

WARM WELCOME

A warm welcome to the pilgrims of the Amarnath Cave of Lord Shiva by the civil society in the Valley has given a good start to the annual pilgrimage. The arduous pilgrimage to cave shrine had come under cloud following the April 22 Pahalgam attack by Pakistan-backed terrorists. The pilgrimage has been going on for centuries and is therefore part of Kashmir’s cultural and religious ethos. The rush of devotees to the high altitude Cave shrine not only turns entire south Kashmir into a venue of big festival but is also a source of micro economy of the area. The pilgrimage breaks barriers of religions or regional identity and all – devotees, service providers and common man – feel involved in it. The pilgrimage is also so much loved because it’s rooted in the local history with a Muslim man Buta Malik discovering the cave with Lord Shiva’s blessings. Pilgrims seen how the ponywallah and other Muslim service providers show their reverence to Lord Shiva and chant Bam bam Bhole to regain breathe on the long trek. The locals living in and around the base camps – Baltal and Pahalgam– await the return of yatris each year; For many tribal families the earnings during the month long pilgrimage provides for their families. However, while devotion and faith can move mountains, the pilgrims should be conscious that security forces and local administration had to work day and night to provide amenities and security for the yatra, especially in view of the terror threat looming large on it. On the opening day security forces are engaged in a gun battle with terrorists in the neighbouring Kishtwar district. The pilgrims would surely keep in mind that most of the official and police are Muslims and they have worked to make their journey enjoyable and safe. The Yatra must be the beginning of a fresh phase of unity of all right minded Indians and not used for dividing people further.

India’s rising score but falling rank in gender equality

**Hemangi Sinha/ Sakshi Chaudhary**

According to the World Economic Forum’s 2025 Global Gender Gap Report, India poses a conundrum. The global rating of India has fallen from 129 to 131 out of 148 international locations, no matter its gain in its overall gender parity rating, which went from 64.1 per cent to 64.4 per cent.

The quantity and sustainability of the improvements made are known as a query by means of this improvement. Is India making progress toward gender equality, or is this improvement being overshadowed by other areas in which development has been relatively gradual?

The Metrics Behind the Movement

The Global Gender Gap Index evaluates gender parity in four different areas: political empowerment, health and survival, educational attainment, and economic involvement and opportunities. India’s score in three of these categories has remained stable or improved. However, the total performance has been significantly impacted by the loss of political empowerment.

India’s score in 3 of these categories has remained solid or progressed. However, the entire overall performance has been appreciably impacted by the loss of political empowerment.

India has made quantifiable strides in a number of regions, along with monetary participation and possibility. One of the number one factors of the 0.9 per cent factor increase on this subindex’s rating is the development in parity in predicted earned income, which accelerated from 28.6 per cent to 29.9 per cent.

This minor upward thrust is massive given the ancient gender-based economic disparity in India. Women endured to take part in the labour pressure on the best price in India’s history, at 45.9 per cent. Regardless of this stability, the commercial enterprise keeps facing problems which include informality, wage inequality, and a lack of social guarantees.

Some other regions of development indicated instructional attainment. India’s

rating extended to 97.1 per cent, reflecting nearly frequent literacy parity and better female tertiary schooling attendance. Secondary-level enrolment figures have come to be further encouraging, and ladies’ gross enrolment now marginally surpasses boys’. Even though there’s nevertheless a giant gap between educational attainment and professional potentialities.

India’s parity score in Health and Survival has improved as a result of longer healthy life expectancy and a better birth – sex ratio. Maternal health initiatives and increased access to healthcare programs like Ayushman Bharat have contributed to a more than 50 per cent decrease in maternal mortality over the past ten years. The overall ranking has dropped due to a sharp reduction in the Political Empowerment dimension, despite improvements in economic, health, and education metrics. The proportion of women in cabinet positions fell from 6.5 per cent to 5.6 per cent, while their representation in Parliament fell from 14.7 per cent to 13.8 per cent. These decreases are part of a longer-term downward trend that began in 2023. Given that the Women’s Reservation Act of 2023 calls for a one-third reservation for women in state assemblies and parliament, this is especially disheartening.

However, this law won’t take effect until after the general elections in 2029 due to continuing procedures like the national census and delimitation. In the meanwhile, few political parties have taken explicit steps to increase female representation, and they are not constitutionally compelled to do so. In India, women have long fought for political representation.

