

Gist of EPW May Week 2, 2023

The Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) is an important source of study material for [IAS](#), especially for the current affairs segment. In this section, we give you the gist of the EPW magazine every week. The important topics covered in the weekly are analysed and explained in a simple language, all from a [UPSC](#) perspective.

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1. Indian Knowledge System

Context: University Grants Commission draft guidelines to incorporate Indian knowledge in higher education curricula.

Introduction:

- The University Grants Commission has released draft guidelines to incorporate Indian knowledge in higher education curricula, aligning with the new National Education Policy's mandate.
- The [National Educational Policy 2020 \(NEP 2020\)](#) recommends the incorporation of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into the curriculum at all levels of education.
- These guidelines are drafted to promote research and instruction in IKS, at all levels of education, by preparing and teaching new courses/programmes at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Background:

- The Indian Knowledge System encompasses all of the systematised disciplines of Knowledge which were developed to a high degree of sophistication in India from ancient times.
- It also includes all of the traditions and practices that the various communities of India—including the tribal communities—have evolved, refined and preserved over generations.

- The UGC-recognized academic institutions provide undergraduate and postgraduate education to the most number of students in India and form the bedrock of the higher education system in India.
- Therefore, it is imperative that the curriculums in these institutions incorporate IKS-related subjects in their curricula to implement the NEP 2020 in letter and spirit.

General guidelines:

- Students both in the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are to gather at least 5% of their mandated credits from IKS courses.
- At least half of these credits are to be sourced from IKS courses related to the student's major discipline of specialisation.
 - Students of medicine, for instance, are expected to read a foundation course in Indian systems of medicine followed by another elective course on a similar theme in the subsequent semester.
- The model curricula appended in the guidelines, therefore enlist IKS foundational courses, presumably compulsory for all students, delineating contributions of early Indians in disciplines ranging from architecture, metallurgy, and health sciences to fine arts and economy.
- Special care should be taken to ensure that the course materials for these IKS courses are based on authentic sources—such as source texts, historical accounts, inscriptions and other records, material and other evidence, and also rigorous sociological records of current practices of different communities.
- The continuity of the Indian Knowledge Traditions from ancient times up to the relatively recent period of the eighteenth or nineteenth century must be emphasised in the design of the course content.
- The medium of instruction for the IKS courses could be any of the Indian languages which have been approved as a medium of instruction in higher education, apart from English and Sanskrit.

Issues with the guidelines:

- Existing modern curricula's relationship with Indian knowledge is uncertain, as subjects like Indian music, philosophy, and ayurveda are criticised for their perceived Western influence and are considered in need of revision.
- The guidelines recognize the historical spread of Indian science, technology, medicine, and literature to Asia and Europe but do not acknowledge the influence of non-Indian knowledge in India.
- Non-Indian authors are notably absent from the reading lists provided for foundational and elective courses, limiting the inclusion of diverse perspectives and research on Indian knowledge.

- While foreign authors are included in the reading lists for teachers, their presence is minimal or non-existent in the sample curricula for students, potentially limiting exposure to global perspectives on Indian knowledge.
- The guidelines emphasise the importance of immersive sessions but tend to prioritise text-based learning, focusing on canonised and sanctified knowledge rather than incorporating experiential aspects of IKS.

Significance:

- The guidelines aim to integrate Indian traditional knowledge into modern textbooks and classroom activities, promoting a seamless integration of concepts.
- Incorporating Indian knowledge in higher education curricula allows for the preservation and promotion of India's rich cultural heritage. By studying ancient Indian texts, philosophies, and practices, students gain a deeper understanding of their own cultural roots and the values that have shaped Indian society.
- IKS emphasises a holistic approach to education that encompasses physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. This helps in a more comprehensive understanding of the world, fostering a well-rounded education for students.
- IKSa is deeply rooted in the local context and addresses issues specific to the Indian society and environment.
- Incorporating Indian knowledge in higher education curricula provides alternative perspectives to Western-centric approaches which allows students to explore diverse ways of thinking and problem-solving.
- Indian knowledge systems, such as Ayurveda, [Yoga](#), and Vedic mathematics, have gained global recognition for their efficacy and relevance.
 - By including these in higher education curricula, Indian universities can attract international students and contribute to the global dissemination of Indian knowledge, promoting India as a hub of learning and innovation.

2. A Right Act for Health**Introduction:**

- On 21 March 2023, the Rajasthan government became the first state in India to adopt legislation with the explicit intent of ensuring the “Right to Health” (RTH) for residents of the state.
- Despite some controversies and delays, the act represents progress in India's public health legislation, although further clarity, framing improvements, and supportive measures are needed.
- Given the current national policy favouring healthcare privatisation and the resource constraints faced by public health systems in most states, the Rajasthan government's commitment to rights-based access to public services is a positive development.

