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John Harrison's *The End of Everything* wins the 2026 Booker Prize for fiction

Associated Press
LONDON



M. John Harrison poses with the trophy after winning the Booker Prize 2026, at Old Billingsgate in London on Tuesday. AP

British writer M. John Harrison won the Booker Prize for fiction on Monday for *The End of Everything*, a satirical dystopian novel whose themes of "catastrophe and apocalypse" chime with our uneasy times. It is the first work of science fiction to take the prestigious $67,000 literary award, but 81-year-old Harrison said he doesn't want to be hemmed in by the sci-fi label.

He said Booker recognition after six decades as an author shows that the era of "genres as fences and boxes, pigeonholes, is over".

"I think this book shows, and the prize now shows, that it is very possible to write a book that mixes not just two genres, but three or four," Mr. Harrison told presspersons at a post-ceremony news conference.

Mr. Harrison beat five other finalists including previous winners Douglas Stuart and Marlon James, who had been the odds-makers' favourites, and Pulitzer Prize laureate Elizabeth Strout.

The End of Everything is set on England's Channel coast in the near future, after an unspecified calamity has shattered society and brought an influx of enigmatic alien entities to Britain. It centres on a beachcomber who lives with his gun-toting aunt and discovers a puzzling, shape-shifting artifact on the shore.

Asked what he wanted to convey to readers, Mr. Harrison said: "It's a grim world, and it'll keep on being grim. And it's weird. But at the end of things there may be some kind of – I wouldn't say hope, or closure, but there might be some kind of relief."

Critics have praised the book's dark humour, though some have been confused by its elusive narrative.

1. M. John Harrison Wins the 2026 Booker Prize

GS Paper I – Art and Culture: Literature and International Awards

Context: British author M. John Harrison won the 2026 Booker Prize for *The End of Everything*, becoming the oldest-ever winner at the age of 81.

1. 2026 Booker Prize: Key Highlights

- **Winner:** M. John Harrison (United Kingdom).
- **Winning novel:** *The End of Everything* – his 13th novel.
- **Genre:** Dystopian satire with science-fiction elements.
- **Theme:** A post-apocalyptic Britain facing societal collapse and mysterious alien entities.
- **Prize money:** £50,000 (approximately US$67,000)

2. About the Booker Prize

- **Established:** 1969; first awarded to P. H. Newby for *Something to Answer For*.
- Recognises outstanding fiction originally written in English and published in the UK or Ireland.
- Open to authors of any nationality.

3. Indian and Indian-Origin Booker Prize Winners

Year	Author	Winning Book
1971	V. S. Naipaul	*In a Free State*
1981	Salman Rushdie	*Midnight's Children*
1997	Arundhati Roy	*The God of Small Things*
2006	Kiran Desai	*The Inheritance of Loss*
2008	Aravind Adiga	*The White Tiger*

4. Difference Between the Two Awards

Basis	Booker Prize	International Booker Prize

Original language	English	Any language
Work recognised	Original English-language fiction	Fiction translated into English
Prize recipient	Author	Author and translator jointly
Indian example	*The White Tiger* – Aravind Adiga	*Tomb of Sand* – Geetanjali Shree

Remember: The Booker Prize celebrates original English fiction, whereas the International Booker Prize celebrates translated literature.

• THEY SAY TITLE ALONE DOES NOT GUARANTEE SPONSORS, ELITE INVITES

100 grandmasters for India but for most, real test of wits begins after the title

Amit Kamath
Mumbai, November 10

ON SUNDAY, India crossed an enviable milestone in chess: 38 years after Viswanathan Anand became India's first grandmaster, the nation now has 100 GMs. Ashok Shrivatri, the 22-year-old from Madhya Pradesh, will go down in chess history as the one to take India's GM count to triple figures.

There are many more in the frantic race to become the next GM, the sport's most prestigious honorific prefix and the top official title offered by FIDE. But unlike other life paths, such as pursuing an educational degree and a cushy job, becoming a grandmaster comes with no guarantees.



Pranav V became India's 75th grandmaster in 2022 at the age of 16. His current rating is 2679. LENNART OOTES/FIDE

The "super grandmasters", who have crossed an Elo rating of 2,700, are usually invited to elite tournaments like Norway Chess, Tata Steel in Wijk aan Zee and Prague Masters — and India currently has five of them: R Praggnanandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi, D Gukesh, Nihal Sarin and Anand. But for most of the rest, just travelling to the next tier of tournaments, even if they get an invite, can burn a hole in the pocket.

"Becoming a grandmaster by itself does not lead to your life changing drastically. I became a grandmaster a few

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2. India Reaches 100 Chess Grandmasters: Challenges Begin After the Title

GS Paper II – Governance and Social Sector: Sports Development

Context: India reached the milestone of 100 chess Grandmasters, 38 years after Viswanathan Anand became the country's first Grandmaster in 1988.

