

# SAMRIDHI

Journal of Dr. MCR HRD IT

July, 2025

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Pavies



**Dr. Marri Channa Reddy**  
**Human Resource Development**  
**Institute of Telangana**

NABET Accredited Excellent (उत्कृष्ट) Institute

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**Smt. A. Santhi Kumari, IAS(Retd.)**  
**Vice Chairperson & Director General**  
**Dr. MCR HRD Institute of Telangana**

***From the VC & Director General's Desk***

It gives me great pleasure to present the second issue of *Samriddhi* for the year 2025. This journal reflects the Institute's ongoing commitment to fostering meaningful dialogue and exchange of knowledge on matters of governance, development, public policy, and institutional innovation.

The present volume features a diverse and engaging collection of articles on good governance, ethical leadership, cooperative movements, and legal frameworks. These contributions drawn from both research and practice, offer valuable insights that are relevant to policymakers, scholars, and civil society.

This issue also highlights the importance of grounding public discourse in local contexts while engaging with broader national and historical perspectives. The featured articles on India's civilizational trade legacy and citizen-led safety measures such as Bystander Intervention serve as timely reminders of the interplay between tradition, innovation, and responsibility in shaping public life.

I congratulate all the contributors for their thoughtful and well-researched submissions. I also commend the editorial team for curating a volume that speaks to both the challenges and possibilities of our times. I encourage readers to reflect, engage, and contribute to future editions of *Samriddhi*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Santhi', written in a cursive style.

**Smt. A. Santhi Kumari, IAS(Retd.)**

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## **Balancing the Scales: A Rural Growth Agenda for National Prosperity**

Prof. Vikas Singh

*India's persistent rural-urban divide poses a formidable barrier to inclusive economic growth, characterized by stark disparities in infrastructure, digital access, employment, and income levels for rural communities. This challenge is exacerbated by inefficiencies in utilizing allocated development funds, such as the ₹15,825.35 crore unspent under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), which stalls progress in housing, job creation, and economic revitalization. This essay critically evaluates key government programs, including the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Jal Jeevan Mission, and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), while exploring strategies for agricultural modernization, rural industrialization, and digital inclusion. It argues that a holistic, integrated approach i.e. leveraging efficient resource allocation, robust public-private partnerships, and sustainable practices—can transform rural India into a vibrant driver of national economic growth. Supported by empirical data, global best practices, and actionable policy recommendations, this study proposes a cohesive framework to unlock rural India's potential, fostering equitable and unified national progress.*

### **Introduction**

India's aspiration to ascend as a leading global economic power is inextricably linked to the prosperity and well-being of its vast rural citizenry, comprising approximately 900 million individuals and representing two-thirds of the nation's total population. However, a deeply entrenched rural-urban divide, characterized by significant asymmetries in infrastructure development, access to digital technologies, and the availability of gainful economic opportunities, poses a formidable threat to the realization of this ambitious vision. Consider the plight of a farmer in Bihar, constrained from engaging in online sales of their produce due to unreliable internet connectivity, or the predicament of a manufacturing unit in Uttar Pradesh encountering difficulties in recruiting locally skilled labor, or the struggles of a woman in Rajasthan facing economic hardship and the inability to afford basic household appliances amidst declining rural income levels. These illustrative scenarios are symptomatic of a systemic issue: the underutilization of crucial rural development funds. The ₹15,825.35 crore in unspent

funds under the PMAY-G, for instance, represents a missed opportunity to construct millions of homes, generate substantial employment, and stimulate local economic activity, remaining stagnant due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and systemic bottlenecks (Ministry of Finance, 2025).

This paper contends that effectively bridging India's persistent rural-urban divide necessitates the adoption of a comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy. Such a strategy must prioritize the efficient mobilization of currently unspent financial resources, the substantial strengthening of rural infrastructure networks, the modernization of agricultural practices, the proactive promotion of rural industrialization initiatives, and the fostering of widespread digital inclusion within rural communities. By strategically leveraging existing government initiatives, fostering innovation within the corporate sector, and adhering to principles of sustainable development, India possesses the capacity to transform its rural economy into a vibrant and significant contributor to overarching national prosperity. This analysis will leverage a diverse range of sources—official government reports, empirical data, and global precedents—to propose actionable solutions that promote inclusive growth. The aim is to ensure that rural India's untapped potential is both recognized and fully harnessed for the nation's collective benefit.

## **The Rural-Urban Divide: Dimensions and Challenges**

### **Infrastructure Progress and Persistent Gaps**

India has made significant strides in advancing rural infrastructure, laying a robust foundation for sustained economic growth. The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) exemplifies this progress, connecting over 60,000 previously isolated villages with all-weather roads, thereby enhancing access to markets, healthcare, and educational facilities (Ministry of Rural Development, 2024). Similarly, the Jal Jeevan Mission, aiming to provide piped water to every rural household by 2028, has achieved 70% of its target, significantly improving water access and living standards. These initiatives underscore India's commitment to bridging rural-urban gaps, fostering inclusive development through improved connectivity and essential services.

This initiative has demonstrably improved public health outcomes and significantly reduced the time burden on women traditionally responsible for water collection, thereby freeing up valuable time for more productive activities (Jal Shakti Ministry, 2024). The

Saubhagya scheme has also made substantial contributions by electrifying 99% of rural households, providing the necessary power to support small businesses and contributing to a notable increase in agricultural wages, with a 5.7% rise for male laborers and 7% for female laborers observed in Fiscal Year 2025 (Labour Bureau, 2025).

Despite these commendable advancements, significant challenges and persistent gaps continue to hinder equitable development. Data from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) reveals a concerning trend: the average expenditure of agricultural households fell below the overall rural average in 2024, signaling a decline in consumption capacity and increasing economic distress within this crucial segment of the population (NSSO, 2024). Moreover, rural unemployment rates remain elevated at 7.2%, a figure exacerbated by the prevalence of underemployment and seasonal labor patterns, which contribute to heightened economic precarity for many rural households (CMIE, 2024). The issue of unspent funds, such as the substantial ₹15,825.35 crore under the PMAY-G, further underscores the inefficiencies in resource allocation and utilization. These funds, if effectively deployed, could have addressed the housing shortages faced by an estimated 1.5 million families and simultaneously stimulated local economies through construction activities and related industries. However, they remain largely unutilized due to a confluence of factors, including bureaucratic delays, inadequate monitoring mechanisms, and limited institutional capacity at the local level (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2024). These persistent gaps highlight the urgent need for streamlined fund disbursement processes and the implementation of targeted interventions designed to maximize the developmental impact of allocated resources.

### **The Digital Divide**

While tangible progress has been made in the realm of physical infrastructure development, a significant digital divide continues to marginalize a substantial portion of rural India. Current statistics indicate that only 34% of rural households have access to internet services, and the level of digital literacy among rural adults remains alarmingly low at a mere 25% (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India [TRAI], 2024). This limited digital access and proficiency severely restricts the ability of rural communities to actively participate in the burgeoning digital economy, including e-commerce platforms, online education opportunities, and digital banking services. For instance, farmers in rural areas often lack access to real-time market price information, significantly diminishing their bargaining power and consequently impacting their



income potential (Indian Council of Agricultural Research [ICAR], 2024). This pervasive digital exclusion exacerbates existing economic disparities, as rural communities are effectively cut off from numerous opportunities to engage with and benefit from the modern economic landscape. Effectively bridging this digital divide necessitates a concerted effort aimed at expanding the reach and robustness of digital public infrastructure, such as broadband networks, coupled with the implementation of comprehensive digital literacy programs specifically tailored to the unique contexts and needs of rural populations.

### **Economic Reforms and Rural Enterprises**

Significant economic reforms, such as the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), have aimed to streamline markets and enhance tax revenue collection at the national level. However, these reforms have inadvertently placed a disproportionate burden on small-scale rural businesses. Traditional Kirana stores, local artisans, and small traders often face considerable challenges in navigating the complexities of GST compliance, coupled with intensified competition from well-organized retail chains. This has contributed to a concerning 3% decline in rural non-agricultural incomes in 2024 (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry [FICCI], 2024; NSSO, 2024). This economic strain is further compounded by the significant annual migration of approximately 10 million rural youth to urban centers in search of better economic prospects, leading to a depletion of the rural workforce and undermining the vitality of local economies (Census of India, 2021). Therefore, policy interventions must strive to achieve a delicate balance between modernization and the provision of targeted support mechanisms for small-scale rural enterprises. Such support is crucial to ensure inclusive economic growth and to retain valuable human capital within rural areas.

### **Revitalizing Agriculture: The Backbone of Rural India**

#### **Challenges Facing Agriculture**

Agriculture remains the dominant source of livelihood for approximately 45% of India's rural workforce; however, its contribution to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) stands at a comparatively low 18%, highlighting issues of low productivity, underlying structural inefficiencies, and systemic vulnerabilities within the sector (Reserve Bank of India [RBI], 2024). The prevalence of small landholdings, averaging a mere 1.1 hectares, severely limits the

potential for economies of scale in agricultural production. Furthermore, the continued reliance on traditional farming methods and the inherent volatility of market prices often create significant financial instability for farmers (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2024). The escalating impacts of climate change present an additional layer of complexity and risk, with regions facing severe water scarcity, such as Rajasthan, and deltaic areas prone to flooding, like West Bengal, experiencing threats to crop yields and the livelihoods of agricultural communities (The Energy and Resources Institute [TERI], 2024). These multifaceted challenges collectively contribute to the ongoing migration of rural youth to urban centers, with approximately 10 million individuals leaving rural areas annually in pursuit of employment opportunities, further weakening the agricultural sector's human resource base (Census of India, 2021).

### **Strategies for Modernization**

Modernizing the agricultural sector is of paramount importance for the comprehensive revitalization of the rural economy. The Union Budget for 2025-26 reflects this recognition through the 'Rural Prosperity and Resilience' program, which allocates a substantial ₹10,000 crore towards the development of digital agricultural infrastructure. This includes the deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven crop advisory services, the establishment of real-time market information platforms, and the promotion of precision farming technologies (Ministry of Finance, 2025). Pilot projects implemented in Punjab, focused on the diversification of cropping patterns to include millets, have demonstrated encouraging results, leading to a 15% increase in participating farmers' incomes by enhancing their resilience to both climate variability and market fluctuations (ICAR, 2024). Scaling such innovative initiatives, in conjunction with the implementation of fair pricing mechanisms such as Minimum Support Prices (MSP), can play a crucial role in stabilizing farmers' incomes and encouraging greater investment in the agricultural sector. For instance, reforms to the MSP system in Haryana resulted in a 10% increase in the incomes of wheat farmers in 2024, illustrating the potential positive impact of well-designed policy interventions (Ministry of Agriculture, 2024).

The adoption of digital tools holds immense promise for agricultural transformation. Platforms like Kisan e-Mitra offer farmers customised advice on soil health and weather, leading to a reported 12 percent improvement in crop yields in pilot areas such as Madhya

Pradesh (ICAR, 2024). Scaling such platforms to reach half of India's rural farmers by 2030 could add an estimated ₹2 lakh crore to the agricultural GDP, significantly boosting rural incomes (NITI Aayog, 2024).

Realising this potential, however, depends on addressing persistent hurdles. Bureaucratic delays, patchy internet access, and limited digital literacy continue to hamper progress. Equipping farmers with the necessary training and infrastructure is essential. Public-private partnerships with agritech firms like Ninjacart—which link farmers directly to markets—can accelerate this shift by offering technical support and improving supply chain efficiency (Ninjacart, 2024).

Equally important is the move toward crop diversification. Shifting to higher-value crops such as pulses and horticultural produce reduces the risks of monoculture and raises farm incomes. Tomato value chain initiatives in Karnataka, for instance, have shown encouraging results (FAO, 2024).

## **Rural Industrialization: Diversifying Economic Opportunities**

### **Leveraging Infrastructure for Industry**

India's ongoing improvements in rural infrastructure, including the expansion of road networks, enhanced electricity availability, and better access to water resources, create a strong foundation for the development of rural industrialization. This strategic focus can effectively diversify income sources for rural populations and help curb the trend of migration to urban centers. The substantial allocation of ₹86,000 crore to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in Fiscal Year 2025 presents an opportunity to transition the scheme's focus from primarily manual labor to skill-based projects. This shift can equip rural workers with valuable skills in sectors such as agro-processing, renewable energy, and manufacturing (Ministry of Rural Development, 2024). The successful establishment of industrial parks by the State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu (SIPCOT), which has generated approximately 50,000 jobs in rural areas, demonstrates the significant potential of localized industrial development initiatives (SIPCOT, 2024).

Implementing targeted incentives, such as offering tax breaks, providing financial subsidies, and streamlining land allocation processes, can effectively attract corporations to establish manufacturing units, agro-processing hubs, and renewable energy projects in rural regions. The development of rural textile hubs in Gujarat, supported by efficient regulatory



frameworks, has led to an estimated 8% annual increase in local GDP, presenting a replicable model for other states to consider (Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation, 2024). Scaling such successful initiatives across the country has the potential to create an estimated 1 million rural jobs by the year 2030, effectively transforming villages into vibrant centers of production and economic activity (NITI Aayog, 2024). Strategic public investment in the development of rural industrial parks not only provides essential infrastructure but also sends a strong signal of stability, thereby attracting private capital investment with an estimated multiplier effect of 1.5–2, as supported by historical data on rural infrastructure spending (RBI, 2024).

### **Corporate and Financial Sector Contributions**

Corporations must recognize the immense potential of rural India's 900 million consumers as a vast and largely untapped market. By developing and offering affordable products specifically tailored to the needs and contexts of rural consumers, businesses can unlock significant growth opportunities. The success of Godrej's low-cost refrigerators and Reliance Jio's affordable smartphones in increasing rural consumption by an estimated 10% in 2024 exemplifies the potential of such tailored solutions (Godrej, 2024; Reliance Jio, 2024). Financial institutions also have a crucial role to play in driving economic inclusion in rural areas through the provision of micro-loans, comprehensive crop insurance products, and accessible savings schemes. The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) covered approximately 50 million farmers in 2024, effectively mitigating agricultural risks and encouraging continued investment in the sector (Ministry of Agriculture, 2024).

Sustainability must be a central tenet of rural industrialization to ensure that economic progress does not come at the expense of environmental degradation. Promoting water-efficient manufacturing processes and investing in renewable energy projects, such as the solar parks established in Maharashtra, can help mitigate climate-related risks like water scarcity and flooding, ensuring the long-term viability of industrial activities in rural areas (TERI, 2024). Corporations that proactively adopt these sustainable practices can effectively meet the needs of rural communities while simultaneously aligning with global sustainability goals, thereby enhancing their market credibility and overall social impact.

**Mobilizing Unspent Funds: Overcoming Bureaucratic Inertia**

The significant amount of unspent rural development funds, exemplified by the about ₹15 thousand crore remaining unutilized under the PMAY-G, represents a critical impediment to achieving meaningful progress in rural development. These substantial financial resources have the potential to construct an estimated 1.5 million much-needed homes, generate approximately 2 million employment opportunities, and provide a significant stimulus to local economies through construction activities and related industries (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2024). However, bureaucratic delays, inadequate monitoring mechanisms, and limited institutional capacity at the crucial panchayat level often hinder the effective utilization of these funds, with over 35% of the Rural Development Ministry's allocated budget remaining unspent in Fiscal Year 2024 (Ministry of Rural Development, 2024). This inefficiency not only stalls critical infrastructure projects but also erodes public trust in governance and perpetuates existing economic disparities.

The implementation of Odisha's digital tracking system for the PMAY-G has demonstrated the potential for improvement, successfully reducing disbursement delays by an estimated 30% and offering a scalable model for nationwide adoption (Odisha Rural Development, 2024). Similarly, the rural housing schemes implemented in Andhra Pradesh, which incorporate real-time monitoring of project progress and fund utilization, further underscore the value of transparency and accountability in ensuring that allocated funds effectively reach their intended beneficiaries (Andhra Pradesh Rural Development, 2024). Expanding the adoption of such robust digital tracking systems, coupled with the implementation of comprehensive capacity-building programs for local governance bodies, holds the key to unlocking the immense potential of these currently unspent funds. For instance, providing targeted training to an estimated 10,000 panchayat officials annually could potentially increase fund utilization efficiency by 20% by the year 2028 (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2024). Addressing these critical bottlenecks in fund disbursement and utilization is absolutely essential to translate budgetary allocations into tangible and impactful developmental outcomes on the ground.

**Global Lessons for Rural Transformation**

Global examples of rural transformation offer valuable lessons for India's own development path. China's Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) generated an estimated 130 million

jobs between 1980 and 2000, helping cut poverty by nearly 50 percent through decentralised industrial growth and local entrepreneurship (World Bank, 2023).

Brazil's Bolsa Família combined conditional cash transfers with skills training, resulting in a 15 percent rise in rural incomes and measurable gains in education among beneficiaries. The programme underscores the power of aligning social welfare with economic opportunity (UNDP, 2024).

Vietnam's rural electrification drive, which reached 98 percent coverage by 2015, sharply improved agricultural productivity and enabled the growth of small-scale rural industries. Its success offers useful parallels for India's Saubhagya scheme and other infrastructure-led rural development efforts (World Bank, 2023).

These diverse global models underscore the critical importance of implementing localized solutions that are tailored to specific regional contexts, prioritizing skill development initiatives to enhance human capital, and fostering strong collaborations between the public and private sectors. India can draw valuable lessons from China's Township and Village Enterprises (TVE) model by developing rural industrial parks that capitalize on locally available resources—for instance, promoting agro-processing industries in agriculturally rich states like Punjab or supporting textile manufacturing in regions such as Uttar Pradesh. Similarly, Brazil's focus on vocational training offers a useful precedent for reforming the MGNREGS program, reorienting it toward building a more skilled and employable rural workforce. Furthermore, Vietnam's success in rural electrification highlights the fundamental need for reliable power infrastructure to support the growth of rural industries. By thoughtfully integrating these valuable lessons from international experiences, India can develop a robust and effective framework for achieving comprehensive rural economic transformation.

### **Policy Recommendations for Inclusive Growth**

To effectively bridge the persistent rural-urban divide and unlock the immense potential of rural India for inclusive growth, the following evidence-based policy recommendations should be implemented:

- **Mobilize Unspent Funds:** Adopt and scale digital tracking systems for rural development funds, drawing on the successful pilot program in Odisha, with the specific goal of reducing disbursement delays by at least 30%. Prioritize the allocation of the ₹15,825.35 crore in unspent PMAY-G funds towards achieving tangible



outcomes in housing provision and job creation by the year 2027 (Odisha Rural Development, 2024).

- **Expand Digital Inclusion:** Aggressively expand rural internet access to reach at least 50% of rural households and increase digital literacy rates among rural adults to 40% by the year 2030. This can be achieved by strategically leveraging existing Digital India initiatives and fostering robust public-private partnerships in the telecommunications sector (TRAI, 2024).
- **Promote Rural Industrialization:** Implement a package of targeted tax incentives and subsidies designed to attract private sector investment in the establishment of rural industrial parks. Aim to create at least 1 million new jobs in rural areas through these industrial initiatives by the year 2030, drawing upon the successful model of Tamil Nadu's SIPCOT industrial development program (SIPCOT, 2024; NITI Aayog, 2024).
- **Modernize Agriculture:** Scale the adoption of AI-driven agricultural tools and platforms, such as the Kisan e-Mitra, to reach at least 50% of Indian farmers by the year 2030. This should contribute to an estimated ₹2 lakh crore increase in the nation's agricultural GDP. Simultaneously, expand the implementation of effective Minimum Support Price (MSP) reforms on a nationwide basis to ensure fair remuneration for agricultural produce (ICAR, 2024; Ministry of Agriculture, 2024).
- **Ensure Environmental Sustainability:** Mandate the adoption of water-efficient manufacturing processes and the utilization of renewable energy sources in all newly established rural industrial projects. This proactive approach will help mitigate climate-related risks, such as water scarcity, and ensure the long-term environmental sustainability of rural industrialization, drawing inspiration from successful solar energy initiatives in states like Maharashtra (TERI, 2024).
- **Strengthen Local Governance:** Implement comprehensive capacity-building programs aimed at training at least 10,000 panchayat officials annually. The objective is to enhance their skills and efficiency in project planning, implementation, and fund utilization, thereby increasing the overall efficiency of rural development fund utilization by an estimated 20% by the year 2028 (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2024).
- **Foster Public-Private Collaboration:** Actively encourage corporations to invest in the development and marketing of affordable, rural-specific products and services. Simultaneously, incentivize financial institutions to expand the reach and accessibility

of micro-loan facilities and comprehensive insurance products in rural areas, building upon the successes of initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and the market penetration strategies of companies like Reliance Jio (Ministry of Agriculture, 2024; Reliance Jio, 2024).