Concerns and Objections:

- Private doctors' associations protested against the bill, claiming their concerns were not addressed, while civil society groups criticised the draft for lacking concrete assurances and social accountability mechanisms.
- Associations of private doctors in Rajasthan have been highly critical of the obligations placed on them to provide emergency care in certain conditions.
- The apprehension has been that all private providers, including individual and smaller providers, might be expected to provide advanced emergency care which is beyond their capacity.
- Civil society groups led by Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (JSA) demand strong oversight and accountability bodies so that services to ordinary people are guaranteed, and reimbursements to private sector providers are ensured.

Political Economy of Healthcare:

- This act should be understood in the context of the state's political economy of healthcare, where public hospitals treat around half of the inpatients, and patients often incur significant out-of-pocket expenses.
- There is a shortage of health personnel, including specialist doctors, and inadequate public health financing, leading to gaps in the public health system.
- The private healthcare sector's influence on the state government is evident in its ability to impact key provisions in the act, highlighting the power of private lobbies and the need for effective regulation in the sector.
- Civil society organisations, despite their significant role in shaping the act, have been marginalised in the bodies established by the act, raising concerns about social accountability and the exclusion of community voices.
- To ensure the realisation of health rights, communities and civil society organisations should be equal partners in the implementation of the act, and issues such as social audits and accessible grievance redressal should be addressed.

3. Foreign Universities in India

Context: Recent guidelines of the UGC have allowed entry to foreign universities in India.

Detail:

- The **draft of University Grants Commission (Setting up and Operation of Campuses of Foreign Higher Educational Institutions in India) Regulations, 2023** was introduced with the aim to
 - **Provide an international dimension to higher education, enable Indian students to obtain foreign qualifications at affordable cost, and make India an attractive global study destination.**

- The regulation favours the FHEIs by allowing them to hire faculty, determine fees and repatriate income abroad.

Advantages of such an initiative:

- New branch campuses will create competition and improve the quality of domestic institutions (public and private), and **improve the employability of graduates and offer popular courses.**
- It will **attract foreign direct investment (FDI) in higher education** and shall save billions of dollars by stopping the outward mobility of students.
- It **proposes to allow the branch campuses of FHEIs** to determine their own curricula and admission policy.
- It will promote India as an **international education hub, disincentivise Indian students from going abroad and save money from repatriation abroad, and encourage competitive culture to upgrade the quality of Indian higher education.**

Concerns regarding this draft:

- There is an apprehension that it will lead to further **commercialisation of the education** sector in India.
- Higher educational institutions in India suffer **from structural and funding constraints**, it **creates a doubt about the possibility of creating world-class education** through this new initiative.
- Experts have expressed their concerns over lowering the condition for setting **branch campuses from the top 100 world-ranked to the top 500 world-ranked FHEIs.**
- It may give rise to **new forms of hierarchy among Indian students** based on the **learning opportunities and access to knowledge in higher education**, when educational reforms are supposed to dissolve such differences.
- It is likely that branch campuses, expecting to get a higher profit, shall offer only courses like engineering, medical, management, IT, etc.
 - Hence, **unlike the public system offering all courses, branch campuses shall be selective in the offer of courses distorting the balance between fundamental and applied branches of knowledge.**
- The branch campuses shall lead to a **further drain of talented faculty of public institutions into private and branch campuses of foreign institutions.** The quality of public higher education may suffer due to the drain of faculty.
- Competition between **public institutions and branch campuses of foreign universities shall not have a level playing field.** The former is dependent on public funding and the latter shall be allowed to charge fees to earn surplus.
 - The former is **subjected to control and the latter is allowed autonomy to make decisions.** Hence, public-funded institutions cannot compete with branch campuses.

4. Women in Indian Legislature

Introduction

- Equality and equity are often seen as synonymous concepts. However, equality is an end product whereas equity drives towards a goal.
- Equity drives toward a more societal, moral, and ethical approach.
- It is thus argued that women's empowerment should focus more on equity.

Details

- According to [International Labour Organization](#), gender equity is defined as fairness in the treatment of men and women depending on their needs.
- It thus implies equal treatment in some cases and unequal treatment in others.
- The United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 5](#) is about 'Gender Equality'.
 - The sub-goal 5.5 seeks to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life".

