2% and stands at 20.4%.
- Among the four indicators of GHI, India has been most successful in reducing the mortality rates of children under five years of age by 2/3rd in the last two decades. The present child mortality rate is 3.7%.
- The number of stunted children has fallen by about one third and stands at 34.7%.
- The number of undernourished population has reduced by a quarter, to become 14%.
- However, the number of wasted children in India has gone up by 1.2% and has reached 17.3% over the last two decades.

Reasons for poor GHI rank:

- India scores poorly in GHI despite having large food stocks, an extensive network of public distribution systems covering every corner of the country as well as 800 million people getting food subsidies.

- The major reason behind such a state of affairs is because the focus of the government is on providing energy sufficient diet instead of a diet that is rich in nutrition.
- Above all, the low per capita income of Indians makes nutritious diets unaffordable for them.
 - According to the [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#), for an Indian, an energy-sufficient diet costs \$0.79 per capita per day. The amount is \$1.9 for a nutrient-adequate diet and \$3.41 for a healthy diet.
- The FAO states that the share of India's population that is unable to afford an energy-sufficient diet has shrunk to just 0.9%.
- However, the FAO analysis shows that 39.1% and 77.9% of Indians are unable to afford a nutrient adequate diet or a healthy diet.

Analysis of consumption pattern in India:

- In 2019, a government report on food and nutrition security pointed towards a change in food consumption patterns which has accentuated the nutrient deficiency among Indians.
- The latest available data shows that only per capita per day consumption of fat has increased whereas per capita per day-energy consumption and protein consumption have declined.
- Also, in most cases, the intake is less than the norms recommended by the Indian Council of Medical Research, both in rural and urban areas.
- There has been a decline in the share of expenditure on cereals both in rural and urban areas. However, at the same time, there is a meagre increase in the consumption of nutritious foods.
- In total food expenditure, the share of expenditure on milk, egg, fish, and meat has increased by 2-3% and spending on pulses has remained constant in both rural and urban areas. Moreover, spending on fruits and vegetables has declined in rural areas.
- The increase in prices of nutritious foods such as pulses, eggs, milk, fish, etc, as compared to cereals has also made them less affordable to a large section of India's population.

Steps to be taken to improve the GHI score:

- The government needs to redesign its strategy on food security to ensure an affordable nutrient adequate diet in the medium term and a healthy diet in the long term.
- The food production targets should be revisited to meet the nutritional requirements.
- In order to climb up in the GHI ranking, there is a need for a comprehensive strategy to focus on the production of nutritious foods as well as to make these nutritious foods available to a large section of the population.

A Letter from a Governor

Context:

- The article analyses the letter written by the Governor of Maharashtra to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra over the latter's decision to keep the places of worship closed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and also focuses on the relationship between the [governor](#) and chief minister of a state.

Relationship between the governor and the chief minister:

- It is generally said that the relationship between the governor and the chief minister is not healthy. This is because of the fact that the Governor is appointed by the Central Government and on the

insistence of the latter, the former adopts a hostile attitude towards those State governments which are ruled by political parties other than those at the centre.

- On the other hand, State governments have also created controversies involving the Governor in many instances.
- On many occasions the office of governor has been subjected to criticism over the use of discretionary power, to favor the ruling party at the centre and in doing so, even bypassing the constitutional norms and procedures.
- The Constitution envisages that the office of governor should remain independent of politics. The autonomy of the governor, however, can be ensured only in certain political conditions. The role of governor becomes less controversial when the same political party rules at the centre and the state.
- In the political framework, where a single party dominates, the tension between the governor and chief minister becomes lesser as in such situations, it does not become a necessity for a governor to destabilize a democratically elected government in the state.

Interpreting the letter of the governor:

- In order to interpret the intention behind the governor's letter, we should look at the content of the letter in the context of contemporary politics. There are some political parties in India, which try to gain political dominance based on manipulations using the office of governor and not through electoral mandate.
- The Governor's letter was problematic on several grounds. The governor raised questions on the policy decisions of the chief minister (of keeping temples closed amidst the pandemic).
 - It must be noted that on the decision of keeping places of worship including temples by the chief minister, the empirical evidence was on his side. If temples were opened, then there could have been a surge in COVID cases.
- Rather than questioning the Chief Minister on the basis of constitutional principles of justice, equality, and secularism, the governor questioned the chief minister from the ideological point of view of Hindutva, which the chief minister's party claims to follow.
- It seems that the governor has seen the decision of the chief minister as a compromise with his own (chief minister's) ideology.
- However, the chief minister, in the right spirit replied that secularism is the core ideal of the Constitution.
- The reply of the chief minister emphasizing secularism reiterates the view that the holders of constitutional posts are not supposed to support any ideas which may go against the constitutional ideals.
- In a diverse society like India, one ideology can go against another ideology. Holders of high public offices are expected to maintain neutrality and refrain from preferring one ideal over the other. The reference point of the value of neutrality should be based on the ideals enshrined in the Constitution.

