

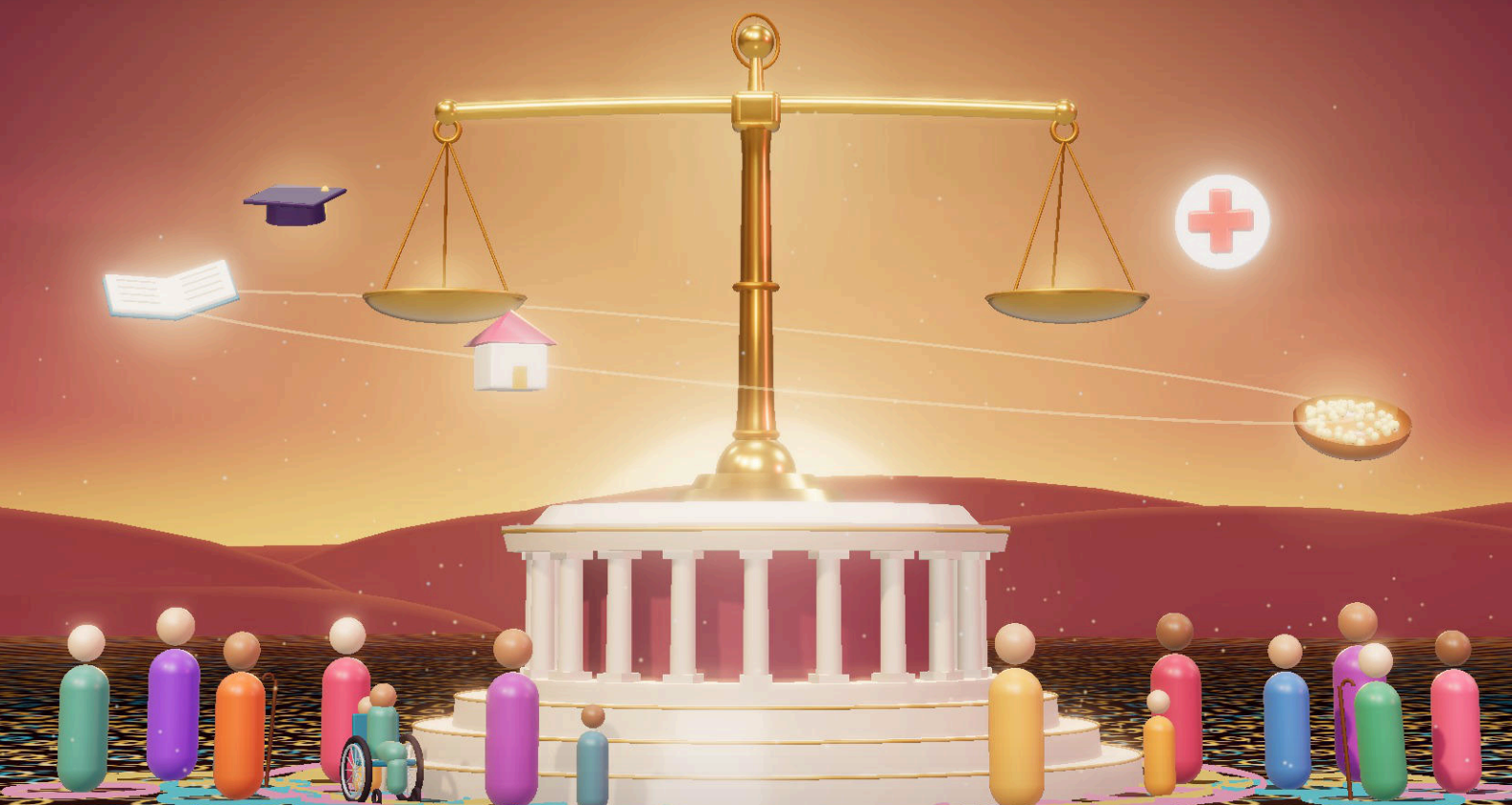
UPSC CIVIL SERVICES · PRELIMS & MAINS GENERAL STUDIES PAPER II

Social Justice

Vulnerable sections, welfare schemes, health, education, human resources, poverty and hunger — rewritten and updated to October 2026, with every PYQ from 2011 to 2026.

Compiled by Arvind KrS

30 chapters • 219 PYQs 2011–2026 • 140 diagrams • 150+ schemes



IN THIS BOOK

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| I Social Justice: Foundations, Institutions and Delivery | II Women and Children |
| III Caste, Tribe and Community | IV Other Vulnerable Sections |
| V Health | VI Education |
| VII Human Resources and Work | VIII Poverty and Hunger |
| IX Ready Reference | |



Social Justice — Notes for UPSC Prelims and GS Paper II

Vulnerable sections, welfare schemes, health, education, human resources, poverty and hunger

2027 Edition · Compiled October 2026 · Compiled by Arvind KrS

Free sample. This sample carries the cover, the full contents, two unit pages and two complete chapters of the book. You may share this sample as it is, without changes.

© 2026 LotusArise IAS. All rights reserved. The complete book is licensed to the purchaser for personal study only. Copying, sharing, reselling or uploading it to any website, drive or group, in whole or in part, is not permitted.

Cover artwork and all diagrams: original illustrations created for this book. UPSC questions are reproduced verbatim for study. Figures, schemes, laws and judgments are stated as they stood in October 2026.

Questions or corrections: support@lotusarise.com

Contents

UNIT I	Social Justice: Foundations, Institutions and Delivery	5
01	Social Justice: Idea, Constitution and the Welfare State IN THIS SAMPLE	6
02	Welfare Schemes: Design, Delivery and Performance	21
03	Institutions for the Vulnerable: Commissions, Bodies and Civil Society	35
UNIT II	Women and Children	49
04	Women in India: Status and Challenges	50
05	Women: Laws, Schemes and Institutions	64
06	Children: Status, Health and Development	78
07	Child Protection: Labour, Marriage, Abuse and Justice	91
UNIT III	Caste, Tribe and Community	103
08	Scheduled Castes: Status, Atrocities and Safeguards	104
09	Manual Scavengers, Denotified Tribes and Other Marginalised Groups	117
10	Scheduled Tribes: Rights, Development and Governance	129
11	Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups and Frontier Tribal Issues	144
12	Other Backward Classes and the Reservation Debate	156
13	Minorities: Rights, Issues and Welfare	169
UNIT IV	Other Vulnerable Sections	181
14	Persons with Disabilities	182
15	Transgender Persons and LGBTQIA+ Rights	195
16	Senior Citizens	207
UNIT V	Health	219
17	India's Health System: Structure, Financing and Challenges	220
18	Universal Health Coverage and Ayushman Bharat	233
19	Public Health Priorities: Mothers, NCDs, Mental Health and the Health Workforce	246

UNIT VI	Education	259
20	School Education: Access, Learning and the Right to Education	260
21	National Education Policy 2020, Languages and Teachers	274
22	Higher Education, Research and Examinations	287
UNIT VII	Human Resources and Work	300
23	Human Resource Development, Skills and Youth	301
24	Labour, Unorganised, Migrant and Gig Workers	315
UNIT VIII	Poverty and Hunger	329
25	Poverty: Concepts, Measurement and Trends	330
26	Fighting Poverty: Livelihoods, SHGs and Social Protection IN THIS SAMPLE	344
27	Hunger, Malnutrition and Food Security	358
UNIT IX	Ready Reference	371
28	Schemes Compendium	372
29	Data and Index Bank	386
30	Judgments, Committees and Reports Bank	399

UNIT I

3 CHAPTERS

Social Justice: Foundations, Institutions and Delivery

GS II: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections. Prelims: Economic and Social Development – Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector Initiatives, etc.

CHAPTERS

01	Social Justice: Idea, Constitution and the Welfare State	6
02	Welfare Schemes: Design, Delivery and Performance	21
03	Institutions for the Vulnerable: Commissions, Bodies and Civil Society	35

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS UNIT

01 Social Justice: Idea, Constitution and the Welfare State

The Idea of Social Justice · Thinkers and Indian Traditions · The Constitution as a Social Charter · Courts and Social Rights · Who Are the Vulnerable Sections? · The Welfare State in India · Growth, Redistribution and Freebies · SDGs and Social Justice · Rights-based Laws at a Glance · Challenges and the Way Forward

02 Welfare Schemes: Design, Delivery and Performance

Welfare Schemes: Meaning and Types · Centre, States and the Money Trail · Targeting: Finding the Beneficiary · DBT, JAM and Digital Delivery · Cash, Kind, UBI and Freebies · Convergence and Aspirational Areas · Monitoring, Audit and Participation · How Well Do Schemes Perform? · Schemes at a Glance · Reforms and the Way Forward

03 Institutions for the Vulnerable: Commissions, Bodies and Civil Society

Why Institutions Matter · Human Rights Commissions · Commissions for SCs, STs and OBCs · Women, Children and Minorities · Other Bodies and Legal Aid · How Effective Are the Commissions? · Institutions at a Glance · Civil Society and NGOs · Foreign Funding, Donors and FCRA · CSR, Philanthropy and Partnerships

SOCIAL JUSTICE

PRELIMS · GS PAPER II

Social Justice: Idea, Constitution and the Welfare State

On 1 July 2026 the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the best-known rights-based welfare law in India, ceased to exist. Its successor, the VB-G RAM G Act, promises 125 days of work instead of 100, but within allocations fixed in advance and shared 60:40 with the States. The change revived an old question: is the state's duty to the poor a legal right, a policy choice or a matter of fiscal capacity? Answering it needs the ideas, the constitutional promise and the history of the welfare state set out here.

SYLLABUS

PRELIMS

Economic and Social Development – Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector Initiatives, etc

MAINS · GS PAPER II

Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections

CONTENTS

01	The Idea of Social Justice	02	Thinkers and Indian Traditions
03	The Constitution as a Social Charter	04	Courts and Social Rights
05	Who Are the Vulnerable Sections?	06	The Welfare State in India
07	Growth, Redistribution and Freebies	08	SDGs and Social Justice
09	Rights-based Laws at a Glance	10	Challenges and the Way Forward
11	Previous Year Questions		

This chapter covers:

- what social justice means, and how Rawls, Sen, Ambedkar and Gandhi understood it;

- the Constitution's provisions for equality, welfare and special protection;
- how the courts widened Article 21, and the landmark judgments;
- who the vulnerable sections are, and why intersectionality matters;
- the welfare state from planning to rights, DBT and the changes of 2025–26, with the SDGs.

Scheme design and delivery follow in Chapter 2 and the national commissions in Chapter 3; each vulnerable group has its own unit, and Chapter 30 collects the judgments.