1. India's 100th Grandmaster

- **Player:** Anuj Shrivatri, aged 22, from Madhya Pradesh.
- **Achievement:** Won the 7th ASEAN Plus Individual Open Chess Championship in the Philippines.
- **Significance:** India became home to 100 Grandmasters.
- **First Indian Grandmaster:** Viswanathan Anand (1988).

2. Understanding the Grandmaster Title

- Awarded by the **International Chess Federation (FIDE)**.
- It is the highest standard lifetime title in chess.
- Normally requires a rating of at least 2,500 and three Grandmaster norms, subject to FIDE regulations.
- **Super Grandmasters:** Players with ratings above 2,700, who are more likely to receive invitations to elite international tournaments.

3. Challenges After Becoming a Grandmaster

1. **Financial constraints:** Travelling to international tournaments, accommodation and participation fees can be expensive.
2. **Limited sponsorship:** Winning the title does not automatically attract sponsors or financial support.
3. **Competitive pressure:** Players must improve their ratings and performance to qualify for elite tournaments.
4. **Unequal opportunities:** Access to invitations and high-level competitions remains limited for many players.

RUSSIA, UKRAINE AT U.S.-BROKERED TALKS IN ABU DHABI

Ukraine talks begin, India pushes for safe Black Sea, quick end to war

In touch with both sides to contribute towards return of peace in region: MEA

Shubhajit Roy
New Delhi, November 10

AS US-BROKERED talks between Russia and Ukraine began in Abu Dhabi Tuesday to try and end the nearly five-year war, India said it was "in touch with both sides" and other "interested parties" to "contribute" towards the "return of peace" to the region.

Ahead of the talks, which were last held in February this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy who said India was ready to "mediate in establishing food

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THE IDEAS PAGE P 9

AT ABU DHABI, NEW DIPLOMATIC PUSH ON UKRAINE. STAKES HIGH FOR INDIA AND WORLD



UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan (centre) during trilateral talks between Russia and Ukraine mediated by the US, in Abu Dhabi, Tuesday. AP

e EXPLAINED

Vital to trade and security

The larger Black Sea region is key to trade and security interests of both Ukraine and Russia. It is the grain export hub of Ukraine, a major agricultural exporter. Russia too exports significant volumes of grain through the Azov-Black Sea region, an area it considers vital for military power projection.

3. **Russia–Ukraine War: Key Developments and India's Position**

GS Paper II – International Relations

Context: The Russia–Ukraine war, which began in its present phase in February 2022, continues to affect European security, global food and energy markets, and maritime trade.

1. Background and Territorial Dimension

1. **2014:** Russia annexed Crimea, while conflict emerged in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine.
2. **February 2022:** Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
3. **Territorial control:** Russia occupies approximately 19–20% of Ukraine, including Crimea and parts of eastern and southern Ukraine.
4. **Annexation claims:** Russia declared Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson part of its territory in 2022. These claims are internationally unrecognised, and Russia does not control all four regions.

2. Important Geographical Locations

Location	Strategic significance
Crimea	Russian naval presence in the Black Sea
Donbas	Industrial region and major conflict zone
Mariupol	Strategic port on the Sea of Azov
Odesa	Crucial Ukrainian port for agricultural exports
Zaporizhzhia	Site of Europe’s largest nuclear power plant
Dnipro River	Important geographical and military barrier

3. Why the Black Sea Matters

1. **Food security:** Ukrainian ports are vital for exporting wheat, maize and other agricultural products.
2. **Maritime trade:** Disruption threatens commercial shipping and increases transportation and insurance costs.
3. **Military significance:** Crimea provides Russia with an important strategic position in the Black Sea.
4. **Global impact:** Disruptions affect food prices, energy supplies and international supply chains.

4. Current Status and Peace Efforts

- **Diplomatic engagement:** Trilateral negotiations involving Russia, Ukraine and the United States resumed in Abu Dhabi on 10–11 November 2026.
- **Major disagreements:** Territorial control, Ukraine's security guarantees, its future relationship with NATO and the conditions for a ceasefire.
- **Continuing conflict:** Military attacks and damage to critical infrastructure remain concerns.
- **Outcome:** Talks have resumed, but no final peace agreement has been reached.

5. India's Position

India supports dialogue and diplomacy while emphasising sovereignty, territorial integrity and respect for international law.

India's key priorities:

1. **De-escalation:** Prevent attacks on energy infrastructure and civilian facilities.
2. **Maritime security:** Ensure safe navigation and uninterrupted movement of commercial vessels in the Black Sea.
3. **Food and energy security:** Protect global agricultural supplies and stable energy markets.
4. **Strategic autonomy:** Maintain engagement with both Russia and Ukraine while advocating a peaceful settlement.

India has also emphasised safe navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, reflecting its broader interest in protecting critical maritime trade routes.

Conclusion

The conflict highlights the interconnectedness of territorial security, food and energy supplies, and maritime trade. A durable peace requires dialogue, respect for sovereignty, credible security arrangements and protection of civilian infrastructure.