The Women’s Reservation Bill was passed after various parliamentary hurdles and more than thirty years. This delay further solidifies the long-standing opposition to female leadership in Indian Governmental institutions and demonstrates a lack of political will.

South Asia and Beyond

When compared to its South Asian neighbours and the BRICS countries, India’s relative decline becomes even more apparent. Stronger political representa-

tion and more successful grassroots empowerment initiatives are the main reasons why nations like Bangladesh and Nepal have outperformed India in gender parity rankings. India’s performance appears particularly low when viewed from this regional perspective, underscoring the urgent need for policy reform.

Furthermore, India still does poorly on measures like the employment – education divide, which should ideally demonstrate greater synergy.

Women make up less than 20 per cent of the workforce and contribute a small portion of the GDP, despite high rates of reading and graduation. Oxfam India 2020 research found that women’s unpaid labour contributes around `19 lakh crore to the economy annually, which traditional economic measurements do not account for.

Bridging the Gap

Even while India has made significant progress towards achieving gender parity in economic inclusion, health, and education, the systemic obstacles that prevent women from fully participating in society still exist. India must implement comprehensive, inclusive, and long-term policy reforms to address important structural concerns if it hopes to go beyond small achievements to revolutionary effects.

Policy Gaps

The delayed implementation of the Women’s Reservation Act, which was passed in 2023, is one of the most obvious gaps. It appears unlikely that the plan to reserve a third of seats in State Assemblies and Parliament would be carried out before 2029. In addition to representation, this delay affects the wider ramifications of having women in leadership roles, including the allocation of resources and the formulation of policies.

Furthermore, even if women’s labour market participation is at its highest point ever – 45.9 per cent – this number conceals a number of issues, including salary inequities, the quality of jobs, their prominence in the unorganised sector, and the absence of social protections. The majority of working women still have low-wage, precarious occupations with few opportunities for growth.

Similar to this, even if initiatives like Jan Dhan Yojana and MUDRA loans have improved financial inclusion, it is still surface. According to the World Bank’s Findex Survey, one-third of all women’s accounts remain dormant. Despite having bank accounts, women continue to struggle with financial independence and decision-making.

Social and Cultural Norms

Patriarchal conventions still limit women’s freedom, independence, and involvement. Gender roles are embedded from a young age and influence financial decisions, career choices, and leadership ambitions. Early marriage is still common and daughters are still viewed as liabilities in many rural areas of India, which hinders progress in school and the workplace.

Women still experience the glass ceiling and glass cliff in metropolitan environments, where they are either excluded from leadership positions or assigned to unstable ones. According to a McKinsey analysis, reducing the gender employment gap might boost India’s GDP by \$770 billion by 2025. However, this promise is still mostly unrealised.

Policy for Accelerated Progress

India needs to take a comprehensive, whole-of-society strategy in order to attain true gender parity. Implementing employment and skill development initiatives that provide women with digital and vocational training is a top priority, especially in high-growth industries like technology, clean energy, and logistics.

Gender-sensitive labour regulations should include provisions for flexible work schedules, workplace safety, and equitable remuneration. Increased political representation and mentorship initiatives are necessary to support women’s leadership. With ministries and state Governments allocating funding according to gendered demands and outcomes, gender-responsive budgeting is crucial. Additionally important are reasonably priced child care and assistance for self-help groups via digital literacy and business training. Education changes should encourage girls to pursue STEM fields and emphasise gender sensitisation from an early age.

WHY KURUBA TRIBE DESERVES SCHEDULE TRIBE STATUS

**Adaguru H Vishwanath**

In a vibrant nation like India, with its rich tapestry of cultures and communities, the need to address the grievances of marginalised groups is paramount. As we strive toward social justice and equality, it is crucial to shine a light on the Kuruba tribe, whose persistent calls for inclusion in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list across Karnataka deserve urgent attention and action.

Currently, the Kuruba community, which numbers nearly 60 lakh, holds ST status solely in the Kodagu (Coorg) district. This limitation not only undermines the collective identity of the Kurubas but also perpetuates a legacy of historical injustice that has stymied our community’s progress for generations. The removal of geographical restrictions is imperative for recognising our rightful place in the socio-cultural fabric of Karnataka.