01 The Idea of Social Justice

Social justice is the fair sharing of a society's benefits and burdens, equal respect for every person, and the removal of disadvantages that people suffer because of the group they are born into rather than anything they have done. The Italian Jesuit Luigi Taparelli coined the phrase in the 1840s, but the idea is older: in India it runs from the Buddha's open sangha and Basavanna's Anubhava Mantapa to the Bhakti saints and the reformers whose demands entered the Constitution.

Four Dimensions

Modern theory gives justice four faces. **Distributive** justice asks who gets what; **procedural** justice asks whether the rules are fair and give everyone a voice and a remedy; **recognition**, a term made central by Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, asks whether stigmatised identities receive equal dignity; and **corrective** justice repairs historic wrongs, as the Forest Rights Act, 2006 does when its preamble speaks of undoing a "historical injustice".

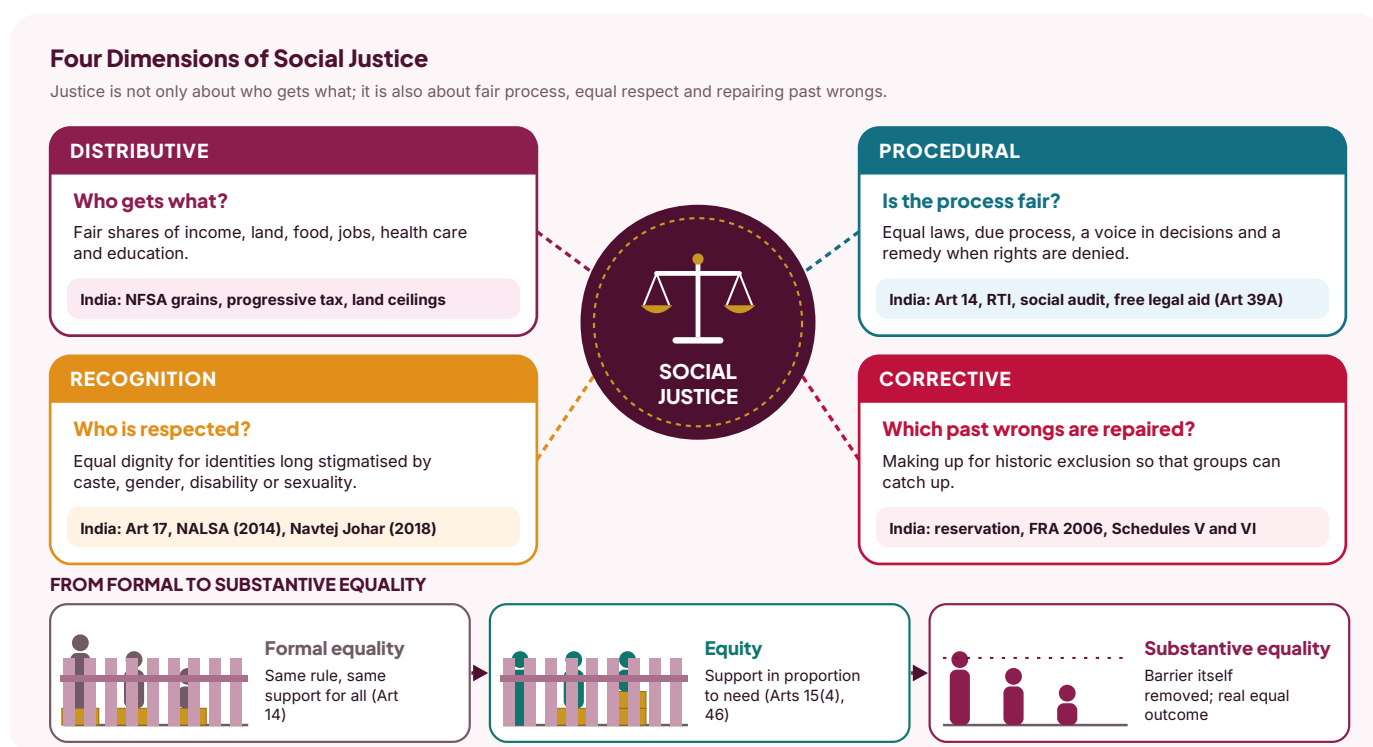


Fig. 1.1 The four dimensions of social justice, and the move from formal to substantive equality.

Equality: Formal, Substantive and Equity

Formal equality treats everyone alike: one law, one rule, one ballot. **Substantive equality** looks at results, because equal treatment of unequal people can preserve inequality. **Equity** is the bridge: support in proportion to need. Harold Laski put it simply: equality means, first, the absence of special privilege and, second, adequate opportunities open to all. Hereditary privilege is therefore the first thing an egalitarian society removes; the Constitution abolishes untouchability (Article 17) and titles (Article 18). Indian law mostly pursues **equality of opportunity**, but seeks something closer to **equality of outcome** where a group has been shut out for generations, as with reserved seats in legislatures and panchayats.

Social Justice as Human Rights

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948** recognises the right to **equal access to public service** (Article 21), social security (Article 22), work and equal pay (Article 23), an **adequate standard of living including food**, clothing, housing and medical care (Article 25), and **education**, free at least at the elementary stage (Article 26). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), which India joined in 1979, made these binding treaty obligations.

02 Thinkers and Indian Traditions

Four thinkers shape most debates on Indian welfare policy; they differ on what should be equalised and who carries the duty.

Four Lenses on Social Justice

How four thinkers answer one question: what does a just society owe its weakest members?

JOHN RAWLS	SEN AND NUSSBAUM	B. R. AMBEDKAR	M. K. GANDHI
1921–2002	b. 1933 · b. 1947	1891–1956	1869–1948
Justice as fairness	Capabilities	Social democracy	Sarvodaya, Antyodaya
• Veil of ignorance: choose the rules without knowing your own place in society • Equal basic liberties come first • Difference principle: inequality only if it helps the worst-off	• Judge lives by what people can actually be and do, not by income alone • Development as freedom: remove hunger, illiteracy, ill-health • Nussbaum: ten central capabilities as a dignity floor	• Liberty, equality, fraternity as one inseparable trinity • Political democracy cannot last without social democracy • Caste as graded inequality, to be annihilated	• Welfare of all, starting with the last person • Talisman: test each step against the poorest face you have seen • Trusteeship, gram swaraj, dignity of labour
Echo: reservation, progressive tax, Antyodaya ration	Echo: HDI (1990), MPI, rights to food and schooling	Echo: Arts 15–17, 46, reservation, Part IV	Echo: Art 40, AAY (2000), SHGs, panchayati raj
ALSO IN THE INDIAN TRADITION			
• Jyotirao Phule Satyashodhak Samaj (1873); schools for girls and lower castes	• Narayana Guru 'One caste, one religion, one God'; temple entry	• E. V. Ramasamy 'Periyar' Self-Respect Movement (1925); caste and gender equality	• Ram Manohar Lohia Seven revolutions; special opportunity for backward groups and women

Fig. 1.2 Four thinkers compared, with reformers of the Indian tradition.

John Rawls: Justice as Fairness

In *A Theory of Justice* (1971) Rawls asked what rules people would choose behind a **veil of ignorance**, not knowing whether they would be born rich or poor, male or female, upper-caste or Dalit. They would choose equal basic liberties for all and the **difference principle**: social and economic inequalities are acceptable only if they benefit the least advantaged and go with positions open to all under fair equality of opportunity. Putting the poorest first, as the Antyodaya Anna Yojana does, is Rawlsian in spirit. Libertarians such as Robert Nozick saw redistribution as a violation of rightful holdings, and F. A. Hayek called social justice a mirage; Indian constitutional practice has not followed them.

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum: Capabilities

For Sen income is only a means; what matters is a person's **capabilities**, the real freedom to be nourished, healthy, literate, mobile and part of public life. *Development as Freedom* (1999) treats hunger, illiteracy and ill-health as "unfreedoms", and *The Idea of Justice* (2009) contrasts **niti** (just rules and institutions) with **nyaya** (justice as actually lived), warning against *matsyanyaya*, where big fish eat small ones. Martha Nussbaum listed **ten central capabilities**, from life and bodily health to affiliation, play and control over one's environment, as a floor below which no one should fall. The UNDP's **Human Development Index (1990)** and the Multidimensional Poverty Index grew from this approach.

B. R. Ambedkar: Social Democracy

For Ambedkar caste was a system of **graded inequality**, in which each group looks down on the one below and so never unites against the hierarchy; in *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) he argued that caste had to be destroyed, not reformed. In his last speech to the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949 he warned that India was entering "a life of contradictions": equality in politics, inequality in social and economic life. **Political democracy cannot last unless social democracy lies at its base**, a way of life that treats **liberty, equality and fraternity** as one trinity, since each fails without the others. Constitutional morality, he said, had to be cultivated. Articles 15 to 17, 46 and the reservation scheme carry his imprint.



Fig. 1.3 B. R. Ambedkar, chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution.

Gandhi: Sarvodaya and Antyodaya

Gandhi's **Sarvodaya** (the welfare of all) came from his 1908 Gujarati paraphrase of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*; its test is **Antyodaya**, the rise of the last person. His **talisman** asked anyone in doubt to recall the face of the poorest person they had seen and ask whether the step they contemplate will be of any use to that person. Trusteeship, gram swaraj and the dignity of labour complete the picture, echoed in Article 40, the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (2000) and the self-help group movement; Deendayal Upadhyaya later made Antyodaya central to his Integral Humanism.

Other Indian voices widened the idea: **Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule** (schools for girls from 1848; Satyashodhak Samaj, 1873), **Narayana Guru** ("one caste, one religion, one God"), **Periyar** (Self-Respect

Movement, 1925) and **Ram Manohar Lohia**, whose socialists demanded 60 per cent of opportunities for backward groups, women, Dalits, Adivasis and minorities.

03 The Constitution as a Social Charter

Granville Austin called the Indian Constitution "first and foremost a social document". The Objectives Resolution (1946) already promised "justice, social, economic and political", and the final text built a full architecture around it.

