

# The Urban World

Quarterly Publication



Regional Centre for Urban & Environmental Studies (RCUES)  
All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIIILSG), Mumbai



**Regional Centre for Urban & Environmental Studies (RCUES), Mumbai**  
(Supported by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India & Accredited under Capacity Building Commission's National Standards)

All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIILSG) established in 1926, is a premier & autonomous research and training institution in India. It is a guide to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and contributed to the principles and practice of urban governance, education, research and capacity building.

The Regional Centre for Urban & Environmental Studies (RCUES) anchored by All India Institute of Local Self Government (AIILSG), Mumbai, was established in 1968 & supported by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India (GoI). The MoHUA, GoI has formed National Review and Monitoring Committee (NRMC) for RCUES, Mumbai in 2018 under the Chairmanship of the Secretary, MoHUA, GoI. The Principal Secretary, Urban Development Department (UDD), Government of Maharashtra (GoM) is the ex-officio Chairperson of the Advisory Committee (AC) of RCUES, Mumbai, which is established by MoHUA, GoI.

RCUES, Mumbai has received an Accreditation Certificate under the Capacity Building Commission's National Standards. RCUES, Mumbai is registered on Integrated Government Online Training (iGOT) platform of Karmayogi Bharat, GoI and associated with Amrit Gyan Kosh under Mission Karmayogi, GoI. RCUES, Mumbai is empaneled as Swachhata Knowledge Partner (SKP) for capacity building & technical support to ULBs under Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) 2.0, MoHUA, GoI & also registered as a Partner with Swachhata Hi Seva (SHS) 2024 Portal.

RCUES, Mumbai as a National Training Institute (NTI), undertakes capacity building initiatives for elected representatives, municipal functionaries & mission functionaries from the States of Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat, Rajasthan and UTs of Diu, Daman, Dadra Nagar Haveli & Lakshadweep from the western region and Assam & Tripura from northeast region. Over the years, RCUES, Mumbai has been working in close coordination with states and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) to provide strategic, advisory, technical and capacity building support focusing on preparing action plans/strategies, technical assessment reports, urban plans such as DPRs, CSPs, CDPs as well as providing on-ground support by engaging with communities for assessment and improvement in infrastructure service delivery in cities.

RCUES, Mumbai has initiated Training Needs Assessments (TNA) and impact assessment to better understand the effectiveness of their training programs. This approach helps identify knowledge/skill gaps and measure the outcomes of training initiatives. The assessments aim to enhance capacity building efforts and improve training program delivery.

Maharashtra Urban WASH and Environmental Coalition (Maha UWES-C) is a joint initiative of the RCUES of AIILSG, Mumbai, and UNICEF Maharashtra. In 2022, MoU is signed with the Directorate of Swachh Maharashtra Mission, Urban Development Department, Government of Maharashtra for building capacities, facilitating partnerships, and supporting innovations under Swachh Maharashtra Abhiyan - Urban 2.0 under Maha UWES-C.

In 2017, AIILSG was empaneled among one of the 35 agencies in India for conducting Integrated Capacity Building Programmes (ICBP). AIILSG Mumbai is supporting the states of Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Goa for the same.

RCUES, Mumbai is advancing capacity building initiatives by extending its efforts beyond training and workshops, urging strong collaboration with states and ULBs. Driven by a small but passionate team, it remains dedicated to empowering municipal officials, with the goal of strengthening governance, thereby enabling better cities.

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## RCUES Key Publications

1. Urban Development.
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4. Hospital Medical Waste Management.
5. Planning for Urban Informal Sector in Highly Dense Cities.
6. Study of Municipal Schools with Special Focus on Drop-outs, Standard of Education and Remedies.
7. Rainwater Harvesting.
8. Institutionalisation of Citizen's Participation in Urban Governance.
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10. Gender Equality in Local Government - Comparative Study of Four States in Western Region in India.
11. Mapping of Basic Services in Urban Slums.
12. Basic Services to the Urban Poor.
13. Health.
14. Security of Tenure.
15. Resettlement and Rehabilitation.
16. Mumbai Human Development Report, 2009.  
(UNDP / MOH & UPA, GOI / MCGM).
17. Resource Material on Urban Poverty Alleviation.
18. Laws of Meetings.
19. Resource Material on Preparation of City Sanitation Plan (CSP) & Capacity Building for Urban Local Bodies.
20. Implementation of 74th CAA, 1992 in Urban Local Bodies and Impact Assessment of Training of Women Elected Members.

# Editorial

## **Women, Education and Environment - Pathways to Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development is an urgent necessity shaped by the interconnected realities of social equity, economic resilience, and environmental stewardship. At the heart of this transformation lies a powerful yet often underutilized force: women. As UN Women emphasizes, “Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world”. The convergence of women's education and environmental engagement thus emerges as one of the most promising pathways toward a sustainable future.

Education has long been recognized as a catalyst for social and economic mobility. According to UNESCO, every additional year of schooling for girls can increase their future earnings by up to 10–20%. In India, female enrolment in higher education has crossed 49% (AISHE Report 2022–23), reflecting significant progress. However, access alone does not guarantee empowerment. Deep-rooted structural barriers ranging from patriarchal norms and financial constraints to the persistent “glass ceiling” continue to limit women's participation in leadership, STEM, and decision-making roles. The commercialization of education and unequal resource allocation further widen these gaps, particularly for women from marginalized communities.

The environmental dimension adds another critical layer. Women are not merely beneficiaries of sustainable development but active agents of change, especially at the grassroots level. The World Bank notes that women comprise a large proportion of the informal waste management workforce in developing countries, often exceeding 50%. Women-led solid waste management initiatives play a vital role in waste segregation, recycling, and resource recovery, significantly reducing environmental degradation while supporting circular economy practices. Yet, these contributions remain largely invisible in formal policy frameworks.

Integrating women into environmental governance offers a high-impact, low-cost strategy for sustainable urban transformation. Evidence shows that when women participate in community resource management, outcomes improve significantly. As United Nations Development Programme reports, communities with higher female participation in environmental decision-making demonstrate better conservation outcomes and resource efficiency. Such initiatives not only enhance environmental sustainability but also generate livelihoods, strengthen community participation, and promote social inclusion directly contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The intersection of women, education, and environment reveals a broader truth: sustainable development cannot be achieved through isolated approaches. It requires an integrated framework

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that recognizes the interconnectedness of social, economic, and ecological systems. As environmentalist Vandana Shiva aptly states, “Women are not just victims of environmental degradation; they are powerful agents of change”. Policies must therefore invest in gender-sensitive education, supportive institutional mechanisms, and the mainstreaming of women's participation in environmental governance.

The example of Kolkata's Bhadrak community illustrates a nuanced reality. While education enhances women's intellectual and cultural capital, it often operates within boundaries shaped by class and gender norms. Education, in such contexts, becomes a double-edged sword empowering yet regulating women's roles. This underscores the need for education to move beyond symbolic value and become truly transformative, challenging entrenched social expectations.

Looking ahead, progress depends on comprehensive structural reforms. These include adopting gender-responsive curricula, strengthening care infrastructure, and expanding women's access to emerging green sectors. According to the International Labour Organization, the transition to a green economy could create 24 million new jobs globally by 2030 provided inclusive policies ensure women's equal participation. Recognizing women's contributions within informal economies and fostering a cultural shift toward gender equality are equally critical.

Women's education and environmental engagement are not parallel agendas but deeply interconnected pathways. When aligned, they have the potential to redefine development itself making it more inclusive, equitable, and resilient. Empowering women is not just a moral imperative; as United Nations asserts, it is “the most effective way to accelerate sustainable development”. A sustainable future depends on recognizing women not only as participants but as leaders and innovators driving transformative change.

In conclusion, the urban world represents a critical site for advancing sustainable development. Recognizing and strengthening women's roles within urban environmental systems is not only a matter of equity but also a strategic necessity for building resilient and sustainable cities. A gender-responsive approach to urban governance can significantly contribute to achieving broader development goals, particularly in the areas of environmental sustainability and social inclusion.



# Women-led Solid Waste Management for Environment Sustainability

**Dr. (Prof.) Sneha Palnitkar**

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Waste Management Resource Centre (WMRC), AILSG, Mumbai, Maharashtra.

## Empowerment of Women under Viksit Bharat 2047

Social Development and Inclusion form the foundation of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Women-led development and empowerment is a core principle under Viksit Bharat. The focus is on ensuring equal access to quality education, healthcare, skill development, financial services, and employment opportunities. Strengthening women's participation in entrepreneurship, local governance, and decision-making institutions promotes economic independence and leadership. Initiatives supporting Self-help Groups (SHGs), digital literacy, start-ups, and access to credit further enhance women's economic empowerment. Ensuring safety, dignity, and legal protection also remains fundamental to creating an enabling environment for women to thrive. Poverty Reduction and Livelihood Promotion are central for inclusive development, by promoting skill development, entrepreneurship, Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), and employment opportunities.

## Environmental Sustainability under Viksit Bharat 2047

Environmental Sustainability is an integral pillar of Viksit Bharat 2047. Urban sustainability is a major focus area. Smart and sustainable cities promote green buildings, efficient public transportation,

source segregation of waste, recycling, circular economy practices, the 3R principle, and pollution control measures. Improving air quality, scientific solid waste management, waste recycling and sustainable urban planning contribute to healthier living environments.