## **Conclusion**

India's enduring rural-urban divide poses a complex, multifaceted challenge—but it also offers a transformative opportunity to unlock the vast, untapped potential of its 900 million rural citizens. The substantial amount of unspent rural development funds, such as the ₹15,825.35 crore under the PMAY-G, must be efficiently mobilized to build essential infrastructure, generate crucial employment opportunities, and foster widespread digital inclusion. Overcoming the inertia of bureaucratic inefficiencies through the adoption of digital tracking systems and strategic capacity-building initiatives at the local governance level is paramount. By prioritizing the modernization of agriculture through the integration of digital tools and the implementation of fair pricing mechanisms, actively promoting rural industrialization through targeted incentives and comprehensive skill development programs, and strategically leveraging corporate innovation to develop affordable and relevant products for rural consumers, India can effectively transform its rural economy into a dynamic and significant contributor to national economic growth. Drawing valuable lessons from global experiences in countries like China, Brazil, and Vietnam underscores the importance of implementing localized solutions, investing in human capital development, and fostering strong and effective public-private collaborations. The adoption and effective implementation of targeted policies—centered on efficient fund utilization, rapid expansion of digital infrastructure and literacy, promotion of sustainable industrial practices, and reinforcement of local governance—can lay the foundation for a more unified and prosperous India. In this vision, every farmer, every worker, and every aspiring individual, from the fertile plains of Bihar to the arid landscapes of Rajasthan, can rightfully claim their stake in a prosperous and equitable future. The path forward demands decisive and sustained action to ensure that no promise remains unfulfilled and no future potential goes unclaimed.

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## **Redefining Success through the Lens of Human Development: A Holistic Personal Growth Framework**

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*The article argues that success should be redefined beyond conventional measures like wealth and social status. It proposes a holistic framework for personal growth that includes emotional intelligence, strong relationships, resilience, adaptability, and contributions to society. The article examines how social media shapes our views on success and stresses the importance of self-awareness, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. It also highlights the need for work-life balance, sustainable living, and the integration of physical, mental, and social well-being. Ultimately, the article encourages individuals to craft their own, value-driven definitions of success, prioritizing ongoing growth in every aspect of life.*

**Keywords:** holistic success, personal development, human growth, emotional intelligence, well-being, self-awareness, resilience, sustainable achievement

### **Introduction**

Success in human development today goes beyond traditional measures like wealth and social status, emphasizing personal, emotional, and social growth. True achievement involves developing emotional intelligence, forming meaningful relationships, building resilience, and expanding wisdom. Key markers of this broader success include strong moral reasoning, the ability to manage emotions, empathy, and a stable sense of self. In our rapidly changing world, success is increasingly tied to being adaptable, engaging in lifelong learning, and maintaining mental well-being. A holistic view of human development considers physical health, psychological wellness, and robust social ties, placing the greatest value on personal growth, quality relationships, and positively impacting others.

### **The Evolution of Success: From Material to Meaningful**

The concept of success has evolved from focusing mainly on material achievements like wealth and status to embracing a more holistic view. Modern understanding, influenced by positive psychology, defines true success as including emotional well-being, strong relationships, personal growth, and contributions to society. Today, success is measured by how well

achievements align with personal values, promote sustainable practices, and support both individual and collective well-being. The following points further elaborate:

- a. **Modern Challenges to Traditional Success Paradigms:** The modern view of success is moving beyond traditional measures like wealth and status, stressing the importance of personal well-being, work-life balance, and environmental sustainability. Increased mental health awareness and a focus on quality relationships and leisure time challenge the idea that career should come first. The digital era requires adaptability and lifelong learning, while recognition of diverse life experiences and cultural backgrounds is expanding our ideas about what it means to succeed. As a result, success is now seen in more holistic terms, emphasizing personal growth, emotional fulfillment, social contributions, and sustainable living.
- b. **Social Media's Impact on Perceptions of Success:** Social media has reshaped how society views success by promoting a culture of comparison and idealized portrayals of achievement. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok display carefully curated highlights of people's lives, leading to "social comparison anxiety" and "success dysmorphia." This can harm mental health and cause individuals—especially younger generations—to measure their worth against unrealistic online standards. To address these negative effects, it's important to develop a healthier definition of success that values personal well-being, authentic relationships, and individual growth rather than external appearances.
- c. **Emotional Intelligence as a Success Marker:** Emotional Intelligence (EI) is increasingly seen as a vital measure of success, involving the recognition, understanding, and management of one's own emotions and those of others. Individuals with high EI tend to perform better, show greater resilience, and report higher job satisfaction and well-being. EI plays an essential role in decision-making, stress management, relationships, and effective leadership. Unlike static traits, emotional intelligence can be developed throughout life, supporting continuous personal growth. This emphasis on EI highlights a broader view that lasting achievement depends not just on intellect or technical skills, but on understanding and skillfully managing the emotional aspects of human experience.

## Understanding Human Development

To redefine success through the lens of human development, it's essential to understand the multifaceted nature of personal growth. Human development encompasses physical, cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of an individual's life. Each of these domains contributes to overall well-being and personal growth. The following points further elaborate:

- a. **The Role of Physical Health in Personal Growth:** Physical health is a crucial component of personal growth and development. Habits like regular exercise, balanced nutrition, and sufficient sleep not only promote physical well-being but also enhance cognitive abilities and emotional resilience. Pursuing physical health builds discipline, perseverance, and goal-setting skills, supporting growth in other life areas. Prioritizing a healthy lifestyle increases energy, self-confidence, and overall well-being, making physical wellness a necessary foundation for sustainable, holistic success. Recognizing the central role of physical health is essential to redefining success in a comprehensive and enduring way.
- b. **Cognitive Development. - Expanding Mental Horizons:** Cognitive development is essential for personal success, involving the continuous growth of mental abilities beyond simply gaining knowledge. Because the brain remains adaptable throughout life, ongoing cognitive development is possible at any age. Engaging in intellectual challenges, exploring new perspectives, and practicing metacognitive strategies all contribute to this growth. Such efforts enhance adaptability, improve decision-making, and increase creativity. By expanding their cognitive capacity, individuals are better prepared to handle complexity, process information, and develop innovative solutions to new challenges.
- c. **Emotional Intelligence and Regulation:** Emotional intelligence involves self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—skills essential for managing emotions and interpersonal relationships effectively. Regulating emotions helps individuals handle stress, make better decisions, and maintain mental well-being and resilience, especially during challenges. Developing these abilities strengthens relationships and supports personal and professional success. As emotional intelligence becomes more valued in organizations and society, it is increasingly seen as both a key personal asset and a critical component of effective leadership, shaping how we understand and measure true achievement.



- d. **The Mind-Body Connection. -A Pathway to Holistic Personal Growth:** The mind-body connection is essential for holistic personal growth, as neuroscience and psychoneuroimmunology show that thoughts, emotions, and beliefs can affect physical health, while physical well-being also influences mental health. Techniques such as mindfulness meditation, yoga, and biofeedback help harness this connection, leading to greater mental clarity and vitality. By nurturing the mind-body link, individuals can achieve balanced success—enhancing resilience, emotional intelligence, and physical well-being. High performers and athletes often use practices like visualization, breathing exercises, and body awareness to optimize mental and physical performance.

### **Requisites for Success in a Holistic Personal Growth Framework**

A holistic approach to personal growth requires a comprehensive set of elements to ensure success. These requisites form the foundation for sustainable development across various aspects of life:

- a. **Understanding the Self - The Foundation for Growth:** Self-awareness is fundamental to personal growth, allowing individuals to understand their thoughts, emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and motivations. It includes both insight into one's internal mental state and an awareness of how others perceive us, enabling better decision-making and social interactions. Developing self-awareness helps people identify areas for self-improvement, recognize recurring behaviors, and make deliberate choices that support ongoing growth. This quality also strengthens emotional intelligence, improving emotional management, empathy, and relationships. Ultimately, understanding one's core values, beliefs, and aspirations leads to success defined by authenticity and fulfillment, rather than conformity to external expectations.
- b. **Self-Esteem:** Self-esteem reflects an individual's overall sense of self-worth and personal value, significantly influencing their approach to challenges, relationships, and personal growth. Authentic self-esteem is grounded in an appreciation of one's inherent worth, independent of external achievements or validation. When individuals possess high self-esteem, they are empowered to set ambitious goals, take risks, and persevere in the face of setbacks. Conversely, low self-esteem can serve as a substantial barrier, inhibiting risk-taking and limiting perceived potential. Nurturing healthy self-esteem involves cultivating self-awareness, practicing self-compassion, and recognizing

intrinsic value beyond external accomplishments, ultimately fostering a more resilient and fulfilling life.

- c. **Using the Power of Inner Beliefs to Shape Our Reality:** Our fundamental self-concept profoundly influences every aspect of our lives, shaping experiences that validate our internal beliefs. Acting as a lens through which we interpret all situations, our self-image often reinforces existing beliefs, sometimes overriding even our strongest conscious intentions. This can lead to unconscious self-sabotage or self-fulfillment; for instance, a student who perceives themselves as "poor in math" is likely to perform poorly, while a socially insecure individual may inadvertently invite rejection. Conversely, a positive self-image can open the door to empowering experiences and opportunities, whereas a negative self-image perpetuates a cycle of limitations.
- d. **Self-Discipline and Hard Work:** Self-discipline and hard work are fundamental pillars of personal development, extending beyond mere productivity to encompass character-building and intentional living. Self-discipline entails the ability to regulate thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in pursuit of long-term goals, fostering a sense of control and purpose. Complementing this, hard work transforms intentions into tangible progress, driving individuals to achieve their aspirations. Together, these qualities are applicable across all areas of life, contributing to a holistic sense of success and fulfillment. By cultivating self-discipline and committing to hard work, individuals can navigate challenges more effectively and realize their full potential.
- e. **Mental Well-Being and Growth:** Mental well-being and growth are central to a holistic view of personal success, going beyond simply the absence of mental illness to include the active development of positive mental states and cognitive skills. Practices such as mindfulness, cognitive restructuring, and lifelong learning improve decision-making, creativity, and problem-solving. Prioritizing mental health and cognitive growth enables individuals to build better relationships, adapt to change, and maintain optimism—all of which form the basis for life satisfaction, resilience, and achieving meaningful goals.
- f. **Vision and Goals:** Developing a long-term vision rooted in personal values and passions is key to personal growth. By setting SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goals, individuals can turn their aspirations into

practical steps for progress. These goals should address all areas of life to support balanced development. Regularly reviewing and refining your vision and goals ensures they stay relevant amid changing circumstances. Maintaining this dynamic, holistic approach leads to a richer, more fulfilling sense of success and personal growth.

- g. **Using the Power of Perception:** The human mind plays a powerful role in shaping how we perceive and experience reality, as our thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes often influence us more than external circumstances do. Through interpretation and adaptation, consciousness can turn difficulties into opportunities for growth or diminish positive experiences with negative thinking. Our internal perspective determines whether we find beauty or suffering in any situation. Thus, the quality of our lives depends largely on the mental lens through which we interpret the world.
- h. **Resilience:** Resilience is the ability to recover from adversity and use challenges as opportunities for personal growth. It involves adopting a growth mindset, effectively managing emotions during stress, and building supportive relationships for encouragement and guidance. Resilient individuals commit to ongoing learning and extract lessons from all experiences, helping them adapt to change and uncertainty. Cultivating resilience leads to greater well-being, personal fulfillment, and long-term success in different areas of life.
- i. **Social Connections:** Building meaningful relationships and strong social connections is essential for personal growth and well-being. Social wellness relies on developing communication skills, empathy, and a supportive network. Healthy, reciprocal relationships—built through emotional intelligence, authentic communication, and strong interpersonal skills—contribute to greater life satisfaction and mental health. By prioritizing relationship development, individuals can foster a more balanced, fulfilling, and interconnected life, supporting both their own and others' success.
- j. **Embracing Change and Transitions:** Adapting to change and navigating transitions is crucial for personal growth and success in today's fast-changing world. Embracing a growth mindset, building resilience, and letting go of outdated beliefs enable individuals to approach life's changes with curiosity and openness. True success lies not only in adaptability but also in continuous learning and finding meaning in transitions. Skillfully managing change allows people to learn and grow from each experience, boosting their ability to thrive amid ongoing transformations.

- k. **Financial Well-Being and Resource Management:** Financial well-being and resource management are key aspects of holistic success, deeply impacting mental health, relationships, and overall life satisfaction. Modern approaches stress the value of simplicity, thrift, and mindful spending—encouraging people to live below their means and prioritize savings. Efficiently managing finances, time, energy, and attention helps align spending with personal values and long-term goals. By adopting a simpler, thrift-oriented lifestyle and distinguishing between needs and wants, individuals can build financial resilience, reduce stress from debt, and foster a more intentional, satisfying relationship with material possessions.
- l. **Minimalism and Intentional Living:** Minimalism and intentional living promote sustainable, purposeful personal fulfilment by encouraging people to identify what truly matters to them and make deliberate, value-driven choices. By prioritizing quality over quantity and practicing mindful consumption, minimalism helps enhance life satisfaction, reduce anxiety, and increase clarity in decision-making. This approach focuses on purposeful engagement and maintaining attention on core priorities, offering practical ways to align daily actions with long-term goals and values.
- m. **Professional Development:** Professional growth is being redefined to emphasize continuous learning, adaptability, and a holistic set of skills. Career success now closely connects with personal well-being and growth, valuing qualities such as emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and digital literacy. Online platforms and micro-credentials have made skill-building more accessible, supporting lifelong development. Modern workplaces prioritize soft skills like creativity, critical thinking, and teamwork, while work-life integration and alignment with personal purpose are seen as keys to a fulfilling and balanced form of success.
- n. **Balancing Short-Term Achievements with Long-Term Growth:** Sustainable personal development requires balancing short-term achievements with long-term growth. While short-term successes boost motivation, relying solely on quick wins can cause burnout and hinder foundational skill-building. True success comes from aligning immediate goals with a long-term vision, treating short-term results as milestones toward lasting growth. This integrated approach increases personal fulfilment and builds key qualities like resilience and adaptability—both crucial for achieving holistic, sustainable success.

- o. **Celebrating Growth and Achievements in a Holistic Context:** Celebrating growth and achievements means shifting from traditional, outcome-focused recognition to valuing all forms of progress, including qualitative improvements that may not fit conventional success metrics. Meaningful celebration recognizes both the journey and the results, using practices like reflection, journaling, and personalized ceremonies. This holistic approach motivates ongoing growth, helps consolidate learning, and builds a more lasting, fulfilling relationship with achievement, encouraging individuals to appreciate their entire personal development journey.
- p. **Contribution and Legacy:** Personal development involves striving to make meaningful contributions to society and leaving a lasting legacy. Here, success is measured not just by individual achievements, but by the positive impact one has on others and the world. This perspective urges individuals to consider their long-term influence and align their growth with the betterment of society. Emphasizing contribution and legacy leads to a more fulfilling and impactful life, benefiting both the individual and the broader community.
- q. **Spiritual Growth and Purpose:** Spiritual growth and purpose go beyond traditional religion, centering on the search for meaning, connection, and transcendence. Research shows that developing spiritual awareness and a clear sense of purpose increases resilience, well-being, and life satisfaction. People who cultivate a personal philosophy rooted in values, ethics, and connection to something greater than themselves benefit from improved health, stress management, and value-driven decision-making. Practices such as mindfulness, meditation, and contemplative inquiry support modern spiritual growth, reducing anxiety, strengthening emotional regulation, and boosting cognitive function. In a society focused on superficial success, a deep sense of purpose offers vital fulfilment and enhances contributions to the greater good.
- r. **Creating Your Success Blueprint:** A personalized success blueprint is a dynamic, comprehensive plan tailored to your core values, strengths, and true aspirations, guiding you toward meaningful personal growth. It integrates all key aspects of human development—intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual—while fostering connections between them for balanced progress. This blueprint combines a long-term vision with specific, actionable SMART goals and daily habits, supporting overall development and flexibility as life evolves. By regularly reviewing, refining, and

celebrating milestones, your success blueprint remains a living guide that adapts to change and enriches your journey, ultimately laying a strong foundation for a fulfilling and sustained personal growth path.

### **Challenges and Implementation**

Implementing a personal growth framework can be challenging due to factors like internal resistance, lack of motivation, limited time, and unsupportive surroundings. To navigate these barriers, it's important to set realistic goals, break them into manageable actions, and cultivate an environment that encourages progress. Building self-discipline, delaying immediate rewards, and proactively preparing for obstacles help sustain motivation and focus. Support from accountability partners or mentors can provide crucial encouragement and guidance when facing difficulties. Adopting a growth mindset that views challenges as learning opportunities also strengthens resilience, enabling ongoing personal development.

### **Embracing a Holistic Approach to Personal Growth and Success**

Redefining success through human development calls for a holistic and proactive approach, urging individuals to move beyond narrow metrics toward a model aligned with their values, passions, and total well-being. This perspective emphasizes nurturing all life dimensions—mental, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual—while setting balanced long-term goals that prioritize fulfillment. It advocates embracing continual learning, practicing self-reflection, using challenges as growth opportunities, and celebrating milestones across every area. Ultimately, this holistic framework is not a destination but an ongoing journey of self-discovery and adaptation—essential for achieving truly meaningful and sustainable success in today's complex world.



## Good Governance and Its Cross-Sectional Role in Ethical Leadership and Academic Performance: A Multilevel Analysis

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*This study examines how ethical leadership influences employee commitment and student satisfaction in Ethiopian public universities, with perceived good governance examined as a mediator and moderator. It is the first to validate Ethiopia's Ethical Leadership Work Questionnaire (ELWQ) and develop a good governance construct. Data were collected from 572 respondents—academic staff, students, and university leaders- across six public universities, with a total sample of 1800 covering four instruments. The study posits that strong governance supports ethical leadership and enhances staff commitment and student satisfaction. The measurement scales were validated using CFA and other statistical methods. Hayes's (2018) conditional mediation analysis and Aguinis's (2013) multilevel modeling, implemented in Jamovi, were used to test the model. Results show that good governance moderates the effect of ethical leadership on staff commitment but not student satisfaction. The findings contribute to understanding governance and leadership in Ethiopian higher education.*

### I. Introduction

Ethics are central to an individual's personal and professional success, initially shaped by family, culture, and education. As Darley, Messick, and Tyler (2013:135) noted, "Ethical behavior is a lifelong education." Educational institutions, particularly through teachers and leaders, play a crucial role in developing ethical values. Leaders influence followers by modeling moral behavior, enhancing their awareness and self-actualization (Aronson, 2001; Zhu, May, & Avolio, 2004).

Ethical leadership also involves fairness through distributive and procedural justice, which impacts employee attitudes like satisfaction and commitment (Dailey & Kirk, 1992; Koh & Boo, 2001; Tansky, Gallagher, & Wetzels, 1997). Trust and loyalty in organizations stem from personal ethical standards.

Gunzenhauser (2017) outlines three doctrines of educator professionalism: professing beliefs about education's value, exercising ethical judgment across roles, and resisting

normalization to uphold defensible educational aims. Similarly, Watson (2013) defines ethical leaders as those who act with integrity and alignment to institutional goals, even in challenging times. Czaja and Lowe (2000:11) stress the importance of leading by example in public education.

Fairholm (2000), states ethical school leaders coach and motivate others toward institutional goals, while Rebore (2000) emphasizes dignity, empowerment, solidarity, and stewardship. Beckner (2004) and Kimbrough (1995) list essential ethical concepts for administrators, including justice, equity, duty, caring, and prudence.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2010) propose four paradigms—justice, critique, care, and profession—for resolving educational dilemmas. Lunenburg and Irby (2006) expand on these with concepts like character, loyalty, and the moral imperative. Scholars such as Northouse (2013) and DuBrin (2010) argue that ethical leadership stems from honesty, community-building, service, fairness, and dignity.

Thus, this study explores the impact of Ethical Leadership on Academic Staff Commitment and Student Satisfaction, with Good Governance as a mediating and moderating factor, focusing on selected Ethiopian universities.

## II. Review of Literature

**Ethical behavior** in education sustains peace, justice, and freedom. Ethically oriented leadership fosters professionalism, commitment, collaboration, and development (Bhattarai, 2015). However, there is limited research on ethical leadership in Ethiopia (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2010). This study addresses this gap by validating the Ethical Leadership at Work Questionnaire (ELWQ) in a culturally diverse Ethiopian context and developing a construct on Perceived Good Governance.

**Ethical leadership** is multidimensional, encompassing people orientation, fairness, power sharing, sustainability, ethical guidance, role clarity, and integrity (Kalshoven et al., 2011). Ethics, from the Greek "ethos," refers to moral principles guiding behavior (Mihelic et al., 2010; Minkes et al., 1999). Ethical leaders promote justice, care, honesty, and integrity (Brown et al., 2005; Caulfield, 2013; Yukl et al., 2013), model value-driven conduct (Sims, 1992; Treviño, 1986), and influence organizational culture and effectiveness (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; Kelly, 1990; Blanchard & Peale, 1996; Hitt, 1990). They lead with compassion (Kouzes & Posner, 1992), embody moral purpose (Thomas, 2001), and foster

environments conducive to professional ethics (Langlois & Lapointe, 2010). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) and Starratt (2004) advocate using multiple ethical paradigms: care, justice, critique, and profession.