Historical Context and Cultural Identity

Historically, the Kuruba community has been classified as “Forest and Hill Tribes” since the 1901 Census, indica-

tive of our deep-rooted connection to the natural environment. Our customs, traditions, and livelihoods reflect a rich heritage that transcends mere administrative classifications. Across Karnataka, from the verdant hills of Kodagu to the plains of Mysuru and beyond, the Kurubas share identical cultural practices, language (Kannada), and social rituals that bind us together. Shared religious beliefs, including the worship of deities such as Beerappa and the observance of festivals like Makke Habba, highlight our community’s unity in diversity. We boast a unique caste structure and a system of totemic symbolism that further delineates our identity. The existence of community priests known as Tammadi or Gorava – whose practices differ significantly from those of traditional Brahmin priests – reinforces our distinct cultural lineage.

Socio-economic Challenges

Despite our cultural richness, the Kuruba community continues to face significant socio-economic challenges. Historically dependent on pastoralism, agriculture, and animal husbandry,

many Kurubas have struggled due to displacement from their ancestral lands and adverse policies that have marginalised their livelihoods.

For instance, literacy rates among Kurubas have remained abysmally low, with only 1.09 per cent recorded in the 1901 census – a figure that saw only marginal improvement by 1931. Continued socio-economic marginalisation, exacerbated by living in forests and rural areas, hampers educational opportunities and economic stability for our community.

Recognising the Kuruba tribe as STs throughout Karnataka would open avenues for targeted welfare programs, educational initiatives, and infrastructural development aimed at empowering the community. It would enable us to harness Government support aimed at improving literacy, healthcare, and employment opportunities – essential components for breaking the cycle of poverty.

Legal Justifications for Inclusion

The case for our inclusion as Scheduled Tribes is bolstered by the legal framework surrounding tribal recogni-

tion in India.

The Supreme Court’s rulings have consistently supported the idea of unifying tribal synonyms under the ST list, arguing in favour of shared characteristics that define tribal identity. Moreover, the 1976 ST Amendment allows for proportional adjustments in the context of area expansions, supporting the stance that Kurubas meet the criteria established by the Lokur Committee regarding primitive traits, distinct culture, and geographical isolation.

The imposition of area restrictions during the 1956 States Reorganisation has resulted in the unjust exclusion of Kurubas from the ST list in many regions of Karnataka. This has been a major oversight, given that other tribes such as Naikda, Lambani, and Soliga have been granted state-wide ST recognition without similar constraints. Parliamentary debates as far back as 1976 have underscored the need to eliminate such regional-based restrictions, highlighting a growing consensus on the need for equitable treatment of all tribal communities.

How the Modi Government rewrote India’s growth story after a lost decade

**Aseervatham Achary**

As the Modi Government marks 11 years in office and one year into its third term, India finds itself at a vastly different juncture than it did in 2014. After a decade of drift, indecision, and policy paralysis under the UPA regime, the BJP-led NDA, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has delivered a decisive shift in both vision and execution. The contrast between the two eras is not merely one of leadership style; it is a difference in outcomes, priorities, and national confidence. The UPA years, especially during its second term (2009–2014), were marred by scandals, economic slowdowns, and administrative inertia.

Despite India’s potential, governance was often reduced to managing coalition compulsions and firefighting reputational damage. Flagship welfare programs lacked targeting, leakages were rampant, and large sections of the poor remained excluded. In stark contrast, the Modi Government embraced technology-backed delivery and scale.

Over 81 crore people today receive free food grains under the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, while the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has led to the construc-

tion of over 12 crore toilets, transforming rural sanitation, an area long neglected during the UPA years. While the UPA Government often spoke extensively about inclusive growth, it failed to operationalise financial inclusion at the grassroots level.