Strategic autonomy must guide India's Starlink policy



Ashwin Prasad Rao

Staff Research Analyst with the Advanced Military Technologies and Outer Space Programme at the Takshashila Institution

Recently, Elon Musk unleashed a volley of social media posts, accusing Indian "oligarchs" of impeding Starlink's entry into India. The government rejected the accusation and clarified that all satellite operators must go through the same regulatory process. The ensuing public debate has centred on Mr. Musk, Mukesh Ambani, protectionism and telecom competition. All this obscures important questions of how much control India will have over Starlink once it operates here.

In its current form, Starlink is unlikely to replace fibre and mobile networks because they have almost opposite strengths. Fibre and mobile networks take time and money to set up, but can serve many people in one area. Starlink reaches remote places without towers or cables but is limited by how many users it can serve in one region. While fibre and mobile networks are optimised for density, Starlink is optimised for reach. Starlink has previously stopped taking new residential customers in areas where it ran out of capacity.

Starlink is well-suited for isolated settlements, border regions, ships, and disaster affected areas. Governments and the military require reliable connectivity in such areas. Starlink can connect soldiers, drones, sensors and command centres without traditional connectivity. Therefore, its operation in India goes beyond retail customer choices and has national security implications.

The risks for India

India has very limited control over Starlink. The network could remain usable in an area where Indian authorities have ordered it switched off. Conversely, it could be disabled when India needs it most. India can licence and penalise Starlink, but SpaceX retains direct control over its satellites, software and terminal access.

The government has recognised these risks and imposed stringent security requirements on satellite Internet providers. Operators must route Indian user traffic through ground stations, called gateways, located in India. They cannot use inter-satellite links to bypass Indian gateways or route Indian traffic through gateways abroad. They must also provide monitoring facilities to Indian security agencies and restrict connectivity when authorities issue security-related orders.

India must balance Starlink's benefits with national security and strategic autonomy

Starlink has indicated willingness to comply. It announced Indian gateway sites and introduced India-specific data controls.

Some of these conditions are difficult to enforce independently. Indian authorities can inspect domestic gateways, but verifying whether Indian traffic has been routed through foreign gateways or mirrored abroad through satellite links is more difficult and depends partly on information provided by SpaceX.

There is also a trade-off. Starlink's advantage is that its satellites can pass traffic between themselves when a ground station is unavailable. If Indian gateways fail, however, these restrictions prevent Starlink from rerouting Indian traffic through gateways abroad, reducing one source of redundancy.

Global experiences

Iran's experience is also a valuable demonstration of the enforcement problem. Since 2023, Iran has complained to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) about Starlink terminals illegally operating on its soil without authorisation. The ITU's Radio Regulations Board has repeatedly called for Starlink transmissions to be stopped over Iran.

At its October 2026 meeting, the Board again noted that unauthorised Starlink transmissions in Iran were continuing. It reiterated its earlier decisions calling for the transmissions to stop and its conclusion that it lacked the authority to suspend the relevant satellite frequency assignments.

Ukraine provides an interesting contrast. In February, Ukrainian authorities worked with SpaceX to identify authorised Starlink terminals and block those used by Russian forces. In Ukraine, SpaceX acted on the government's requests. In Iran, years of appeals have failed to achieve the same result.

Conversely, on October 14, Ukrainian officials reported that Starshield, the military service built on Starlink technology, began losing connectivity on terminals travelling faster than about 160 km/h, disrupting drone missions and frontline logistics. Zelenskyy said the restrictions applied in Ukraine but not in EU countries. Ukraine said normal service was restored on October 24. The reason and responsibility remain contested.

Reuters reported, citing officials, that an order came from within the White House, although Trump denied personally issuing it. The disruption coincided with Washington's pressure on Ukraine to stop striking Russian oil refineries.

For an ordinary user, losing Internet access can be an inconvenience. For armed forces, emergency responders and other essential services, it can have far more serious consequences.

SpaceX also depends on American regulatory approvals and government contracts, giving Washington considerable leverage over the company. If American interests diverge from India's during a crisis, this dependence could become a strategic vulnerability.

India needs alternatives

Keeping Starlink out entirely would sacrifice valuable connectivity, particularly in remote regions. India should retain its strict licensing conditions while improving its ability to check compliance. Starlink continues to evolve and regulation will have new challenges to contend with.

Therefore, a more effective way to reduce the dependency risks is to have alternatives to Starlink. Military and other essential users should maintain backup connections and tested procedures for switching between them. Using more than one satellite internet provider, from countries under different jurisdictions, would reduce dependence on the decisions of a single entity. Expanding ground coverage would reduce the number of communities for whom Starlink will be the only practical option. A parliamentary review found that only 30% of gram panchayats had a functional BharatNet connection as of February 2026.

But fibre and mobile towers cannot cover every ocean, mountain region or remote frontier. India will also need satellite alternatives of its own. India should encourage more domestic constellations and use their demand for satellites and rockets to build Indian industry. Industrial capacity and satellite Internet capacity go hand-in-hand.

India needs enough alternatives to keep essential communications working even when Starlink is unwilling or unable to.