Employee Commitment, a multidimensional construct (Meyer & Allen, 1991), includes:

- Affective commitment (emotional attachment) (Mowday, 1982)
- Continuance Commitment (cost of leaving) (Scholl, 1981; Brickman, 1987)
- Normative commitment (moral obligation) (Wiener, 1982)

Work experiences, such as equity in rewards and decision-making participation, are strong predictors of affective commitment (Glisson & Durick, 1988; Rhodes & Steers, 1981).

**Good governance**, as defined by the World Bank (1989), emphasizes efficient public service, a reliable judiciary, and accountability. It encompasses eight key characteristics: participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability (UN; Kaufmann et al., 2007). It fosters sustainable development, equity, and quality service delivery, including education (Asmerom et al., 1995; Sengupta, 1996; OECD, 1997). Good governance supports education systems through standards, performance information, incentives, and accountability (Kaufmann et al., 2004, 2007).

**Student University Satisfaction (SUSS)** is students' evaluations of their educational experience and facilities (Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2017). This study uses Bhamani's (2012) four-dimensional SUSS scale: university facilities, assessments, teaching quality, and policies. Physical environment, class size, and administrative services significantly affect student satisfaction (Coles, 2002; Galloway, 1998; Price et al., 2003).

**Mediation and Moderation** concepts are essential in understanding variable interactions. A mediator explains how an independent variable affects a dependent one, while a moderator changes the strength or direction of that relationship (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Mediated moderation occurs when the effect of an interaction (independent variable  $\times$  moderator) is transmitted through a mediator (Muller et al., 2005).

This study addresses the gaps in prior research by examining how ethical leadership influences employee commitment and student satisfaction, and whether good governance acts as a mediator and moderator. It is the first to validate ELWQ in Ethiopia and develop a local construct of perceived good governance.

**Empirical Scope:** Data were collected from six public universities. Ethiopian Civil Service University, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, Kotebe Metropolitan University, Adama University, and Ambo University. Six hundred respondents, including top management, deans, department heads, staff, and students, participated using stratified random sampling across first-, second-, and third-generation institutions.

### **III. Hypotheses Development**

#### **Ethical Leadership and Employee Commitment**

Scholars across various contexts have examined the relationship between ethical leadership and employee commitment with mixed results. Priya (2016) found ethical leadership and commitment inseparable, as leaders influence employee behavior and performance. Khuong and Dung (2015) showed that ethical leadership, ethic-based rewards, and organizational justice significantly influenced employee engagement via trust. In tourism, Khuong and Nhu (2015) linked ethical leadership and organizational culture to employee sociability and commitment, recommending sociability traits and a mission-driven culture to boost commitment. Peter (2015), focusing on Uganda's public sector, revealed a strong link between ethical leadership and performance, highlighting the need for ethical behavior at leadership levels. Conversely, Laurie (2014) found no significant effect of ethical leadership on organizational citizenship behavior. In Canada, Peggy (2013) showed that ethical leadership correlated positively with affective and normative commitment among military personnel but not continuance commitment.

*H1: Ethical leadership has a significant positive effect on employee commitment.*

#### **Ethical Leadership and Student Satisfaction**

Brown et al. (2005) defined ethical leadership as including appropriate conduct and communication, influencing fairness, justice, and reward mechanisms (Treviño & Ball, 1992; Gini, 1998). Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986) explain how ethical leaders model behavior, promoting employee reciprocity and satisfaction (Neubert et al., 2009; Ogunfowora, 2014). Academic ethical leadership fosters student satisfaction through fair treatment, empathy, and constructive interaction (Schweigert, 2016; Long et al., 2013). Effective student-teacher interaction enhances satisfaction and learning outcomes (Picciano, 2002; Young & Norgard, 2006). Faculty ethics shape students'

moral identity and citizenship (Reed & Aquino, 2003; Wright, 2015), while fairness and utilitarian leadership promote inclusive well-being (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Strike et al., 2005). Trust and support from ethical faculty strengthen student engagement and retention (Tarter et al., 1989; Keaveney & Clifford, 1997), with teaching quality and responsiveness positively affecting satisfaction (Fitri et al., 2008).

*H2: Ethical leadership has a significant positive effect on student satisfaction.*

### **Ethical Leadership and Good Governance**

Ethical leadership is central to good governance and is defined as the government's ability to act effectively, justly, and accountably (UNPAN, 2000; Hope, 2005). Leadership grounded in moral integrity enhances transparency and citizen trust (Morrell & Hartley, 2006). Unethical conduct often stems from a lack of ethics in Leadership (Cohen & Eimicke, 1995; Fournier, 2009). Menzel (2007) argued that democratic governance hinges on ethical leadership, prompting global institutions like the UN and OECD to champion ethics in public administration (Richter & Burke, 2007; DPADM, 2007). Ethical governance solves systemic socio-political challenges in the developing world (Kakumba & Fourie, 2007).

*H3: Ethical leadership has a significant positive effect on perceived good governance.*

### **Good Governance and Employee Commitment**

Post-crisis reforms in countries like Indonesia emphasized organizational governance to enhance performance and accountability (Jalal F., 2009; Grindle, 2010). OECD (2004) and Cadbury (2000) define governance as a system of control emphasizing transparency, fairness, accountability, and responsibility (Silveira & Saito, 2009). These principles improve HR commitment, teamwork, and adaptability (Aurangzeb & Asif, 2012). Empirical studies (Bauwhede, 2009; Imen, 2007) support governance's impact on performance and commitment. Commitment is a belief in and desire to stay with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Marius & Cremer, 2008). Studies affirm commitment's links with Leadership, trust, and satisfaction (Chen et al., 2009; Dale & Fox, 2008).

*H4: Good governance has a significant positive effect on employee commitment.*

### Good Governance and Student Satisfaction

Good governance practices contribute to public satisfaction. Since the 1980s, satisfaction surveys have assessed service quality, with tools like SERVQUAL (Zeithaml et al., 1990) and ACSI gaining prominence (Schmidt & Strickland, 1998). European initiatives such as the Swedish Customer Satisfaction Index and Belgium's Quality Barometer followed. However, construct validity issues remain (Bouckaert, 1995). Satisfaction depends not solely on service quality but also on expectations, mission alignment, and social perception (Stipak, 1979; Roth et al., 1990; Conroy, 1998). Citizens judge services by purpose and fairness, not just delivery (Princeton Survey Research Associates, 2000). Governance that aligns with public expectations and demonstrates integrity is key to improving satisfaction.

*H5: Good governance has a significant positive effect on student satisfaction.*

### Mediation and Moderation Hypotheses

*H6: Good governance mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee commitment/ student satisfaction.*

*H7: Good governance moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and the outcome variables, employee commitment and student satisfaction, given a university type.*

## IV The Model and Methods

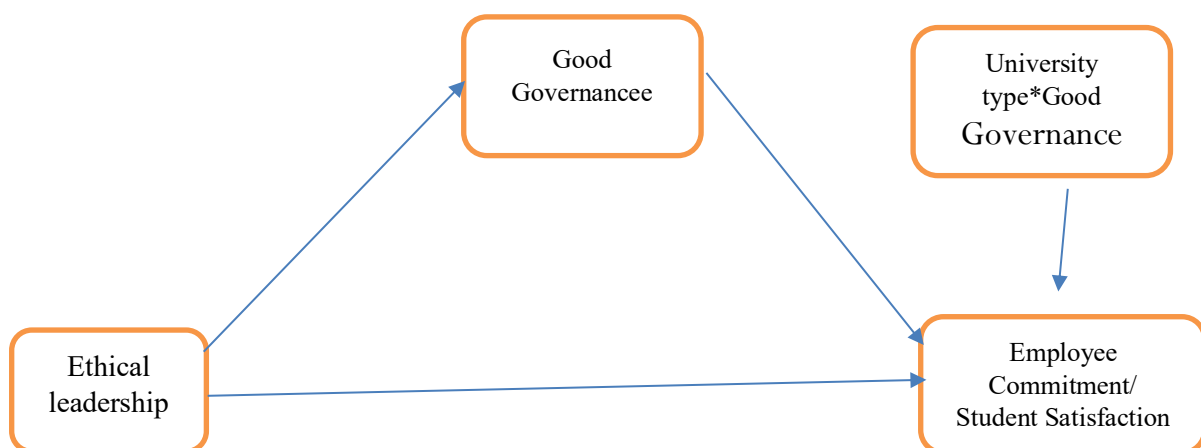


Figure 1: Cross-sectional mediation.



The model presents a framework for examining how Ethical Leadership (EL) influences Employee Commitment (EC) and Student Satisfaction (SS), with Good Governance (GG) playing a central mediating role.

1. Direct Path: Ethical Leadership → Employee Commitment / Student Satisfaction

Ethical leadership positively influences both Employee Commitment and Student Satisfaction.

2. Moderating Role of Good Governance

Good governance is positioned at the cross-level intersection, moderating the relationship between Ethical Leadership and the outcome variables.

3. Multilevel and Cross-Sectional Dynamics

The model assumes a multilevel structure, likely involving: Individual university-level data (perceptions of leadership, student satisfaction, academic staff commitment). Institutional level variation represented different universities. It captures cross-sectional effects, offering a snapshot of how these constructs interact at a single point in time across multiple levels.

### **Mediating Moderation**

The present study is a cross-sectional study aiming to study the impact of ethical leadership on academic staff commitment and student satisfaction using mediating moderation methods through good governance as the mediator and moderator.

For the present research, data were collected using four different multidimensional measurement instruments (Ethical Leadership (7-dimensions), Perceived Good Governance Scale (6-dimensions), Organizational Commitment Scale (3-dimensions), and Student University Satisfaction Scale (4-dimensions)). There were 180 items from which data were gathered from respondents. The study demanded that the data be obtained from multiple samples to develop, validate, and assess the reliability of the constructs used in the study.

Furthermore, a large sample size was required to test the hypotheses using the models. Considering all these factors and recommendations made by eminent researchers in behavioral sciences, we collected data using 600 (60 items \* 10 respondents = 600 responses) questionnaires from five universities at different stages of research. Bentler & Chou (1987) and Schwab (1980) also have recommended a 10:1 responses/cases to item ratio.

### **Sample Size Determination**

This study intends to develop a Perceived Good Governance Scale that measures six dimensions of good governance practices in educational institutions. In addition, this study validated the seven-dimension Ethical Leadership at Work Questionnaire (ELWQ) and measured employee commitment on a three-dimensional organizational commitment scale. Finally, this research measured student satisfaction on a 20-item Student University Satisfaction Scale.

During the process of developing the Perceived Good Governance Scale, we followed the recommendations made by Baker (1994), Guadagnoli & Velicer (1988), Hoelter (1983), and Hinkin (1995). Baker (1994:182) noted, "a pilot study is often used to pre-test or try out" a research instrument. Baker (1994) found that a sample size of 10-20% of the sample size for the actual study is a reasonable number of participants to consider enrolling in a pilot. Similarly, Guadagnoli and Velicer (1988) recommended a sample size of 150 observations to obtain an accurate solution in exploratory factor analysis as long as item intercorrelations are reasonably strong.

On the other hand, for confirmatory factor analysis, a minimum sample size of 200 has been recommended by Hoelter (1983). Hinkin (1995), after an extensive review of previous research, suggested that a sample of 150 would be the minimum acceptable for scale development procedures at each stage. Thus, the final questionnaire contained 110 items related to Ethical Leadership, Perceived Good Governance, Organizational Commitment, and Student University Satisfaction.

Recommendations for item-to-response ratios range from 1:4 (Rummel, 1970) to at least 1:10 (Bentler & Chou, 1987; Schwab, 1980) for each set of scales to be factor analyzed. Bentler & Chou (1987) recommended a 1:10 ratio of parameters to cases for Maximum Likelihood with multivariate normal data. Relying on the above recommendations, we finalized a sample size of 600 for our final study. All four questionnaires were distributed in different intervals to avoid method bias. We have collected the data on independent and dependent variables separately in different intervals to avoid common method bias procedurally (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, we have also used Harman's single-factor test (Harman, 1960) to verify whether a common method bias exists. The test revealed no common method bias; as for all the scales, the single-factor extraction had a variance of 50

percent. Thus, all the recommendations about sample sizes were adhered to. The usable response rate ranges between 55% and 75% in social sciences. This point is also considered when determining the sample size for our study.

### **Sample for Construct Development, Reliability, and Validity of PGGS.**

While the overall Sample size is around 600, it is distributed across four questionnaires: Perceived Good Governance, 600; Ethical Leadership, 600; Employee Commitment, 200; and Student University Satisfaction, 400. The sample size used for the Pilot Study was 100. The final valid sample was 571.

### **V Data Analysis and Results**

Table 2 reveals that 40% of the participants were female and 60% male. This indicates that the data we collected was balanced and fair. Regarding the age group, 36% were between 20-25 years, 53.7% fell between the ages of 25-40, and 10% were above 40 years. This indicates that the participants are mature enough to examine the questions and critically provide relevant data. Student respondents were sampled from different programs, including postgraduate. While 38% were from year II, 30% were from year III, 17.3% were from year IV, and 14.7% were from year V, the composition was relational since the number of students decreased when the program year increased. Regarding the university type, most respondents were from the second (30.4%) and third (28.8%) generations, while 25.8% were from the 1<sup>st</sup> generation and 15% were from technical or education-oriented universities. This implies that it is possible to generalize the study results to all universities.

**Table 2: Profile of Students and Academic Staff**

Students (a)						
Gender		Frequency	Percent	Program Year	Frequency	Percent
Val id	Female	170	43.9	II Year	147	38.0
	Male	217	56.1	III Year	116	30.0
	Total	387	100.0	IV Year	67	17.3
Age Group				V Year	57	14.7
Val	< 20	47	12.1	Total	387	100.0
id	20 – 25	95	24.5	University Type		

	25 – 30	84	21.7	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	100	25.8	
	30 – 35	69	17.8	2nd generation	118	30.4	
	35 – 40	55	14.2	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation	111	28.8	
	Above 40	37	9.6	Technical/Educational	58	15.0	
	Total	387	100.0	Total	387	100.0	
Academic staff (b)							
Gender		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Education Qualification	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Female	82	44.1	44.1	2 <sup>nd</sup> Degree	107	57.5
	Male	104	55.9	100.0	PhD	31	16.7
	Total	186	100.0		Others	48	25.8
Age in Years					Total	186	100.0
Valid	20 – 30	109	58.6	58.6	Work Experience		
	30 – 40	72	38.7	97.3	Less than5	27	14.5
	40 -50	5	2.7	100.0	5 – 10	133	71.5
	Total	186	100.0		10 -15	17	9.1
					15 – 20	8	4.3
					Above 25	1	0.5
					Total	186	100.0

Source: Field Survey

Table 2 depicts that 44% of academic staff participants were female and 56% male. A relative proportion of female participation gives the research conclusion more inclusiveness. Most respondents were between the 20-40 age group, while 58.6% of the participants fell between the 20-30 age group, and 38.7% were between the 30-40 age group. Regarding education qualification, 57.5% of respondents held their 2nd degree, and 16.7% held their terminal degree. Regarding work experience, 14.5% of the respondents' years of service were less than 5 years, 71.5% were between 5 and 10 years, and 13.5% were 10 years and above. According

to Mathieu and Zajac (1990), age group and work experience positively correlate with employee commitment.

Below, we present the descriptive statistics of all the constructs in terms of Mean, Standard deviation, Skewness, and Kurtosis. The Skewness and kurtosis statistics are in the acceptable Zone -1 to +1, indicating no normality issues. Similarly, Low values for standard deviation indicate consistency in the opinions expressed by sample individuals on various dimensions of the constructs. Similarly, most of the mean values of the dimensions are above 3.0, indicating satisfactory levels of the dimensions.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics- Ethical Leadership**

**Table: Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
elpw	571	3.43504461679	.699518940786	-.086	.102	-.261	.204
acss	571	3.42958885831	.926564803423	-.470	.102	-.193	.204
gg	571	3.705	.9487	-.493	.102	-.012	.204
Valid N (listwise)	571						

Source: Computed using field data

The table provides descriptive statistics for three constructs measured: ELPW (Ethical Leadership Perception at Work), ACSS (Academic Staff Commitment and Student Satisfaction), and GG (Good Governance), based on a sample of 571 respondents. Good Governance (GG) has the highest mean score (3.71), indicating a relatively favorable perception among respondents. Ethical Leadership Perception at Work (ELPW) has a mean of 3.44, suggesting a moderately optimistic view. ACSS has a slightly lower mean (3.43), reflecting moderate agreement regarding employee commitment and student satisfaction. ELPW has the lowest standard deviation (0.70), indicating more consistent responses. ACSS and GG show greater variability (0.93 and 0.95, respectively), suggesting more diverse perceptions among respondents. All three variables are negatively skewed (skewness values between -0.086 and 0.493), meaning a slight tendency for respondents to give higher (more

favorable) ratings. GG and ACSS are more left-skewed than ELPW, implying stronger positive perceptions. All constructs show slightly platykurtic distributions ( $kurtosis < 0$ ), indicating flatter distributions than a normal curve.

The data indicates that respondents perceive good governance and ethical leadership positively, with slightly more variability in how they rate academic staff commitment and student satisfaction. The distributions are close to normal, though somewhat skewed toward favorable responses.

Does good governance have a cross-sectional impact (mediating moderation) on the relationship between ethical leadership and academic commitment across universities?

The cross-sectional impact, also known as the mediating moderation effects of Good Governance, has been studied in this research for both academic commitment and student satisfaction using the multilevel model. A two-level model was attempted using individual (Teachers and students) data for the first level and the university type data for the second level. Since the data on individuals are nested within university data, we propose a multilevel model using R procedures implemented in Jamovi. These models are linear and mixed. A two-level model using individuals at level I and universities at level II has been estimated. Jamovi provides results for the mixed models using the R procedure. We used Aguinis's (2017) procedure to estimate the model. The procedure provides the results under four assumptions: 1) Random intercept model. The first model is the random intercept model, which allows the intercept to change and differ in both models. We have used maximum likelihood estimation for this. The results are presented in the Appendix. The intercept of the model is significant, and the variance is different for the models. This model is known as the null model. The second model is known as the random intercept and fixed slope model, including the independent and mediator variables. The third model is the random intercept and random slope model, which allows the random slope to change. The model is similar except for adding independent variables using the random coefficients option. The fourth model, which is of interest to us, allows for the cross-sectional interaction, which enables the level II predictor to enter the model as an interaction variable along with other predictors. The interaction term  $ELWPAVE * GGAVE$  is introduced in the model to determine whether this has any moderating effect. The results indicate that its coefficient is statistically significant, implying that there is some mediating moderation. The table below presents the mediating moderation impact of the good governance variable:



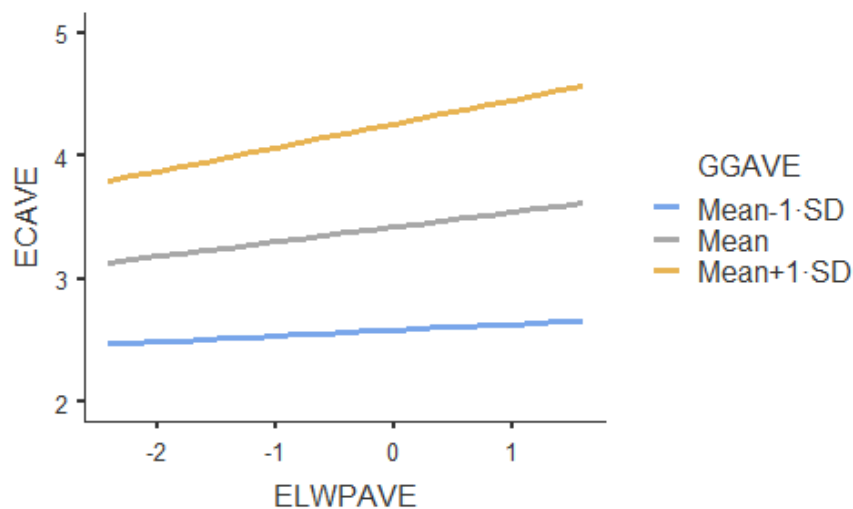
**Table 4: Mediating Moderation: Employee Commitment****Fixed Effects**

Variable	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	Df	t	P
(Intercept)	3.4239	0.0243	3.37636	3.4710	149.28	141.18	< .001
ELWPAVE	0.1206	0.0358	0.05039	0.1910	158.42	3.37	< .001
GGAVE	0.8776	0.0256	0.82748	0.9280	4.48	34.34	< .001
ELWPAVE * GGAVE	0.0765	0.0371	0.00383	0.1490	183.03	2.06	0.040

**Fixed effects parameter estimates**

	Variable	SD	Variance	ICC
Groups	University_Type	0.00136	1.84e-6	2.01e-5
	ggave	0.0504	2.54e-5	
Residual		0.30249	0.0915	

Note: computed using the Aguinis Procedure(2013)

**Effects Plot: Mediating Moderation**

The slope indicates a positive relationship between ethical Leadership (ELWPAVE) and Employee commitment (ECAGE) at different levels of the mediator variable, i.e., good governance across the universities.