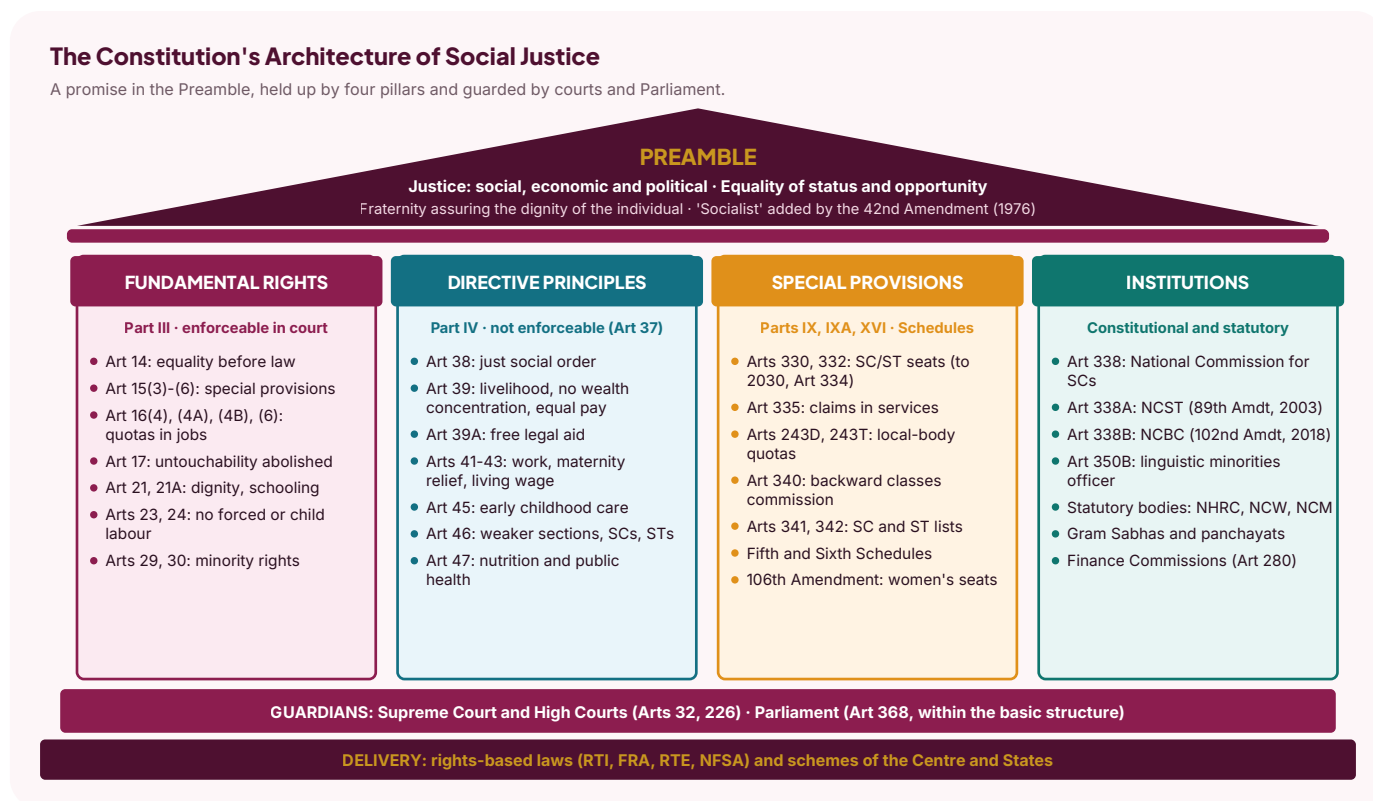


Fig. 1.4 How the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles, special provisions and institutions fit together.

The Preamble

The Preamble resolves to secure to all citizens **justice, social, economic and political**; liberty; **equality of status and of opportunity**; and fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual. The **42nd Amendment (1976)** added "socialist". **Economic justice** is thus promised in the Preamble and given concrete form by the Directive Principles, especially Articles 38 and 39.

Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles

The **Fundamental Rights** (Part III) are enforceable in court and mostly restrain the state. The **Directive Principles of State Policy** (Part IV) tell the state what to achieve. Article 37 makes them **not** enforceable by any court, yet "fundamental in the governance of the country". They spell out the **social and economic democracy** that political democracy needs, and so embody the ideal of a **welfare state**.

PROVISION	WHAT IT DOES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
Art 14	Equality before law and equal protection of laws; permits reasonable classification
Art 15(3), (4), (5), (6)	Special provisions for women and children; for SEBCs, SCs, STs (1st Amendment, 1951); for their admission, even in private institutions (93rd, 2005); for EWS (103rd, 2019)
Art 16(4), (4A), (4B), (6)	Job quotas for backward classes; promotions for SCs and STs (77th, 1995); carry-forward of vacancies (81st, 2000); EWS up to 10%
Arts 17, 23, 24	Untouchability abolished; trafficking and forced labour banned; no child under 14 in factories, mines or hazardous work
Arts 21, 21A	Life with dignity (widely read by courts); free and compulsory education for ages 6–14 (86th, 2002)
Arts 29, 30	Protection of language, script and culture; minorities' right to run educational institutions
Art 38	A social order based on justice; clause (2), added in 1978, asks the state to minimise inequalities of income, status and opportunity
Art 39	Adequate livelihood; material resources for the common good; no concentration of wealth to the common detriment (39(c)); equal pay for equal work (39(d))
Arts 39A, 41, 42, 43	Free legal aid (1976); right to work, education and public assistance in old age, sickness and disablement; maternity relief; living wage
Arts 45, 46, 47	Early childhood care to age six; interests of weaker sections, SCs and STs; nutrition and public health

COMMON CONFUSION: PREAMBLE, DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES AND EQUALITY

The **welfare state** ideal is declared in the **Directive Principles**, not in the Preamble or the Seventh Schedule. **Economic justice** appears in the Preamble and the Directive Principles. **Concentration of wealth** offends Article 39(c), a Directive Principle, not the Right to Equality. Equality itself implies the absence of privileges, not the absence of competition.

Special Provisions and Institutions

- **Representation:** Articles 330 and 332 reserve legislative seats for SCs and STs (until 2030 under Article 334); Articles 243D and 243T (73rd and 74th Amendments, 1992) reserve local-body seats for them and at least one-third for women. The 106th Amendment (Articles 330A, 332A, 334A) came into force on 16 April 2026 but will operate only after the delimitation that follows Census 2027.
- **Services and lists:** Article 335 (claims of SCs and STs in services), Article 340 (backward classes commissions such as Kalelkar and Mandal), Articles 341 and 342 (Presidential lists of SCs and STs).

- **Tribal areas:** the **Fifth Schedule** covers Scheduled Areas in ten States; the **Sixth Schedule** gives autonomous district councils to Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram (Chapter 10).
- **Institutions:** National Commissions for SCs (Article 338), STs (338A, 2003) and Backward Classes (338B, 2018), and the Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities (350B).

04 Courts and Social Rights

Because Directive Principles cannot be enforced directly, the Supreme Court has read many of them into Article 21. Public interest litigation, pioneered by Justices P. N. Bhagwati and V. R. Krishna Iyer, opened the court to the poor.

In **Kesavananda Bharati (1973)** the Court treated Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles as complementary. **Minerva Mills (1980)** added that the harmony and balance between Parts III and IV is part of the **basic structure**, and struck down the 42nd Amendment's attempt to give all Directives priority over Articles 14 and 19. **N. M. Thomas (1976)** treated reservation as a facet of equality, not an exception to it. In 2024 a nine-judge bench in **Property Owners Association v State of Maharashtra** held, by majority, that not every private resource is a "material resource of the community" under Article 39(b).

CASE (YEAR)	RIGHT READ INTO ARTICLE 21, OR RULE SETTLED
Francis Coralie Mullin (1981)	Life with human dignity, including food, clothing and shelter
Bandhua Mukti Morcha (1984)	Dignity drawn from Articles 39, 41 and 42; freeing bonded labourers
Olga Tellis (1985)	Livelihood: pavement dwellers cannot be evicted without fair procedure
Unni Krishnan (1993)	Free education up to 14 is a fundamental right; led to Article 21A
Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity (1996)	Emergency medical care; denying treatment violates Article 21
PUCL v Union of India (from 2001)	Right to food: mid-day meals and ICDS made entitlements; paved the way to NFSA 2013
Indra Sawhney (1992)	27% OBC quota upheld; creamy layer; 50% ceiling
Janhit Abhiyan (2022)	10% EWS quota upheld, 3:2
Davinder Singh (2024)	States may sub-classify SCs and STs on quantifiable data

JUDGMENT: DIGITAL ACCESS IS PART OF THE RIGHT TO LIFE (2025)

In **Pragya Prasun v Union of India** (30 April 2025), acid-attack survivors who could not "blink" for a live photograph and a lawyer who is blind could not complete digital KYC for bank accounts and SIM

cards. The Supreme Court held that the **right to digital access is an intrinsic part of Article 21**, called bridging the digital divide "a constitutional imperative" and issued twenty directions; the RBI amended its KYC rules in August 2025. As welfare moves online, inclusion has to be designed in.

05 Who Are the Vulnerable Sections?

The Constitution speaks of "weaker sections" (Article 46), "socially and educationally backward classes" and Scheduled Castes and Tribes, but never defines vulnerability. In policy, a **vulnerable section** is a group whose exposure to harm is higher and whose capacity to cope or be heard is lower. Vulnerability may be **ascribed** (caste, tribe, gender, disability), tied to the **life cycle** (children, the elderly), to **work** (informal, migrant and sanitation workers), to **identity** (religious minorities, transgender persons) or to **situations** such as displacement and disaster. The result is **social exclusion** (René Lenoir, 1974): being shut out of the institutions through which others gain income, status and voice.

Who Are the Vulnerable Sections?

Groups whose risk of harm is higher and whose voice is weaker, because of birth, body, age, work or identity.

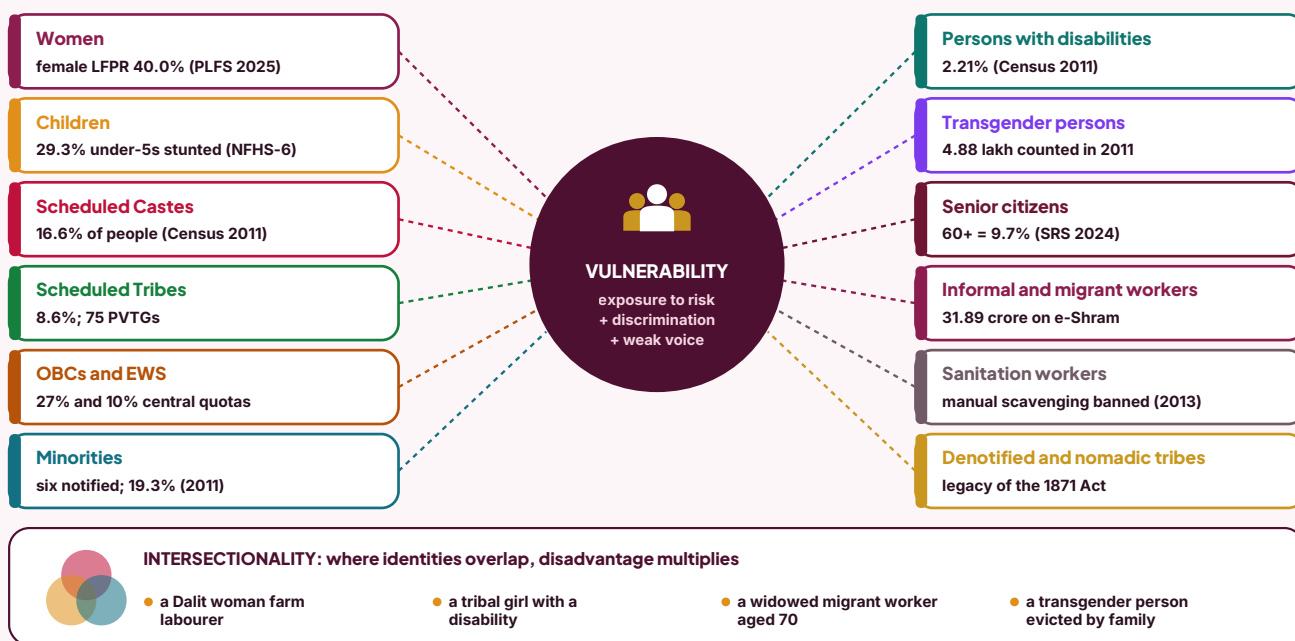


Fig. 1.5 The main vulnerable sections, with one indicator each.