Conclusion:

- In the above context, there is a need to focus on concerns that have bearings on public policy. What is required is to look into the rational framework of public policies that are framed around constitutional ideals.
- The basis of the relationship between the governor and the chief minister should be to accommodate the aspirations of the common people.
- For both the governor and the state government, the prime focus should be on the rational resolution of common issues.
- Any deviation from this would not only be detrimental to the public cause but would also harm the dignity and legitimacy of public institutions.

How Modern Are the Public Institutions in India?

Context:

The article analyses the concept of modernity in public institutions in India and throws light upon how it is being compromised in the wake of individuals occupying key positions in these public institutions getting inclined to the traditional ideals that are based on caste and religious identities.

The idea of modernity in public institutions:

- Modern institutions are symbols of merit and efficiency. Both merit and efficiency can be achieved through open competition. The open competition includes both examination and election.
- The modernity of any institution depends on the rational functioning of that institution.
- The bureaucrats occupy key positions in these modern institutions on the basis of competitive examinations and on the other hand the ruling elites (politicians) get into these institutions through elections.
- Both bureaucrats as well as politicians who constitute these modern institutions, have to shun their traditional ideals or privileged social status which is based on caste, patriarchy, and other notions of superiority.
- It is only when public institutions are devoid of these traditional ideals, that they become modern.
- These public institutions can retain their modernity only if the occupants of these institutions develop prohibitive rationality. It is prohibitive rationality that controls the appetite for traditional privileges such as religion, caste, and blood relations.
- That is why bureaucrats are taught to develop a creative appetite which in turn can only be fulfilled when they adhere to the constitutional ideals.
- In recent times, the inclination of the occupants of public institutions towards traditional ideals has challenged the modern character of these institutions.
- What is being observed is that modern and traditional ideas are not separated from each other but are entangled with each other.
- Though there are many instances to establish the above argument, there are two instances that can be cited to show the overlapping of modern and traditional ideals.

Letter of the governor of Maharashtra to the chief minister of Maharashtra:

- In a letter to the chief minister of Maharashtra, the governor of Maharashtra raised questions over the former's decision to keep the places of worship closed amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The governor also questioned the Hindutva ideology of the chief minister, which the chief minister's party claims to uphold.
- Some of the members of the central government did express dissatisfaction over the content of the letter. Others, however, chose to downplay the issue by stating that the letter was written in the individual capacity of the governor.
- The question is: "Can individual expression be separated from the institutional location?" The answer is "No".
- Institutional location does influence such expression even if one provides a disclaimer that the said act was done in an individual capacity and it has no bearing on the public position that the person occupies.
- Thus, the argument to separate individual articulation of a particular ideal from public office is a strategy that is used to avoid any embarrassment caused by such expression.
- The disclaimer fails to rectify the damage done because it is the institutional location that makes the individual expression significant.

The case of investigating agencies:

- There is a stark morally discomfoting overlap between the conservative social and the modern public institutions in the case of penal institutions such as the police. Specifically with respect to the rape victims who belong to a socially oppressed caste.
- As has been reported in the media, in many cases, Police officials and accused belong to the same privileged social background. Such an overlap reduces the scope of getting justice.
- Caste and religious overlap between the accused and investigating officials dilutes the case against the accused and justice becomes elusive. Such overlap favours the accused rather than the victim.
- The overlap between the traditional mindset and the modern institutions compels us to draw an analogy between a caste panchayat and an investigating agency.
- Despite getting training from the top training institutes in the country, some government officials get inclined towards parochial loyalties instead of adhering to modern rationality and bring bad names to public institutions.

Conclusion:

- Institutions that teach modernity have lost their control over the practice and implementation of modern values.
 - The caste-based rationality which is provocative has to be replaced by prohibitive rationality. It is prohibitive rationality that can tame the growing appetite for traditional ideals among those who sit in the public institutions.
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