**Mediating Moderation: Students**

Does good governance have a cross-sectional impact (mediating moderation) on the relationship between ethical leadership and student satisfaction across universities?

The cross-sectional impact is also known as the mediating moderation effects of Good Governance has been studied in this research for both academic commitment and student satisfaction using a multilevel model. As mentioned above, a two-level model was attempted using individual (Teachers and students) data for the first level and the university type data for the second level. Since the data on individuals are nested within university data, we propose a multilevel model using R procedures implemented in Jamovi. These models are linear and mixed. A two-level model using students at level I and the University at level II has been estimated. Jamovi provides results for the mixed models using the R procedure. We used Aguinis's (2013) procedure to estimate the model. The procedure provides the results under four sets of assumptions: 1) Random intercept model. The first model is known as the random intercept model, which allows the intercept to change and differ between the models. We have used Maximum likelihood estimation in this procedure. The intercept of the model is significant, and the variance is different for the models. This model is known as the null model. The second model is the random intercept and fixed slope model, including the independent and mediator variables. The third model is the random intercept and random slope model, which allows the random slope to change. The model is similar except for adding independent variables using the random coefficients option. The fourth model, which is of interest to us, allows for the cross-sectional interaction, which allows the level II predictor into the model as an interaction variable along with other predictors. The interaction term ELWPAVE\* GGAVE is introduced into the model to determine whether this has any moderating effect. The results indicate that the coefficient is statistically not significant, implying that there is no mediating moderation. The table below presents the mediating moderation impact of the good governance variable:

**Table 4: Cross-Sectional Mediation: Students**

**Fixed Effects**

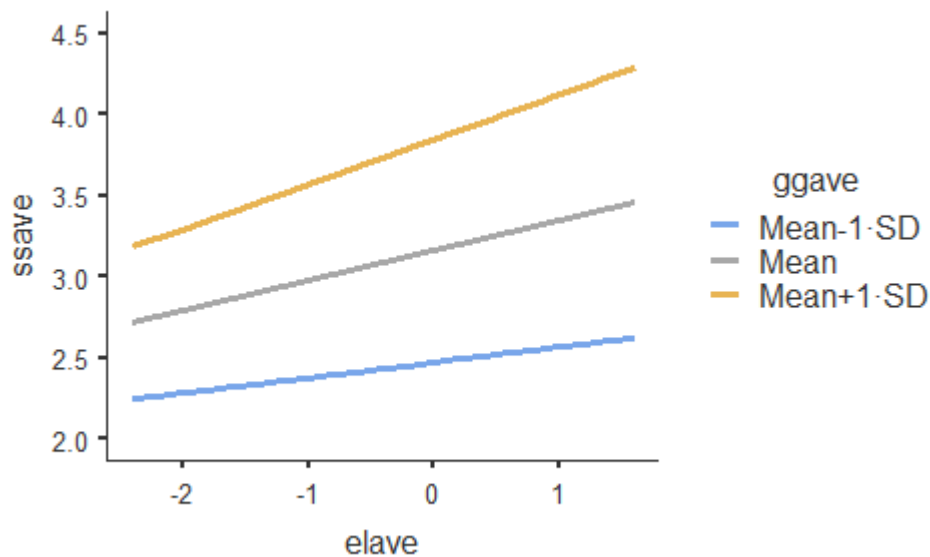
Variable	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	Df	t	P
(Intercept)	3.1596	0.0993	2.9649	3.3540	4.64	31.81	< .001
Elave	0.1847	0.0634	0.0604	0.3090	383.56	2.91	0.004
Ggave	0.7233	0.0637	0.5985	0.8480	6.78	11.36	< .001
Elwave * ggave	0.0963	0.0639	-0.0288	0.2220	383.30	1.51	0.132

**Random Components**

	Variable	SD	Variance	ICC
Groups	University_Type	0.1764	0.03113	0.0497
	ggave	0.0876	0.00768	
Residual		0.7715	0.59528	

Note: computed using the Aguinis Procedure(2013)

**Figure 1: Effects Plots**



The slope indicates a positive relationship between ethical leadership (ELAVE) and student satisfaction (SSAVE) at different levels of mediator variables, i.e., good governance across the universities, though it is not statistically significant.

## V Conclusion

This study has investigated the impact of ethical leadership behavior of education leaders on academic staff commitment and student satisfaction. The study posits that by preaching and practicing ethical standards and implementing good governance initiatives, education leaders can foster affective commitment among academic staff and student satisfaction. Further, the research has validated the different constructs (scales) in the context of public universities in Ethiopia. The Perceiver Good Governance scale has been proposed and validated using data collected from Academic Staff, experts, and students. The relevant data are collected from educational leaders, Academic Staff, and students. Academic staff rated educational leaders on the Ethical Leadership Scale and Good Governance Indicators. They also expressed their perceived levels of commitment on the Employee Commitment Scale. Student data has been

collected using the Students' University Satisfaction Scale. Various statistical procedures have been used to validate the scales, such as Construct validity, Discriminant validity, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The mediated moderated effect is assessed using Hayes's (2018) conditional meditational analysis, and multilevel data analysis modeling has been attempted using Aguinis's (2013) procedure. A two-level multilevel model has been estimated using the R procedure in Jamovi software.

The evidence based on Aguinis's (2013) procedure suggests mixed evidence for mediating the moderation impact of Good Governance in the context of an Ethiopian public university. The multilevel model estimation using individuals (Teachers and students) at the first level and university type at the second level suggests evidence of mediating moderation impact in the case of teachers, but this is absent for students. This may be due to teacher interaction across universities, through seminars, conferences, and research.

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## **Empowering the Global South: India's ITEC Programmes at Dr. MCR HRD Institute of Telangana**

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### **Introduction**

In light of changing power dynamics and the evolving importance of the Global South in global affairs, India working to promote cooperation between nations can be seen as a message for holistic growth and mutually-beneficial collaboration. The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme is a shining example of this commitment by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

Among the prominent institutions executing these capacity-building initiatives, the Dr. MCR HRD Institute under the Government of Telangana has carved a distinguished name for itself. Since joining hands with the ITEC initiative, the Institute has consistently delivered high-quality training programmes for diplomats and professionals from ITEC partner countries. Focusing on areas such as media, public relations, and commercial diplomacy, these programmes have helped reinforce India's strategic relationships across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, while fostering a spirit of knowledge sharing and mutual progress.

### **A Vision Based on Collaboration Rather Than Patronage**

India's role in the Global South is fundamentally informed by a unique philosophy—one that resolutely breaks with the heritage of hierarchical donor-recipient relations. Rather than providing aid as a superior entity, India embraces a model premised on equality, solidarity, and mutual empowerment. This is informed by the historical experience of India as a post-colonial state and its conception of global development as inclusive.

The core of this vision is the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme initiated in 1964 by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. ITEC has emerged since its inception as one of India's most significant diplomatic programs with a diverse range of training programs, technical support, study visits, and project consultancy

service. Now, over 160 partner nations from Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania actively engage in ITEC, thus making it a keystone of India's South-South cooperation landscape.

The driving philosophy of ITEC is to develop human and institutional capacities in partner nations through experience-sharing of India's developmental history, technical know-how, and administrative innovations. India does not export fixed models but adapts its programmes to the exact needs of participating countries, again strong evidence of the belief that development has to be context-specific and locally initiated.

Against this larger context, the Dr. MCR HRD Institute, Government of Telangana, has evolved as an important regional player. The Institute has assumed a central position in providing ITEC training in priority thematic areas of governance practice, e-governance, institutional reforms, public relations and media, diplomacy, and leadership in public administration. With its carefully selected courses, the Institute not only builds technical capabilities but also a profound appreciation of democratic values, public accountability, and citizen-friendly service delivery, values that resonate throughout the Global South.

By placing this training in Telangana, a state that is renowned for its administration's innovations, technology-based solutions, and inclusive governance models, India asserts its devotion to taking the objectives of foreign policy and rendering them meaningful, grass-roots-level development cooperation. The ITEC program is hence not merely a diplomatic instrument; it is an embodiment of India's faith in empowering its partners by means of collective growth, practical knowledge, and human-oriented development.

### **A Seven Cohorts Journey and Beyond**

The experience of the ITEC training programmes at Dr. MCR HRD Institute has been nothing less than revolutionary. The Institute has had seven heterogeneous cohorts of participants from various continents over the past year, each with varying insights, knowledge, and cultural backgrounds.

The initial participants to attend were from South Africa, establishing a strong foundation for India's increasing interaction with the African continent. This was followed by Vietnamese participants, demonstrating India's connection to Southeast Asia, and subsequently Sri Lanka, further establishing the nation's neighbourhood-first policy.

Subsequent batches received commercial diplomats from Egypt, marking an increasing interest from West Asia. Guyanese delegates (in two groups), Suriname, and Tanzania introduced representation from Latin America, the Caribbean, and East Africa. Second-time entry from countries such as Nepal and Sri Lanka served to highlight the programme's increasing popularity and its serious influence on participants.

A turning point occurred in June 2025, when the Institute welcomed a remarkably diverse group of delegates representing 14 countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This experience was not merely quantitative, it represented India's growing standing as a trustworthy international partner in terms of knowledge exchange and capacity building.

### **Telangana's Strategic Significance**

In India's larger development and diplomacy outreach, the Telangana state has gradually become an important contributor. From its inception as the newest Indian state to its transformation into a model of effective governance, Telangana's trajectory has been remarkable.

Lying at the core of this success story is Hyderabad, a city that comfortably blends its royal heritage with contemporary ambitions. Famous for its cultural heritage, Hyderabad is today also a centre of innovation, technology, and policy-making. Strategically positioned here is the Dr. Marri Channa Reddy Human Resource Development Institute of Telangana (Dr. MCRHRDIT), providing international delegates with an opportunity not only to acquire administrative expertise but also to imbibe India's democratic values and inclusive development philosophy.

Telangana is unique in the sense that it is able to bridge India's vision for external affairs with ground reality. The ITEC scheme under the aegis of the Ministry of External Affairs discovers in Telangana an active partner which gives more than it takes in the way of hosting. With well-crafted modules for training and rich cultural exposure, Telangana has been able to create a community of international professionals bound together by their quest for good governance and effective communication.

A moving instance of this synergy was seen in November 2024, when the Indian Prime Minister visited Guyana, at the same time that Guyanese delegates were present at Dr. MCRHRDIT. This convergence was greater than coincidence; it underscored India's smooth integration of diplomatic efforts and development outreach.



This momentum was carried forward in July 2025 as the Prime Minister of India visited Trinidad and Tobago. At the time when we recently concluded the 14 countries' diplomatic visit to our institute, Although visits at the top level invite notice, it is the sustained work of institutions such as Dr. MCRHRDIT which creates lasting connections through exchange, training, and interaction.

In the broad picture of Indian international ambitions, Telangana is a pragmatic and visionary partner that embodies the country's ethics while acting energetically in the world. As international geopolitics keeps changing, Telangana demonstrates that sincere diplomacy frequently germinates not only in summits but also in the mundane dialogue that occurs across training rooms and cultural landmarks.

### **Building Bridges through Knowledge Diplomacy**

The programmes conducted at Dr. MCR HRD Institute, Government of Telangana, go beyond traditional classroom teaching. They are dynamic environments for cultural interaction, policy debates, and collaborative learning. Modules designed bespoke contain expert talks, experiential sessions, interactive discussions, and exposure visits, each designed to meet the unique developmental requirements of the participating nations as well as to exchange India's best practices in governance and media.

Delegates had the opportunity to engage with top Indian civil servants, subject-matter experts, and media workers. Tours to major organisations like Telangana Police Command & Control, Tribal Welfare Museum, All India Radio, Doordarshan, T-Hub, Ramoji Film City, Golconda Fort, Charminar, Chowmohalla Palace, Hussain Sagar Lake, Shilparamam, Birla Science Museum, and several government offices also heighten their awareness of India's working systems.

The participants tend to go back to their homelands as goodwill ambassadors, armed with skill sets and imbued with a rich experience of India's democratic traditions, pluralism, technological advances, and inclusive policies. These interactions form sound foundations for long-term collaboration and cooperative diplomacy.

The Ministry of External Affairs' initiative to make Dr. MCR HRD Institute of Telangana a principal training partner under the ITEC scheme speaks volumes about Telangana's rising stature in the realm of administrative excellence and innovation.



Telangana's governance model that puts people first and is tech-driven holds great lessons for nations with similar developmental ambitions. The Institute, infused with state-of-the-art facilities and an enduring academic network, provides a learning experience that is both globally applicable and locally relevant.

This partnership between the central institutions and the state leadership is a demonstration of how India's federal structure allows for the growth of foreign policy through bottom-up initiatives and cooperation.

### **Looking Ahead: Enhancing South-South Solidarity**

In a global community where issues such as climate change, public health crises, gaps in digitalization, and the integrity of information continue to present serious hazards, the importance of collaborative action on the part of Global South nations is greater than ever before. The ITEC training schemes designed at Dr. MCR HRD Institute, Telangana, in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs, GOI, are active attempts at responding to these international needs.

Each generation helps develop not only professional know-how but also a sense of teamwork among future global leaders. These programs are building a network of knowledgeable, interconnected professionals able to navigate the nuances of governance, diplomacy, and media across borders.

India's position, as a nation that has both endured and provided development solutions, puts it in a singular position to span the long-standing global divides. The training model at Dr. MCR HRD Institute illustrates this philosophy to perfection by presenting sustainable, people-based models of growth.

### **Conclusion**

India's long-standing engagement with the Global South is grounded in respect, shared interests, and a pledge to empowerment. The ITEC Programme, and more so the powerful training sessions at Dr. MCR HRD Institute of Telangana, make this pledge real with skilful connections and goodwill that endures.

In the future, the arrival of subsequent cohorts will ensure to intensify these interactions. These interactions not only elevate individuals but also help to construct a multipolar and inclusive world order, a world where India and its like-minded partners from the Global South advance together in concert and purpose.

## Himalayan Highways and Oceanic Gateways: India's Civilizational Trade Legacy in South Asia

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*India's ancient trade routes, both by land and sea, were not just used for business, but also for sharing culture and ideas. Based on the belief that the world is one big family, trade in India was connected to ethical and spiritual values. This paper studies how India's trade system shaped civilization, using historical records, literature, and archaeology. It examines major trade routes like Uttarapatha, Dakshinapatha, and the Great Route, as well as important ports such as Tamralipti, Kaveripattinam, and Kalinga. These routes connected India with Central Asia, Southeast Asia, Rome, and Persia, allowing not only the exchange of goods, but also traditions, and religions like Buddhism and Hinduism. The paper further explores how invasions and colonial rule, especially the British Raj, disrupted these trade networks and shifted India's economy to serve imperial interests. After independence, especially since 1991's economic reforms, India has worked to revive these routes with projects like the Act East Policy, Sagarmala, Bharatmala, and the Chabahar Port. These efforts aim not just to boost the economy but also to restore India's cultural influence. Examining India's trade history from a civilizational perspective, the paper underscores the profound connection it has to the country's identity and way of thinking. Restoring and strengthening these trade routes in the 21st century provides India with an opportunity to reclaim its position as a global hub for business, education, and cultural exchange.*

**Keywords:** Trade Routes, Ancient India, Grand route, Uttarapatha, Dakshinapatha, Maritime Routes, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

## INTRODUCTION:

The United Nations, in its recent report, mentioned that India's economy is expanding at the fastest rate in 2025. The UN assessment indicated that the Indian economy will grow at a rate of 6.2%<sup>1</sup> in the current fiscal year and 6.3% in 2026, surpassing that of the US, China, and the EU. India's status as a major global financial system and a cultural force is evidence of the enduring essence of "*Sone ki Chidiya*". Geography plays an important role in the evolution of the culture and economy of a country. Referring to the above report, it is imperative to find out the roots of India's economic growth in the 77 years after independence. Due to its advantageous geographic location and wealth of natural resources, India has a long and illustrious economic history. It played a significant role in the ancient and medieval world economies because of its extensive mineral richness, fertile regions, and bustling trade routes.

The changing climate not only affects the lives of people but also influences their thought processes and the trade of a country. The routes passing through mountains in deserts are naturally very difficult; on the other hand, the routes passing through open valleys, rivers, and vast plains become easier. Trade route development demonstrates that, since ancient times, nomadic tribes in search of nourishment for their flocks must have gradually learned about the nation's natural pathways. However, prehistoric hunters must have traded the natural pathways that are now known as roads even before these tribes existed. This continuous search for natural channels must have resulted in a network of trade routes across the country<sup>2</sup>.

The Vedic literature constantly remembers these early path-finders. Agni is designated as *Pathikrit*, "path-maker" or "guide" in Satapatha-Brahmana (Kanda 12. Adhyaya 4. Brahmana 4) because the burning of vast jungle tracks created routes following which the Vedic culture entered the farther corners of India.

अग्निर्वै पथिकृत्। पथामपि नेता। स एवैनं यज्ञपथमपिनयति। एतदेव तत्र कर्म॥<sup>3</sup>

India's trade routes have a long and illustrious history, acting as the veins through which the lifeblood of commerce, culture, and civilization flowed across the Indian subcontinent and

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<sup>1</sup>News On Air. (2025, May 21). India continues to be fastest growing major economy in 2025, ahead of China, US, European Union, says UN report. News On Air. <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/indian-economy-to-grow-at-6-3-during-current-fiscal-ahead-of-china-us-european-union-says-un-report/#:~:text=1%3A49%20PM-.India%20continues%20to%20be%20fastest%20growing%20major%20economy%20in%202025,Union%2C%20a%20UN%20report%20said.>

<sup>2</sup> Chandra, M. (1977). Trade and trade routes in ancient India. Abhinav Publications.

<https://books.google.co.in/books?id=rDL4kA7SWkEC>

<sup>3</sup> Satapatha-brahmana, kanda 12. Adhya 4. brahmana 4 [1] <https://thevyasa.in/shatapatha12/>

beyond. Since the earliest days of Indian civilization, trade has been pivotal to the evolution of society, affecting economic growth and political alliances as well. The sea and land routes of trade, linking India to Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and even the Roman Empire, were active in shaping not just the economy of India but also its glorious position in the world for the coming centuries.

The earliest records of India's trade routes are mentioned in the Atharva Veda, where the term "*Anthas*"<sup>1</sup> describes the routes that linked far-off parts of the subcontinent. This source emphasizes the importance of trade as an economic process and as a dynamic aspect of India's existence in the Vedic period.

This study aims to explore the history of Indian trade routes and also seeks to answer questions such as how these historical routes were destroyed over time, especially during colonialism, and how the heritage of these old contacts is being restored in modern India, particularly under the current Prime Minister. Considering the historical importance of these routes, this research intends to emphasize their ongoing significance in shaping India's past, present, and future, as well as in fostering important connections with neighboring nations.

This paper uses a multidisciplinary and civilizational approach to study India's ancient trade networks. That means it looks at the topic from many angles—history, literature, archaeology, religion, geography, and modern politics. By using different types of sources, such as ancient texts, archaeological evidence, and recent government policies, the paper gives a more complete picture of how trade worked in India through the ages. At the same time, it follows a civilizational approach, meaning that it sees trade not just as a business activity but as a part of India's broader cultural and spiritual traditions. Trade in ancient India was guided by values like truth, fairness, and the idea that the whole world is one family (*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*). This approach helps us understand how Indian trade spread knowledge, religion, and culture across regions, not just goods. Secondary sources provide analytical frameworks and contextual depth. This research uses qualitative analysis to understand the evolution, disruption, and revival of trade routes, giving importance to the philosophical foundations and geopolitical consequences of India's civilizational commerce. The framework is rooted in a *Bhartiya* perspective, interpreting trade as a medium of ethical engagement, civilizational expression, and cultural diplomacy rather than mere economic activity.

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<sup>1</sup> Sanatan Dharma. (2019). Atharva Veda complete collection. Internet Archive.  
<https://archive.org/details/atharvavedaallparts/Atharava%20vediya%20brhat%20sarava%20anukramanika/>

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Indian trade routes have a long history dating back thousands of years, as evidenced by archaeological findings and ancient literature. Long-distance trade with India predates the Silk Road's alleged inception. Since 2500 BCE, the Indus Valley Civilization maintained active commercial links with Persia and Mesopotamia and exported beads, textiles, and pearls<sup>1</sup>. These initial interactions laid the foundation for a culture of an interconnected civilization that would only get strengthened over the centuries. Due to its advantageous location at the intersection of the land and sea regions of Asia enabled it to communicate with Central Asia, China, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. India's contribution to the Silk Route was not just about goods—it was as much about ideas, religions, technologies, and civilizational values<sup>2</sup>.