4. Starlink in India: Strategic Autonomy, Technology and National Security

GS Paper III – Science and Technology; Internal Security

Context: Starlink's proposed expansion in India raises questions about satellite internet technology, national security, data sovereignty and dependence on foreign-controlled digital infrastructure.

1. Understanding Starlink and Its Technology

1. **What is Starlink?** A satellite-based broadband internet service operated by SpaceX, founded by Elon Musk.
2. **Core technology:** Uses a constellation of thousands of Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites, operating at approximately 550 km above Earth.

3. **How it works:**
    - User terminal (satellite dish) sends and receives signals.
    - LEO satellites relay data between users and ground stations.
    - Ground gateways connect satellite networks to the terrestrial internet.
    - Optical inter-satellite laser links allow satellites to transfer data between themselves.
4. **Key advantage:** Lower latency and wider coverage than traditional geostationary satellite internet.
5. **Applications:** Remote connectivity, border areas, ships, disaster management, defence communications and underserved regions.

2. Strategic and Security Concerns for India

1. **Data sovereignty:** India must ensure domestic internet traffic and sensitive data remain under Indian regulatory oversight.
2. **Limited operational control:** SpaceX retains control over its satellites, software and network operations, creating dependence on a foreign private company.
3. **National security:** Unauthorised terminals or communication links could create risks for military operations, border security and intelligence activities.
4. **Regulatory enforcement:** India requires domestic gateways, security monitoring and restrictions on routing Indian traffic through foreign gateways. However, independently verifying satellite traffic flows remains challenging.
5. **Geopolitical vulnerability:** Dependence on a US-based company could expose essential communications to foreign policy decisions during geopolitical tensions.

3. Global Experiences and Strategic Lessons

1. **Ukraine:** Starlink has supported military communications and drone operations. Changes in service availability and restrictions have demonstrated the influence a private satellite operator can exercise during warfare.
2. **Iran:** Unauthorised Starlink terminals have challenged government control over internet connectivity, highlighting difficulties in enforcing national regulations over cross-border satellite networks.
3. **China:** Is developing its own satellite internet constellations to reduce dependence on foreign providers and strengthen strategic control over space-based communications.

Key lesson: Satellite internet is not merely a commercial service; it is dual-use infrastructure with both civilian and military applications.

4. Way Forward for India

1. **Strict regulation:** Enforce domestic gateway, data-routing, security and lawful monitoring requirements.
2. **Indigenous capabilities:** Develop Indian satellite constellations and strengthen domestic space manufacturing.
3. **Multiple providers:** Encourage competition among satellite internet operators to avoid dependence on a single company.
4. **Strengthen alternatives:** Expand BharatNet, optical fibre and mobile networks, particularly in rural and border regions.
5. **Strategic backup:** Ensure defence forces, emergency services and critical infrastructure have alternative communication systems.

Conclusion

India must balance technological innovation and digital inclusion with national security and strategic autonomy. The objective should not be to restrict satellite internet, but to ensure that **connectivity does not become a source of strategic dependence**.

More women work but in informal and less secure jobs

Despite the rise of women's participation in the labour force, women still carry the burden of unpaid domestic work and childcare

DATA POINT

Tanu M. Goyal
Shravani Prakash
Ketaki Gaikwad
Arjun Tandon

The rise in women's workforce participation in India is now well-documented. Yet, it conceals a less encouraging reality – men and women are experiencing India's structural transformation very differently.

Between 2017-18 and 2025, the number of working women nearly doubled, from 104 million to 201 million, and the female worker population ratio rose from 22% to 38%. But most of the increase has come from rural India, largely in agriculture and in own-account and unpaid family work on farms and in household enterprises.

The positive here is that a larger part of women's daily work is finally being counted. For decades, the labour women did on the fields and cattle sheds went mostly unrecorded, and was thereby left out of policy and budgets. Simply counting, however, has just revealed how many women work but says little about the work itself. The recent ICRIER report, 'The Participation Paradox', uses the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and the Time Use Survey to look at these dimensions. Five data points stand out.

Most of the surge in women's employment has been absorbed by agriculture, the sector that structural transformation expects workers to move out of **(Chart 1)**. The number of rural women working in crop and animal production rose from 54 million to over 100 million. Rural men, however, did move out as their share in agriculture fell from 54.1% to 47.2%, while women's rose from 70.7% to 73.3%. Surprisingly, urban women employed in agriculture rose from 2.6 million to 6.3 million, becoming their largest single employer in 2025. Outside agriculture, women's employment gains were concentrated in garments, retail and construction, sectors where work is largely informal and dominated by micro and own-account enterprises. The shift towards self-employment is particularly pronounced in rural areas where women in own-account work quadrupled, while the share of regular salaried jobs among them slipped from 10.5% to 9.3%.

Despite the rise in women's workforce participation, average weekly working hours have fallen for every group between 2017-18 and 2025. The decline was steepest for rural women, who worked a little over six hours less per week. The combination of rising participation and falling hours suggests that much of the new employment is marginal and low in intensity **(Chart 2)**.