CONCEPT: INTERSECTIONALITY

Kimberlé Crenshaw coined **intersectionality** in 1989 to show that a Black woman's experience is not simply racism plus sexism. In India a Dalit woman farm worker faces caste, gender and class at once, and policies designed for "women" or "SCs" separately may miss her. The Supreme Court used the idea in **Patan Jamal Vali v State of Andhra Pradesh (2021)**, a case of sexual violence against a blind Dalit woman. Good policy therefore needs data broken down by more than one identity.

The Welfare State in India

A **welfare state** accepts responsibility for a minimum standard of life for every citizen. Britain's Beveridge Report (1942) named its enemies as five "giants": want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. India began poor, unequal and divided by caste, so it joined a development state that built dams, schools and industries to welfare for those left behind. The Ministry of Welfare became the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** in 1998, signalling a shift from charity to rights.

How India's Welfare State Has Changed, 1950–2026

Five phases: from planned state provision to legal entitlements, digital delivery and, now, recalibration.

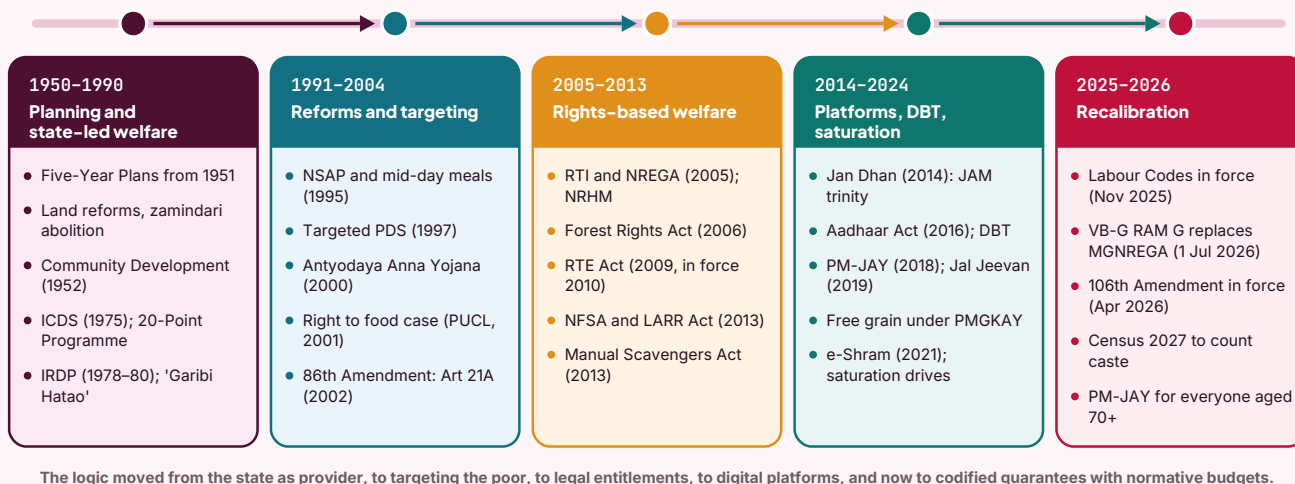


Fig. 1.6 Five phases of India's welfare state, from the Five-Year Plans to the recalibration of 2025–26.

From Rights to Platforms

The years **2005–2013** produced the **rights-based approach**: RTI, NREGA, the Forest Rights Act, the RTE Act and the National Food Security Act each turned a benefit into a **legal entitlement** with time limits, grievance redress, transparency and often compensation for delay. MGNREGA was the first law to make **social audit** by the Gram Sabha mandatory.

From 2014 the emphasis moved to delivery. The **JAM trinity** (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, mobile) made **Direct Benefit Transfer** the default: by August 2026 more than **₹52 lakh crore** had been transferred under 318 schemes, with estimated gains of about ₹5.14 lakh crore (to March 2025) from weeding out duplicate and fake beneficiaries. The **saturation approach** aims to reach every eligible person rather than a quota. ILO data show social protection coverage (at least one cash benefit) rising from **19%** in 2015 to **64.3% in 2025**, about 94 crore people. Critics point to exclusion through failed authentication, e-KYC deadlines and data errors; the "rightful targeting" drive deleted 2.35 crore ineligible or duplicate beneficiaries from ration lists.

INDIA: FROM MGNREGA TO VB-G RAM G

The **Viksit Bharat–Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025** came into force on **1 July 2026** and repealed MGNREGA. It guarantees **125 days** of work per rural household, lets States pause works for up to 60 days in peak farm seasons, and is funded **60:40** (90:10 for North-Eastern and Himalayan States) within **normative State allocations**; spending beyond them falls on

the State. The government cites leakages, falling poverty and durable assets; critics say a budget cap turns a demand-driven right into a scheme and shifts costs to States. By 24 September 2026 it had generated 31.69 crore person-days, 61.65 per cent by women.

Other changes of **2025–26**: the four **Labour Codes** came into force on 21 November 2025, defining gig and platform workers in law; PM-JAY now covers everyone aged 70 or more (October 2024); the women's reservation amendment took effect in April 2026; and **Census 2027** will count caste for all communities, the first such count since 1931. Entitlements now follow a citizen through the life cycle: maternity cash (PMMVY) and free delivery, anganwadis for the under-sixes, the RTE Act and PM POSHAN at school, scholarships and skilling for youth, VB-G RAM G work, NFSA grain and PM-JAY cover in working life, insurance and widow or disability pensions against shocks, and NSAP pensions in old age, though their size varies sharply between States.

07

Growth, Redistribution and Freebies

One school, associated with Jagdish Bhagwati and Arvind Panagariya, holds that fast growth is the best anti-poverty programme, creating jobs and the revenue that pays for welfare. Another, associated with Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, points to Kerala and East Asia: public investment in health, education and nutrition must come early, because healthy and educated people make growth broad-based. The **Kuznets curve**, in which inequality first rises and then falls with growth, has not held everywhere. India's record supports both camps: growth cut extreme poverty sharply, but income and wealth inequality stay high.

INDICATOR	LATEST VALUE	SOURCE (YEAR)
Extreme poverty (\$3.00 a day, 2021 PPP)	2.6% (27.1% in 2011-12)	World Bank, 2023-24
Multidimensional poverty (projected)	11.28% (29.17% in 2013-14)	NITI Aayog paper, 2024
Consumption Gini, rural / urban	0.237 / 0.284	MoSPI, HCES 2023-24
Income share of the top 10%	about 58%	World Inequality Report 2026
Human Development Index	0.685, rank 130 of 193; 30.7% lost to inequality	UNDP HDR 2025 (2023 data)
Social services spending, Centre + States	7.9% of GDP	Economic Survey 2025-26 (BE)
Government health spending	1.48% of GDP (target 2.5%)	National Health Accounts 2022-23

The line between welfare and "**freebies**" is contested. Spending that builds capabilities (school meals, health cover, scholarships, rations for the poor) is usually defended as investment rooted in Part IV; pre-election handouts are criticised as fiscally risky. In **S. Subramaniam Balaji (2013)** the Supreme Court held that poll promises are not a "corrupt practice" and asked the Election Commission to frame guidelines; a fresh petition remained pending in 2026. The debate (Chapter 2) turns on purpose, design and fiscal space rather than labels.

08 SDGs and Social Justice

The eight **Millennium Development Goals** (2000–2015) were succeeded by the **Sustainable Development Goals**, adopted by the UN General Assembly in **September 2015** as the **2030 Agenda**: 17 goals and 169 targets for all countries, to be achieved **by 2030**, under the pledge to "leave no one behind". The idea came from the Rio+20 conference of 2012, **not** from the Club of Rome, whose 1972 report was *The Limits to Growth*. Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 16 form the social-justice core.

- **NITI Aayog** coordinates the SDGs; MoSPI's National Indicator Framework measures them.
- **SDG India Index 2023-24** (fourth edition, July 2024, still the latest): score **71**, up from 57 (2018) and 66 (2020-21), on 113 indicators; Kerala and Uttarakhand led with 79, Bihar trailed with 57.
- In the UN SDSN's **Sustainable Development Report 2026** India ranked **94th** of 167 countries (score 68.3), its best ever, up from 99th in 2025. India presented its third Voluntary National Review to the UN in July 2025.

09 Rights-based Laws at a Glance

LAW (YEAR)	RIGHT CREATED	LATEST STATUS (2026)
Right to Information Act (2005)	Information from public authorities within 30 days	2019 amendment on commissioners' terms; DPDP Act amendment (13 Nov 2025) exempts personal information, challenged
MGNREGA (2005)	100 days of wage work on demand per rural household	Repealed from 1 July 2026
VB-G RAM G Act (2025)	125 days of wage work per rural household	In force 1 July 2026; 60:40 sharing; all States notified schemes
Forest Rights Act (2006)	Individual and community rights over forest land and resources	25.42 lakh titles from 54 lakh claims; about a third rejected (June 2026)
RTE Act (2009)	Free, compulsory schooling for ages 6–14; 25% seats in private schools	No-detention relaxed (2019); TET mandatory for teachers (SC, 2025)

LAW (YEAR)	RIGHT CREATED	LATEST STATUS (2026)
National Food Security Act (2013)	Subsidised grain for up to 75% rural and 50% urban people; maternity benefit	Grain free under PMGKAY till Dec 2028; ONORC in all States
Manual Scavengers Act (2013)	Ban on manual scavenging; right to rehabilitation	NAMASTE scheme; sewer deaths continue
Street Vendors Act (2014)	Right to vend in designated zones	PM SVANidhi loans extended to 2030
RPwD Act (2016)	21 disabilities; 4% job and 5% higher-education quotas	Mandatory accessibility rules ordered (Raturi, 2024); drafts issued
Code on Social Security (2020)	Social security for unorganised, gig and platform workers	In force 21 Nov 2025; central rules May 2026

10 Challenges and the Way Forward

The welfare promise is wide on paper; the harder question is whether rights can be realised when public spending stays modest and delivery agencies do not work together.