### *Uttarapath*

As mentioned in ancient Indian writings as the Uttarapatha, this road served as the Indian subcontinent's civilizational lifeline and its link to Central Asia, Persia, and even the Far East long before the Silk Road was mentioned in Chinese history. The first written reference to this route comes from the Mahabharata, Shanti Parva, Chapter 207, Verse 43

उत्तरापथजन्तवाश्च कीर्तयिष्यामि तानपि। योनाः काम्बोजग्रामाणाः किराताः शबरैः सह॥<sup>3</sup>

This was well over three centuries before the Silk Route was officially established under the Han dynasty of China. *Kautilya's Arthashastra* also refers to its western portion as the *Haimavatha Path*, indicating its role to link *Taxila and Vahlika* (Balkh)<sup>4</sup>. *Megasthenes'* accounts of ancient Greece, *A. Foucher*, a French historian, and Indian scholars such as *Moti Chandra* have projected its vast reach — *the Caspian Sea through Herat and Bactra to Taxila, Pataliputra, and Tamralipti*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Frenez, D. (2023, October 18). Indus Valley: Early Commercial Connections with Central and Western Asia. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History. <https://oxfordre.com/asianhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-595>.

<sup>2</sup> Law, R. (2006). Moving mountains: The trade and transport of rocks and minerals within the greater Indus Valley region. Space and spatial analysis in archaeology, 301-313. ISBN 0826340229 <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=vBnJ3rEvzLYC>

<sup>3</sup> Mahabharata, Shanti Parva, Chapter 207, Verse 43 [https://archive.org/details/zrne\\_mahabharata-vol.-8-shanti-parva-sanskrit-text-with-english-trans.-edited-by-dr.-/page/98/mode/2up?view=theater](https://archive.org/details/zrne_mahabharata-vol.-8-shanti-parva-sanskrit-text-with-english-trans.-edited-by-dr.-/page/98/mode/2up?view=theater)

<sup>4</sup> Olivelle, P. (2020). Long-distance trade in ancient India: Evidence from Kautilya's Arthaśāstra. The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 57(1), 31-47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019464619892894> (Original work published 2020)

<sup>5</sup> Marshall, J., & Foucher, A. (1982). The Monuments of Sanchi (Vol. 1). Swati Publications. [The Monuments of Sanchi | INDIAN CULTURE](#)

The major north-south trading route was the Uttarapatha, which is the one that is most commonly referenced in ancient records. This powerful route connected *the Indus Valley to the Gangetic Plains* and went all the way to *Central Asia and China*<sup>1</sup>. It was the route by which commodities such as silk, spices, and metals were exchanged between India and other distant destinations during the classical ages. *Panini* (c. 500 BCE), the famous Sanskrit grammarian, refers to it as *Uttarapathena hyitam* (V. 3.77), literally "the northern road"<sup>2</sup>. He explains that the Uttarapatha, a route that passed through northern India, served as an essential link between the Indian subcontinent and the remaining Eurasian mainland.

### *Dakshinapatha*

The Mahabharata (Aranyaka Parvan 59.2) also mentions references to the *Dakshinapatha*,

दक्षिणापथजन्तवः सर्वे नराधमाः स्मृताः। गुहाः पुलिन्दाः शबराः पुण्ड्रका मद्रकैः सह॥<sup>3</sup>

The roads were constructed just like arteries originating from central India, indicating an intimate network of inland connectivity predating outside records. Pali texts also detail these routes more in the 5th century BCE, mentioning the journeys of monks, scholars, horse traders, and tumblers. North of these were the Indian southern trade routes, also known as the *Dakshinapatha*, which connected regions like *Tamil Nadu with Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and the Arabian Peninsula*<sup>4</sup>. These roads facilitated the export of goods like black pepper, cotton, ivory, and spices, which were highly sought by traders worldwide.

On the Indian southern coast, there were ports of *Muchiri and Kaveripattinam* that played a crucial role in trading spices, cloth, and other goods, facilitating economic, religious, and cultural exchanges. The *Tamil Sangam poetry* offers vivid descriptions of this prosperous maritime trade, in which descriptions of the alien ships sailing back and forth to bring gold to the harbors, and black pepper and other items traded in crowded markets. The coastal town of *Kaveripattinam* (Puhar), for instance, was an active city that connected India's maritime trade with the markets of *Rome, Persia, and Southeast Asia*. Malabar ports such as *Bharukachchha*

<sup>1</sup> Chandra, M. (1945). Geographical and economic studies in the Mahabharata: Upayana Parva [Geographical And Economic Studies In The Mahabharata Upayana Parva : Chandra, moti : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive](#)

<sup>2</sup> Chandra, M. (1977). Trade and trade routes in ancient India. Abhinav Publications. <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=rDL4kA7SWkEC>

<sup>3</sup> Sukthankar, V. S. (Ed.). (1941). The Mahabharata - Aranyaka Parva. Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.486384/page/n69/mode/2up>

<sup>4</sup> Andaya, B. W. (2017). Seas, oceans and cosmologies in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 48(3), 349–371. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463417000534>

(modern-day Bharuch), *Tamralipti*, and *Muchiri* played a central role in the Indian Ocean network of commerce, which was essential to the Indian economy as well as foreign affairs<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the evidences also depict India's growing maritime routes, which are imperative to study as a necessity of today, as well as seeking strong maritime connectivity in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and these ancient civilizational connections facilitate today's international diplomatic linkages of India with neighbours, concerning the Act East Policy and SAGAR as well.

### *The Great Route*

One of Asia's oldest and most strategically significant channels of trade, culture, and migration is the Great Route, which originates in northern India and is far too frequently ignored in the dominant world narrative. Despite traversing difficult terrain, including the high mountain ranges that encircle Gilgit, the valleys of the trans-Indus River, and parched plateaus, the Great Route continued to serve as a route for traders, pilgrims, monks, and pastoral tribes<sup>2</sup>. Although the Silk Route depended heavily on Chinese statecraft and diplomacy, the Great Route was supported by Indians' śreṇīs (merchant group) social infrastructure, local rulers, and community-based security systems like atavīpālas (forest guards)<sup>3</sup>. Ancient Vedic texts, although not employing the term 'sārthavāha' (caravan leader), speak of sophisticated trade culture and warn against 'paripanthins' (robbers), which suggests that organized trade entailed sophisticated logistical and defence arrangements<sup>4</sup>.

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, an ancient *Greco-Roman travelogue* written during the first century, presents lavish trade details between India and the Roman Empire. It affirms the *harbor of Barbaricum* (modern Karachi), a major hub of trade between India and regions

<sup>1</sup> Hassan, R. Coastal Ports and Commercial Towns of Ancient India. <https://jaljali.org/coastal-ports-and-commercial-towns-of-ancient-india/>

<sup>2</sup> Rtveldze, E. V. (2010). The Great Indian Road: India–Central Asia–Transcaucasia. *Anabasis. Studia Classica et Orientalia*, 1, 80-96. <https://journals.ur.edu.pl/anabasis/article/view/10126>

<sup>3</sup> Dicey, E. (1877). Our route to India. *The Nineteenth century and after: a monthly review*, 1(4), 665-685. [https://www.proquest.com/docview/2640858?pq-](https://www.proquest.com/docview/2640858?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true&sourcetype=Historical%20Periodicals)

[origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true&sourcetype=Historical%20Periodicals](https://www.proquest.com/docview/2640858?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true&sourcetype=Historical%20Periodicals)

Nagarkar, S. (2020, May 18). Ancient Indian economy part III – Guilds in ancient Bharata. *Indic Today*. <https://www.indica.today/long-reads/ancient-indian-economy-part-iii-guilds-in-ancient-bharata/>

Amarasimha. (1913). *The Nāmalingānusāsana (Amarakosha) of Amarasimha with the Commentary (Amarakoshodghātana) of Kshīrasvāmin* (K. G. Oka, Ed.). Government of India Press.

<https://archive.org/details/the-amarakosa/page/n79/mode/2up?view=theater>

<sup>4</sup> Salles, J. F. (1993). The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* and the Arab-Persian Gulf. *Topoi. Orient-Occident*, 3(2), 493-523. [https://www.persee.fr/doc/topoi\\_1161-9473\\_1993\\_num\\_3\\_2\\_1482](https://www.persee.fr/doc/topoi_1161-9473_1993_num_3_2_1482)



as far-off as Africa and Rome<sup>1</sup>. This period witnessed the peak of Indo-Roman trade when Indian traders brought products such as spices, pearls, and fabric across the oceans, and Romans exported wine, olive oil, and bronze goods to India<sup>2</sup>. These exchanges not only meant economic growth but also cultural exchange, and this cultural impression enriched people from both states and embraced it for centuries.

### *Kushan Dynasty and Buddhism*

The Kushan Empire (around 1st to 3rd century CE) has a remarkable imprint on history due to the degree to which they assisted in developing trade all over Central Asia and in the Roman Empire. The Kushanas were able to facilitate the flow of goods, ideas, and civilizations from China to India to the West by controlling the Silk Road.

Archaeological remains, such as ivory coffers in Begram in today's Afghanistan, demonstrate the influence of Mathura art on merchandise traded along these routes. The magnificence of Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, and Jagayyapeta Buddhist stupas also owes to the wealth generated by trade with the Roman Empire<sup>3</sup>. It follows that the Kushan Empire undoubtedly contributed to the impressive growth of robust trading ties between China, India, and the West.

It is noteworthy that Buddhist missionaries, Sanskritists, craftsmen, and medical experts passed through this route, bringing Indian knowledge systems to Gandhara, Bactria, and Central Asia, and laying the groundwork for Indo-Greek and Kushana syncretism<sup>4</sup>. Even under the unfavourable geographical situations, this route was always utilized from the Vedic period to Alexander's invasion; the Scythians, Kushans, and Huns, all of them, entered India through this corridor<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Gaur, A. S., Sundaresh, & Tripathi, S. (2005). Evidence for Indo-Roman trade from Bet Dwarka waters, west coast of India. *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, 34(1), 122-127. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1095-9270.2005.00080.x>

<sup>2</sup> Puri, B. N., Mukhamedjanov, A. R., Litvinsky, B. A., Harmatta, J., & Multiple Authors. (1994). *The Kushans*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/kushans-1994-hcca>

<sup>3</sup> Høisæter, T. L. (2023). Trade, Buddhism, and the Kushan connection: exchange across the Pamir Knot and the making of the Silk Roads, 2nd century BCE to 5th century CE. In *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Asian History*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.598>

<sup>4</sup> Chandra, M. (1977). *Trade and trade routes in ancient India*. Abhinav Publications. <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=rDL4kA7SWkEC>

<sup>5</sup> Sen, T. (2015). *Buddhism, diplomacy, and trade: The realignment of India–China relations, 600–1400*. Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN 1442254734  
[https://books.google.co.in/books?id=gUt7CgAAQBAJ&dq=24.%09Sen,+T.+\(2015\).+Buddhism,+diplomacy,+and+trade:+The+realignment+of+India%E2%80%93China+relations,+600%E2%80%931400.+Rowman+%26+Littlefield&lr=&source=gbp\\_navlinks\\_s](https://books.google.co.in/books?id=gUt7CgAAQBAJ&dq=24.%09Sen,+T.+(2015).+Buddhism,+diplomacy,+and+trade:+The+realignment+of+India%E2%80%93China+relations,+600%E2%80%931400.+Rowman+%26+Littlefield&lr=&source=gbp_navlinks_s)

Particularly pertinent is the connection between Buddhism and Indian trade. Via establishing Buddhist monasteries and stupas at commerce hubs, Buddhist outreach via sea assisted in bridging the gap between remote regions of Asia.

During the period of Emperor Ashoka, his son Mahinda and daughter Sanghamitta went to Sri Lanka along *the Dakshinapatha Maritime Route*, from the port of *Tamralipti* to *Jambukola Pattana*. To promote the trade of products and the sacred Bodhi seedling, which symbolizes the civilizational link between India and Sri Lanka, merchant guilds travelled the same route. At the same time, the Uttarpatha brought Buddhism north from Gandhara to China's Dunhuang and Xi'an via Bactria, Khotan, and Kucha. With the help of local kings and businessmen, monasteries grew along these caravan routes. These establishments had two functions: they were places of worship and relaxation for traders, which allowed for the interchange of ideas and goods.

The *Mahachaityas* and *Viharas* found at sites such as *Bhaja, Karle, and Kanhari* along India's western seaboard are a reflection of the deep influence of commerce in shaping the religious and cultural learnings of ancient India<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand, the Silk Route, though in praise of having connected China with the West, only gained popularity in the *2nd century BCE*, after *Chang Kien* had travelled to Bactria and witnessed *Chinese goods that had made it there via the Indian northeast*. This is proof of India's already established *trans-regional linkages*. Even now, the British fortified *Khyber and Attock* to protect this route from geopolitical threats, and Subhas Chandra Bose's INA attempted to enter India along this route in World War II<sup>2</sup>. It can be inferred from the above discussion that the Kushan Empire played a pivotal role in shaping transcontinental trade and cultural exchange. By integrating commerce with Buddhism, they facilitated the spread of Indian knowledge systems across Asia. Their legacy endures in the art, religion, and economic networks that once connected India with Central Asia, China, and the Roman world.

### *India's Cultural Footprints along the Silk Route*

The Silk Route, often romanticized as a linear trail of Chinese silk reaching the Mediterranean, has historically been interpreted through predominantly Sinocentric or Eurocentric lenses.

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<sup>1</sup> Chandra, M. (1977). Trade and trade routes in ancient India. Abhinav Publications. <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=rDL4kA7SWkEC>

<sup>2</sup> Khan, N. R. (2005). India's connection with the Silk Route. *India Quarterly*, 61(1), 79-117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097492840506100102>

Such narratives tend to marginalize the Indian subcontinent's pivotal role in shaping and sustaining these expansive trans-regional trade networks. Far from being merely a consumer base or a transit zone, India functioned as a dynamic civilizational and economic hub within the Silk Route system. From the Harappan civilization to the Mughal era, the subcontinent consistently served as a vital axis of intercontinental exchange, where economic vitality merged with cultural transmission.

In his paper, "India's Connection with the Silk Route," Nasir Raza Khan provides a comprehensive overview of the intricate web of maritime and overland trade corridors that historically linked India with Central Asia, Persia, and China. He convincingly argues that India's involvement in the Silk Route was not limited to geographic proximity but extended deeply into the cultural, economic, and civilizational dimensions of the network. Rather than a singular route, the Silk Route comprised a vast, decentralized system of interconnected land and sea paths—many of which originated, converged, or culminated on Indian soil<sup>1</sup>.

India was historically linked to Central Asia through several prominent overland routes. From *Leh and Kashmir*, Indian traders followed the route through *Karakoram to Yarkand* and *Kashgar*. Punjab merchants, especially from Lahore, used *the Kabul-Balkh* route to travel to Bukhara. A second principal road extended from *Multan to Kandahar and Herat into Bukhara and Isfahan*, connecting *India to Iranian and Central Asian* commercial centers. Paths from the eastern Himalayas, like *the Hindustan-Tibet route and the Simla-Kulu-Leh route*, facilitated easy access to Lhasa and beyond. Even *the Nathu La Pass in Sikkim* acted as a critical link between India and the Tibetan plateau<sup>2</sup>.

India's maritime links to the Silk Road were less prominent, yet ports like Bharuch, Sopara, Tamralipta, and later Surat and Masulipatnam played a crucial role in connecting the subcontinent with East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Southeast Asia<sup>3</sup>. Maritime trade streams tended to be calibrated to the overland systems and permitted an intercontinental exchange of goods, persons, and culture. Indian ships carrying textiles, spices, and jewels sailed

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<sup>1</sup> Dolma, R. (2017). Ladakh at the Cross-road During 19th and 20th Century. *Journal of Central Asian Studies*, 24, 185-195.

<https://ccas.uok.edu.in/Files/93269b6c-7f53-4439-ae9a-3bdf55a4c649/Journal/db7fa2bf-d556-49a7-9822-e891286dbabb.pdf#page=195>

<sup>2</sup> Tripathi, S., & Rao, S. R. (1994). Tamralipti: The ancient port of India. *Stud Hist Cult*. <http://drs.nio.org/drs/handle/2264/7445>

<sup>3</sup> Khan, N. R. (2005). India's connection with the Silk Route. *India Quarterly*, 61(1), 79-117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097492840506100102>

westwards, and religious pilgrims and foreign ambassadors travelled eastwards to see India's temples and universities.

India's economic and cultural contributions to the Silk Route were enormous. It exported cotton and silk fabrics, indigo, pepper, cardamom spices, copperware, ivory, and jewels. It imported horses, wool, precious metals, and highland products from Central Asia. But aside from the trade of material items, India was a cultural center. Buddhism spread widely up to Central Asia and China from India along these routes due to Indian monks who transported scriptures, arts, and architectural styles across borders. Equally, Indian astronomy, mathematics, and medicine found appreciative ears in foreign kingdoms. Indian commercial communities like Multanis, Lohanis, and Shikarpuris established successful commercial enclaves in *urban centers like Samarkand, Bukhara, and Isfahan*, facilitating business as well as cultural continuity<sup>1</sup>.

India's ancient trade system was different from other big empires like China and Rome. While China controlled trade through its central government, and Rome protected trade through its army and taxes, India followed a different path. Indian trade was mostly managed by local merchant groups called *śreṇīs*, and supported by kings, religious centres, and community guards. It was less about strict control and more about trust, values, and cooperation.

In India, trade was not only about making money—it was also about spreading culture, religion, and knowledge. Indian traders followed moral principles like honesty and non-violence, and helped share ideas like Buddhism and Hinduism across Asia. This shows that India saw trade as a part of its larger civilizational role, not just an economic activity.

### *Kalinga Route and its legacy*

Benudhar Patra narrates in “Trade, Trade Routes, and Urbanisation,” foregrounds Odisha's pivotal role in ancient global trade from a civilizational Indian perspective. Strategically situated along India's eastern coastline, Odisha emerged as a major maritime center in antiquity. Historical ports such as Tamralipti, Palur, Manikpatna, and Khalkattapatna anchored Odisha's integration into robust coastal (*kulapatha*) and international (*samudrapatha*) trade networks. These maritime routes connected the region to Southeast Asia, China, and even the Roman Empire, embedding Odisha within expansive trans-Asian commercial circuits.

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<sup>1</sup> Patra, B. (2018, January). Trade, trade routes, and urbanisation. In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress (Vol. 79, pp. 117-125). Indian History Congress. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26906237>

Classical sources—including Greco-Roman writers like Pliny and Ptolemy, as well as Chinese pilgrims such as Hiuen Tsang, Fa-Hien, and I-Tsing—attest to Odisha's prominence in long-distance trade. The region exported a variety of commodities, including textiles, spices, elephants, and Buddhist cultural elements. Far from being a marginal player, Odisha functioned as a vital civilizational hub, significantly contributing to urban development, economic prosperity, and cross-cultural interaction within the Indian Ocean world<sup>1</sup>.

#### *The Mughal Empire: The Grand Trunk Road*

The Mughal Empire played a pivotal role in formalizing India's integration into the Silk Route network. Emperors such as Akbar recognized the strategic and economic advantages of maintaining accessible and safeguarded trade routes. Substantial resources were allocated to building infrastructure, including the Grand Trunk Road, caravanserais, and security outposts. Akbar's initiatives to clear the Khyber Pass and establish rest stations significantly enhanced trader safety. Additionally, Shah Jahan's architectural patronage extended to thriving trade cities, while the empire's political stability created a favourable environment for commercial activity and long-distance exchange<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, the Mughal Empire's strategic investments in infrastructure, security, and urban development strengthened India's role in transcontinental trade. By fostering a stable and prosperous environment, the Mughals not only promoted domestic commerce but also embedded India deeper into the Silk Route system, influencing global economic and cultural exchanges for centuries.

#### *Great Game & Trade Route*

India's pivotal role in transcontinental trade began to diminish with the advent of colonialism. The British-Russian rivalry in Central Asia—famously known as the Great Game—reshaped the Silk Route into a zone of strategic contestation. Historic overland ties between India and Central Asia were disrupted, often militarized or severed entirely. British imperial policy redirected India's trade towards maritime channels under its control, while Russian territorial ambitions increasingly isolated Central Asia. These developments led to a swift decline in

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<sup>1</sup> Sharan, A. M., St, J. S., Das, B. L., & Council, B. L. (2014). Ancient Uttarpath and Modern Grand Trunk Road Are Two Different Highways.