Manufacturing reflects this pattern most clearly. In rural textiles, the gender gap in weekly working hours widened from 11 to 21; in wearing apparel, from 19 to 21. Garments and textiles are expected to draw women into regular factory work, where their hours would gradually rise towards men's. The widening gap suggests that many women in these industries remain in home-based, piece-rate, or own-account work.

The wage gap

While women's earnings have risen, men's wages have risen faster. A rural woman now earns roughly 45% of what a rural man earns, down from 53%. The sectoral picture is equally telling. The widest hourly earnings gaps are in the sectors that employ most women. Per hour, men in rural tobacco manufacturing earn 2.1 times what women do; in education, 2 times; in textiles, 1.8; in crop production, 1.7. By contrast, women earn on par with men in about 20 urban sectors, including scientific research, publishing, advertising and management consultancy which employ a small fraction of working women.

When asked why they are not in the labour force, 60% of women cite childcare and household commitments. Among men, fewer than 1% give these reasons.

These patterns have barely changed since 2021-22. Skilling and job creation can expand women's employment only if women have the time to take up these opportunities. That time is already absorbed by unpaid work at home that remains invisible in national income accounting. The Time Use Survey Shows that in 2024, Indian women spent an average of 3.7 hours a day more than men on domestic work and nearly one hour more on care.

Concerningly, taking up paid work does little to ease this burden. Working women still spend around four hours a day on unpaid domestic work and nearly two on care, in rural and urban India alike. Working men, in contrast, spend under three hours on both type of activities combined.

These paradoxes suggest that the gains from India's structural transformation have gone largely to men. Beyond raising participation, women should be pushed towards more productive, better-paid work without adding onto the unequal burden of unpaid care.

First, reduce that care burden, the main supply-side constraint. This means affordable, good-quality childcare, paid paternity and shared parental leave financed partly through social insurance. Second, make industrial and MSME policy work for women. MSME support should reward hiring women, widen access to finance and technology, and open hostels and arrange transport in textile parks and industrial areas. Third, create paid work for rural women close to home through place-based enterprise clusters, livelihood missions, and women-led producer organisations.

India has brought women's work into the data. The next step is making that work more productive, better paid, and more secure.

Labour at what cost?

The data were sourced from the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), 'The Participation Paradox' (2026). Authors are with the ICRIER. Views expressed are personal

Chart 1: The surge in women's employment was mostly due to the agriculture (primary) sector, from which men have moved out of between 2017 and 2025

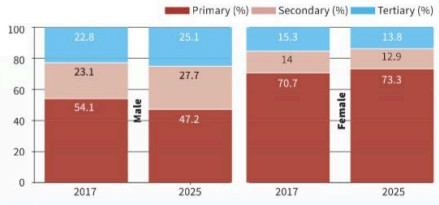


Chart 2: While more women are working, their average working hours have gone down, which suggests that much of the employment is marginal and low in intensity

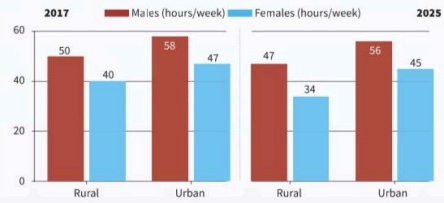
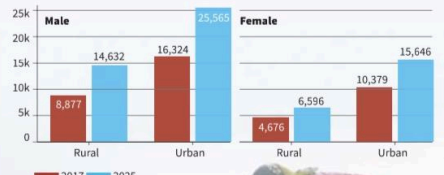


Chart 3: While women's earnings per month have risen, they are falling behind men's monthly wages, which rose faster. Figures for wages are in ₹





5. Women's Employment in India: Rising Participation, Persistent Inequality

GS Paper I – Indian Society | GS Paper III – Indian Economy

Context: The ICRIER report *The Participation Paradox (2026)* highlights a major contradiction in India's labour market: more women are entering the workforce, but many remain concentrated in informal, low-paid and insecure jobs while continuing to shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic work.

1. Rising Participation, Limited Structural Transformation

- **Workforce growth:** Between 2017–18 and 2025, the number of working women nearly doubled from 104 million to 201 million; the female Worker Population Ratio rose from 22% to 38%.
- **Concentration in agriculture:** Women's share of agricultural employment increased from 70.7% to 73.3%?
- **Informal employment:** Much of the increase has come through self-employment, unpaid family work and micro-enterprises rather than regular salaried jobs.
- **Limited diversification:** Women remain concentrated in agriculture, garments and textiles, with relatively limited movement into better-paid sectors.

2. The Quality of Employment Gap

- **Fewer working hours:** Women's average weekly working hours declined between 2017 and 2025, suggesting that rising participation has not necessarily translated into more intensive employment.
- **Wage inequality:** Rural women earn approximately 45% of rural men's wages; the gender wage gap persists across sectors.
- **Occupational segregation:** Women are concentrated in lower-paid and home-based work, while men dominate several better-remunerated occupations.
- **Underemployment:** Increased workforce participation does not automatically mean access to stable, productive and adequately paid jobs.