Rapid urbanization in India has significantly increased solid waste generation, crating environmental, health and governance challenges for urban local bodies. One method of planning is recognizing the informal sector activities in 3R and intergradations in city solid waste management system. Women play a central yet often unrecognized role in waste management at household, community and informal sector levels. Integrating women systematically into Solid Waste Management systems can enhance sustainability, improve efficiency and promote inclusive urban development.

Achieving environmental sustainability requires a systemic shift toward scientific Solid Waste Management anchored in the 3R principle – Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. Sustainable SWM reduces environmental degradation while conserving natural resources and energy. Landfills are major sources of methane emissions, contributing to climate change. By adopting a 3R-based circular economy approach, cities can:

- Minimize waste generation at source.
- Increase resource recovery.
- Reduce landfill dependency.
- Lower carbon emissions.
- Promoting green jobs and enterprises.

These actions align with global sustainability commitments under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Solid waste management is an obligatory responsibility of municipal authorities, which mostly view solid waste as a health and environmental hazard rather than resource recovery. Those who make the policy decisions about formal solid waste management are often not well informed about the existing informal practices of waste recovery and recycling in their cities. The formal sector treats this solid waste, the material that needs to be got rid of. On the other hand, the informal sector treats the same waste as a raw material and an important commodity, an economic resource or 'ore'. Waste recycling activities are extensive, which span a wide range of consumer products and provide income earning opportunities to a vast number of urban poor in big cities. These activities simultaneously reduce the demand for energy, imported raw material and the provision of a supply of inexpensive industrial feed stocks.

If we look at Solid Waste Management Sector in cities, the formal municipal solid waste management is usually represented by a hierarchically structured, centralized and rigid municipal bureaucracy which is responsible for collecting and disposing household, commercial and institutional solid wastes. Part of the solid waste generated in big cities go through many levels of the informal network in waste recycling sector, the primary work of which is done by the urban poor women and socially disadvantaged groups.

Taking a close look at the different processes of waste recycling unfolds a wide range of products, which are transformed from different kinds of waste. Waste recycling processes strengthen the city's economy. They reduce the volume of garbage which must be disposed of by the municipal body and enable small local factories to save manufacturing costs, since production from recovered material uses less energy than production from the virgin material.

Before recyclable waste reaches such small or big manufacturing factories, it goes through many groups of the informal sector, which involves a wide range of people at various levels and within which various groups have differential access to types of waste. The urban poor who are directly dependent on waste recycling for their livelihood are at the lowest level of the informal network. Thousands of people are engaged in the process of waste recycling as door-to-door waste collectors, waste pickers, recycle workers, middlemen, and so this informal sector activity is an important source of livelihood in any urban centres. It is observed that the waste recycling sector in cities is functioning very well from the starting point door to door waste collectors, waste pickers and middlemen – to the manufacturers of the consumer products and citizens without much support from the municipal corporation or the state government.

Women are pivotal yet often undervalued actors in solid waste management driving both formal and informal waste collection, segregation of waste, and recycling. While facing challenges like safety risks, occupational hazards, women enhance sustainability through household waste management and leadership roles. By integrating gender equality into environmental strategies, society can achieve a more resilient and sustainable future.

In many cities, women constitute many the informal waste recycling sector acting as waste pickers, sorters, aggregators and recycle workers.

Women are primary managers of household waste segregation and are highly represented among informal waste workers. Their participation directly contributes to Improved waste segregation at source – dry, wet, domestic hazardous, e-waste and sanitary waste, and increased recycling and resource recovery.

Women-led solid waste management represents a high-impact, low-cost strategy for sustainable urban transformation. By institutionalizing women's participation in SWM systems, municipal corporations can simultaneously advance environmental sustainability, social inclusion and economic empowerment. Achieving environmental sustainability requires a systemic shift toward scientific solid waste management anchored in the 3R principle – Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

### **Key Policy Objectives**

For women-led Solid Waste Management, key policy objectives are as follows -

1. Formal Inclusion – Integrate women waste pickers and SHGs into municipal SWM systems and 3R practices.
2. Economic Empowerment – Promote women-led waste recycling, composting and circular economy enterprises.
3. Capacity Building and Skill Training – Provide skill training on segregation of waste, composting, plastic recycling and safety protocols.
4. Social Protection – Ensure access to health insurance, safety gear and social security benefits.
5. Gender-Sensitive Local Governance – Mainstream gender considerations into municipal SWM policies and contracts.
6. Encourage the involvement of women in city level solid waste management decision making process for sustainability.

### **Innovative Approaches and Environmental Sustainability**

Historically, innovations have always been the lifeblood of the city. Cities are the places that allow people to live out their ideas, needs, aspirations and passions. Experimentation, the ability to rewrite rules, to be unconventional to visualize future trends, to discover common threads among the seemingly chaotic disparate, to look at situations laterally and with flexibility are all ways of encouraging innovations. A shift in urban policy is also forcing policy makers to rethink how to solve different city problems innovative solutions that deal with urban development issues will go a long way in healing our urban environment and preserving what the Brundtland Commission so rightly called "Our Common Future" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Underlying the need for altered resources allocation priorities, ecological sustainability and an accelerated innovation process is the need for a new vision of urban life.

Today, three distinct issues, namely, (i) the urban informal sector, (ii) solid waste management, and (iii) urban poverty have all combined to initiate innovations in the poverty and solid waste management intersection. The activities of informal waste recycling and role of urban poverty are well known to those directly involved in solid waste management. A socially enlightened approach to solid waste management can draw inspiration from the concept of sustainable urban development espoused by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). The report gave prominence to the principle of resource conservation while discussing solid waste management problems. The report urged big cities to make more effective use of their waste as resources and insisted that sustainable development in cities will depend on work with the majority of urban poor. Today, attention has been focused on the maximum use of waste recycling,

reuse and several innovative approaches have been initiated in this direction. Environmental movements are beginning to place considerable emphasis on waste recycling as part of an environmental ethic for resource conservation, waste reduction and sustainable urban development. Agenda 21, finalized way back in Rio-de-Janeiro in 1992, set the framework for the current dialogue on solid waste management and social aspects of urban environment.

An acceptance of the possible linkages between urban development and environment, especially in big cities, has seen a growing focus on issues relating to solid waste management. A close observation reveals that the urban solid waste management sector is a complex system of different interrelated work activities, namely waste storage, collection, haul, disposal, waste recovery and waste recycling. Solid waste management consists of a formal and informal sector in solid waste management in big cities. Today, several innovative approaches are introduced in solid waste management. Women-led strategic interventions are the focus of city solid waste management.

## Strategic Interventions

- Mandate source segregation at some with women-led awareness campaigns.
- Allocate municipal SWM contracts to women SHGs and cooperatives.
- Establish Material Recovery Facilities [MRFs] operated by trained women groups.
- Provide microfinance and market linkages for green enterprises.
- Introduce occupational health and safety standards for women waste workers.
- Integrate SWM initiatives under National Missions such as Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) and NAMASTE scheme by National Safai Karmacharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC).

## Some Interventions related to Women-led Solid Waste Management

### • Stree Mukti Sanghatana (SMS), Mumbai

Stree Mukti Sanghatana is a Mumbai-based NGO established in 1975 that works for women's empowerment, social justice and environmental sustainability. One of its major areas is in solid waste management (SWM) through the 'Parisar Vikas Programme', started in 1998 in collaboration with the Municipal Corporation in Mumbai.

### Key Contributions in Solid Waste Management

- Organizing women waste pickers into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and cooperatives.
- Providing ID cards, training and social recognition to informal waste workers.
- Promoting waste segregation, composting and recycling in communities, schools and institutions.
- Establishing decentralized waste management systems, such as composting and biogas units.
- Creating federations like Parisar Bhagini Sangh, which represents thousands of women waste workers.

### Impact

SMS has empowered thousands of women waste pickers in Mumbai and other cities by improving their livelihoods, working conditions and social dignity while also strengthening sustainable waste management systems.

### • Aakar, Mumbai

Aakar is an organization working on sustainable solid waste management and circular economy solutions. It focuses on improving waste collection systems, recycling practices and community participation in waste management.

## Key Contributions in Solid Waste Management

- Promoting segregation of waste at source in urban communities.
  - Supporting recycling and resource recovery initiative.
  - Working with municipal bodies, communities and waste workers to strengthen waste management systems.
  - Conducting awareness campaigns, training programmes and capacity building in waste management practices.
3. Public Awareness – Educating citizens, especially school children, about hygiene and cleanliness.
  4. Sanitation Facilities – Ensuring availability of clean public toilets and proper drainage systems.
  5. Community Participation – Encouraging residents, local groups, and corporate to actively participate in keeping the city clean.

## Impact

Aakar supports the development of sustainable and community-based waste management models, helping cities move toward zero-waste and circular economic systems.

### • **SWaCH, Pune**

SWaCH Pune is an initiative aimed at promoting cleanliness, hygiene, and sustainable waste management in the city of Pune. Inspired by the SBM, it focuses on creating a healthy and clean urban environment through community participation, public awareness, and effective sanitation practices.