Challenges

- **Minimal public investment:** government health spending is 1.48 per cent of GDP against the 2.5 per cent target of the National Health Policy 2017; education spending is well short of NEP 2020's 6 per cent; the central old-age pension of ₹200 a month is unchanged since 2006.
- **Non-integrated governance:** nutrition, health, sanitation and schooling sit with different departments, and beneficiary databases do not talk to each other.
- **Fiscal federalism and weak accountability:** most social services are State subjects, but money and design come through centrally sponsored schemes with fixed sharing ratios, and disputes over conditions hurt beneficiaries; social audits are irregular, posts lie vacant and caste and gender bias persists at the point of delivery.
- **Rights diluted, people excluded:** normative allocations, RTI amendments and tighter eligibility turn entitlements back into discretion; digital-only processes shut out the groups the law targets; the 2021 census comes only in 2026-27, and there is no official poverty line after 2011-12.

Way Forward

- **Invest** in health and education towards the national targets, and index pensions and wages to prices.
- **Integrate** schemes at district and panchayat level with a consent-based beneficiary registry, on the Aspirational Districts model.

- **Make rights real** through time-bound delivery with compensation, as in State Right to Services Acts, regular social audits, grievance redress and **offline help** wherever technology fails.
- **Cooperate** with States through fewer conditions and more untied funds, and **build fraternity** through education and public example, as Ambedkar urged.

STATE PRACTICE: TAMIL NADU'S SCHOOL BREAKFAST

Tamil Nadu began free breakfasts for primary pupils in government schools in **September 2022**, later adding aided schools. A new government renamed it the Perunthalaivar Kamarajar Breakfast Scheme (July 2026) and on **22 September 2026** extended it to Classes 6 to 8: about **34.6 lakh children** in nearly 45,000 schools. It shows continuity across governments.

USING THIS CHAPTER IN MAINS

Open social-justice answers with a constitutional anchor (the Preamble, Article 38 or Ambedkar's "life of contradictions") and close with a capability or SDG link. For rights-based welfare, set the gains of the 2005–13 laws against the 2026 shift to VB-G RAM G, then weigh spending, convergence and federalism. Ready data: social protection coverage 64.3% (ILO, 2025); extreme poverty 2.6% (2023–24, World Bank); government health spending 1.48% of GDP; SDG India Index score 71; SDR 2026 rank 94.



Previous Year Questions



Prelims

2021

Under the Indian Constitution, concentration of wealth violates

☐ a the Right to Equality

☒ b the Directive Principles of State Policy

☐ c the Right to Freedom

☐ d the Concept of Welfare

Answer: (b). Article 39(c), a Directive Principle, directs the State to ensure that the economic system does not result in concentration of wealth to the common detriment (Section 03).

2020

Which part of the Constitution of India declares the ideal of Welfare State ?

☒ a Directive Principles of State Policy

☐ b Fundamental Rights

☐ c Preamble

☐ d Seventh Schedule

Answer: (a). The Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV) declare the ideal of a welfare state (Section 03).

2017

One of the implications of equality in society is the absence of

☒ a Privileges

☐ b Restraints

☐ c Competition

☐ d Ideology

Answer: (a). Equality in society implies the absence of special privileges for any section, so that all have equal rights and opportunities (Section 01).

2016

Consider the following statements :

1. The Sustainable Development Goals were first proposed in 1972 by a global think tank called the 'Club of Rome'.

2. The Sustainable Development Goals have to be achieved by 2030.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

☐ a 1 only

☒ b 2 only

☐ c Both 1 and 2

☐ d Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (b). The SDGs were adopted at the UN in 2015 (after Rio+20) for achievement by 2030; the Club of Rome's 1972 work was 'The Limits to Growth', not the SDGs (Section 08).

2015

Consider the following statements regarding the Directive Principles of State Policy :

1. The Principles spell out the socio-economic democracy in the country.

2. The provisions contained in these Principles are not enforceable by any court.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

☐ a 1 only

☐ b 2 only

☒ c Both 1 and 2

☐ d Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (c). The Directive Principles set out the ideal of social and economic democracy, and Article 37 makes them non-justiciable (Section 03).

2015

The ideal of 'Welfare State' in the Indian Constitution is enshrined in its

☐ a Preamble

☒ b Directive Principles of State Policy

☐ c Fundamental Rights

☐ d Seventh Schedule

Answer: (b). The Directive Principles, especially Articles 38, 39 and 41–47, embody the ideal of a welfare state (Section 03).

2013

'Economic Justice' as one of the objectives of the Indian Constitution has been provided in

- ☐ a the Preamble and the Fundamental Rights
- ☒ b the Preamble and the Directive Principles of State Policy
- ☐ c the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy
- ☐ d None of the above

Answer: (b). Justice—social, economic and political—is promised in the Preamble and given concrete shape by Directive Principles such as Articles 38 and 39 (Section 03).

2011

Consider the following:

1. Right to education.
2. Right to equal access to public service.
3. Right to food.

Which of the above is/are Human Right/Human Rights under "Universal Declaration of Human Rights"?

- ☐ a 1 only
- ☐ b 1 and 2 only
- ☐ c 3 only
- ☒ d 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d). The UDHR (1948) recognises the right to education (Article 26), equal access to public service (Article 21) and food as part of the right to an adequate standard of living under Article 25 (Section 01).

Mains

2026

GS II · 15 MARKS

Can the constitutional mandate of rights-based welfare be effectively realised in the context of non-integrated governance and minimal public investment ? Examine.

UNIT VIII

3 CHAPTERS

Poverty and Hunger

GS II: Issues relating to poverty and hunger. Prelims: Economic and Social Development – Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector Initiatives, etc.

CHAPTERS

25	Poverty: Concepts, Measurement and Trends	330
26	Fighting Poverty: Livelihoods, SHGs and Social Protection	344
27	Hunger, Malnutrition and Food Security	358

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS UNIT

25 Poverty: Concepts, Measurement and Trends

Understanding Poverty · Measuring Poverty: Lines and Surveys · Multidimensional Poverty · Poverty Trends since 2011-12 · Who Are the Poor? · Urban Poverty · Inequality and the Paradox of Poverty · Causes of Persistent Poverty · Schemes at a Glance · Way Forward

26 Fighting Poverty: Livelihoods, SHGs and Social Protection

From Trickle-Down to Rights · Rural Jobs: MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G · Self-Help Groups and Microfinance · DAY-NRLM and Lakhpati Didi · Urban Livelihoods and Housing · Social Pensions and Insurance · Financial Inclusion · Cash Transfers, UBI and Graduation · Schemes at a Glance · Assessment and Way Forward

27 Hunger, Malnutrition and Food Security

Hunger and Malnutrition: Concepts · The Data: Where India Stands · Causes of Malnutrition · Poverty and Malnutrition: A Cycle · The National Food Security Act, 2013 · Reforming the PDS · Nutrition Programmes · Millets and Dietary Diversity · Schemes at a Glance · Way Forward

SOCIAL JUSTICE

PRELIMS · GS PAPER II

Fighting Poverty: Livelihoods, SHGs and Social Protection

On 1 July 2026 India's best-known anti-poverty law, MGNREGA, gave way to the VB-G RAM G Act, which promises 125 days of work instead of 100 but within budgets fixed in advance. At least five State assemblies had passed resolutions against it. In the same year the number of rural women earning at least ₹1 lakh a year through self-help groups, the "Lakhpati Didis", passed 3.46 crore. Wage guarantees and women's collectives are the two pillars of India's fight against poverty, and both are being remade.

SYLLABUS

PRELIMS

Economic and Social Development – Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector Initiatives, etc

MAINS · GS PAPER II

Issues relating to poverty and hunger; welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes. GS Paper I: Poverty and developmental issues

CONTENTS

01	From Trickle-Down to Rights	02	Rural Jobs: MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G
03	Self-Help Groups and Microfinance	04	DAY-NRLM and Lakhpati Didi
05	Urban Livelihoods and Housing	06	Social Pensions and Insurance
07	Financial Inclusion	08	Cash Transfers, UBI and Graduation
09	Schemes at a Glance	10	Assessment and Way Forward
11	Previous Year Questions		

This chapter covers:

- how anti-poverty strategy evolved from trickle-down to rights and saturation;
- rural employment, from MGNREGA to the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025;

- self-help groups, microfinance, DAY-NRLM and Lakhpati Didi;
- urban livelihoods, housing, pensions, insurance and financial inclusion;
- cash transfers, UBI, the graduation approach and an assessment.

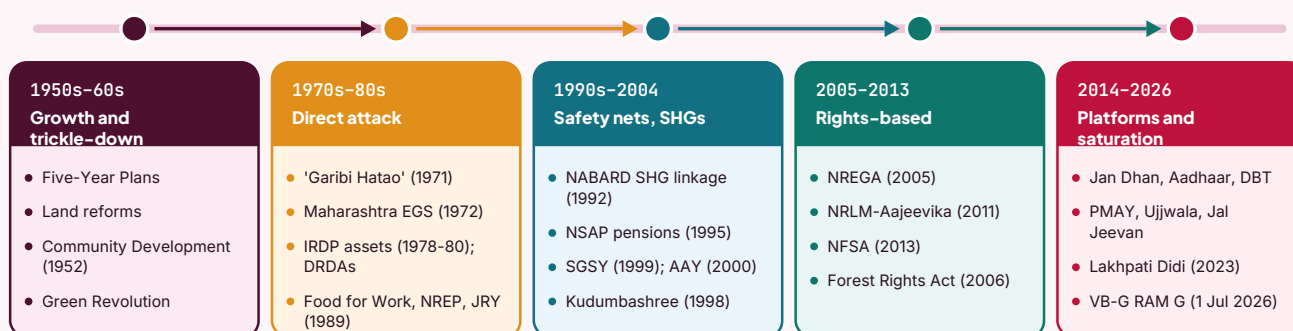
Concepts and measurement of poverty are in Chapter 25 and food security in Chapter 27; labour codes and unorganised workers are in Chapter 24.