3. Unpaid Care Work: The Hidden Barrier

- Women spend approximately 3.7 hours more per day on unpaid domestic work than men and nearly one hour more on caregiving.
- Around 60% of women outside the labour force identify domestic and childcare responsibilities as a reason for not working.
- This creates a **double burden**, where paid employment is added to, rather than substituted for, unpaid household responsibilities.

4. Way Forward: From Participation to Economic Empowerment

1. **Care infrastructure:** Expand affordable childcare, public creches and shared parental leave.
2. **Formal employment:** Promote secure, regular and better-paid jobs with social protection.
3. **Economic opportunities:** Improve women's access to credit, skills, technology and markets, particularly through MSMEs.
4. **Rural diversification:** Expand non-farm employment, local enterprises and women-led producer organisations.

5. **Workplace support:** Ensure safe transport, suitable workplaces and accessible employment opportunities.

Conclusion: India's challenge is no longer merely to bring more women into the workforce, but to ensure that their participation translates into economic independence, decent employment and equal opportunities. Recognising unpaid care work and improving job quality are essential for inclusive growth and substantive gender equality.

Without rationale

India's federal structure could have benefited from the Kurian Committee

By abruptly disbanding the Justice Kurian Joseph Committee on Union-State Relations and handing over its task to the Tamil Nadu State Law Commission, the C. Joseph Vijay government appears to have succumbed to the political impulse to reverse earlier decisions rather than being guided by any compelling rationale or necessity. This gains credence from the very grounds cited. The committee executed its mandate with scholarly rigour, seen in Part I of its report that was submitted to the then M.K. Stalin government in February. Citing the Committee's basic character of being a "non-statutory body" is unconvincing, particularly when the Law Commission itself is established only through "executive order". There is also no public evidence of State Law Commissions having examined or addressed issues concerning Union-State relations. The mandate "to suggest ways and means for the inter-State relations and Centre-State relations", constitutes only one part of the broader terms of reference of the State Law Commission, reconstituted in August. Given the commission's wider responsibilities, successive State governments

6. Justice Kurian Joseph Committee on Union–State Relations: Rebalancing Indian Federalism

GS Paper II – Indian Constitution | Federalism | Centre–State Relations

Context: The Tamil Nadu government's decision in November 2026 to discontinue the Justice Kurian Joseph Committee, after receiving its first report, has brought the debate over State autonomy, Centre–State relations and institutional continuity into focus.

1. Background: Evolution of Centre–State Relations

India adopted a federal system with a relatively strong Union to maintain national unity, territorial integrity and administrative stability after Independence. However, changing political, economic and regional dynamics have repeatedly raised concerns about excessive centralisation.

Major areas of Centre–State tensions:

1. **Legislative:** Overlap between Union and State powers, particularly under the Concurrent List.
2. **Administrative:** Governor's discretionary powers and the use of Central agencies.
3. **Financial:** States' dependence on the Union for financial resources and concerns over GST-related autonomy.
4. **Political:** Delimitation, representation of States and the balance between national policies and regional priorities.
5. **Governance:** Central intervention in areas such as education, healthcare and local administration.

Recent development: Tamil Nadu constituted the Justice Kurian Joseph Committee on 15 April 2025. It submitted Part I of its report in February 2026. On 6 November 2026, the succeeding State government discontinued the committee, citing overlap with the Tamil Nadu State Law Commission, and transferred its records to the Commission. Its remaining work was therefore left incomplete.

2. Constitutional and Institutional Framework

Constitutional provision	Significance

Article 1	India as a Union of States
Article 246 and Seventh Schedule	Distribution of legislative powers
Article 254	Repugnancy between Union and State laws
Article 263	Inter-State Council
Article 280	Finance Commission
Article 279A	GST Council
Article 356	President’s Rule

Important judicial principles:

- **S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994):** Federalism is part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.
- **Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India (2018):** Emphasised constitutional morality, representative government and cooperative federalism.
- **Union of India v. Mohit Minerals (2022):** GST Council recommendations have persuasive value and are not legally binding on Parliament and State legislatures.

3. Important Committees and Commissions on Centre–State Relations

Committee / Commission	Major significance
Rajamannar Committee (1969–71)	Tamil Nadu initiative advocating greater State autonomy and review of Union powers
Sarkaria Commission (1983–88)	Recommended cooperative federalism, consultation and restrained use of Article 356
Punchhi Commission (2007–10)	Examined Governor's role, emergency provisions and contemporary federal challenges
Justice Kurian Joseph Committee (2025–26)	Proposed structural and constitutional reforms to rebalance Union–State relations

4. Major Recommendations of the Justice Kurian Joseph Committee

Part I of the report proposed a broad restructuring of India's federal framework. Its key recommendations include:

A. Governor and State Autonomy

- Establish time-bound procedures for Governors to act on State Bills, including a proposed 15-day timeline.
- Appoint Governors from a panel of three names approved by the State Legislative Assembly.
- Provide a fixed, non-renewable five-year tenure and clearer limits on discretionary powers.