SWaCH is India's first wholly owned cooperative of self-employed waste collectors and other urban poor. It is an autonomous enterprise that provides front-end waste management services to the citizens of Pune.

## Key Focus Areas of SWaCH Pune

1. Clean Streets and Public Spaces – Regular cleaning drives, proper garbage disposal, and anti-littering campaigns.
2. Waste Management – Segregation of wet and dry waste, recycling, and promoting composting at homes.

The increasing concern in the last decade on environmental degradation because of urbanization, as well as growing focus on undertaking clean city programmes, have firmly placed solid waste management on the agenda of governments municipal bodies, and other stakeholders. The role of the urban informal sector workforce in solid waste management and its cost-effectiveness if integrated into the entire process of the urban service delivery systems, can no longer be ignored. It is now recognized that the informal network of urban poor, wherever they have been systematically organized to work as a link in the chain of solid waste and environmental management initiatives, the outcome has been remarkably positive. Therefore, it is useful to highlight such initiatives that have linked mobilization of citizens in environmental cleanliness programmes, the rag-pickers and municipal clean city schemes, to produce dramatic changes that benefited all stakeholders in the city.

Aspects of the dependence of the underprivileged on discarded garbage and role of all these stakeholders are so important for big cities that they deserve to be better understood than they are at present. It is beyond the capacity of most municipal bodies to eliminate these informal networks in waste recycling sector should they wish to. It remains isolated from socioeconomic initiatives that are changing the urban service delivery system. Whatever the innovative alternatives that may be

worked out, solid waste management must evolve a positive approach to regard informal waste recovery, reuse and recycling as an integral component of solid waste management in cities.

## **Conclusion**

Women are essential stakeholders in the social dimension of solid waste management. Policies that recognize and empower women's participation in SWM can simultaneously achieve environmental sustainability, social inclusion and economic development. Strengthening women-led initiatives will contribute to more resilient and sustainable urban systems. Women-led solid waste management represents a high-impact, low-cost strategy for sustainable urban transformation. By institutionalizing women's participation in SWM systems, municipal corporations can simultaneously advance environmental and sustainability, social inclusion and economic empowerment.

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## **Notes**

- 1) *Data obtained from field visits along with key informants involved in Ragpickers Project, Adult Education Centre, SNDT University (Pune).*
- 2) *Author's personal notes about Stree Mukti Sanghatana, Aakar and SWaCH organizations.*



# Women and Higher Education Environment in India: Pathways to Sustainable Development

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## Introduction

Making effective use of knowledge in any country requires developing appropriate policies, institutions, investments, and coordination across the above four functional areas. Education has been a major influence on economic growth. Greater efficiency in the use of resources would increase the rate of return investment in education. During the closing decades of the twentieth century, emphasis in developing nations regarding educational development was placed on three broad outcomes of education: contribution to economic growth and competitiveness, improvement in social equity, and poverty alleviation.

In the recent years, the increased participation of women in higher education, especially in male-dominated areas like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), is a welcome development. The enrollments in different subjects show a decrease in the gender gap, with women enrolling in postgraduate courses outnumbering men. This is an indication of changing attitudes in Indian society, where women are aspiring for higher education and professional opportunities in greater numbers. Government policy, awareness initiatives, economic imperatives, and social acceptance have all played their part in creating this change. However, the gaps still exist, driven by patriarchal thought, economic needs, safety, and lack of support. Women students are faced with the

limitations of job prospects in scientific disciplines and social pressure on marriage and family responsibilities (AISHE, 2019).

National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001 adopted by GoI promised equal access to education for women and girls and stated that “Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation/vocation/technical skills by women. Reducing the gender gap in higher education would be a focus area. Sectoral time targets in existing policies will be achieved, with a special focus on girls and women, particularly those belonging to weaker sections including the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Other Backward Classes/Minorities. Gender sensitive curricula would be developed at all levels of educational system to address sex stereotyping as one of the causes of gender discrimination.” When it comes to women's empowerment within higher education, three main factors are vital: societal attitudes to women which discourage their participation in decision-making, their lower enrolment in higher education to date (although here, patterns are rapidly changing in all regions), and the absence of

a gender dimension in the higher education curriculum. Women will certainly not accede to leadership posts in higher education or in society in greater numbers until these issues are addressed.

UNESCO/Commonwealth Secretariat sponsored study on 'Women in Higher Education Management' (Mukherjee & Kearney 1993) had identified the principal barriers that hamper women in higher education are limited access to education, especially higher education; discriminatory appointment and promotion practices; the stresses of dual family and professional roles; family attitudes; career interruptions; cultural stereotyping; alienation from the male culture and continued resistance to women in management positions; propagation of the glass ceiling syndrome which privileges covert criteria for advancement; absence of adequate policies and legislation to ensure the participation of women.

## **Current Scenario**

In the field of higher education, cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai had Gender Parity Index (GPI) below unity, while cities like Bhopal, Lucknow, Indore and Kolkata showed a positive GPI. Male-female disparities in terms of educational provision and utilization have attracted considerable attention in education research. Analysis of educational finances assumes crucial importance in educational policy, planning, and administration, as finances form a necessary, though not sufficient condition, for the success of education development plans and programmes. Of late, issues relating to financing of education are gaining attention, essentially because of dwindling resource base on the one hand and increasing financial needs of the education sector on the other. Various alternative mechanisms of funding and mobilization of resources are being explored in India and in many developing countries. In this context, an initiative of UGC, an apex body of higher education in India; to audit gender

dimensions in financial allocation in the university system is most welcome. After reviewing the schemes devoted towards enhancing the participation rate of women in higher education under the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, the Planning Commission of India allocated more funds earmarked for women in higher education for UGC under the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan period.

Even though higher education had been inexpensive or almost free during the first four decades, yet access has not been easy for women. It has been denied to the disadvantaged groups and especially women from these groups because of social and economic reasons. There were two very pertinent reasons for this. First, these institutions offer mostly 'masculine' subjects. Second, they are very expensive and a longstanding understanding of the social situation of women indicates that most of the parents are reluctant to invest in the education of their daughters whose education does not have a production value because her income goes to the groom's family. Neo-liberal Macro Economic Policies fostering commercialization of higher education have worsened the predicament of women in higher education. From both perspectives, Human Development Approach and Human Capital Formation approach, it is important to invest in women for long term interest of the health of our economy.

There is a need to focus on Gender concerns within Economics of Education as it is experienced that in the drive for privatization, women as students are the main losers as parents channelize financial resources for son's education, daughter's education is less important. NAAC study reveals that there is ghettoisation of women in general higher education (Arts and Commerce) and mostly men through professional colleges (Engineering, Architect, Medicine, Science & Technology) in the post reform period where private higher education is replacing its subsidized counterpart (Kurup and Singai. 2017).

Where are the Indian Women in the knowledge economy? Education is a necessity for all and not just a luxury for those who can afford it. Therefore, it must be a top concern for India as she ventures into the future, since without a solid educational spine, her economy will no longer be able to stand the test of time. At present, only 7% of total India women have been able to enroll for higher education institutions.

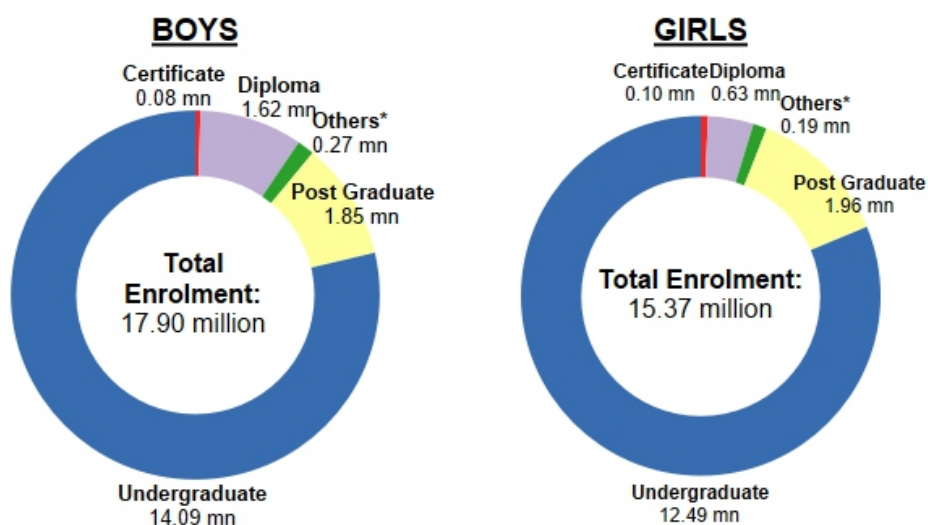
### Challenges for Women in Higher Education

Even when higher education had been inexpensive or almost free during the first four decades, the access was not easy for the students from underrepresented communities and women of all communities. The disadvantage gets compounded for women from the marginalised groups because of socioeconomic reasons as well as prejudice against higher education for girls and women. There were two very pertinent reasons for this. First, these institutions offer mostly 'masculine' subjects. Second, they are awfully expensive and a longstanding understanding of the social situation of women indicates that many of the parents are reluctant to invest in the education of their

daughters whose education does not have 'a production value' for the parental family because her income goes to the groom's family. Neo-liberal macroeconomic policies fostering commercialization of higher education have worsened the predicament of women in higher education. From perspectives of both, human development approach and human capital formation approach, it is important to invest in higher education of women for long term interest of the health of our economy. In this context, it is matter of great regret that the National Education Policy 2020 proactively promotes privatization of higher education and leave its access to market which is socially constructed to serve the commercial interests and students facing gendered intersectional vulnerabilities will be forced out of the higher education institutions.