01 From Trickle-Down to Rights

India's strategy against poverty has changed with each generation of policy. The early Plans expected growth, land reform and the **Community Development Programme (1952)** to lift everyone; when growth stayed slow and its gains narrow, the 1970s brought a **direct attack** on poverty under "Garibi Hatao": the Twenty Point Programme (1975), the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP, 1978-80) for assets, and wage programmes such as Food for Work (1977), NREP and RLEGP that later merged into the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (1989). Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Scheme (1972), backed by a State law in 1977, was the first legal job guarantee.

How India Has Fought Poverty, 1950s–2026

Five shifts in strategy: each phase kept earlier tools but changed the main lever.



From the state as provider, to targeting the poor, to legal rights, to digital delivery and women's collectives.

Fig. 26.1 Five phases of India's anti-poverty strategy, 1950s to 2026.

The 1990s added safety nets (NSAP, 1995; Antyodaya Anna Yojana, 2000) and group-based self-employment through the **Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY, 1999)**. The **rights-based** phase of 2005–2013 turned work (NREGA) and food (NFSA) into legal entitlements. Since 2014 the emphasis has been on delivery through Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and mobile phones, on **saturation** of household assets (houses, toilets, gas, water, electricity) and on women's collectives. The **District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs)**, set up from 1980 to run IRDP, coordinated anti-poverty programmes across departments at district level and watched over the use of their funds; they were **not** panchayati raj bodies. Their central funding ended on 1 April 2022, and States were asked to merge them with zila parishads.

02 Rural Jobs: MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G

The **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005** gave every rural household whose adult members volunteered for unskilled manual work a legal right to **100 days of work a year** on demand,

with **no** BPL, caste or income condition. Work had to be given within 15 days, within 5 km of home, failing which an unemployment allowance was due; one-third of workers were to be women; Gram Sabhas planned works and held the first mandatory **social audits**. The Centre paid all unskilled wages and three-quarters of material costs. It raised rural wages, eased distress migration and gave women independent earnings (their share of person-days rose from 48 per cent in 2013-14 to 58 per cent in 2025-26), but suffered delayed wages, low wage rates, unregistered demand and an average of only about 48 days per household.

The VB-G RAM G Act, 2025

The **Viksit Bharat–Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025** (assent 20 December 2025) came into force on **1 July 2026** and repealed MGNREGA. All States notified their schemes by August 2026, and by 24 September it had generated 31.69 crore person-days, 61.65 per cent of them by women.

MGNREGA (2005) and VB-G RAM G (2025) Compared

The guarantee grew; the funding model changed. The old Act was repealed on 1 July 2026.

	MGNREGA, 2005 (repealed)	VB-G RAM G Act, 2025
Days guaranteed	100 per rural household	125 per rural household
Nature	Demand-driven; open-ended funds	Normative State allocations; excess paid by State
Centre : State	~90 : 10 (all unskilled wages central)	60 : 40 (90 : 10 NE and Himalayan)
Seasonal pause	None	Up to 60 days in sowing and harvest
Wages	Paid within 15 days (often late)	Weekly; floor ₹300, average ₹327
Works	Gram Sabha shelf; many small works	4 verticals: water, roads, livelihood, climate
Accountability	Social audit by Gram Sabha	Six-monthly audit; biometric checks, AI
Admin cost cap	6 per cent	9 per cent
Case for: more days, faster wages, durable assets, fewer leaks		Case against: budget cap, 40% State burden, pause, exclusion

Fig. 26.2 MGNREGA and the VB-G RAM G Act compared.

- **Guarantee:** 125 days of wage work per rural household per year; States may notify a pause of up to 60 days in peak sowing and harvest seasons, with the 125 days given in the remaining 305 days.
- **Funding:** a centrally sponsored scheme shared **60:40** (90:10 for North-Eastern and Himalayan States; 100 per cent central in UTs without legislature), within **normative State-wise allocations**; spending beyond them falls on the State, and States bear the unemployment allowance.
- **Works:** four verticals: water security, core rural infrastructure, livelihood infrastructure and extreme-weather mitigation; assets pooled in a national rural infrastructure stack; Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans linked to PM Gati Shakti; panchayats to execute at least half the works by cost.
- **Delivery:** weekly wages (at most within a fortnight); a wage floor of ₹300 a day (national average ₹327.4 from July 2026); social audits every six months; biometric and face authentication; administrative cost cap raised from 6 to 9 per cent.

The debate. The government argues that the new law gives more days, faster wages, better assets, less leakage and a framework suited to a country where extreme poverty has fallen sharply. Critics, including the assemblies of Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Karnataka and Kerala (December 2025–February 2026), argue that a **budget cap** converts a demand-driven right into a supply-driven scheme, that the 40 per cent State

share strains poorer States, that the seasonal pause can leave labourers without work when farm jobs are scarce, that digital authentication excludes workers, and that dropping Mahatma Gandhi's name was needless. A Madras High Court PIL against eight provisions was withdrawn in March 2026; Karnataka and Telangana plan Supreme Court challenges, and in August 2026 that Court left petitioners free to challenge the new law. The test will be whether allocations follow real demand and wages are paid on time.

03

Self-Help Groups and Microfinance

A **self-help group (SHG)** is a group of 10 to 20 people, usually women of similar economic background, who save regularly, lend from their pooled savings to members, keep accounts, and decide together. The group, not the individual, borrows from a bank; members accept **joint responsibility for the loans taken by any member**, so peer pressure replaces collateral. NGOs such as MYRADA in Karnataka developed the model in the 1980s.

The SHG Ladder: From Savings to Livelihoods

How a self-help group grows, and the federations and banks that support it under DAY-NRLM.

SHG-BANK LINKAGE, MARCH 2025

- 1.43 crore SHGs; 17.1 crore households
- Loans outstanding ₹3.04 lakh crore; NPA 1.74%
- NRLM: 10.08 crore households (July 2026)

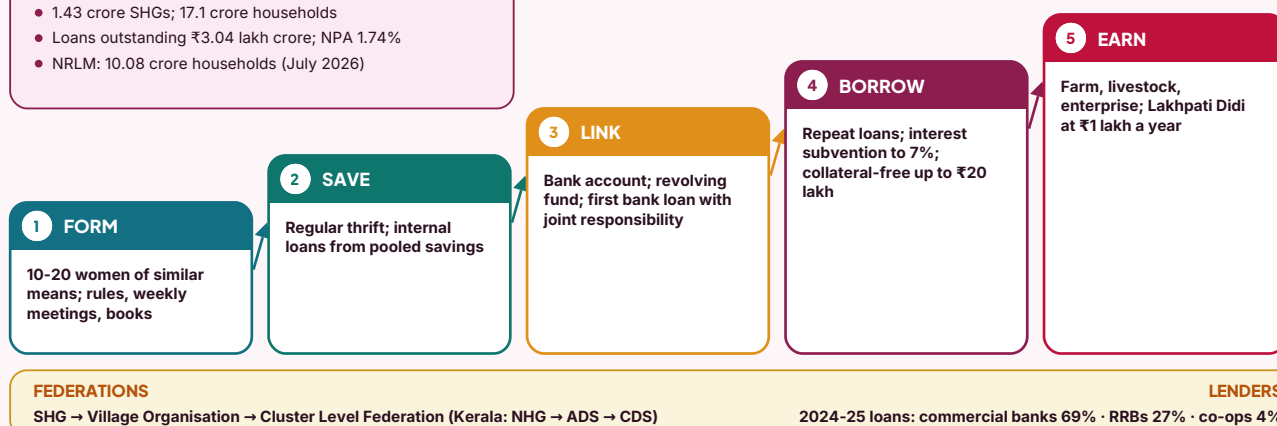


Fig. 26.3 The SHG ladder: from savings to livelihoods, and the federations that support it.

The SHG-Bank Linkage Programme

The **SHG-Bank Linkage Programme (SBLP)** was started by **NABARD in 1992** as a pilot linking 500 groups to banks, **not** by the State Bank of India; the RBI brought SHG lending under priority-sector norms in 1996. Commercial banks, **Regional Rural Banks** and cooperative banks lend to SHGs; commercial banks gave about 69 per cent and RRBs 27 per cent of SHG loans disbursed in 2024-25. It is the largest microfinance programme in the world:

- About **1.43 crore SHGs** covering **17.1 crore households** were savings-linked with banks in March 2025, with savings of ₹71,433 crore.
- Loans outstanding to 84.94 lakh SHGs were **₹3.04 lakh crore**, and bad loans fell to **1.74 per cent**, far below most retail lending.

Microfinance: Services and Models

Microfinance is the supply of a range of financial services to low-income households: **credit, savings, insurance and remittance or fund transfer**. Besides SHGs, **microfinance institutions (MFIs)** lend through **joint liability groups (JLGs)** of four to ten borrowers without collateral.

FEATURE	SHG-BANK LINKAGE	MFI-JLG MODEL
Lead institution	Banks, with NABARD and NRLM	NBFC-MFIs, small finance banks, banks
Starts with	Savings and internal lending	Credit
Group	10–20 members; group borrows	4–10 members; individuals borrow
Interest	Lower; subvention under NRLM	Higher (often above 20 per cent)
Size (March 2025)	₹3.04 lakh crore outstanding	₹3.81 lakh crore, down 14 per cent

MFI lending has gone through cycles of boom and crisis. In **2010** over-lending and coercive recovery in Andhra Pradesh, linked to borrower suicides, led to a State law and the RBI's Malegam Committee. The RBI's 2022 framework defines a microfinance loan as a collateral-free loan to a household earning up to ₹3 lakh a year and caps repayments at half of household income. After rapid growth, stress returned in 2024–25: borrowers with four or more lenders defaulted, the portfolio shrank, and Karnataka (an ordinance in February 2025, then an Act) and Tamil Nadu (2025) enacted laws against coercive recovery. The industry's "guardrails" now cap a borrower at three lenders and ₹2 lakh of unsecured debt.

Legitimacy, Accountability and Social Hurdles

SHGs and their patrons need scrutiny: paper groups formed to meet targets, capture by elites, weak bookkeeping, multiple borrowing, political use of federations, and MFIs that charge high rates and recover harshly. Remedies include grading and audits of groups, credit-bureau reporting, transparent pricing, grievance redress and accountability of federations to members.

Penetration also faces **socio-cultural hurdles**: restrictions on women's mobility and public speech, husbands' or in-laws' control over loans, caste divisions that keep groups homogeneous or exclude Dalit women, low literacy and numeracy, and the double burden of unpaid care. Groups are thinner in the North and East than in the South, where the movement began.