B. Legislative and Constitutional Reforms

- Move education, including medical education, back to the State List.
- Require wider State ratification for constitutional amendments, strengthening State participation in changes affecting the federal structure.
- Restrict unilateral territorial reorganisation by requiring the consent of affected States or other democratic safeguards.

C. Language Policy

- Reject the imposition of a single language across India.
- Protect linguistic diversity and strengthen the constitutional recognition of India's languages.
- Propose changes to Articles 343, 345 and related language provisions.

D. Delimitation and Political Representation

- Extend the freeze on inter-State allocation of Lok Sabha seats until 2126 or until fertility rates converge.
- Strengthen State participation in delimitation and address concerns over unequal demographic transitions.

E. Fiscal Federalism

- Rebalance voting arrangements in the GST Council.
- Clarify that GST Council recommendations are advisory, consistent with the Supreme Court's Mohit Minerals judgment.
- Give States greater flexibility in determining State GST rates within prescribed limits.

F. Electoral and Institutional Reforms

- Separate Union and State election administration through independent election institutions.
- Reconsider simultaneous elections because of their potential implications for State-level democratic accountability.
- Reform the anti-defection framework to reduce political manipulation.

Important: These are committee proposals, not existing constitutional or legal provisions. Their implementation would require appropriate legislative or constitutional processes.

5. Way Forward

1. **Cooperative federalism:** Strengthen the Inter-State Council as a regular platform for resolving Centre–State disputes.
2. **Constitutional accountability:** Establish clear and time-bound procedures for the functioning of Governors.
3. **Fiscal decentralisation:** Improve predictability of transfers and strengthen States' financial capacity.
4. **Democratic consultation:** Involve States in decisions affecting education, language, delimitation and other shared subjects.
5. **Institutional continuity:** Preserve expert research and ensure that unfinished work is transparently carried forward.

Conclusion

Indian federalism must balance a strong Union with empowered States. The Justice Kurian Joseph Committee's recommendations reopen an important constitutional debate: national unity is strengthened not by excessive centralisation, but by trust, consultation and respect for regional diversity.

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6. UPSC Previous Year Question Linkages

Mains – GS Paper II

1. **2024:** What changes has the Union Government recently introduced in the domain of Centre–State relations? Suggest measures to build trust between the Centre and States and strengthen federalism.
2. **2013:** Though the federal principle is dominant in our Constitution and that principle is one of its basic features, it is equally true that federalism under the Indian Constitution leans in favour of a strong Centre. Discuss.

Prelims – Relevant PYQs

1. **2025:** With reference to the Inter-State Council, National Security Council and Zonal Councils, how many were established under the provisions of the Constitution?
   Answer: Only one – the Inter-State Council (Article 263).
2. **2016:** Parliament can legislate on a State List subject in the national interest under which constitutional provision?

Answer: Article 249, following a Rajya Sabha resolution passed by a two-thirds majority of members present and voting.

3. **2004:** Under which Article can Parliament legislate on State List subjects during a Proclamation of Emergency?
   Answer: Article 250.

Transparency is essential to institutional credibility



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The proposed amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, have triggered strong reactions from civil society organisations, Opposition parties and Christian institutions. The concerns are not without substance. What it seeks is tighter regulation of foreign-funded organisations, including provisions concerning assets created or acquired through foreign contributions. The Government maintains that the objective is greater transparency, accountability and prevention of misuse of foreign funds, while critics fear possible restrictions on legitimate civil society activity and minority institutions being disproportionately affected. With the Bill referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee for further scrutiny, there is an opportunity for a reasoned debate.

Foreign contribution cannot become a pretext for suppressing legitimate charitable, educational, health care or social-service activity. At the same time, the receipt and utilisation of foreign funds cannot be placed beyond scrutiny.

Transparency is not an assault on minority rights; it is a condition of public trust. This raises a question for minority institutions opposing the proposed amendments: are they prepared to put their own houses in order? This is not about greater state interference, but about voluntary transparency and accountability to those they claim to serve.

Consider the Catholic Church in Tamil Nadu. The dioceses have established numerous social-service structures and societies dedicated to the poor, vulnerable and marginalised. Their contribution to social development is substantial, but how many ordinary faithful have meaningful access to even the basic financial picture of these institutions? How many can readily see annual income-and-expenditure statements, audited accounts, major sources of funding and the broad utilisation of resources? The more fundamental question is this: should institutions that speak forcefully about accountability to the state, not voluntarily practise an equally high, if not higher, standard of accountability to their faithful, beneficiaries and stakeholders?

Institutional power, financial accountability

The question becomes even more pertinent when one considers the enormous educational and social footprint of popular religious orders such as the Society of Jesus and the Salesians of Don Bosco, as well as the many premier institutions run by dioceses, including medical colleges, and numerous congregations of women religious. Their contribution to education and public life is undeniable. Yet, influence carries responsibility.