<https://www.engr.mun.ca/~asharan/UTTARPATH/UTTARPATHV3.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Khan, S. (2021). Power Games on The Silk Route: A Journey from Historical to Modern Era. Eurasian Research Journal, 3(2), 33-56. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/erj/issue/64308/976388>

Indo-Central Asian commerce and the disintegration of land-based trade corridors that had prospered for centuries<sup>1</sup>.

Consequently, Indo-Central Asian trade experienced a steep decline, and the ancient pathways that once sustained civilizational dialogue collapsed. Despite this erosion, traces of India's presence endured. Even in the 19th century, British explorers such as Alexander Burnes documented Indian merchant activity in cities like Bukhara and Astrakhan. The Shikarpuris remained influential in regional banking and the silk trade, demonstrating the flexibility of India's mercantile networks despite imperial disruptions. These enduring traces affirm that India was not a peripheral player but a civilizational core in the Silk Route's grand narrative<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the colonial geopolitics disrupted India's centuries-old linkages with Central Asia, undermining its historic trade networks and cultural presence. However, remnants of India's influence persisted through merchant communities and recorded encounters. These echoes of the past continue to inform contemporary diplomatic and cultural efforts to revive regional connectivity and historical civilizational ties. Restoring India to the center of the Silk Route is essential, as it reclaims the rightful place of Indian civilization in world history and underscores that, long before the era of globalization, India was already a vibrant hub of transcontinental exchange.

## THE COLONIAL IMPACT ON HISTORIC TRADE ROUTES

In 1919, the Central Asian Society in London featured a notable paper titled *"An Old Route to India"* by Frederick D. Harford. While framed within a British colonial viewpoint, the paper remains highly relevant to an Indian civilizational understanding of historic global trade routes connecting Bharat with Persia, Mesopotamia, and the Arabian Peninsula. This Indian perspective not only seeks to honour the ancient pathways but also emphasizes trade as a cultural and civilizational endeavour, transcending mere economic transactions.<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Levi, S. (1999). The Indian merchant diaspora in early modern central Asia and Iran. *Iranian Studies*, 32(4), 483-512. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210869908701966>

<sup>2</sup>Harford, F. D. (1919). An old route to India. *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, 6(3-4), 99-118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068371908724764>

<sup>3</sup>The London gathering of the Central Asian Society in 1919 witnessed the reading of an impressive paper, *"An Old Route to India"* by Frederick D. Harford. Though read in a British colonial context, the paper is very relevant for an Indian civilizational perspective of viewing global trade networks of the past that linked Bharat to Persia, Mesopotamia, the Arabian Peninsula, and further afield. This perspective tries not only to adhere to the ancient path laid out but also to align our sight with an Indian vision where trade was seen as a cultural and civilizational pursuit, not an economic objective.

*The Aleppo-Basra Corridor: A Civilizational Artery*

Harford's discussion about land routes indicates that it is a vast transcontinental corridor connecting the Indian subcontinent with West Asian region's metropolises like Aleppo, Basra, Petra, and Gaza, and further into Egypt, Syria, and even North Africa. It was a vast network that existed as a key conduit of commercial, cultural, and diplomatic exchange long before the colonial sea routes dominated international commerce. The circuits were not geographical but civilizational circuits along which India exported not only commodities like spices, cloth, pearls, and medicines but also systems of knowledge, religious practices, and cultural imprints.

The civilizational significance of these routes was realized by the early geographers like Ptolemy, who charted connections running from North China via Bactria and Media to the Euphrates, which was a route linked with the Indic realm via Central Asia.

*Harappan and Early Indian Maritime Gateways*

Ancient trade with the West is not only known to Ptolemy, but Harappans also traded with Mesopotamia via the Persian Gulf, a trend that was carried on through Harford's routes subsequently. The Indian Sea gateways were sites such as Lothal, Barygaza (modern Bharuch), and Sopara, which connected with Charax (Mahammerah) and Basra. India was not just a participant but quite frequently the center of culture that attracted demand from the likes of Rome, Persia, and the Arab Caliphates.

*Colonial Disruptions: Portuguese and British Interference*

The British and Portuguese upheavals in these trading networks were also pivotal. The Portuguese sought to disintegrate the established Arab and Indian sea networks, which successfully downgraded ancient Indian-West Asian trade networks, channelling trade into their colonial ports. The British East India Company subsequently adopted this destructive heritage, using the Aleppo-Basra trade circuit and the Persian Gulf not to honour traditional routes but to monopolize and manage them, disrupting centuries of shared civilizational exchange.

*European Accounts of Ancient Routes*

The article also mentions the immense cartographic and archival effort of Harford and Douglas Carruthers. Their rediscovered historic maps and diaries—those of Edward Ives's and John



Henry Grose's, for example—give a richly layered vision of the Aleppo-Basra route. The trip was taken by a few European travellers, including Pedro Teixeira in 1604, Gaspar de Bernardino in 1606, and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier in 1638. From the point of view of an Indian, these travels are important both for what they report and what they suggest—India's positioning at the centre of the global economy, even in reports that were not written from within India. John Newberry's 1580 voyage, which resulted in the formation of the Levant Company, was an English attempt to tap into a network that had long been cultivated by Indian, Arab, and Persian merchants. The East India Company then travelled the same path to convey mail and despatches between India and London, an explicit recognition of the value of this pre-existing channel<sup>1</sup>.

#### *Arab Contributions and Civilizational Parallels*

Arab merchants' contribution is another area of civilizational complementarity. Harford refers to tribal protection systems during transit by agents called "Aban" that mimic the Indian tradition of neighbourhood protection and merchant guilds. Desert expanses between Baghdad and Damascus were found to be cattle-grazing lands and temporary sources of water, thereby perpetuating the caravans. Such information, over the years, is proof of the competence of early traders in leveraging natural ecology to support economic mechanisms.

#### *The End of the Overland Trade and Civilizational Rupture*

Slow rundown of Aleppo-Basra overland trade by Turkish intervention, tribal conflicts, and resulting infrastructural redundancy was not only the demise of a physical route but a disconnection of a link of civilization. Harford's camel caravans, lumbering two and a half miles per hour for twenty-five to forty-five days, capture the long-suffering, unending procession of civilizational India along the deserts and valleys of Arabia and Persia.

#### *The Colonial Impact on Indian Trade Networks*

The arrival of the British Empire caused a gargantuan shift in the history of trade in India, breaking the country's political hierarchy and the delicate web of trade. The British sought to monopolize India's wealth, particularly its spices, cotton, and cloth, which were much sought after in Europe. They placed regulations to focus control of trade and convert India into a raw

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid

material provider, shutting out its ability to participate in world trade. Seaports and trade routes were also controlled by the British, interfering with local economies significantly. The British also applied economic measures to exploit Indian resources, channelling sea trade routes to ports held by Britain, interfering with traditional maritime commerce. The Silk Route and land trade routes through Central Asia and Persia were also affected by British domination. The establishment of colonial monopolies in major industries like salt, textiles, and opium transformed India's conventional trade routes, forcing Indian traders to operate in a situation where colonizers' interests became a greater priority than traditional trade customs. The colonial influence on India's trade network and the global economy had far-reaching consequences, which in turn shaped India's contemporary trade policies and infrastructure.

#### *Reclaiming Bharat's Trade Legacy in the 21st Century*

In present-day India, when the country wishes to recreate its earlier connectivity through modern infrastructural projects and bilateral trade agreements under its vision for "Viksit Bharat," remembering and re-tracing these ancient routes assumes importance. Harford's paper, being in British imperialist interests, automatically develops a latent mapmaking of India's lost geography of civilization. Aleppo-Basra route, the Persian Gulf channel, the Petra-Gaza axis—all were not simply alien routes but an extension of Bharat's civilization horizon.

### **REVIVAL OF LEGACY**

India's geography and civilization values have, since ancient times, laid the foundation for a vast and interconnected network of trade routes, both land and sea. The routes were not only commercial highways but conduits of culture, knowledge, religion, and diplomacy. From the seacoast cities of the Harappan civilization, including Lothal, to the dynamic exchange along *Uttarapatha* and *Dakshinapatha*, ancient India was the focal point of international trade.

Trade was an activity that was Dharmic, regulated by not just material gain but by moral principles too. Indian merchants were said to deal in honest trade, and commercial cities tended to become intellectual and religious centers.

In the *Atharva Veda's Prithvi Sukta*, our notice has been attracted to the *panthas* or paths of our great nation.

येते पन्थानो बहवो जनायना रथस्य वर्त्मानसश्च यातवे ।

यैः संचरन्त्युभये भद्रपापास्तं पन्थानं जयेमानमित्रमतस्करं यच्छिवं तेन नो मृड ॥<sup>1</sup>

A.V. XII. 1. 47

This hymn seems to have been the keynote of the caravan leaders. It draws our attention to that; This land had many routes and their arteries. These routes were the principal means of communication for the people. On these routes, the chariots plied. They were the main mode of communication for bullock carts to carry commodities. Good or bad, anyone could use those routes. But protecting the people on those routes from the ravages of the wild beasts and the robbers had to be ensured. Those highly protected and safe routes represented the bliss of the earth.

#### *Disruption of Trade Routes: The Colonial Era*

Such a legacy was disrupted by external interventions, chiefly by the British colonial state. The British colonial state in India systematically dismantled India's native trade networks, replacing them with railways and ports for raw material extraction and British goods importation. This led to a location shift, with the original routes connecting Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Africa being replaced with routes connecting the Indian interiors to port cities for British shipping lines.

This de-industrialization resulted in economic drain and dependence on British financial systems, shipping, and maritime insurance, transforming India into a peripheral colony providing British industrial growth. Post-World War II, there was this new world power represented by the United States, which controlled world maritime routes via the Bretton Woods institutions. This created Cold War Infrastructure, dollar hegemony, and US-led developments in logistics, containerisation, and air freight that further harmonised international routes with Western supply chains.

#### *Independent India's Challenges & Nehruvian Approach*

Nehruvian vision rested on economic independence and judicious exposure to the world trade regime, largely due to the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War and ideological predisposition

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<sup>1</sup> Nair, R. (2021, July 23). How Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh rescued India in 1991 and made history. ThePrint. <https://theprint.in/economy/how-narasimha-rao-and-manmohan-singh-rescued-india-in-1991-and-made-history/700893/>

towards socialism. India then invested in state-sector undertakings, heavy industry, and infrastructure on a large scale, like dams and steel factories, which were viewed as the 'temples of modern India.'

After centuries of colonial plunder and the forced diversion of India's natural trade flows, the newly independent Indian state in 1947 faced a fragile situation. Its first leadership's main task was to politically and economically stabilize the nation while simultaneously regaining control over its natural resources, strategic geography, and commercial potential. However, the early decades after independence were influenced by the trauma of partition, food shortages, and Cold War tensions, which greatly limited India's trade ambitions.

Local conflicts further intensified the geopolitical constraints of the Nehruvian period. The 1962 war with China effectively shut down the Himalayan land routes, cutting off India's ancient overland trade links with Central Asia and Tibet. Likewise, the conflicts with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971 disrupted trade on the western frontier. In such a tense environment, the vision of India as a trade-transit country was overshadowed by national security concerns. Border trade was minimal, and maritime capacities lagged.

Trade policies were designed to protect domestic industries and save foreign exchange. Institutions like the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) acted more as gatekeepers than facilitators. For decades, India's global trade remained cautious and limited.

Things changed dramatically in 1991. A severe financial crisis forced India to open up its economy. The Government of India introduced major reforms: the rupee was devalued, the License Raj was dismantled, and India began integrating with global markets.<sup>1</sup>

Rao also launched the "Look East Policy" to reconnect India with Southeast Asia, regions that shared deep historical and cultural ties with India, especially through ancient maritime routes from the Chola and Pallava periods. The idea was to revive India's role as a regional trade and cultural hub. But progress was slow due to regional instability and poor infrastructure.<sup>2</sup>

After 2014, the Indian Prime Minister gave new energy to this vision. His "Act East Policy" was built on Rao's initiative but focused more on execution. The Government of India

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial Board. (2010, November 27). India's Look East policy. Economic and Political Weekly. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2010/48/editorials/indias-look-east-policy.html>

<sup>2</sup> Dastidar, A. G., & Nair, S. (2018, August 17). Golden Quadrilateral: Vajpayee's biggest infra effort in roadways. The Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/atal-bihari-vajpayee-golden-quadrilateral-5310899/>

linked economic development (Vikas) with diplomacy, making infrastructure a key part of India's strategic outreach.<sup>1</sup>

Major projects, such as Sagarmala (for port modernization) and Bharatmala (for highway development), were launched to enhance transportation and logistics across India. These aimed to connect remote and border areas more effectively, especially the northeast, which has long been seen as India's gateway to Southeast Asia but has historically been neglected.

India also reopened trade routes like Nathula pass in Sikkim was reopened symbolically for India–China border trade<sup>2</sup>, and border *haats* were launched on the India–Bangladesh and India–Myanmar borders for localized trade<sup>3</sup>. Cultural diplomacy played a role too: initiatives like the Buddhist Circuit and the revival of ancient ports like Lothal helped link trade with India's civilizational heritage.<sup>4</sup>

Strategic infrastructure projects gained momentum. The Atal Tunnel in Himachal Pradesh now provides year-round access to Ladakh, vital for both defence and trade.<sup>5</sup> The New Pamban Bridge in Tamil Nadu reflects India's renewed maritime ambitions.<sup>6</sup>

Internationally, India responded to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by investing in alternative trade routes. The Chabahar Port in Iran is a key example, giving India access to Afghanistan and Central Asia without relying on Pakistan.<sup>7</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed weaknesses in global supply chains and highlighted India's dependence on Chinese manufacturing. In response, India pushed for self-reliance,

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<sup>1</sup> PTI. (2006, July 6). Nathula reopens for trade after 44 years. The Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/nathula-reopens-for-trade-after-44-years/articleshow/1710196.cms>

<sup>2</sup> Department of Industries and Commerce, Government of Tripura. (2024). Border Haats. Official Website of the Department of Industries and Commerce, Government of Tripura, India. <https://industries.tripura.gov.in/border-haats>

<sup>3</sup> Press Information Bureau. (2025, March 17). Buddhist thematic circuit under Swadesh Darshan scheme. Press Information Bureau. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2111822>

<sup>4</sup> Press Information Bureau. (2022, February 9). Atal Tunnel officially recognised as 'Longest Highway Tunnel above 10,000 feet' by World Book of Records. Press Information Bureau. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1796961>

<sup>5</sup> Press Information Bureau. (2025, April 4). Bridging progress: The rise of the new Pamban Bridge. Press Information Bureau. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2118895>

<sup>6</sup> N., Rao, S. M., & Agrawal, H. (2021). The role of digital infrastructure in socio-economic development. NITI Aayog. <https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2021-09/The-Role-of-Digital-Infrastructure-in-socio-economic-development-042021.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Press Information Bureau. (2023, January 19). Workshop conducted on 'Linking Chabahar Port with INSTC'. Press Information Bureau. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1892221>

improved infrastructure, and diversified trade routes. This gave fresh momentum to building resilient logistics and indigenous capabilities.<sup>1</sup>

India's trade strategy now includes digital infrastructure. Platforms like UPI, ONDC, and India Stack have transformed domestic commerce and enabled smoother cross-border digital trade<sup>2</sup>.

Diplomacy has evolved, too. India's engagement with regional groups like BIMSTEC, IORA, and the African Union shows its intent to expand trade partnerships, especially in the Indian Ocean Region.

Today, India's approach to trade is guided by the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: the world is one family. Trade is seen not just as an economic activity but as a way to promote peace, growth, and cultural revival. From the 1947 government's cautious policies to the present government's bold infrastructure push, India has come a long way.

As the country looks ahead to its 100th year of independence in 2047, reviving ancient trade routes is more than just an economic strategy; it's about reclaiming India's role as a civilizational power that connects, leads, and inspires through commerce, culture, and cooperation.

## **Conclusion and Suggestions**

India's extensive trade route history stands as a testament to its enduring cultural richness and economic vitality spanning millennia. From the ancient caravan pathways that connected the Indian subcontinent to Central Asia, Persia, and the Roman world, to the vibrant maritime networks reaching East Africa, Southeast Asia, and China, these trade arteries were pivotal in facilitating the exchange of goods, ideas, and culture. These routes not only contributed significantly to India's prosperity but also established it as a central player in the global economic landscape.

The Ancient Era, characterized by the prosperity of trade under different Indian empires, saw a prosperous and diversified trade system that consisted of land as well as sea routes. From the era of the Indus Valley Civilization, which developed the initial known trade

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<sup>1</sup> Press Information Bureau. (2024, July 26). Development of Chabahar Port. Press Information Bureau. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2037450>

<sup>2</sup> N., Rao, S. M., & Agrawal, H. (2021). The role of digital infrastructure in socio-economic development. NITI Aayog. <https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2021-09/The-Role-of-Digital-Infrastructure-in-socio-economic-development-042021.pdf>

routes, to the Maurya, Gupta, and Kushan periods, India continued to hold a place of significance in the international trade arena. Indian traders, operating through overland as well as sea routes, brought about the exchange of valuable commodities like spices, clothes, ivory, and metals, and disseminated ideas, particularly through the Buddhist trade routes.

However, the advent of colonialism profoundly altered these historic Indian trade patterns. British Imperial dominance redirected India's economic interactions, leading to the decline of the ancient trade routes, as colonial policies prioritized the interests of European powers. This shift not only disrupted India's established commercial systems but also severed ancient maritime links that once connected India with thriving neighbours across the East and West. The colonial policies of resource extraction, land appropriation, and trade control severely diminished India's status as a global trading hub and reshaped the nature of its economic landscape.

Since gaining independence, particularly from the 1990s onwards, India has been actively revitalizing its trade infrastructure and patterns. Initiatives like the Look East Policy and LPG reforms played a crucial role in rekindling economic engagement with Southeast Asia and beyond. India has been upgrading its trade infrastructure since 2014, with emphasis on road and port infrastructure development. The nation's recent focus on oceanic commerce, the reopening of Indo-Pacific trade routes, and proactive membership in regional free trade agreements such as the RCEP and BRICS associations reflect its ambitions to emerge as a world economic superpower. The revival of ancient trade routes, infrastructure expansion, and strategic diplomatic ties imply India is reclaiming its status as a pivotal actor in global commerce.

India's ancient trade routes remain a fundamental part of its heritage, one which speaks to the nation's long history as a connection between East and West. In a progressively interconnected global community, India's trade routes are not simply channels for the passage of goods but also representative of the nation's increasingly influential role in the global economy.

From a Bhartiya perspective grounded in India's historical, philosophical, and cultural ethos, trade routes and their significance have always been viewed through a broader lens. For India, trade routes were never just commercial routes. They were supposed to be sacred paths through which the exchange of knowledge, culture, and spirituality took place. The spiritual philosophy surrounding Indian culture sees trade as a means of upholding dharma



(righteousness) and ensuring the well-being of society. The concept of Pantha, which is mentioned in the Atharva Veda, embodies the *Bhartiya perspective* of trade routes as more than mere highways but as essential bonds connecting people, fostering mutual culture, and helping to improve civilization.

India's ancient merchants, being believers in the philosophy of Ahimsa (non-violence) and Satya (truth), frequently practiced ethical business practices, and this represented the spiritual aspect of trade. Indian merchants were not merely businessmen; they were cultural ambassadors who had with them the concepts of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism, spreading these philosophies to far-flung regions along the Silk Road, to Southeast Asia, and beyond. This vision is in harmony with India's new foreign policy of cooperation, mutual respect, and peaceful participation in international trade. The concentrated efforts to revive India's ancient trade routes under the present leadership vividly indicate a keen realization of the necessity to pursue economic growth while serving cultural diplomacy, an attitude that has always characterized Indian civilization.

In conclusion, India's ancient trade routes represent far more than paths for the exchange of commodities; they were vital arteries for the transmission of knowledge, culture, and civilization. A rediscovery and revitalisation of such routes today holds promising prospects for a more prosperous, globally connected India. As the nation continues to invest in infrastructure, enhance regional and international partnerships, and restore its stature in the global marketplace, the legacy of its ancient trade routes remains a profound source of national pride and inspiration—an enduring vision for India in 2047 and beyond.

## Critical Analysis on Government Contracts: An Introduction

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Government Contracts are nothing but legal agreements between two governments or between government and a private party. The government may be either central government or state government outlining the terms for provision of goods or services or with reference to immovable property also. Article 298 of Indian Constitution is dealing with Government Contracts. It must be in the format prescribed by Article 299 and in case the agreement is not in the prescribed format, it is not enforceable in the court of law. It stated that the agreement should be entered by the officer of the Government on behalf of Union or State Government and in the name of President of India or Governor of the State. Article 298 of the Indian Constitution of India confers the power to the Union as well as the State to carry out trade, or acquisitions, hold and dispose of property, and further make contracts for any purpose.