SHGs, the State and the Gender–Poverty–Nutrition Cycle

Some see the rise of SHGs as the state handing development to the poor themselves. A fairer reading is that SHGs are a partnership: the state funds, trains and links them to banks through DAY-NRLM, while groups deliver what bureaucracies cannot, such as monitoring schools and anganwadis, running community kitchens, social audits of works, and collective bargaining. Microfinance alone is **not** an "anti-poverty vaccine"; **credit helps those who already have a skill and a market**. But women's collectives can break the cycle of **gender inequality, poverty and malnutrition**: **income in women's hands is spent more on food and children**, groups

spread messages on breastfeeding and diets, and federations run nutrition gardens and take-home rations. Kerala's Kudumbashree and Bihar's Jeevika (whose SHGs campaigned for Bihar's prohibition law in 2016) show the political voice that collectives can build.

04 DAY–NRLM and Lakhpati Didi

The **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (Aajeevika)** replaced SGSY in **June 2011** and was renamed **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–NRLM** in 2016. It seeks to organise one woman from every poor rural household into an SHG, federate groups into village organisations and cluster-level federations, and build their **skills and livelihoods**. It does **not** set up industries or distribute free farm inputs.

- **Scale:** **10.08 crore households in about 92 lakh SHGs** (July 2026); cumulative bank credit to SHGs of ₹13.41 lakh crore since 2013–14; Budget 2026–27 ₹19,200 crore.
- **Finance:** a revolving fund and a community investment fund for each group; interest subvention that brings bank loans of up to ₹3 lakh down to 7 per cent, with a further 3 per cent for prompt repayment in backward districts; collateral-free bank loans up to ₹20 lakh.
- **Livelihoods:** farm and livestock support through the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana; the Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme; the Aajeevika Grameen Express Yojana for rural transport; and placement-linked skilling for rural youth through DDU-GKY and Rural Self Employment Training Institutes.
- **Community cadres:** a large cadre of community resource persons, including Krishi, Pashu and Bank Sakhis; Namo Drone Didi trains SHG women as drone pilots.

A **Lakhpati Didi** is an SHG member whose household earns at least **₹1 lakh a year**, sustained over at least four farm seasons or business cycles. The original target of 3 crore was crossed in 2025; **3.46 crore** were reported by March 2026 (Maharashtra, Bihar and West Bengal lead) and the target is now **6 crore by 2029–30**. Because incomes are self-reported through the mission's digital records, independent verification and the durability of these earnings remain open questions.

STATE PRACTICE: KERALA'S KUDUMBASHREE

Launched in **1998** by Kerala's State Poverty Eradication Mission, **Kudumbashree** organises women into **neighbourhood groups** of 10–20, federated into **Area Development Societies** at ward level and **Community Development Societies** at the local-government level. In March 2025 it had about 3.17 lakh groups and 48 lakh members, one woman per family. Its strength is its tie to elected local bodies: groups help prepare panchayat plans, run canteens, farming collectives, care services and micro-enterprises, and offer a ladder into local politics.

CASE IN POINT: BIHAR'S GRADUATION PROGRAMME

The ultra-poor often stay outside SHGs. Bihar's **Satat Jeevikoparjan Yojana** (August 2018), run by Jeevika, adapts the **graduation approach** pioneered by BRAC in Bangladesh and tested in West Bengal by Bandhan-Konnagar. Women-headed households, first those once dependent on country

liquor and toddy, and ultra-poor SC and ST families, receive a productive asset, a consumption allowance, 24 months of mentoring and entry into SHGs. Over two lakh households had been reached by 2025, believed to be the largest government-led graduation programme in the world.

05 Urban Livelihoods and Housing

The **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM)**, which organised urban poor women into SHGs, supported street vendors and ran shelters for the homeless, **ended on 30 September 2024**. A pilot successor, the **Deendayal Jan Aajeevika Yojana–Shehari** (from October 2024 in 25 cities, still a pilot in 2026), focuses on six vulnerable occupations: construction, transport, gig, domestic, waste and care workers. **PM SVANidhi** (2020), which gives street vendors collateral-free working-capital loans, was restructured in August 2025 with loans of ₹15,000, ₹25,000 and ₹50,000, a UPI-linked credit card, and lending extended to March 2030.

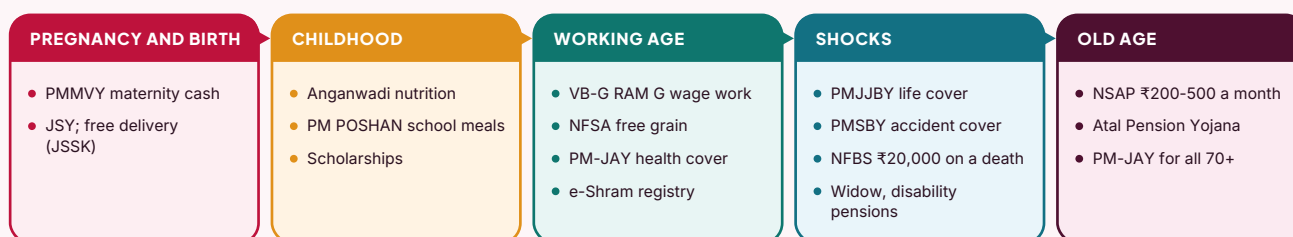
Housing is a large anti-poverty asset. **PMAY–Gramin** (2016) targets 4.95 crore rural houses by March 2029 and had completed 3.12 crore by August 2026. **PMAY–Urban 2.0** (September 2024) aims at one crore more urban houses for households earning up to ₹9 lakh, through beneficiary-led construction, affordable housing in partnership, affordable rental housing and interest subsidy; over a crore urban houses had been completed under both phases, most in women's names.

06 Social Pensions and Insurance

The **ILO's Social Protection Floors Recommendation (No. 202, 2012)** asks countries to guarantee basic income security across the life cycle and essential health care. India's coverage by at least one cash benefit reached about 64.3 per cent in 2025 (ILO), but benefits are often small.

A Social Protection Floor across the Life Cycle

Main central schemes against each risk; benefit levels vary widely between States.



ILO Recommendation 202 (2012): basic income security for children, working age and old age, plus essential health care.

India: 64.3% covered by at least one cash benefit (ILO, 2025); gaps are the adequacy of benefits and portability for migrants.

Fig. 26.4 India's social protection floor across the life cycle, with the main central schemes.

The **National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP, 1995)** covers about 3.09 crore people under State-wise caps: the Indira Gandhi National Old Age, Widow and Disability Pension Schemes, the National Family Benefit Scheme (₹20,000 on the death of a breadwinner) and Annapurna (10 kg of grain for elderly people without a

pension). The central old-age pension is still ₹200 a month, unchanged since 2006-07 (₹500 from age 80 since 2011); States add top-ups that range from small sums to several thousand rupees.

Low-cost insurance was launched in 2015: **PMJJBY** gives ₹2 lakh life cover for ₹436 a year, **PMSBY** ₹2 lakh accident cover for ₹20, and the **Atal Pension Yojana** a guaranteed pension of ₹1,000 to ₹5,000 for unorganised workers. Cumulative enrolments reached 28.05 crore, 59.18 crore and 9.40 crore respectively by July 2026. The older **Aam Admi Bima Yojana** (2007) insured the head or an earning member of rural landless households aged 18 to 59 and gave a free scholarship to two children in Classes 9 to 12; its cover moved to PMJJBY and PMSBY from 2017.

07 Financial Inclusion

Financial inclusion is part of social and economic inclusion: a bank account lets a poor household save safely, receive transfers without middlemen, borrow at fair rates, insure itself and build a credit history. The **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY, August 2014)** is the national mission for financial inclusion; it offers a zero-balance account with a RuPay debit card, accident insurance and an overdraft of up to ₹10,000. By August 2026 it had **59.09 crore accounts** holding ₹3.17 lakh crore; 56 per cent belong to women and 78 per cent are in rural and semi-urban areas. Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and mobile phones (the JAM trinity) underpin direct benefit transfer.

The **RBI's Financial Inclusion Index**, first published in August 2021, combines 97 indicators from banking, investment, insurance, postal and pension services into a score from 0 to 100, with three sub-indices: **Access (35 per cent), Usage (45 per cent) and Quality (20 per cent)**, which covers financial literacy, consumer protection and inequality in services. It rose from 43.4 in March 2017 to 67.0 in 2025 and **70.0 in March 2026**, driven mainly by usage. Problems remain: inactive accounts, weak credit access for the poorest, digital fraud and mis-selling, and a gender gap in use.

08 Cash Transfers, UBI and Graduation

A **universal basic income (UBI)** is an unconditional cash payment to every citizen. The Economic Survey 2016-17 discussed a quasi-UBI of ₹7,620 a year for 75 per cent of people, costing about 4.9 per cent of GDP, funded by ending many leaky schemes. A pilot by SEWA with UNICEF in Madhya Pradesh villages (2011-13) found better nutrition, schooling and small investments. India has since moved to targeted transfers instead: **PM-KISAN** (₹6,000 a year to landholding farmer families since 2019, excluding tenants and the landless) and State cash transfers to women such as Madhya Pradesh's Ladli Behna and Maharashtra's Ladki Bahin (Chapter 5).

FOR A BASIC INCOME	AGAINST A BASIC INCOME
Ends exclusion errors and leakages of targeting	High fiscal cost; pays the rich too
Respects choice and dignity; less paperwork	May displace health, education and food schemes

FOR A BASIC INCOME	AGAINST A BASIC INCOME
Insures against shocks; helps informal workers	Inflation can erode cash, unlike grain in kind
Can raise women's bargaining power if paid to them	Men may control the money; hard to withdraw later

Evidence suggests cash does **not** make people work less; the real choice is between cash and public services, and both are needed. For the poorest, the **graduation approach** sequences an asset grant, a stipend, coaching and savings over two years; trials in West Bengal found gains still visible ten years later.