“The gross enrolment ratio of all young men and women in higher education in India was 23.6 in 2014-15, up from 20.8 in 2012–13. This was lower than the global average of 27 and lower than other emerging economies, such as China (26) and Brazil (36), according to the data released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development” (Salve 2016).

**Figure 1: Enrolment in Higher Education, 2014–15**



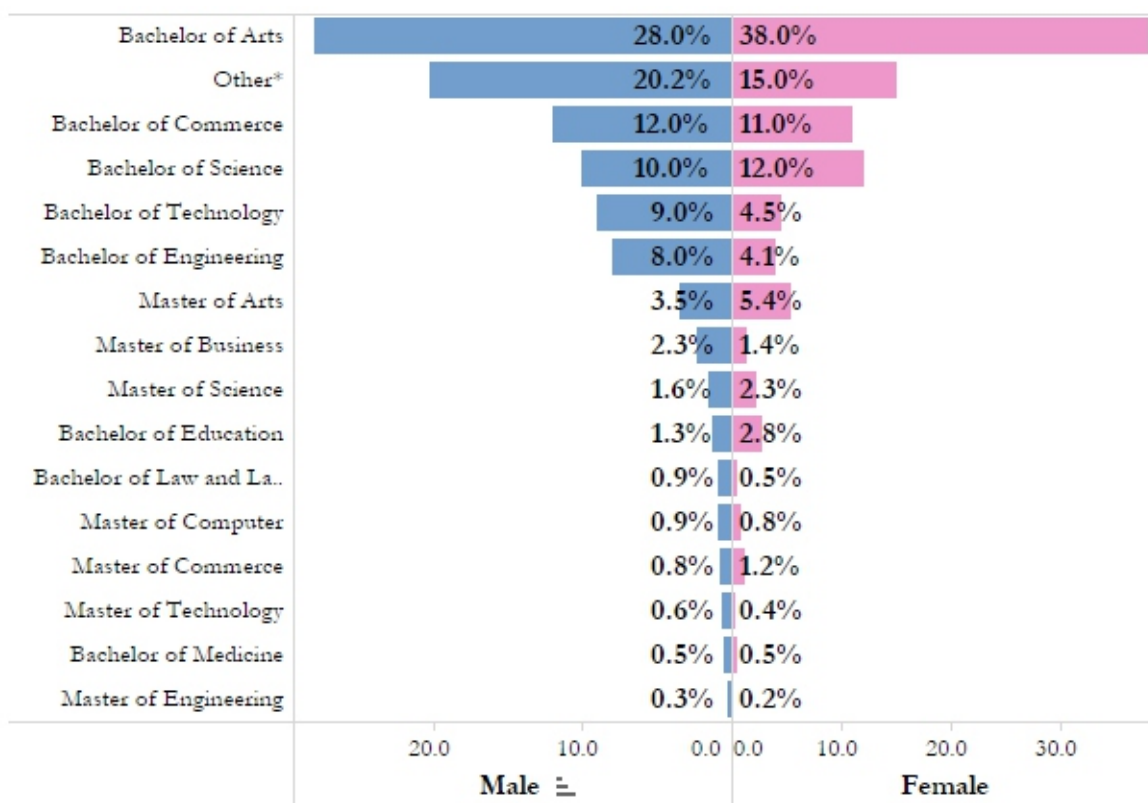
*NOTE: Others\* include Integrated, P.G. Diploma, M.Phil and Ph.D.*

*Source: Salve, 2016*

As Figure 1 shows, in 2015, out of total number of 17.90 million boys, 14.9 million boys i.e., 82% of total boy–students in HEIs were studying undergraduate courses. Out of 15.37 million girls in HEIs, 12.49 million i.e., 81% girl–students in HEI were doing undergraduate courses. Among them, only 10% of boys and 13% of girls could manage to join post graduate courses, 9% of boys and 4% of girls could pursue diploma courses, 0.47% of boys and 0.65% (i.e., less than 1%) enrolled for certificate courses and 1.5% of men and 1.2% of women could enrol for integrates degrees, P.G. Diploma, M.Phil., and Ph.D. courses. In the context of digitalization of economy, the under–representation of women in STEM sectors puts them at a high risk of being displaced by technology and their inability to take advantage of flagship programmes of the Indian state such as Skill India Stand Up India and Start Up India.

As Figure 2 reveals, the highest concentration of both, male (28%) and female students (38%) is seen among Bachelor of Arts. Only for Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Master of Arts (M.A.), Bachelor of Science (B. Sc.), Master of Science (M.Sc.), Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) courses female students outnumber male students. When it comes to professional courses such as Bachelor of Technology (B. Tech.), Bachelor of Engineering (B.E.), Master of Business, Bachelor of Law (L.L.B.), Master of Law (L.L.M.), Master of Computer Application (M.C.A.), Master of Technology (M.Tech.) and Master of Engineering (M.E.), gender gap was found. Only for enrolment in Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (M.B.B.S.) course, gender parity was found.

**Figure 2: Higher Education Enrolment Rates (By Course)**



**NOTE:** Others\* include all other courses

Source: Salve, 2016

As per AISHE 2018–19 Report, Gender distribution in Student enrolment at Undergraduate level was 51% for men and 49% for women. In Diploma courses, the gender is extremely wide with enrolment of 66.8% males and 33.2% females. Ph.D. programmes in different disciplines were marked by enrolment of 56.18% men and 43.82% women scholars. While enrolment for integrated courses was 57.50% for men and 42.50% men and student enrolment for post graduate Diploma, courses was 54.09% for men and 45.91% for women.

There is a need to focus on gender concerns within economics of education as it is found that in the drive for privatization, women as students are the main losers as parents channelize financial resources for son's education, daughter's education is less important. NAAC study reveals that there is ghettoization of women in general higher education (Arts and Commerce) and mostly men through professional colleges (Engineering, Architect, Medicine, Science & Technology) in the post reform period where private higher education is replacing its subsidized counterpart (Patel 2009).

Currently, centres and departments of women's studies, Dalit studies, tribal studies, disability studies are facing major crisis in terms of funds and positions. These disciplines are extremely important for creation of a responsible citizenry, still are marginalized in the academic hierarchy and are kept on oxygen. These disciplines need serious attention of not only the state and publicly funded universities but also of the private higher educational institutions. These disciplines need legitimate place in the higher education institutions with adequate funding for faculty positions, research grant and student support. Women's Studies, Dalit studies, Tribal/Indigenous Studies, Queer Studies, Studies on Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policies, Human Rights Education

through their teaching, training, documentation, research, and evidence-based policy intervention have contributed significantly to academia during last 4 decades. As academic disciplines, it they link themselves to the grass-roots reality in pursuit of equity and equality. At a time when higher education is facing the brunt of reduced public expenditure on education, the alliance between social movements and these disciplines voicing concerns of the marginalized people must be strengthened. Legitimacy to the knowledge constructions and philosophies, by scholarships from the margins in the mainstream academia is a need of an hour (Kurup and Singai 2017). At present, only 7% of total India women have been able to enroll for higher education institutions.

The COVID–19 pandemic disproportionately affected marginalized populations globally. With educational institutions being closed, and online education emerging as a common substitute, students from underprivileged backgrounds have been the worst hit. Not surprisingly, gender has added an additional layer to this disenfranchisement. In India, numerous girls at the intersections of gender, class, and other structural hierarchies like caste, have little or no access to devices to smartphones or tablets. They have been whisked away from their studies towards domestic duties and work in the informal sector. Even boys faced the burden of their gender: the economic crisis brought about by the pandemic pushed them towards forced labour (Patel, 2020). It is very important to realize that free and quality education as a prerequisite to lifelong learning. As recommended by the National Education Policy, 6% of GDP must be allocated for education in general and minimum 2% of the education budget must be for higher education with the earmarked funds for girls and women.

## Initiatives by UGC

Higher education enables women to take an active part in decision making and ensures all round development of women. Furthermore, higher education provides the expertise usually required for the key posts which shape policy in all fields. Hence, its particular importance for women is obvious. For enhancing participation of women in higher education through equal opportunities, equal treatment and affirmative action the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan of UGC made a proactive effort towards affirmative action by evolving targeted schemes for women in higher education system: Day-care Centre (Rs. 5 Lakhs), Women's Hostel (Rs. 1 Crore), Basic Facilities (Rs. 50 Lakhs, University with higher percentage of SC/ST/OBC/Minorities/Women, Women's Study Centre (Rs. 25 Lakhs) and (Rs. 5 Lakhs per year), P.G. Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Child (Rs. 2000 per month for 20 months) and Capacity Building for Women in Higher Education (Rs. 519075 lakhs).