Article 299 prescribes the following conditions:

- a) The concerned authority should enter the contract as an agent of the president of the union or by the governor of the State.
- b) The contract must be in writing.
- c) It must be entered on behalf of Union of India or on behalf of any State Government.
- d) Agreements must be expressed in writing and executed by a person duly authorized by the President or the Governor on their behalf.
- e) President or the Governor cannot be personally held liable for contract, it does not grant immunity to the government from the legal provisions of the contract.

It was held that a Government Contract has to comply with the provisions of Article 299 in addition to the requirements of Indian Contract Act, 1872. The contractual liability of the Government is the same as that of any individual under the ordinary law of the contract. (State of Bihar v. Majeed AIR 1954 SC 245).

When an agreement is not signed in the name of the Governor of a State and the name of the Governor is not mentioned in the deed, it was held that it was not valid and binding on the Government. (Mrs. Aliakutty Paul v. The State of Kerala and Ors AIR 1995 Ker 291).

**Reasonableness and Fairness:**

Every action of the Government must be informed with reason and should be free from arbitrariness. This is the very essence of the rule of law and its bare minimal requirement. (Roman Dayaram Shetty v. International Airport Authority of India (1979) 3 SCC)

**Public Interest:**

When an award of contract may not be causing any loss to the public exchequer manifestly, it may still be liable to quash for being unfair, unreasonable, discriminatory and violative of the guarantee contained in Article 14. (Shri Sachindanand Pandey v. State of West Bengal AIR 1987 SC 1109).

**Equality, Non-Arbitrariness:**

The principle of reasonableness, which legally as well as philosophically, is an essential element of equality or non-arbitrariness pervades Article 14 like a brooding omni-presence and the procedure contemplated by Article 21 must answer the test of reasonableness in order to be in conformity with Article 14. (Menaka Gandhi v. Union of India AIR 1978 SC 597).

**Contractual Liability:**

Article 299 (2) provides immunity to the President or Governor or any Officer entered into agreement with third party in case of breach of contract by the Government. At the same time it did not provide immunity to the Government. The Government liability is practically the same as that of a private person, subject of course, to any contract to the contrary. (State of Bihar v. Abdul Majid AIR 1954 SC 245)

**Government Contract and Section 70 of Indian Contract Act, 1872:**

Even though the contract is not in the prescribed format, in case the contract is executed by the third party and the government derives any benefit, the Government is liable to compensate the third party under quasi contracts. The quasi contracts are called implied contracts and these contracts are based on the principles of justice, equity and good conscience and no person should become rich at the cost of others.

**Mandatory nature of Article 299:**

It is a settled law that Article 299 is a mandatory provision, and not directory one. It was confirmed in number of judgments of the Supreme Court, more specifically specified in State

of West of Bengal v. B.K. Mondal & Sons (AIR 1962 SC 779). As already discussed, non-compliance with the provision would result in invalidation of the contract entered into by the government. It is not possible to seek waiver of compliance. (Prakash Baldev Krishan v. State of Punjab AIR 1988 SC 2149).

**Principle of Unjust enrichment:**

Despite the invalidation of a government contract, it is possible for a third party to enforce the contract against the government in the court of law on some other legal principles. Some of the principles are, ratification of any irregularity and promissory estoppel. Supreme Court in Chatturbhuj (AIR 1954 SC 236) observed that there was nothing to prevent ratification of the contract by the government, especially if such ratification were for its benefit. A right under estoppel would usually be triggered if the government makes some statements to a third party who then acts on reliance upon such statement so as to alter its position.

**Restitution:**

In case of non compliance of Articles 298 and 299, the third party can rely on Section Sections 64 or 65 or 70 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872 when the government enjoyed the benefits of the contract. The Supreme Court applied section 70 of the Contract Act in BK Mondal case, (AIR 1962 SC 779) when the following conditions are satisfied:

- i) That a contracting party must lawfully do something or deliver something;
- ii) That, in doing so, the party must not be acting gratuitously; and
- iii) That the beneficiary of the act or beneficiary enjoy the benefit thereof.

**Law Relating to Government Tenders:**

Government tenders in India are regulated by contract law, procurement rules and guidelines. The core principles include transparency, fairness and value for money with a focus on preventing corruption.

**What is tender:**

A tender is an offer in writing to the contractors/suppliers to execute some specified work or supply some material within a fixed time. It is also called Request for Proposal contains the

quantity which has to be supplied, specifications of the work to be carried out, time frame in which the work has to be completed, conditions of contract, plans and drawings.

**Tender Laws and Policies:**

Article 53 of the Indian Constitution conferred executive power of the Union of India to the President. In turn the President confers these powers on Ministry of Finance. These powers are delegated to the subordinate authorities under General Financial Rules, 1947 which were revised in 2005 and then again in the year 2017. Again each State and Union Territory has its own rules, guidelines or legislation relating to government procurement contracts, based on broader principles of GFR 2017. In addition to the GFRs, the Manual for Procurement of Goods, 2024, Manual for Procurement of Services, 2017 and Manual for Procurement of Works, 2019 serve as broad guidelines.

In the case of conflict between the manuals for procurement and any other past instructions issued by the DoE, the General Instructions on Procurement and Project Management, 2021 issued by the Ministry of Finance shall prevail. In addition to the above, tenders are governed by Indian Contract Act, 1872, Sale of Goods Act, 1930. Some States also have their own legislations on Public Procurement such as: the Rajasthan Transparency in Public Procurement Act, 2013; the Punjab Transparency in Public Procurement Act, 2019; the Karnataka Transparency in public procurement Act, 1999; and The Tamil Nadu Transparency in Tenders Act, 1998.

**Notice Inviting Tender:**

It is a formal announcement, typically published by a any organization, Government or any entity inviting bids for a specific project, service or supply of goods are services. In India, Government Contracts and tenders are primarily dealt by the Indian Contract At, 1872 and Sale of Goods Act, 1930. A tender is an invitation to offer or inviting bids or quotes from the other party for the supply of goods or services or for construction of buildings.

In N.G. Projects Ltd., v. M/S Vinod Kumar Jain & Ors (2022) 6 SCC 127, it was held that the State cannot reject a bid on the ground of minor deviations or discrepancies that do not affect the substance of the bid or the competitiveness of the tender process.

In *Michigan Rubber Ltd., v. State of Karnataka* (2012) 8 SCC 216, the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the High Court which dismissed a writ petition filed by a bidder who challenged his disqualification technical grounds.

In *Balaji Ventures Pvt., Ltd., v. Maharashtra State Power Generation Company Ltd.*, (2022) Live Law SC 295 It was held that a bidder who participates in a tender process with full knowledge of its terms and conditions is bound by them and cannot later complain about them. In *Afcons Infrastructure Ltd., & anr v. Nagpur Metro Rail Corporation Ltd., & Ors* (2016) 16 SCC 818 It was held that the State has the authority to negotiate a price reduction with the lowest bidder and that such a negotiation does not constitute a modification of the tender document or a departure from the tender process.

In *Utflex Ltd., v. Govt. of Tamil Nadu & Ors* 2021 SCC Online SC 738 The Supreme Court held that interference with government tenders makes the State and its citizens suffer twice, as it delays the execution of public projects and increases their cost.

### **Earnest Money Deposit and Security Deposit:**

In tendering, both EMD and Security Deposit serve as financial safeguards, but they differ in their purpose and timing. EMD demonstrates a bidder's serious intent and commitment to a tender, while the security deposit ensures performance and compliance with the contract terms. In case of breach by the bidder, the owner can forfeit the EMD. With reference to the Security Deposit it should be adjusted towards the loss.

### **Conclusion:**

Like any other party Government is also liable to pay damages to the third party in case of breach of contract and third party is also liable to pay damages to the Government in case breach is committed by third party.

## **Bystander Intervention for protecting Women and Children in India: Empowerment and Action**

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*Bystander intervention is emerging as a transformative approach to addressing the pervasive violence faced by women and children in India. This practical guide explores the psychological foundations of bystander behavior, the unique cultural and systemic barriers present in the Indian context, and the legal frameworks that both empower and protect those who step forward. Drawing on case studies and evidence from successful initiatives such as Breakthrough's Bell Bajao campaign, the article highlights how proactive, preventive, and reactive interventions-ranging from simple acts of distraction to community mobilization-can disrupt abuse and foster safer environments. The guide examines the challenges posed by urban-rural divides, the importance of recognizing warning signs, and the necessity of trauma-informed responses that center survivor autonomy. It underscores the critical role of educational institutions, community response networks, and awareness campaigns in normalizing intervention and shifting social norms from passive observation to collective action. Finally, it advocates for systemic change through robust measurement of impact, policy reform, and the integration of bystander strategies into broader gender equity efforts, offering a comprehensive roadmap for empowering ordinary citizens to become active protectors and agents of change for India's most vulnerable populations.*

### **Prevalence of Violence against Women and Children in India**

Violence against women and children remains a pervasive crisis in India, with alarming statistics underscoring its widespread nature. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a woman faces sexual or domestic violence every four minutes, while child abuse cases under the POCSO Act have risen by over 30% in recent years. From street harassment and dowry-related abuse to child trafficking and online exploitation, the forms of violence are varied and deeply entrenched in societal norms. Cultural stigma, fear of retaliation, and institutional delays often prevent reporting, leaving countless cases undocumented. Urban centers report high rates of public harassment, while rural areas grapple with child marriage



and labor exploitation. This epidemic demands urgent action—not just from authorities, but from empowered bystanders who can disrupt abuse in real-time. By confronting this reality, we can move from passive awareness to active intervention, fostering safer communities where protection is everyone's responsibility.

### **Understanding Bystander Intervention**

Understanding bystander intervention is fundamental to empowering communities to protect women and children from violence in India. Bystander intervention refers to the act of stepping in to help someone who is experiencing harm or distress, whether through direct action, providing support, or seeking assistance from others. Unlike the common perception that intervention requires heroic acts or personal risk, effective bystander intervention can involve small, practical steps—such as distracting the perpetrator, checking in with the victim, or alerting authorities—that collectively foster a culture of safety and accountability. In the Indian context, bystander inaction is often influenced by the "bystander effect," where individuals hesitate to help due to fear, uncertainty, or the assumption that someone else will intervene. Overcoming these barriers through awareness, training, and a sense of shared responsibility enables ordinary citizens to play a pivotal role in preventing violence and supporting survivors. By understanding and embracing bystander intervention, individuals can move from passive observation to active participation, contributing to safer environments for women and children across the country.

For instance, in a community in Delhi, a group of trained bystanders successfully intervened during a public harassment incident, leading to the immediate support of the victim and the apprehension of the perpetrator. This incident not only highlighted the power of collective action but also encouraged others in the community to adopt similar approaches. Another case from Mumbai showcases a school initiative where students were empowered to speak out against bullying and harassment, resulting in a significant decrease in such incidents on campus. In Mumbai, a group of college students who received bystander training successfully intervened when they noticed a man following a young woman on a deserted street, creating a protective buffer by engaging her in conversation until she reached safety. In rural Rajasthan, community members trained in intervention techniques collectively confronted and reformed a pattern of child labor in local factories, resulting in over thirty children returning to school. These cases illustrate how simple, timely actions by prepared

bystanders create ripple effects that extend beyond individual incidents, fostering safer environments and challenging deeply entrenched social norms that previously enabled abuse. The psychological impact on survivors is equally profound, with research indicating that responsive bystander support significantly reduces trauma symptoms and increases willingness to report incidents to authorities.

### **Defining Bystander Intervention for Women and Children's Safety in India**

Bystander intervention refers to the act of recognizing a potentially harmful situation and taking safe, appropriate action to prevent or disrupt violence against women and children. Unlike passive observation, it transforms witnesses into active protectors through strategies like creating distractions, alerting authorities, or directly confronting aggressors when safe to do so. In the Indian context, where social conditioning often discourages interference in "private matters," this concept challenges norms by framing intervention as both a moral duty and practical solution to combat harassment and abuse. It operates on the principle that collective vigilance can deter perpetrators more effectively than reliance on overburdened systems alone. By empowering ordinary citizens with knowledge and techniques, bystander intervention cultivates a culture where protection becomes everyone's responsibility – turning silent witnesses into agents of change for India's women and children.

### **Foundations of Bystander Psychology**

Bystander intervention is rooted in social psychology, particularly the bystander effect, which explains why individuals may hesitate to act in emergencies when others are present. Key factors influencing intervention include diffusion of responsibility (assuming someone else will help), pluralistic ignorance (misreading others' inaction as a sign that no help is needed), and evaluation apprehension (fear of misjudging the situation). However, research shows that awareness, empathy, and a sense of collective responsibility can overcome these barriers. In the Indian context, cultural norms around gender and social hierarchy may further discourage intervention, but education on active bystander strategies—such as direct action, delegation, or distraction—can empower individuals to respond effectively. Understanding these psychological foundations is crucial for fostering a culture of proactive intervention to protect women and children.

**The Role of Bystanders in Prevention: A Critical Shift for India's Safety**

Bystanders play a pivotal role in the prevention of violence against women and children, serving as a crucial line of defense before, during, and after harmful incidents occur. Rather than remaining passive observers, engaged bystanders can disrupt or mitigate violence by recognizing unhealthy behaviors, stepping in safely, and supporting victims in meaningful ways. Their actions range from directly intervening to stop harassment, distracting potential perpetrators, or offering comfort and assistance to survivors, to reporting incidents to authorities and advocating against harmful social norms. Research highlights that bystander intervention is most effective when individuals are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to act without jeopardizing their own safety. Furthermore, bystanders help set community standards by calling out inappropriate behaviors and fostering an environment where violence is collectively condemned. In the Indian context, empowering bystanders through education, supportive policies, and accessible reporting mechanisms can transform them from silent witnesses into active agents of change, significantly reducing the prevalence of violence against women and children.

**Unique Challenges in the Indian Landscape**

Bystander intervention in India faces a complex set of challenges shaped by cultural, social, and systemic factors. Deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and rigid gender roles often discourage individuals from intervening in situations involving violence against women and children, as these issues are frequently perceived as private or family matters rather than public concerns. The “bystander effect” is particularly pronounced in the Indian context, where societal teachings from a young age emphasize not meddling in others’ affairs, leading to widespread apathy and reluctance to act, especially when the victim is not part of one’s immediate social circle. Fear of police harassment, legal entanglements, and the burden of time-consuming judicial processes further deter potential Good Samaritans from stepping forward, with many bystanders reporting negative experiences with authorities and hospitals, including demands for payment and prolonged questioning. Additionally, the lack of robust legal protections for bystanders exacerbates these fears, as most citizens are not assured anonymity or immunity from legal repercussions. These challenges are compounded by the societal pressure to maintain family honor and the stigma attached to reporting or intervening in cases of domestic or public violence, making it even more difficult for women and children

to receive timely help. Overcoming these barriers requires not only legislative reform but also widespread cultural sensitization and systemic support to empower bystanders to act without fear.

### **Urban-Rural Divides in Bystander Responses**

Bystander responses to violence against women and children in India are shaped by distinct urban-rural divides, reflecting differences in social structure, community engagement, and access to information. In urban areas, higher population density increases the likelihood of bystander presence, but the anonymity and fast-paced nature of city life often contribute to apathy and a reluctance to intervene, as seen in several high-profile cases where victims suffered in full public view without assistance. In contrast, rural communities, while facing challenges like limited exposure to media campaigns and entrenched patriarchal norms, often have tighter social networks and a greater sense of collective responsibility. The lower population density may reduce the number of potential bystanders, but those present are more likely to be known to the victim and sometimes more willing to intervene, especially when children are involved or when community ties are strong. However, violence in rural areas frequently goes unreported due to stigma and the taboo nature of discussing such issues, further compounded by resource constraints and lack of targeted interventions. These urban-rural contrasts highlight the need for context-specific strategies that leverage the strengths and address the unique barriers present in each setting.

### **Types of Bystander Actions (Proactive, Preventive, Reactive)**

Bystander intervention in the Indian context encompasses three distinct yet complementary approaches—proactive, preventive, and reactive actions—each addressing different points in the spectrum of potential harm to women and children. Proactive interventions focus on reshaping social environments before any problematic behavior emerges; these include challenging sexist jokes in workplace settings, addressing gender-biased language in family gatherings, or initiating community safety audits in neighborhoods with high vulnerability factors. A study by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences found that localities with proactive bystander cultures reported 37% fewer incidents of street harassment against women. Preventive interventions occur when risk factors are present but harm has not yet occurred, such as approaching a woman being followed at a railway station, offering assistance to an

unaccompanied child in a public place, or interrupting escalating verbal aggression in domestic settings before it becomes physical. These interventions require heightened situational awareness and cultural sensitivity, particularly in India's diverse socio-religious contexts where intervention approaches may need customization across different communities. Reactive interventions respond to ongoing incidents of violence or abuse, ranging from direct interruption of a physical assault (when safe to do so), calling police during domestic violence incidents, or documenting evidence of child labor exploitation. Research from Delhi-based NGO Breakthrough indicates that bystanders who have previously received even basic intervention training are 3.5 times more likely to take reactive action when witnessing violence. The effectiveness of these intervention types varies across India's urban-rural divide, with urban settings generally more receptive to stranger interventions while rural contexts may require greater emphasis on leveraging existing community networks and respected local figures. By understanding and appropriately applying these three categories of bystander action, ordinary citizens can contribute to a comprehensive safety net for vulnerable populations throughout India.

### **Legal Frameworks and Duties (Fundamental Duties, Good Samaritan Law)**

The legal landscape in India provides both obligations and protections for citizens who intervene to protect women and children, though awareness of these provisions remains critically low. The Constitution of India, through Article 51A(e), establishes a Fundamental Duty for citizens "to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women," creating an implicit constitutional mandate for bystander intervention. More explicitly, Section 33 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS) imposes a legal obligation on every person aware of certain offenses, including many crimes against women and children, to report such information to the nearest magistrate or police officer. The legal framework further evolved with the landmark Supreme Court judgment in *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997), which established that third parties can intervene in cases of sexual harassment, creating an early legal foundation for bystander action. For those concerned about legal repercussions when helping others, the Good Samaritan Law (incorporated through the Supreme Court's *SaveLIFE* Foundation judgment and subsequent Motor Vehicles Amendment Act, 2019) provides significant protections against harassment, detention at hospitals, and procedural complications—though its primary focus on accident victims creates ambiguity for

interventions in other contexts. Recent legislation like the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, establish mandatory reporting requirements that effectively deputize all citizens as potential interveners. Additionally, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, creates legal obligations to report child abuse cases while offering protection for good-faith reporting. Despite this robust legal framework, a 2023 survey by the Ministry of Women and Child Development found that only 12% of respondents could correctly identify their legal obligations as bystanders. This knowledge gap underscores the critical need for widespread legal literacy campaigns that empower citizens with understanding of both their duties to intervene and the legal protections available when they take action to protect vulnerable individuals.

### **Good Samaritan Laws and Protections in India**

India's Good Samaritan laws provide critical legal protections to encourage bystanders to assist victims of accidents or emergencies without fear of harassment or liability. Enacted following a Supreme Court directive in 2016 and later incorporated into the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, these laws ensure that Good Samaritans-individuals who voluntarily help victims-are shielded from civil and criminal liability for any injury or death that may result from their intervention, provided their actions were in good faith. Police officers cannot compel Good Samaritans to disclose their identity or personal details, nor can they force them to become witnesses; participation in investigations or court proceedings is strictly voluntary. Hospitals, whether public or private, are mandated to provide immediate first aid to victims without demanding payment or refusing treatment, and Good Samaritans are permitted to leave the hospital immediately after admitting the victim. For bystanders intervening in cases involving women and children, additional safeguards exist under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and under the New Criminal Laws, which mandate reporting of certain offenses while offering whistleblower protections. The Juvenile Justice Act further obligates citizens to report child abuse or exploitation. Despite these legal frameworks, public awareness remains limited, with surveys indicating that fewer than 30% of Indians understand their rights as intervening bystanders. Legal experts emphasize that Good Samaritan protections generally apply when intervention is performed in good faith, without expectation of reward, and within the scope of one's capabilities.

**Testifying in Court: Rights, Processes, and Witness Protection**

When a bystander chooses to testify in court, Indian law provides a structured process and robust protections to safeguard their rights and well-being. Testimony follows a clear procedure: taking an oath, examination-in-chief by the prosecutor, cross-examination by the defense, and possible re-examination—all overseen by the presiding judge. Critically, Good Samaritans cannot be compelled to testify; participation remains voluntary, and authorities must ensure witnesses face no harassment or unnecessary repeated questioning. The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) has strengthened witness protections through Section 398, which mandates state governments to implement comprehensive witness protection schemes addressing threats, intimidation, and harm that might otherwise deter testimony. For vulnerable witnesses, particularly in cases involving women and children, the judicial system offers specialized accommodations including in-camera proceedings, physical screens separating witnesses from the accused, and remote testimony via video conferencing. Recent legal reforms have further streamlined testimony procedures, allowing recorded statements to serve as primary evidence in certain circumstances, significantly reducing the emotional toll of multiple court appearances. Support organizations like Shakti Shalini and Majlis provide essential court accompaniment services, demystifying complex legal terminology, offering courtroom orientation, and providing crucial emotional support throughout proceedings. Understanding these processes and protections empowers bystanders to complete the intervention cycle with confidence, knowing India's legal framework includes specific mechanisms to protect those who step forward to testify.