Women in Legislature and Panchayats

- The Women's Reservation Bill, 2008 or the Constitution Bill (108th Amendment), 2008 intended to ensure one-third reservation for women in the lower houses of the national (Lok Sabha) and state legislatures (Vidhan Sabha).
 - It was passed by the [Rajya Sabha](#) in the year 2010 with a two-thirds majority.
 - However, Lok Sabha never voted on it and it lapsed with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha.
- It should be noted that issues of gender, class and caste are important factors in political functioning.
- Many experts argue that legislative reservation is not the ideal way to achieve political empowerment of women.

Women in Lok Sabha

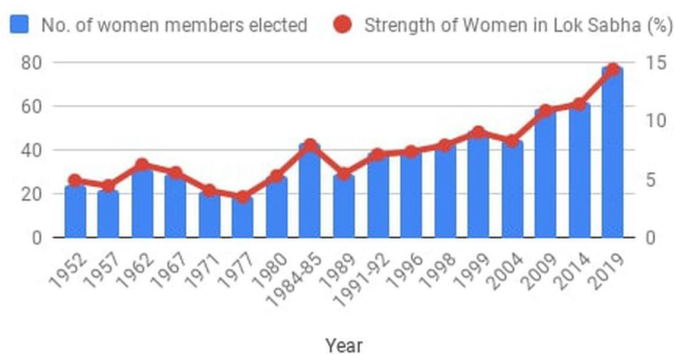


Image source: The Hindu

Arguments against Women Reservation

- The major factors that prevent women from entering the legislature are illiteracy and lack of autonomy.
- There is a lack of political will to ensure 33% reservations for women in the central and state legislatures.
- It is argued that in a diverse India, reservations would be insufficient to protect the interests of minority groups like women, SC, and STs.
- It is also argued that there is a difference in the representation of women at the parliamentary/state assembly level and Panchayat level as the former is concerned with policy-making while the latter is expected to focus on the distribution of public goods at the grassroots level.
- Moreover, political parties are cautious of taking any step that can disturb social structures that are heavily dependent on caste, religion, and community.
- The independence and autonomy of women leaders are often questioned.
- Women's reservation is often considered tokenism and a redressal of the historical injustice to women.
- Many Scandinavian countries like Denmark, Norway, and Sweden saw a gradual increase in quotas. Its success was dependent on the education, employment, and financial independence of women.
- It might promote proxy culture like *Sarpanch pati*.
- Rather than reservation, it is important to focus on the continued absence of women in politics.

Arguments in favour of Women's Reservation

- The representation of women in political positions can mitigate gender biases.
- It also reduces the gender gap in parental aspirations.
- It also creates an impact on voters' choices.
- It is found that women leaders invest more in public goods suitable to local women like water.
- Some experts argue that women's presence in politics will be effective only when it is above a certain threshold. A large number of women in the legislature can transform the male-dominated political system.
- Reservation is a fast-track way to increase the representation of women in politics.
- The idea of reservation should be seen as a means to an end.
- Women parliamentarians can raise issues associated with women like sexual harassment and domestic violence.

Conclusion:

- It is argued that gender empowerment in India is seen as equality instead of equity.
- India requires a strong sociopolitical shift at the lower levels through education, equal opportunities, economic independence, and ultimately political independence.

5. Dark Side of the Gig Economy

Introduction

- The gig economy grew tremendously after the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) as the self-employed worker played a significant role in driving the economy after a huge downfall.
- It is expected that the gig economy in India will employ approximately 23.5 million people. This would help in generating nearly 4% of the country's income.

Associated Concerns

- Despite its significant size and impact in India, the gig economy is not covered under labour regulations.
- The gig workers in India are forced to work without any social protection.
 - Notably, the government replaced 29 labour laws with [4 new laws](#) in 2019-20.
- The pay rates of gig workers fluctuate frequently and thus make them highly vulnerable to the whims of some powerful entities.
 - In a major online firm, the monthly wages of delivery agents were reduced by 50%.
- It should be noted that platforms refer to gig workers as “partners” rather than “employees”. As a result, they are disentitled from social security benefits and the right to paid leaves.
- Due to lower pay rates, the platform will attract fewer delivery agents. It will further lead to a systemic collapse.
- There is also a lack of grievance redressal mechanisms for delivery agents as they are communicated through push alerts or pre-recorded interactive voice response calls.
- The gig workers' accounts are terminated if they question or protest against unfair policies or wage rate cuts.
- In India approximately 73 million individuals are unemployed. There is also a lack of formal job opportunities.

Way Ahead

- The gig workers should be offered social security.
- The working conditions should be made favourable along with fair pay and employee benefits.
- They should be put on the list of employees qualified with statutory benefits owing to the risk and susceptibility.
- The challenges faced by gig workers should be addressed by both the union and the state governments.
- Companies engaging temporary workers should be held responsible for ensuring the fair treatment of these workers.