There is an urgent need for a reversal of these trends by means of wider access higher education, review of appointment and promotion procedures, provision of legislative and infra-structure support in all professions special programmes for mentoring women for induction in decision making bodies affirmative action to favor women's access and participation while awaiting a genuine change in attitude towards full gender equality and institutional and governmental support through clear and effective policies which are actually enforced. The state must provide support services to women such as transport, crèche, hostel, counseling and bridge courses.

## Demand of the Day

The Gender sensitive university curriculum must offer stimulating role models for women students;

provide encouragement and build their confidence and present male-dominated careers in a light which is more attractive to women. Moreover, since development theory acknowledges that the gender dimension has become a key factor in any solutions proposed for global problems, gender mainstreaming in higher education is a MUST.

Equal opportunities offered in circumstances of inequalities of endowment an environment will only perpetuate the existing patterns of inequality. Affirmative action strategies to reduce inequities of access generally have a bad name; whether from the traditionalists who see them leading to the watering down of standards or among some women who see them as devaluing their credentials if all women are viewed as having entered under these strategies. Hence, capacity enhancement of women in higher education be the key area of intervention.

Women in higher education governance must safeguard women's legal rights and ensure their inclusion at all levels, guided by the principle of the "Critical Mass Factor". This means moving beyond token representation of one or two individuals and aiming for 30–50% participation, thereby ensuring genuine institutional commitment to gender equity and inclusive decision-making. The UGC Programme on Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education was initiated by UGC with a realization that women managers are heavily under-represented in the management cadres of the University system. The UGC's initiative "Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education" seeks to remedy the situation and bring about a more equitable representation of women in administrative positions in universities and colleges. The National Consultative Committee for Capacity Building of Women Managers in

Higher Education, under the UGC, manages the activities of the project. Prof. Armaity S. Desai, former Chairperson of the UGC is the Chairperson of this committee. Regional and Local coordinators are appointed to implement the programme to cover a wide area. Under this programme various workshops are conducted all over the country.

### Conclusion

The state must provide women with solid foundation in mathematics and science subjects; discourage the system of tracking students into arts and science streams at the second level of education, provide childcare facilities at the institution of higher learning. In situations where particular fields of study have to be pursued in another country, create special funding for married women so that their spouses can accompany them; provide a means through which the issues of gender inequality can be addressed both formally and

informally, at all levels of society. Decision-making role of women in higher education as also in the larger polity around needs to be guarded and nurtured for all women so that women can make themselves heard as a public voice of judgment - heard by both men and women; Expansion of gender dimension in educational curriculum - not only in higher education but all levels, and particularly in science and technology curriculum - should be meant for the public domain of judgment, of both men and women alike. For sustainable development of the economy, both efficiency and equity considerations demand enhanced access of women to higher education, positive discrimination in their favour is called for in general and targeted interventions for higher education opportunities from girls and women from the under-served and historically neglected sections.

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# Education, Gender and Agency in Kolkata's Bhadralok Community

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## Abstract

Education has historically been the defining marker of Bhadralok identity in Kolkata, symbolising cultural refinement, intellectual distinction, and urban middle-class mobility. For women within this community, however, educational access has unfolded within a complex matrix of privilege and regulation. While schooling and higher education have long distinguished Bhadralok families, women's learning has often been encouraged within boundaries shaped by ideals of respectability, domestic responsibility, and class continuity. Education enhances symbolic capital and family prestige, yet its translation into autonomous agency remains uneven.

This paper examines how education shapes gendered agency in Kolkata's Bhadralok community by situating women's experiences at the intersection of gender and class. Drawing on an intersectional feminist framework, it argues that caste privilege and middle-class status do not automatically dissolve patriarchal constraints; rather, they frequently reconfigure them into subtler forms. Women's qualifications contribute significantly to household stability and urban professional life, yet expectations of caregiving, moral propriety, and moderated ambition continue to influence how educational attainment may be exercised.

In a contemporary urban context marked by economic restructuring, demographic shifts, and intensified professional competition, the gap between educational attainment and sustained agency becomes increasingly visible. The paper contends that policy approaches must move beyond access-based indicators toward structural reforms that enable career continuity, caregiving support, and gender-sensitive institutional practices. Reimagined in this manner, women's education can move beyond its historical role as a marker of refinement to become a substantive foundation for equitable participation and inclusive urban development in Kolkata.

**Keywords :** Bhadralok; women's education; gender norms; urban middle class; intersectionality; Kolkata.

*“True learning liberates the human spirit from fear and dependence.”* - Rabindranath Tagore

## Introduction

The Bhadralok community has historically symbolized the educated, culturally refined middle and upper-middle classes of Bengal. Associated with learning, linguistic sophistication, and

intellectual authority, this class consolidated its identity through education—first under colonial rule and later within the postcolonial urban order, particularly in Kolkata. Yet narratives of Bhadraklok achievement have largely centred on men: their professions, public leadership, and scholarly contributions. The educational trajectories of women and the meanings education has held for shaping their lives have received far less sustained attention. This paper reorients the lens toward women, placing education at the centre of inquiry to examine how it shapes their selfhood, aspirations, and negotiations within a class deeply invested in intellectual distinction.

For Bhadraklok women, education has historically carried layered and often contradictory meanings. It was actively encouraged as a sign of cultivation, moral discipline, and social prestige, yet it was not intended to disrupt patriarchal hierarchies fundamentally. Girls were educated not only to acquire knowledge but also to embody refinement—fluent speech, aesthetic sensibility, and controlled comportment. Educational attainment enhanced marriage prospects and reinforced family honour, becoming part of the symbolic capital sustaining middle-class respectability. At the same time, access to schools and universities opened intellectual horizons, exposing women to new ideas and possibilities that occasionally stretched beyond the domestic sphere, even if their realization remained socially regulated (Sarkar, 2001).

In contemporary Kolkata, many Bhadraklok women pursue advanced degrees and professional careers. However, their academic and professional accomplishments coexist with enduring expectations surrounding marriage, caregiving, and the preservation of family reputation. The tension between intellectual autonomy and social conformity continues to shape their lived experiences (Chakravarti, 1993). Education provides analytical skills, economic opportunity,

and confidence, yet its application is often mediated by classed notions of propriety. Women learn to balance ambition with restraint and independence with familial obligation, negotiating identities that are both self-directed and socially embedded.

Within the Bhadraklok imagination, education signifies more than employability; it represents moral worth and cultural superiority. Women become central to reproducing this identity—ensuring children's academic success, maintaining linguistic and cultural refinement, and safeguarding social status. Thus, women's education operates dually as empowerment and responsibility. By foregrounding this duality, the paper moves beyond viewing education as mere access or attainment, instead exploring how it shapes everyday choices, relationships, and identity formation within a specific classed and gendered context.

This paper argues that education within the Bhadraklok community has never been a neutral instrument of advancement. Rather, it has functioned as a historically embedded mechanism through which class identity is reproduced and gender roles are regulated. By tracing women's educational journeys across colonial, nationalist, and contemporary neoliberal phases, the paper demonstrates how education operates simultaneously as cultural capital, moral discipline, and negotiated agency. An intersectional feminist framework allows us to examine how caste privilege, middle-class aspiration, and patriarchal expectations converge in shaping women lived realities.

## **Historical Context of the Bhadraklok Community**

Indian society has historically been structured into upper, middle, and lower classes based on socio-economic status. The upper class includes influential business leaders, senior bureaucrats, intellectuals, and affluent professionals who

typically own significant property and resources. Women in this group often engage in paid work for personal fulfilment rather than economic need and participate in voluntary activities that reinforce social prestige. The middle class comprises clerks, junior officials, teachers, journalists, and small-scale entrepreneurs. With modest property and limited financial security, this group frequently depends on dual incomes, leading many women to seek employment in teaching, clerical, or administrative positions. The lower or working class includes landless labourers, factory and construction workers, largely employed in the unorganized sector. Characterized by minimal property ownership, limited access to education, and precarious living conditions, they constitute a significant segment of the urban and rural poor (Dutta, 1999).

In Kolkata (formerly the capital of British India), the middle class emerged prominently during colonial rule. The British administration created an English-educated intermediary class drawn from upper-caste groups, former Mughal officials, moneylenders, and educated Brahmins. This group, known as the Bhadrak, came to represent educated professionals and a minority of merchants and industrialists.

Emerging in the colonial era, the Bhadrak emphasized education, cultural refinement, and moral respectability. While men symbolized public authority and intellectual leadership, women were idealized as embodiments of virtue and domesticity. This gendered ideology reinforced patriarchal norms, confining middle-class women largely to the private sphere and regulating their social roles (Chatterjee, 2021).

This historically produced alignment between education, caste privilege, and gendered domesticity did not simply shape institutional access; it structured how women came to understand themselves. To grasp the contemporary implications of this legacy, it is necessary to examine how identity is formed within this classed and gendered terrain.

## **Women, Education, and the Shaping of Identity in the Bhadrak Context**

Understanding identity among married, upper-middle-class women in the Bhadrak community requires situating lived experience within broader social theory. The “self” may be understood as reflective self-awareness, while “identity” refers to the relatively stable sense of belonging formed through social interaction. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, identity emerges through everyday exchanges within family, educational institutions, and community networks. Structural interactionist thought further reminds us that these interactions are organized along axes of class, caste, gender, religion, and age. For Bhadrak women, education becomes a crucial site where these intersecting structures meet personal aspiration.