The Modi Government made inclusion tangible through the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity, revolutionising welfare delivery. Over 52 crore loans have been provided under the Mudra Yojana, with 68 lakh street vendors empowered through PM SVANidhi. Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) to 20 crore women during the pandemic stand as a testament to real-time governance, a concept alien to the UPA era, which was defined by middlemen and red tape. In a major achievement over the past eleven years, the Direct Benefit Transfer system under Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Government has revolutionised welfare delivery in India, resulting in cumulative savings of Rs 3.48 lakh crore by curbing leakages and ensuring direct transfers to beneficiaries. Since its inception, Rs 44 lakh crore worth of benefits have been transferred via DBT. To put this scale in perspective, counting Rs 1 lakh every minute would take over 833 years

to reach that total. The DBT model has significantly improved the efficiency and targeting of Government subsidies. India’s farmers, too, were long used to hollow promises and minimal budgetary support. Under the UPA, minimum support prices stagnated, insurance schemes were either non-existent or ineffective, and rural distress remained unresolved.

In contrast, the Modi Government quintupled the agriculture budget, distributed nearly 25 crore soil health cards, and directly transferred Rs 3.7 lakh crore through PM-Kisan. Over Rs 1.75 lakh crore in crop insurance claims have been settled under the PM Fasal Bima Yojana. Women, often relegated to symbolic representation during the UPA years, have emerged as a force in the Modi era.

The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana has enabled over 10 crore households to access clean cooking fuel, drastically improving women’s health and dignity. Paid maternity leave was extended to 26 weeks, and women received over 35 crore Mudra loans comprising 68 per cent of total disbursements marking a major departure from the limited economic inclusion offered earlier. The vision of “Lakshpati Didis” aims to turn 3

crore women into income earners, setting a clear goal for empowerment that goes beyond tokenism.

The UPA’s approach to education reform and youth development was characterised by bureaucratic inertia and outdated frameworks. By contrast, the Modi Government introduced the National Education Policy (NEP) after 30 years, bringing in multidisciplinary flexibility and investing massively in skill development.

Over 1.6 crore individuals have been trained under the PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana, while more than 1.6 lakh startups many of them youth-led have emerged, creating over 17 lakh jobs. Infrastructure upgrades under the PM SHRI scheme, the establishment of 7 new IITs and 8 IIITs, and a tripling of AIIMS underline the Government’s long-term commitment to building a knowledge economy.

In terms of physical infrastructure, the change is dramatic. Under the UPA, projects moved slowly, and red tape throttled investments. Today, highway construction proceeds at 34 km per day, metro rail networks have quadrupled, and 86 new airports have been operationalised. The rural road network now spans nearly 4 lakh km, with 99 per cent

connectivity achieved. The railway budget has increased ninefold, facilitating the introduction of 400 Vande Bharat trains, transforming connectivity and travel comfort across the country.

More than 136 Vande Bharat trains are currently operational, connecting various cities. On national security and foreign policy, the UPA’s tenure was marked by hesitation and passivity. Cross-border terror and infiltration met with little response beyond diplomatic protest.

In contrast, the Modi Government’s handling of crises whether surgical strikes and air strikes like Operation Sindoor or rescue missions like Operation Kaveri reflects a clear doctrine of assertive, sovereign decision-making. Defence exports have increased 34 times since 2014. India’s defence exports have surged to a record high of Rs 23,622 crore in FY 2024–25. Strategic decisions such as the abrogation of Article 370 and the restructuring of the Ordnance Factory Board highlight a leadership unafraid to act. Economically, India was in a fragile state by 2014 burdened by rising NPAs, stalled investments, and falling investor confidence.

Today, India is the fastest-growing economy in the world. India is the

fourth-largest economy in the world, and it leads in innovation and manufacturing. From mobiles to toys, products are now being made in India.

India leads the world in real-time digital transactions (49 per cent of the global total), has reduced NPAs to 2.6 per cent, and FDI inflows have seen a steady rise from USD 36.05 billion in FY 2013–14 to USD 81.04 billion (provisional) in FY 2024–25, marking a 14 per cent increase from USD 71.28 billion in FY 2023–24. The Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme alone has catalysed Rs 14 lakh crore in manufacturing output and created 11.5 lakh new jobs. These are not just economic figures, they represent India’s transition from fragility to resilience.

The Modi Government has also streamlined the business ecosystem with bold reforms. While the UPA era was defined by complex regulations and outdated laws, India has since climbed 79 ranks in the Ease of Doing Business index and seen a 17-fold increase in patent grants.

Over 1.8 lakh companies were registered in 2023–24 alone, supported by simplified labour codes, reduced corporate taxes, and the removal of archaic colonial-era laws.