09

Schemes at a Glance

SCHEME	MINISTRY & LAUNCH YEAR	WHAT IT DOES	LATEST STATUS (2026)
VB-G RAM G (earlier MGNREGA)	MoRD, Act 2025	125 days of rural wage work; 60:40 funding	In force 1 July 2026; ₹95,692 crore (2026-27)
DAY-NRLM (earlier SGSY)	MoRD, 2011	SHGs, credit, rural livelihoods, skilling	10.08 crore households; ₹19,200 crore
Lakhpati Didi	MoRD, 2023	SHG women earning ₹1 lakh a year	3.46 crore; target 6 crore by 2029-30
DAY-NULM → DJAY-S pilot	MoHUA, 2013	Urban SHGs, shelters, vendors	NULM ended Sept 2024; DJAY-S still a pilot
PM SVANidhi	MoHUA, 2020	Working-capital loans for street vendors	Restructured; lending to March 2030
PMAY-Gramin; PMAY-U 2.0	MoRD 2016; MoHUA 2024	Pucca houses for the poor	3.12 crore rural houses built; urban 2.0 under way
NSAP	MoRD, 1995	Old-age, widow, disability pensions; family benefit	3.09 crore; ₹200 rate unchanged
PMJDY	Finance, 2014	Basic bank account, RuPay, overdraft	59.09 crore accounts
PMJJBY; PMSBY; APY	Finance, 2015	Life and accident cover; pension	28.05, 59.18, 9.40 crore enrolled
PM-KISAN	Agriculture, 2019	₹6,000 a year to landholding farmers	Approved for 2026-31 (₹3.15 lakh crore)

Assessment and Way Forward

Successive governments have cut extreme poverty sharply (Chapter 25), but poverty persists despite dozens of programmes. Reasons include low and uncertain funding, fragmented schemes, exclusion and inclusion errors in targeting, leakages and delays, weak panchayats and staff vacancies, and the fact that growth created too few good jobs. Above all, **programmes work where there is political will**: Kerala's health, schooling and Kudumbashree, Tamil Nadu's universal food schemes and Odisha's disaster preparedness show that sustained commitment, not scheme design alone, makes the difference. Eradicating poverty also means freeing people from the **processes of deprivation**, such as bonded labour, debt, landlessness, caste exclusion and illness, not only giving them transfers; secure land and forest rights, debt relief and health cover attack those processes directly.

PROGRAMME	WHAT IT ACHIEVED	WHERE IT FELL SHORT
MGNREGA (2006–2026)	Rural wage floor; women's earnings; distress cover in 2020	Late wages; about 48 days a year on average
SHGs and DAY-NRLM	10 crore women organised; NPA under 2 per cent	Thin enterprise; weak markets; ultra-poor left out
Housing and assets	3.12 crore rural houses; gas, toilets, water	Quality, use and upkeep uneven
Pensions (NSAP)	3.09 crore covered	₹200 a month since 2006-07; caps on numbers
Jan Dhan and insurance	59 crore accounts; FI-Index 70.0	Low use of credit; fraud; gender gap

- **Protect the right to work** under VB-G RAM G: demand-led allocations, timely wages, offline options and real social audits.
- **Move SHGs from credit to enterprise**: markets, value chains, verified incomes; graduation for the poorest.
- **Regulate microfinance** for responsible lending, transparent pricing and humane recovery.
- **Build a social protection floor**: indexed pensions, portable benefits, insurance for e-Shram workers.
- **Deepen inclusion**: credit, insurance and fraud protection for Jan Dhan users, especially women.

USING THIS CHAPTER IN MAINS

For anti-poverty questions, show the evolution of strategy in two lines, then judge a programme on reach, adequacy and accountability rather than outlays. SHG answers need balance: savings, credit discipline and women's voice against elite capture, debt stress and social hurdles. Add both sides of the 2026 VB-G RAM G debate. Ready data: 1.43 crore SHGs, NPA 1.74% (2025); 3.46 crore Lakhpati Didis; FI-Index 70.0 (March 2026); 59.09 crore Jan Dhan accounts; NSAP pension ₹200 since 2006-07.



Previous Year Questions



Prelims

2023

Consider the following statements :

1. The Self-Help Group (SHG) programme was originally initiated by the State Bank of India by providing microcredit to the financially deprived.
 2. In an SHG, all members of a group take responsibility for a loan that an individual member takes.
 3. The Regional Rural Banks and Scheduled Commercial Banks support SHGs.
- How many of the above statements are correct?

☐ a Only one

☒ b Only two

☐ c All three

☐ d None

Answer: (b). The SHG–Bank Linkage Programme was started by NABARD in 1992 (not SBI); members share responsibility for loans, and RRBs and scheduled commercial banks lend to SHGs (Section 03).

2015

'Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana' has been launched for

☐ a providing housing loan to poor people at cheaper interest rates

☐ b promoting women's Self-Help Groups in backward areas

☒ c promoting financial inclusion in the country

☐ d providing financial help to the marginalized communities

Answer: (c). PMJDY (2014) is the national mission for financial inclusion, giving every household a basic bank account with a RuPay card, accident insurance and an overdraft facility (Section 07).

2012

How does the National Rural Livelihood Mission seek to improve livelihood options of rural poor?

1. By setting up a large number of new manufacturing industries and agribusiness centres in rural areas
2. By strengthening 'self-help groups' and providing skill development
3. By supplying seeds, fertilizers, diesel pump-sets and micro-irrigation equipment free of cost to farmers

Select the correct answer using the codes given below :

☐ a 1 and 2 only

☒ b 2 only

☐ c 1 and 3 only

☐ d 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b). NRLM (now DAY-NRLM) organises poor households into Self-Help Groups and builds their skills and livelihoods; it does not set up industries or hand out free farm inputs (Section 04).

2012

How do District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) help in the reduction of rural poverty in India?

1. DRDAs act as Panchayati Raj Institutions in certain specified backward regions of the country.
2. DRDAs undertake area-specific scientific study of the causes of poverty and malnutrition and prepare detailed remedial measures.
3. DRDAs secure inter-sectoral and inter-departmental coordination and cooperation for effective implementation of anti-poverty programmes.
4. DRDAs watch over and ensure effective utilization of the funds intended for anti-poverty programmes.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

a 1, 2 and 3 only

b 3 and 4 only

c 4 only

d 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (b). DRDAs were district-level agencies that coordinated anti-poverty programmes across departments and monitored the use of their funds; they were neither Panchayati Raj Institutions nor research bodies (Section 01).

2011

With reference to "Aam Admi Bima Yojana", consider the following statements:

1. The member insured under the scheme must be the head of the family or an earning member of the family in a rural landless household.
2. The member insured must be in the age group of 30 to 65 years.
3. There is a provision for free scholarship for up to two children of the insured who are studying between classes 9 and 12.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

a 1 only

b 2 and 3 only

c 1 and 3 only

d 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c). Aam Admi Bima Yojana insured the head or an earning member of a rural landless household aged 18–59 (not 30–65) and carried a free Shiksha Sahyog scholarship for up to two children in Classes 9–12; since 2017 its cover has been provided through PMJJBY and PMSBY (Section 06).

2011

Microfinance is the provision of financial services to people of low-income groups. This includes both the consumers and the self-employed. The service/services rendered under microfinance is/are:

1. Credit facilities
2. Savings facilities
3. Insurance facilities
4. Fund Transfer facilities

Select the correct answer using the codes given below the lists:

a 1 only

b 1 and 4 only

c 2 and 3 only

d 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (d). Microfinance means a range of financial services for low-income households, i.e. credit, savings, insurance and remittance/fund-transfer facilities (Section 03).

2011

Among the following who are eligible to benefit from the “Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act”?

- a Adult members of only the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households
- b Adult members of below poverty line (BPL) households
- c Adult members of households of all backward communities
- d Adult members of any household

Answer: (d). The guarantee was universal: any rural household whose adult members volunteered for unskilled manual work could demand 100 days of work, with no BPL or caste condition; from 1 July 2026 MGNREGA has been replaced by the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025, which guarantees 125 days on the same universal basis (Section 02).

Mains

2026

GS III · 10 MARKS

Examine the view that financial inclusion is an integral part of social and economic inclusion in a country like India. Also throw light on the usefulness of the R.B.I.'s Financial Inclusion Index.

2021

GS II · 10 MARKS

Can the vicious cycle of gender inequality, poverty and malnutrition be broken through microfinancing of women SHGs? Explain with examples.

2020

GS II · 15 MARKS

“Micro-Finance as an anti-poverty vaccine, is aimed at asset creation and income security of the rural poor in India”. Evaluate the role of the Self Help Groups in achieving the twin objectives along with empowering women in rural India.

2018

GS I · 10 MARKS

‘Despite implementation of various programmes for eradication of poverty by the government in India, poverty is still existing.’ Explain by giving reasons.

2017

GS II · 10 MARKS

Hunger and poverty are the biggest challenges for good governance in India still today. Evaluate how far successive governments have progressed in dealing with these humongous problems. Suggest measures for improvement.

2017

GS II · 15 MARKS

“The emergence of the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in contemporary times points to the slow but steady withdrawal of the State from developmental activities.” Examine the role of the SHGs in developmental activities and the measures taken by the Government of India to promote the SHGs.

2017 GS II · 15 MARKS

"Poverty alleviation programmes in India remain mere showpieces until and unless they are backed up by political will." Discuss with reference to the performance of the major poverty alleviation programmes in India.

2016 GS I · 12.5 MARKS

"An essential condition to eradicate poverty is to liberate the poor from the process of deprivation." Substantiate this statement with suitable examples.

2016 GS III · 12.5 MARKS

Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) is necessary for bringing unbanked to the institutional finance fold. Do you agree with this for financial inclusion of the poorer section of the Indian society? Give arguments to justify your opinion.

2015 GS II · 12.5 MARKS

The Self-Help Group (SHG) Bank Linkage Programme (SBLP), which is India's own innovation, has proved to be one of the most effective poverty alleviation and women empowerment programmes. Elucidate.

2014 GS II · 12.5 MARKS

The penetration of Self Help Groups (SHGs) in rural areas in promoting participation in development programmes is facing socio-cultural hurdles. Examine.

2013 GS II · 10 MARKS

The legitimacy and accountability of Self Help Groups (SHGs) and their patrons, the micro-finance outfits, need systematic assessment and scrutiny for the sustained success of the concept. Discuss.

Liked the sample? Get the complete book.

You have read 2 of 30 chapters. The full Social Justice book runs to 412 pages: every chapter in the same depth, 219 previous year questions (94 Prelims from 2011 and 125 Mains from 2013, up to 2026), 140 original diagrams, and a ready-reference unit with a directory of 150+ schemes, a data and index bank and a judgments, committees and reports bank.

30

CHAPTERS · 9 UNITS

219

PYQS 2011-2026

140

ORIGINAL DIAGRAMS

150+

SCHEMES IN THE
DIRECTORY

ALL NINE UNITS IN THE FULL BOOK

I	Social Justice: Foundations, Institutions and Delivery	3 ch · p5
II	Women and Children	4 ch · p49
III	Caste, Tribe and Community	6 ch · p103
IV	Other Vulnerable Sections	3 ch · p181
V	Health	3 ch · p219
VI	Education	3 ch · p259
VII	Human Resources and Work	2 ch · p300
VIII	Poverty and Hunger	3 ch · p329
IX	Ready Reference	3 ch · p371



₹236 complete book · PDF

GET THE FULL BOOK

Scan the code or visit store.lotusarise.com · One-time payment, instant PDF download