Historically, in urban Bengal, especially in Kolkata, education signified refinement and cultural authority. However, women's education differed in purpose from that of men. While men were prepared for professional and public roles, women were guided toward accomplishments that enhanced domestic competence and moral prestige. Literary knowledge, music, aesthetic cultivation, and etiquette were valued as attributes of the Bhadrak, the “respectable woman,” whose learning was intended to complement rather than unsettle patriarchal arrangements (Phadke, Ranade, & Khan, 2011). Education thus became central to the making of gendered class identity.

Normative ideals of femininity reinforced this model. Respectability emphasized caregiving, modest conduct, and devotion to family. Even as women entered universities and salaried employment, expectations that they prioritise domestic responsibilities persisted. Educational qualifications often enhanced women's influence in household decision-making, yet they also expanded their obligations, ensuring children's academic

success, maintaining emotional harmony, and upholding cultural standards. Education, therefore, functions dually as a resource and responsibility: it strengthens authority while intensifying accountability (Palriwala & Neetha, 2011).

Cultural symbols further anchor this identity. Among many Hindu Bengali women, marital markers such as shakha, pala, loha, and shindur signify conjugal status and continuity. While women may reinterpret these symbols personally, their meanings remain embedded within broader discourses of respectable femininity. Education does not displace these frameworks; instead, it coexists with them, producing identities that combine intellectual achievement with ritual observance (Das, 2019).

Theoretical debates on identity underscore that recognition is shaped not only by self-perception but also by collective labelling. Naming practices, caste location, kinship ties, and gender norms structure how Bhadrak women are seen and how they see themselves. Earlier psychological models that privileged male development have been critiqued for obscuring such gendered dynamics. Within the Bhadrak milieu, women's educational journeys intersect with caste privilege, religious norms, and middle-class aspirations, producing identities that are negotiated rather than singular (Chattopadhyay, 2024). Education thus becomes the key arena through which selfhood is continuously shaped, affirmed, and disciplined.

### **Transforming Bhadrak Modernity: Class Decline and Gendered Reconfiguration**

In contemporary Bengal, the once distinctive Bhadrak class, historically rooted in Western education, cultural refinement, and professional authority, has undergone a visible transformation. In urban centres such as Kolkata, traditional markers of status such as English education and cultural sophistication no longer guarantee social dominance. Economic pressures, professional

stagnation, and competition from an emergent entrepreneurial middle class have destabilised older hierarchies. Families that once occupied secure intellectual and bureaucratic positions increasingly report downward mobility, while demographic shifts, including low fertility and youth out-migration, contribute to a perceived shrinking of the community's influence.

This restructuring has significant gendered implications. Historically, Bhadrak respectability depended upon a carefully maintained division between male public authority and female moral guardianship (Bhattacharya, 2005; Choudhuri, 1998). Women symbolised refinement, restraint, and cultural continuity (Chatterjee, 2023). Education was central to this identity: it enhanced prestige and moral capital but was rarely intended to unsettle domestic hierarchies (Bhattacharya, 2005). Paid employment for women, especially in earlier decades, often generated anxiety, as financial independence appeared to challenge established gender arrangements (Chatterjee, 2018; Chatterjee, 2023).

Today, economic precarity has altered the material foundations of this arrangement. Women's education and employment increasingly contribute to household stability. Yet the symbolic burden of preserving class respectability remains disproportionately theirs. Thus, as class privilege becomes uncertain, gender regulation intensifies in subtler forms. Education continues to signify distinction, but its function shifts, from pure cultural capital to economic necessity.

The decline of stable professional authority among Bhadrak men has subtly reconfigured gender expectations. As traditional markers of masculine provision weaken, women's educational and professional participation becomes economically indispensable. Yet rather than dissolving patriarchy, this shift often produces a re-domesticated modernity, where women are encouraged to succeed, but without destabilising symbolic hierarchies within the household (Banerjee, 2005).

## **Educated Agency within the Boundaries of Respectability**

Within this transformed landscape, education occupies an ambivalent position in women's lives. On one hand, higher education expands professional opportunity, fosters analytical confidence, and strengthens bargaining power within households. On the other hand, its application remains mediated by expectations of marriage, caregiving, and disciplined femininity. Women may be encouraged to pursue advanced degrees, yet often within “appropriate” disciplines aligned with domestic compatibility and reputational safety.

The ideology of respectability, historically shaped by colonial and nationalist thought, continues to regulate women's mobility, visibility, and ambition. Public success is permissible, even desirable, so long as it does not disrupt the moral coherence of the family. In this context, education becomes both empowerment and responsibility: it enhances authority while increasing expectations around child-rearing, emotional labour, and cultural transmission (Chatterjee, 1989).

Neoliberal consumer culture complicates this dynamic further. Professional achievement and lifestyle consumption may signal modernity, yet they coexist with older hierarchies of caste, class, and gender (Mukherjee 1995; Banerjee 1989). Educated Bhadrakok women, therefore, negotiate layered pressures: to contribute economically, to maintain cultural distinction, and to embody restrained femininity.

Access to opportunity remains subtly gendered. While families value education, institutional participation and leadership trajectories are shaped by confidence, mobility, and social support. Education does not simply liberate or constrain; it structures a field of negotiation where agency is exercised within socially prescribed limits (Chakravarty, 2022).

In contemporary Bhadrakok society, therefore, women's education has become the central site through which class anxiety, economic adaptation, and gendered respectability converge. It is through women's educational and professional trajectories that the community recalibrates its identity in an era of uncertainty.

## **Education at the Intersection of Gender and Class**

An intersectional feminist lens allows for a deeper understanding of how education shapes the lives of Bhadrakok women in the contemporary moment. Their experiences cannot be reduced to gender alone; they are structured at the intersection of caste privilege, middle-class aspiration, cultural capital, and patriarchal norms. Education becomes the key site where these forces converge (Chakrabarti, 2019).

Intersectionality is particularly instructive here because it complicates celebratory narratives of middle-class women's progress. Bhadrakok women benefit from caste location, urban access, and cultural capital, yet these very privileges intensify the demand that they embody controlled modernity. Their subordination is not marked by overt exclusion from education, but by regulation of its scope and visibility.

Historically, access to English education distinguished the Bhadrakok from both colonial rulers and subaltern populations. Women's education, however, functioned differently from men's. While it elevated family prestige and consolidated caste-class boundaries, it simultaneously prescribed a disciplined form of femininity. The educated woman was expected to be articulate yet restrained, knowledgeable yet deferential, modern without

being disruptive. Education thus produced distinction while reproducing hierarchy.

Intersectionality reveals that Bhadrakalok women occupy a paradoxical position. Their caste and class location afford them educational access and cultural authority unavailable to many other women. Yet within their own social milieu, gendered expectations regulate how far that access may translate into autonomy (Anand, 2021). They are privileged in relation to poorer or lower caste women, but constrained within patriarchal structures that define respectability and moral worth (Chatterjee, 2021).

In the contemporary context of economic uncertainty, this intersection becomes sharper. As class stability weakens, education is increasingly mobilized as a strategy of security and mobility. Women's qualifications are encouraged not only for symbolic refinement but for economic contribution. However, the moral script governing their conduct remains intact. They are expected to succeed professionally without unsettling domestic hierarchies, to embody ambition without visible transgression.

Education, therefore, functions simultaneously as empowerment and discipline. It enhances economic potential and self-confidence, yet it also binds women to the reproduction of class identity, ensuring children's academic success, maintaining cultural sophistication, and sustaining reputational boundaries. The burden of managing this balance falls disproportionately on women.

Through an intersectional feminist framework, the Bhadrakalok woman emerges not simply as an educated middle-class subject, but as a historically situated figure navigating layered power structures. Her education is both a resource and a regulatory mechanism—enabling mobility while anchoring her within enduring expectations of classed femininity.

## **Way Forward: Reimagining Education for Women's Urban Agency**

Reimagining women's education in contemporary urban Bengal requires moving beyond access-based metrics toward structural transformation. While Bhadrakalok women in Kolkata have long benefited from schooling and higher education, their educational mobility does not automatically translate into professional continuity or decision-making power (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). Urban policy frameworks must therefore address the gap between educational attainment and sustained agency. Some of the suggested areas are as follows:

- **Ensuring Career Continuity Mechanisms:** The municipal and state-level education policies should incorporate gender-responsive career continuity mechanisms, including re-entry pathways for women who experience career breaks due to caregiving responsibilities. Urban local bodies can collaborate with universities and professional institutions to design flexible certification programs and skill-upgradation modules that enable women to re-enter the workforce without stigma.
- **Building Care Infrastructure in Urban Workspaces:** The workplace policies in urban institutions, public and private, must integrate caregiving infrastructure such as childcare facilities, flexible work models, and equitable leave systems. Without redistributing domestic labour and care responsibilities, educational gains remain constrained within traditional gender expectations.
- **Recognizing Invisible Gendered Constraints in Middle-Class Contexts:** The urban governance must recognize that middle-class women's challenges are often rendered invisible because they are not framed as “disadvantaged.” Intersectional policy approaches should

acknowledge that caste privilege and educational access do not eliminate gendered constraints; instead, they may reconfigure them into subtler forms of regulation.