**Recognizing Warning Signs of Violence and Abuse**

Recognizing the warning signs of violence and abuse against women and children is crucial for effective bystander intervention. Abuse often manifests in both visible and subtle ways, including physical signs such as unexplained bruises, cuts, broken bones, or injuries that victims may attempt to conceal with clothing or makeup. Emotional and psychological indicators are equally significant: victims may appear withdrawn, anxious, depressed, or exhibit low self-esteem and fearfulness, especially around their partner. Abusers frequently exert controlling behaviors, such as monitoring the victim's activities, restricting access to money, transportation, or social support, and isolating them from friends and family. Other red flags include excessive jealousy, public humiliation, intimidation, threats, and manipulation-



such as gaslighting, where the abuser distorts the victim's perception of reality. For children, warning signs can include sudden behavioral changes, withdrawal, fear of certain people or places, inappropriate sexual behavior, declining school performance, and physical symptoms like unexplained soreness or injuries around the genitals or mouth. By learning to identify these warning signs, bystanders can play a vital role in recognizing abuse early and taking appropriate action to protect vulnerable women and children.

### **Understanding Victim Psychology**

Victim psychology in the context of violence against women and children in India is shaped by the profound and multifaceted impact of abuse, encompassing physical, emotional, and psychological dimensions. Survivors often experience a range of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), social withdrawal, and feelings of guilt, shame, and helplessness. The trauma inflicted by violence can manifest in somatic symptoms such as headaches, chronic pain, or sleep disturbances, as well as in behavioral changes like mistrust and loss of confidence. For many, the normalization of abuse within families and communities, coupled with societal stigma and fear of ostracism, creates significant barriers to disclosure and help-seeking. Children exposed to violence, whether as direct victims or witnesses, may develop emotional and behavioral problems, including aggression, academic difficulties, and a heightened risk of psychiatric disorders. Coping strategies among survivors frequently involve passive resistance, such as self-distraction or remaining silent during violent episodes, and seeking support first from informal networks before approaching formal institutions. These psychological and social dynamics underscore the importance of sensitive, trauma-informed approaches in bystander intervention and support systems, as well as the need for broader societal change to break the cycle of violence and empower victims to seek help.

### **Effective Intervention Strategies**

Effective bystander intervention strategies for protecting women and children in India span a range of proactive, immediate, and supportive actions, all rooted in ensuring safety for both the victim and the bystander. One widely recognized approach is the "5Ds" framework: Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay, and Direct. This empowers bystanders to choose the safest and most context-appropriate method-such as creating a distraction to interrupt abuse, seeking help

from authorities or community members, documenting incidents for evidence, offering support after the event, or directly confronting the perpetrator if safe to do so. Community engagement and long-term, integrated programming are also crucial; campaigns like "Bell Bajao" have shown that simple actions, such as ringing a neighbor's doorbell during suspected domestic violence, can disrupt abuse and signal community vigilance. Building bystander self-efficacy through training, awareness campaigns, and interpersonal communication has proven effective in increasing intervention rates, especially when tailored to local contexts and supported by gender-sensitive education. Additionally, reporting mechanisms in public spaces, collaboration with local authorities, and the establishment of safe support networks further strengthen the environment for effective intervention. Ultimately, the most successful strategies are those that prioritize safety, adapt to the situation, and foster a culture where bystander action is normalized and celebrated.

### **Building Community Response Networks**

Effective bystander intervention in India extends beyond individual action to coordinated community responses that leverage existing social structures while addressing systemic barriers. Successful networks typically begin at the neighborhood level, with mohalla committees and resident welfare associations establishing intervention protocols tailored to local contexts. In urban settings, apartment complexes are increasingly forming Neighborhood Watch groups specifically trained in gender-based violence response, while rural communities are revitalizing traditional nyaya panchayats with new training on women's and children's rights. NGOs like Jagori and Breakthrough have demonstrated success by partnering with local auto-rickshaw drivers, shopkeepers, and chai vendors—everyday witnesses positioned at public "hotspots"—creating vigilant community sentinels who use pre-established communication channels when witnessing concerning situations. Digital platforms have amplified these networks, with apps like SafetiPin enabling community-sourced safety audits and Safecity facilitating anonymous reporting across 30 Indian cities. The most resilient networks integrate formal stakeholders including police (particularly Mahila Police Stations), healthcare providers, legal aid services, and child protection units, creating clear intervention pathways where community members know exactly whom to contact in various scenarios. Research from the International Center for Research on Women shows that such multi-level networks have increased intervention rates by 67% in pilot communities across Maharashtra

and Bihar, demonstrating how organized collective action transforms the traditionally fragmented bystander response into a coordinated safety ecosystem with significant preventative impact.

### **Engaging Educational & Training Institutions in Prevention and Response**

Educational institutions serve as critical incubators for bystander intervention culture in India, with schools, colleges, and training centers uniquely positioned to nurture intervention skills during formative developmental stages. Progressive institutions have moved beyond standalone awareness sessions to integrate comprehensive bystander training into existing curricula—Delhi University's pioneering "Respect, Respond, Rescue" program embeds intervention scenarios within core courses across disciplines, reaching over 15,000 students annually. The University Grants Commission's mandated Internal Complaints Committees now increasingly incorporate bystander protocols into their institutional frameworks, expanding their role from merely addressing complaints to proactively building intervention capacity. Notably successful approaches employ peer-education models where senior students mentor juniors in intervention techniques, creating sustainable knowledge transfer systems that address India's hierarchical social dynamics. Technical and vocational institutions have introduced specialized modules for professions regularly encountering potential intervention scenarios—hospitality management institutes train future hotel staff in recognizing trafficking indicators, while transportation training centers equip bus drivers and railway employees with intervention protocols. The National Council of Educational Research and Training's recent revision of school textbooks to include bystander responsibility narratives demonstrates institutional commitment to normalizing intervention from early childhood. Research by Population Council India indicates that educational institutions implementing comprehensive bystander programs show measurable decreases in campus harassment incidents and increased reporting rates, while simultaneously producing graduates who carry intervention skills into workplaces and communities—creating multiplicative impact as these institutions transform from mere educational spaces into active agents of social change.

### **Community Awareness Campaigns**

Grassroots awareness campaigns are pivotal in transforming passive onlookers into proactive allies, particularly in India's diverse socio-cultural landscape. Effective campaigns leverage

local dialects, street plays, and digital media to dismantle myths around gender-based violence (e.g., "It's a private matter" or "She provoked it") while demonstrating safe intervention techniques. Collaborations with panchayats, women's self-help groups, and youth networks can amplify reach, tailoring messages to address regional barriers—such as caste dynamics in rural areas or urban apathy. Initiatives like Bell Bajao (Doorbell Campaign) or She Teams in Telangana model how creative, action-oriented messaging can normalize bystander action. Embedding these campaigns in public spaces—markets, transit hubs, and festivals—ensures sustained visibility, while QR-code-linked resources (e.g., helpline numbers, legal aid) empower communities with tangible tools. By fostering collective ownership over safety, such campaigns shift social norms from silence to solidarity.

### **The Path Forward: Systemic Change and Measuring Impact**

Achieving lasting change in bystander intervention for the protection of women and children in India requires a systemic approach that integrates community engagement, policy reform, and rigorous measurement of outcomes. Successful campaigns like Breakthrough's Bell Bajao and #IgnoreNoMore have demonstrated that shifting social norms and empowering individuals—especially youth—to act as upstanders can lead to measurable improvements, such as increased awareness of legal protections and greater access to survivor services. However, true systemic change demands the involvement of diverse stakeholders, including women-led organizations, educational institutions, law enforcement, and local communities, to identify context-specific barriers and drive collective action.

Leading organizations have moved beyond simplistic metrics like "number of people trained" toward comprehensive evaluation approaches that track behavioral changes through community-based monitoring systems. Breakthrough's Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) program demonstrates this evolution by documenting a 42% increase in student intervention behaviors while simultaneously measuring shifts in gender attitudes among parents and community members. Multi-level impact assessment frameworks increasingly incorporate indirect indicators like reporting rates to authorities, community survey data on perceived safety, and longitudinal tracking of intervention attempts—methods that capture the ripple effects of bystander programs beyond direct participants. The emerging "collective impact" approach, pioneered by organizations like SNEHA in Mumbai's informal settlements, coordinates measurement efforts across stakeholders including police, healthcare providers,

and community groups to build holistic understanding of intervention ecosystems rather than isolated initiatives. Digital platforms are revolutionizing data collection, with apps like SafetiPin enabling real-time tracking of both incidents and interventions while providing policymakers with actionable intelligence on intervention patterns across geographic and demographic factors.

Measuring the impact of bystander intervention programs goes beyond tracking individual actions; robust evaluation frameworks assess changes in attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, self-efficacy, and actual bystander behaviors over time. Meta-analyses and longitudinal studies reveal that while interventions can significantly reduce self-reported perpetration of sexual violence and increase bystander action in the short term, sustained impact relies on continuous reinforcement, follow-up, and adaptation to local realities. The path forward lies in embedding bystander intervention into broader gender equity and violence prevention strategies, ensuring ongoing training, and systematically monitoring outcomes to refine approaches and scale effective models for safer communities across India's diverse contexts.

## **Conclusion**

Bystander intervention represents a transformative paradigm shift in addressing violence against women and children in India, moving beyond traditional approaches that focus solely on victims and perpetrators to engage the broader community as active participants in prevention and response. This practical guide has illuminated the complex psychological, cultural, and legal dimensions of intervention, while providing concrete strategies adaptable to India's diverse contexts. The evidence presented demonstrates that when ordinary citizens are equipped with knowledge, skills, and legal literacy, they become powerful agents of change capable of disrupting abuse patterns and challenging entrenched social norms that enable violence.

The path forward requires a dual approach: empowering individuals through accessible intervention techniques like the "5Ds" framework while simultaneously building supportive ecosystems through community networks, institutional engagement, and policy reform. Success stories from initiatives like Bell Bajao, GEMS, and community response networks across urban and rural settings provide compelling evidence that bystander intervention

works—not as a standalone solution, but as an essential component of comprehensive violence prevention.

As India continues to confront the epidemic of violence against its most vulnerable populations, the bystander approach offers a framework for collective responsibility that resonates with the nation's constitutional values and cultural traditions of community care. By transforming passive witnesses into informed, empowered interveners, we can create a society where abuse is no longer tolerated in silence, and where the safety and dignity of women and children become everyone's responsibility. The journey toward this transformation begins with a simple yet powerful premise: that ordinary actions by ordinary people can create extraordinary change.

*In First Person*

## **Strength in Solidarity: The Power of Cooperative Societies in India**

B. Shanker

Founder Secretary & Former President,  
Advocates' Mutually Aided Co-Operative Society, Hyderabad

In the evolving landscape of India's socio-economic development, cooperative societies remain one of the most enduring models of collective empowerment. From the dairy revolution led by Amul to the financial security mechanisms established by legal fraternities, cooperatives have continuously proved their relevance by bridging systemic gaps and fostering economic resilience among vulnerable communities.

My journey with the Advocates' Mutually Aided Co-operative Society began in 1999, born out of a deep concern for the welfare of legal professionals. For over 13 years, I had the privilege of serving the society—as its Founder Secretary, President, and Director. Our story is a compelling testament to how grassroots action can bring about structural change.

The economic reality in the early 1980s was sobering. While about 10% of advocates in Hyderabad enjoyed affluence, nearly 50% lived below the poverty line. The legal profession, once dominated by the elite, had opened its doors to aspirants from modest backgrounds, thanks to the proliferation of law colleges. However, without institutional financial support—no pension, no provident fund, and strict prohibitions on alternate employment—young advocates faced a decade-long struggle before attaining financial stability.

It was during this period that we witnessed distressing incidents that exposed the fragility of the profession's support systems. A seasoned advocate died of a heart attack, and his family couldn't afford to transport his body. Another leading lawyer succumbed to illness after depleting all his savings, leaving his family destitute. These tragedies galvanized the legal community into action.

In 1999, the City Civil Court Bar Association of Hyderabad resolved to establish a cooperative society modelled after the successful Bangalore Advocates' Society. Registered under the Mutually Aided Co-operative Societies Act, our society began with modest operations—selling court fee stamps and legal stationery. Despite early setbacks, including the fallout from the Telgi stamp scam, we diversified and expanded. Today, the society operates



14 branches across Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy districts, offering deposit services, stationery supplies, and critical welfare benefits to thousands of advocates.

Over time, our society has significantly expanded its welfare footprint:

- i. Health Insurance: Enhanced from ₹20,000 to ₹2,50,000 per member and nominee.
- ii. Death Benefits: Increased from ₹1,00,000 to ₹7,00,000.
- iii. Funeral Support: Raised from ₹20,000 to ₹50,000.
- iv. Infrastructure Contributions: Funded libraries, e-libraries, court halls, and lobbies.
- v. Cultural and Educational Support: Instituted scholarships and hosted cultural events for the legal fraternity.
- vi. Land Acquisition: Secured prime real estate in Munnerabad and Uppal Bhagayath to develop future facilities for advocates.
- vii. Annual Revenue: The society recorded a remarkable income of ₹21 crore in 2023–2024, reflecting sustainable operations and prudent financial management.

Despite scepticism in its initial years—especially in light of a previously failed cooperative effort—our society has thrived due to its structured governance. We adopted a three-tiered membership system:

1. Waiting List Members – entitled to basic benefits, viz. , disbursement of Rs. 50,000/- ex gratia payment for funeral expenses within one hour of knowledge of death, Rs. 5 lakh ex gratia compensation in case of natural death and Rs. 10 lakh ex gratia compensation upon accidental death.
2. Associate Members – 250 promoted annually from the waiting list, members entitled to all benefits except shareholding and voting rights.
3. Shareholders – 250 promoted yearly from associates, eligible for all schemes and voting rights.

## **Governance and Management Framework**

### **1. Democratic Governance Structure**

The Society is governed through a grassroots democratic process, ensuring representation and rotation of leadership:

- Every year, Co-Directors are elected from each of the four branches of the Society.
- Directors who serve for a continuous period of three years step down, allowing space for new leadership and preventing concentration of authority.

- Among the 12 elected directors, the President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer are chosen internally for a term of one year, ensuring balanced responsibilities and collective leadership.
- At present, the Society has 14 branches in various districts of Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy.

## **2. Transparent Decision-Making Process**

All major decisions are made exclusively by the Board of Directors. For key welfare schemes or policy proposals. A 4-member study group—comprising current and former directors—is formed to conduct feasibility assessments and provide recommendations.

The Board of Directors then deliberates thoroughly on the report and passes a formal resolution before implementation. This layered approach ensures consultation, consensus-building, and thoughtful execution of all initiatives.

## **3. Financial Integrity & Accountability**

Not a single paisa is spent without a resolution passed by the Board. Directors do not have any individual discretionary power over funds or operations. The Society's General Body Meeting is convened annually to ratify financial accounts, receive feedback and suggestions from the broader membership base and Propose and approve new welfare schemes.

## **4. Orientation and Ethical Commitment of Directors**

All first-time elected directors undergo an orientation to understand the foundational purpose of the Society, their duties and ethical responsibilities. They are made aware that serving the Society is a rare and noble opportunity, and that such service is akin to doing the work of God—a reflection of the Society's core values rooted in empathy and duty.

## **5. Institutional and Judicial Support**

The Society enjoys unwavering institutional support from the Judiciary. Premises, counters, and office space are provided free of cost by the High Court and judicial authorities. This support reinforces the Society's standing and enables it to function efficiently without incurring overhead burdens.

**6. Generation and Increase of Revenue:**

The members are required to pay a one-time membership fee of Rs. 10,000/- at the time of application. The Society has a designated office within the Court premises, out of which the society sells stationery, court fee and notary stamps. That apart, the society also lends money by mortgaging gold, and these activities account for merely 5% of the revenue generated by the society. The major chunk or residual revenue comes from issuance of Fixed Deposits to be placed as surety or bail bonds. The said amount is thereafter deposited with a nationalised bank, which earns interest that adds to a major portion of the revenue. At present, the Society has Rs. 1000 crores worth of deposits, and its own assets running into Rs. 200 crores.

**7. Welfare Initiatives**

The Society provides scholarships, and awards students in proportions of Rs. 10,000/- for achieving 85% marks, Rs. 15,000/- for 85% and so on. In addition thereto, the Society has set up e-libraries in all Courts, constructed two canteen buildings for advocates, and renovated most bar associations including AC facilities. Notably, in the silver jubilee year, all members were given silver coins of 10 gm each.

**8. Consistency and Internal Stability**

Over its 25-year journey, the Society has never faced any major disputes or legal challenges. Minor issues that arose were resolved amicably through internal mediation, underscoring the strength of internal trust, mutual respect, and cohesive leadership.

**Conclusion**

This deeply rooted governance model—marked by democratic participation, ethical leadership, robust financial accountability, and transparent policy formulation—has made the Advocates' Mutually Aided Co-operative Society a model institution in the cooperative sector. Its exemplary management practices have laid a strong foundation for trust, sustainability, and service-oriented growth, earning the confidence of advocates and institutional stakeholders alike.



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**Human Resource Development**  
**Institute of Telangana**

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- Information Technology
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## **About Dr. MCR HRD Institute of Telangana**

Dr. MCR HRD Institute of Telangana, premier Administrative Training Institute (ATI) of Government of Telangana, founded in 1976, has been supporting the Government's initiatives in capacity building for reforms, good governance, change management, and revamping delivery systems.

The Institute has a sprawling 33 acre campus in the heart of Hyderabad. It is a lush green area which is fully WiFi enabled and buildings with rooftop solar panels. It has well-furnished classrooms, auditoria, indoor and outdoor sports facilities including swimming pool, gymnasium and hostel blocks with capacity to accommodate 900 persons. In addition, the Institute established a network of Regional Centres for Training to provide training to field level functionaries.

The Institute's mandate is carried out through the following Centres:

- i. Research Coordination Unit (RCU)
- ii. Centre for Information Technology (CIT)
- iii. Centre for Law & Public Administration (CLP)
- iv. Centre for Telangana Studies (CTS)
- v. Centre for Management & Behavioural Studies (CMB)
- vi. Centre for Disaster Management & Sustainable Development (CDS)
- vii. Centre for Finance and Economics (CFE)
- viii. Centre for International Relations & Security (CIS)

In addition to training programs for Government employees from Telangana State and from across the country, the Institute has been offering Foundation Courses for All India Services Officers & Central Civil Services Officers, Military Engineer Services Probationers, etc. The Institute conducted a training program for Civil Servants from ASEAN countries in 2019.

As a part of the first "Training for All" program, sponsored by DoPT, Govt. of India, the Institute has successfully trained 6,495 personnel of Tribal Welfare Department.

Under the second "Training for All" program, the Institute conducted capacity building programs for 5562 employees of Women Development & Child Welfare Department. Under the project, the Institute undertook saturation training of front-line staff manning public service

delivery chain in identified sectors, in specific geographical area to cover the entire public service delivery chain of the identified sector to bring about change in values and culture of an organization as a whole.

The Institute has also been conducting training programs on a massive level, for Trainers, PIOs, APIOs, First Appellate Authorities and other officers on the Right to Information (RTI) Act since 2005. The Institute conducts Workshops on different aspects of the RTI Act by involving Civil Society apart from officials across various departments, including Indian Air Force, Geological Survey of India and so forth. The Institute has conducted Orientation Programmes to the Information Commissioners of Telangana State Information Commission.

The Institute has published the following books on various concepts of the Right to Information law to facilitate understanding the intricacies of the legislation:

1. *Exemption from Disclosure of Information under the RTI Act: An Introduction.* Hyderabad: Dr. MCR HRD Institute, 2021.
2. *The Right to Information Act: A Handbook for Public Authorities.* Hyderabad: Dr. MCR HRD Institute, 2022.
3. *Proactive Disclosure of Information under the Right to Information Act: A Guide* Hyderabad: Dr. MCR HRD Institute, 2021.

The publications are available on our website at:

[https://www.mcrhrdi.gov.in/rti\\_publications.html](https://www.mcrhrdi.gov.in/rti_publications.html)

The Institute has earned *UTKRSHT* Accreditation from the National Accreditation Board for Education and Training (NABET) following a highly rigorous assessment process. Further, the Institute won the prestigious SKOCH Governance Silver Award at the 68th SKOCH Summit held in 2020, for offering Virtual Training Programs, especially the Foundation Course for All India Services and Central Services Officers.



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