- **Integrating Gender Sensitization in Higher Education:** The curriculum reform at higher education levels should incorporate gender-sensitization and critical engagement with social norms, enabling young women and men to question inherited expectations of respectability, domesticity, and professional hierarchy. Education must cultivate not only employability but also critical citizenship.
- **Expanding Women's Civic Participation Platforms:** The local self-government institutions can play a role in creating urban community platforms, public lectures, civic forums, and women's leadership initiatives, that normalize women's presence in public decision-making spaces. Such interventions gradually shift cultural expectations surrounding women's mobility and authority.

## Conclusion

The educational experiences of Bhadrakol women illustrate that access alone does not guarantee empowerment. Education has historically been a defining feature of urban middle-class identity in Kolkata, yet its benefits for women remain mediated by enduring norms of respectability and caregiving responsibility. As urban economies evolve and professional competition intensifies, women's education is increasingly indispensable to household stability and civic life.

For education to function as a genuine instrument of empowerment, it must be supported by institutional, workplace, and governance reforms that enable continuity, autonomy, and shared responsibility. When urban policy frameworks recognize the intersection of gender, class, and

cultural expectation, education can move beyond symbolic refinement and become a substantive foundation for women's agency in contemporary cities.

In this sense, strengthening women's educational pathways is not merely a matter of social welfare; it is central to building equitable and resilient urban futures. The case of Bhadrakol women demonstrates that even within historically privileged urban communities, education can operate as both mobility and regulation. Recognising this dual character is essential for policymakers and educators alike. When educational systems consciously challenge restrictive norms rather than quietly reproducing them, they create conditions for transformative change. Reimagined in this way, women's education in Kolkata holds the potential not only to sustain class identity but to reshape it toward greater gender equity and democratic participation.

*In the words of Michelle Obama, "There is no limit to what we, as women, can accomplish."*

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# ROUND & ABOUT

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## **LAKSHYA ZERO DUMPSITE:**

### **India's Drive to Eliminate City Dumpsites under Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)**

Initiatives under the SBM have strengthened sanitation and waste management systems across cities, laying the foundation for cleaner urban spaces. Building on this foundation, and with the goal of eliminating legacy dumpsites, the Government of India (GoI) launched the Dumpsite Remediation Accelerator Programme (DRAP) in November 2025, with the objective of achieving “Lakshya: Zero Dumpsites” by October 2026, with most dumpsites targeted for clearance within this timeframe. Approximately 2,479 dumpsites were identified across the country, primarily those containing legacy waste of 1,000 tons or more.

A press release from the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA), GoI, on 31 January 2026, revealed major achievements in this regard. The reported facts are as under:

1. Over 61% of legacy waste has already been processed. The programme prioritizes 214 high-impact sites containing nearly 80% of the remaining waste. Remediated waste is repurposed into resources such as road-building material, filling of low-lying areas, recyclables, and Refuse-Derived Fuel.
2. Once dumpsites are remediated, cities benefit from cleaner air, safer groundwater, reduced fires, and reclaimed land for infrastructure or developing green cover.
3. In 2025, 459 dumpsites across 438 cities in 26 States achieved complete remediation, with 183 lakh metric tons (LMT) of legacy waste remediated. This adds to a cumulative total of 1,138 dumpsites fully remediated across 1,048 cities in 29 States, with 877 LMT of legacy waste remediated overall. Alongside the remediation of existing dumpsites, the Government will ensure that no new dumpsites are created.
4. Currently, remediation is underway at 1,428 dumpsites across the country. Under the DRAP, 214 dumpsites have been identified as high-impact sites because they together contain nearly 80% of India's remaining legacy waste. These sites, spread across 30 States & UTs covering 200 Urban Local Bodies, account for approximately 8.6 crore metric tons of accumulated waste and have therefore been prioritized for accelerated remediation. The approach to addressing legacy dumpsites follows a double-pronged strategy to remove old dumpsites and prevent new ones by setting up waste processing facilities.

*Biomining means digging out old waste from a dumpsite and cleaning it up in a scientific way. After the waste is excavated, it is spread out in long rows and allowed to breathe in air while special microbes (bio-cultures) speed up natural decomposition. Once the waste becomes stable and dry, it is screened and separated into different categories such as soil-like fines, bricks, stones, metals, plastic, clothes, and other recyclables. Each of these materials is then sent for proper reuse, e.g. for road construction, recycling, co-processing in industries, or composting depending on its type. Biomining converts a mixed garbage hill into usable resources ensuring that very little is left to go to a landfill.*

[Reference: PIB, New Delhi, 31 January 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2221171&reg=3&lang=1>]

## **New Solid Waste Management Rules Notified; To Come into Force from 1 April 2026**

Since their inception of about two centuries ago, one of the chief functions of municipalities has included city cleaning. The municipalities were collecting waste and dumping it on the skirts of cities. In Mumbai itself, the Deonar dumping ground was set up in 1927. Approximately, there are 2,479 identified dumpsites across the country, primarily those containing legacy wastes of 1,000 tons or more.

In 1996, a scientist lady Mrs. Almitra Patel in Bangalore saw the dangers in uncontrolled dumping and total lack of scientific approach in handling waste that she filed a PIL (WP 888/1996) in the Supreme Court, which resulted into making the first statutory rules namely Municipal Solid Wastes (Management and Handling) Rules, 2000 whose implementation became legally binding on all the municipalities. Handling and managing waste became a matter of keen monitoring. With the experience gained during implementation, these rules were replaced by the Solid Waste Rules, 2016. Based on the insight gained in implementation of the national missions (SBM 1.0 and SBM 2.0) the rules of 2016 have now been replaced by the rules of 2026.

By their Notification dated 27 January 2026, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has notified the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026, superseding the Rules of 2016 on the subject. The rules will come into effect from 1 April 2026. The revised rules integrate the principles of Circular Economy and Extended Producer Responsibility, with a specific focus on efficient waste segregation and management. The rules contained detailed instructions. Some of the salient features are summarized as follows:

1. Four-stream segregation of solid waste at source has been made mandatory under the SWM Rules, 2026. Waste is required to be segregated into wet waste, dry waste, sanitary waste and special care waste. Each of these categories is clearly defined in the rules.



2. Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility (EBWGR): Bulk waste generators are made accountable for the solid waste generated by them. This is in addition to the existing definition of Bulk Waste Generators.
3. Faster Land Allocation for Waste Processing and Online Monitoring of Complete Solid Waste Management
4. Duties of Local Bodies and Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs).
5. Use of Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) by Industries
6. Restrictions on Landfilling and Remediation of Legacy Waste Dumpsites
7. Solid Waste Management in Hilly Areas and Islands.

There are detailed provisions and instructions on all these topics.

[References: (1) PIB, New Delhi, 28 January 2026; <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2219676&reg=3&lang=2>; (2) PIB, New Delhi, 31 January 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2221171&reg=3&lang=1>]

### **Third Mumbai Taking Shape**

As a major policy of decongesting Mumbai (area 437 sq.km.), the Government of Maharashtra had started developing Navi Mumbai in 1971 (area 344 sq.km). Today, it is a bustling city with about 1.68 million population which serves as a key residential and commercial hub in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). The coming up of an international airport in the MMR necessitated developing another satellite city, namely Navi Mumbai Airport Influence Notified Areas (NAINA), officially notified in 2013 (area 371 sq.km).

With the Mumbai Trans-Harbour Link (MTHL) bridge having been opened, the Government of Maharashtra envisioned the idea of Third Mumbai as Karnala-Sai Chirner (KSC) New Town in October 2024 (area 334 sq.km). In February 2026, the Maharashtra Cabinet gave its clearance for land acquisition, which has set the stage for development. Master Plan of the new town is under preparation, expected to be final around August, 2026.



A few salient features were given out in the press are as below:

<p><b>THIRD MUMBAI AT A GLANCE</b></p> <p>KSC (Karnala Sai Chirner) New Town in Raigad district, being pitched as Mumbai's next growth frontier, is a planned urban region aimed at decongesting Mumbai and building a new economic hub around the Atal Setu and Navi Mumbai International Airport.</p> <p><b>WHAT IS THIRD MUMBAI</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A planned new urban region in Raigad district.</li> <li>● Spread across 323.44 sq km.</li> <li>● Covers 124 villages in Uran, Panvel and Pen</li> <li>● Designed as a planned extension of the MMR</li> </ul> <p><b>WHY IS IT BEING BUILT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To manage rapid development after the Atal Setu and the Navi Mumbai International Airport.</li> <li>● To reduce congestion in Mumbai</li> <li>● To create jobs, economic hubs</li> <li>● To support Maharashtra's goal of a 300 billion dollar MMR GDP by 2029.</li> </ul>	<p><b>WHAT WILL THE CITY HAVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Business and finance districts.</li> <li>● Logistics, warehousing hubs</li> <li>● Data centres and IT clusters.</li> <li>● Universities and research hubs.</li> <li>● Medical infrastructure.</li> <li>● Retail and entertainment zones.</li> <li>● Luxury to affordable housing</li> <li>● Transit oriented mixed use neighbourhoods</li> </ul>	<p><b>ECONOMIC VISION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Raigad Pen Growth Centre as the first city</li> <li>● BKC style business district</li> <li>● Public private partnership driven development</li> <li>● Target of hosting 65% of India's future data centre capacity</li> </ul> <p><b>CURRENT STATUS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Area currently consists of hills, forests and agricultural land</li> <li>● Drone surveys and land mapping underway</li> <li>● Land use plan and masterplan in preparation</li> </ul> <p><b>WHO IS DEVELOPING IT</b></p> <p>MMRDA appointed as New Town Development Authority on October 15, 2024</p>
	<p><b>STRATEGIC CONNECTIVITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Atal Setu with a 20 minute Mumbai link.</li> <li>● Proximity to Navi Mumbai International Airport.</li> <li>● JNPT Port.</li> <li>● Mumbai Goa Highway.</li> <li>● Mumbai Pune Expressway.</li> <li>● Upcoming Metro Line B.</li> <li>● Rail network access.</li> </ul>	

Graphic Source: The Indian Express, Mumbai, 12 February 2026.

[Reference: Widely covered in the Press]

## **Developing City Economic Regions (CER) - A New Scheme to Support the Growth of Select Cities**

A catchy term used for cities is engines of growth, given the substantial contribution made by them to the GDP. Cities have become hubs of a gamut of activities and amenities, which include institutions, businesses, financial centres, institutions of higher education, cultural centres, better transport facilities, housing, etc.

There are also Temple Cities, which have their own features, particularly requiring facilities for crowd management and infrastructure.

The cities have given rise to a host of problems. To support the growth of cities and to solve their problems, various National Missions have been/or are under implementation to support their growth. One more scheme adding to the repertoire of policy measures is a scheme for selected CERs. The Budget 2026-27, presented on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2026, has sanctioned an allocation of Rs.5000 crore over 5 years, per CER announced, for implementing their plans through a challenge mode with a reform-cum-results based financing mechanism.

The seven city regions identified for this initiative are: Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar-Puri-Cuttack (Tri-cities), Coimbatore-Erode-Tiruppur (Tri-cities), Pune, Surat, Varanasi and Vishakhapatnam. The focus of the scheme will be to upgrade urban infrastructure, and provision of basic amenities.

*[References: (1) PIB, New Delhi, 1 February 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2221455&reg=3&lang=2>; (2) The Hindustan Times (E-Paper), 30 March 2026]*

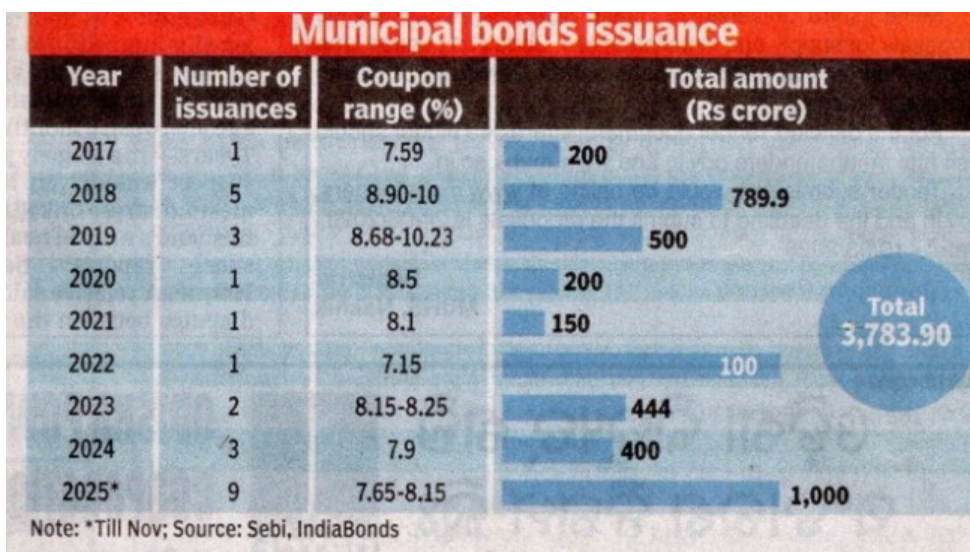
## **Municipal Bonds - Incentive Grants Announced**

Another major announcement in the Union Budget 2026-27 relates to the incentive grants to Municipal Corporations for the issuance of municipal bonds of higher value. An incentive of Rs. 100 crores for a single bond issuance of more than ₹1000 crore” announced<sup>1</sup>. As regards Municipal Bonds, a few facts may be noted:

Bonds are dated securities issued for about 10-Year period for raising finance. They are extensively used by the Union Government, State Governments, companies, Development Finance Institutions, Banks (for raising capital) and other financial institutions. They are regulated by the Securities & Exchanges Board of India (SEBI).

The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation had issued municipal bonds worth Rs.1,000 million<sup>2</sup> in early 1998 without a State guarantee. This has been subject of various studies. Raising finance through municipal bonds is always advantageous for municipalities than raising loans for their infrastructure projects.

As the issuance of municipal bonds had slowed down, a support scheme of providing interest subvention up to Rs.13 crores per Rs.100 crores for the first issuance (max Rs.26 crores) and Rs.10 crores per Rs.100 crores for subsequent green bonds (max Rs.20 crores) was introduced by the Government of India<sup>3</sup>. As a result of this scheme, issuance of municipal bonds got some momentum. Since 2017, 26 bonds issuances have been done by the municipalities, raising total Rs.3,783.90 crore. Its progress is shown in the accompanying graphics. This scheme is also in operation.



Graphic Source: The Times of India, Mumbai, 10 March 2026.

Notes:

1. Budget Highlights (2026-27), PIB, New Delhi, 1 February 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2221455&reg=3&lang=2;>
2. The 2007 RBI Study - Municipal Finance in India: An Assessment
3. Urban Update (April 2025)

## Union Cabinet approves INDIA'S NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTION (2031-2035) to be communicated to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

In terms of Article 4 of the Paris Agreement, all the member countries are required to prepare and communicate to UNFCCC, its National Determined Contributions (NDCs). They are prepared much in advance and embody the country's domestic mitigation measures.

On 25 March 2026, the Union Cabinet approved the NDC for the period 2031 to 2035. Its salient features are as under:

### India's third set of nationally determined contribution (2031-35)

	NDC-1	NDC-2	NDC-3	PROGRESS
<b>Year of announcement</b>	2015	2022	2026	
<b>Target year</b>	2030	2030	2035	
<b>Goal 1:</b> Reducing emissions intensity (emissions per unit GDP)	<b>33-35%</b> from 2005 levels	<b>45%</b> from 2005 levels	<b>47%</b> from 2005 levels	<b>36%</b> reduction achieved by 2020
<b>Goal 2:</b> Share of non-fossil electricity sources	40%	50%	60%	<b>52%</b> in February 2026
<b>Goal 3:</b> Creating additional carbon sinks (forests, trees)	<b>2.5 to 3 bn tonnes</b> over 2005 stock	<b>2.5 to 3 bn tonnes</b> over 2005 stock	<b>3.5 to 4 bn tonnes</b> over 2005 stock	<b>2.3 bn tonnes</b> created by 2021

*Graphic Source: News Today, 26 March 2026, <https://visionias.in/current-affairs/news-today/2026-03-26/environment/union-cabinet-approves-indias-nationally-determined-contributions-ndc-for-the-period-2031-to-2035>*

1. India commits to reduce Emissions Intensity of its GDP by 47% by 2035 from 2005 level.
2. India to achieve 60% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2035.
3. India to create Carbon Sink of 3.5 to 4.0 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> eq. through Forest and Tree Cover by 2035 from 2005 level.
4. India's commitments are aligned with a vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 and Net-Zero by 2070.

*[Reference: PIB, New Delhi, 25 March 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2245209&reg=3&lang=1#:~:text=Press%20Release%...>]*

## **Development of Seven High-Speed Rail Corridors Announced**

Another important budget announcement having an impact on cities – growth connectors - relates to the Seven High-Speed Rail Corridors between cities as 'growth connectors' to promote environmentally sustainable passenger systems. These include:

- I. Mumbai-Pune
- ii. Pune-Hyderabad,
- iii. Hyderabad-Bengaluru,
- iv. Hyderabad-Chennai
- v. Chennai-Bengaluru,
- vi. Delhi-Varanasi,
- vii. Varanasi-Siliguri.

[Reference: PIB, New Delhi, 1 February 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2221455&reg=3&lang=2>]

## **Call for Research Papers!**

The Regional Centre for Urban & Environmental Studies is pleased to invite contributions for Urban World in the form of articles and research papers from researchers, authors, publishers, academicians, administrative and executive officers, readers on the following themes –

- 1) Technology Innovations Shaping Urban India
- 2) Mobility & Transportation
- 3) Climate Change & Sustainability
- 4) Urban Health & Environment

Articles could be between 2000 to 4000 words. They may contain compatible tables, charts, graphs, etc. We reserve the right to edit for sense, style and space. Contributions may be e-mailed in digital form as a Word file to the Director, RCUES, Mumbai.

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