Minority institutions opposing the FCRA amendments must demonstrate transparency and accountability themselves

Across the educational sector, there have long been allegations and public concerns regarding admission-related donations, capitation and other payments in institutions offering sought-after courses. Such allegations must not be treated as established facts against particular institutions without evidence. But where institutions receive substantial fees, donations, grants or other contributions, a legitimate question remains, a demand for transparency is not an accusation of wrongdoing. On the contrary, the most effective answer to allegations of financial mismanagement or diversion is transparent, independently audited and accessible accounting.

The same principle should apply to religious and social-service organisations. If institutions appeal to the faithful and the public for donations in the name of the poor, education, health care and social development, their stakeholders should reasonably expect a clear picture of how those resources are utilised. Transparency need not mean exposing confidential individual transactions or compromising institutional autonomy. It can simply mean publishing audited annual accounts, broad income-and-expenditure statements, major funding sources and the purposes for which resources are deployed. Such voluntary disclosure would strengthen the moral authority of organisations that are now demanding greater accountability from the state.

The unfinished question of Dalit Christians

The issue becomes particularly compelling in the context of the Church's advocacy for Dalit Christians. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) has raised concerns over the FCRA Amendment Bill with the Union Government. Its memorandum has also raised the continuing denial of Scheduled Caste (SC) status to Christians of SC origin and sought an early resolution of the matter pending before the Supreme Court. The CBCI has undertaken initiatives on the issue and its policy documents have acknowledged the persistence of caste discrimination within Indian society and, importantly, within the Church.

For decades, Dalit Christians have awaited a resolution of their claim to SC status. The Church possesses considerable institutional influence, extensive organisational reach and substantial financial resources. Has that influence and capacity been mobilised with the same sustained intensity for the constitutional rights of its most marginalised faithful as it is now being mobilised when the regulatory framework governing its institutions is threatened?

There is an inherent irony here. The Church rightly argues that caste does not disappear when a Dalit becomes a Christian. If that is so, and if caste-based exclusion continues beyond conversion, then the constitutional marginalisation of Dalit Christians should occupy a central place in the Church's public advocacy. It is difficult, therefore, to avoid asking what institutional accountability means if the voices of the most disadvantaged members of the institution remain comparatively weak.

Accountable autonomy

The answer should lie neither in unchecked state power nor in unchecked institutional autonomy, but in accountable autonomy. Minority institutions have made an invaluable contribution to India's educational, healthcare and social landscape, and their right to function freely must be protected.

But institutional freedom carries institutional responsibility. The credibility of their opposition to excessive FCRA regulation will ultimately depend not merely on what they demand from the government, but on what they are willing to disclose to the people who sustain and depend upon their institutions.

Perhaps the most important test of an institution is not how loudly it protests when its own autonomy is threatened, but how openly it answers questions from the poor, the faithful, the beneficiaries, parents, students and the communities it serves. Minority rights and institutional accountability are not opposing principles; they are complementary ones. The state must not use transparency as a pretext to weaken legitimate minority institutions. But minority institutions, in turn, cannot demand transparency from the state while treating transparency to their own stakeholders as optional.

Before asking the state to put its house in order, minority institutions should be willing to open their own doors and demonstrate that their houses are in order.

7. FCRA Amendments: Transparency, Accountability and Minority Rights

GS Paper II – Governance | Constitutional Bodies | Fundamental Rights

Context: Proposed amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010 have triggered debate over balancing financial transparency and accountability with the autonomy and constitutional rights of minority institutions.

1. Background: FCRA and Proposed Changes

- **FCRA, 2010:** Regulates the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contributions by individuals, associations and organisations in India.
- **Government's objective:** Strengthen transparency, accountability and prevent misuse of foreign funds.
- **Concerns:** Civil society and minority organisations fear excessive regulation could restrict legitimate charitable, educational, healthcare and social-service activities.
- The proposed amendments have been referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee for further scrutiny.

2. Institutional Accountability and Financial Transparency

Religious and charitable organisations, including churches, operate educational institutions, hospitals and social-service organisations.

Key concerns include:

- Limited public access to audited financial statements and details of foreign funding.
- Need for transparency regarding donations, grants, expenditure and beneficiaries.
- Allegations of financial irregularities should be investigated through evidence-based and independent audits rather than assumptions.

3. Minority Rights and Dalit Christians

- **Constitutional protection:** Articles 25–30 protect religious freedom and minority cultural and educational rights.
- **Caste discrimination:** The status of Dalit Christians raises concerns about continuing caste-based exclusion despite religious conversion.
- **Scheduled Caste status:** The question of extending Scheduled Caste recognition to Christians of Dalit origin remains a matter of constitutional and judicial debate.
- The Church's advocacy for Dalit Christian rights also raises questions about whether religious institutions demonstrate comparable accountability towards their own marginalised members.

4. Way Forward: Accountable Autonomy

1. **Proportionate regulation:** Ensure FCRA compliance without unnecessarily restricting legitimate charitable and educational activities.

2. **Financial transparency:** Publish audited accounts, major funding sources and broad expenditure details.
3. **Independent oversight:** Use evidence-based audits and fair investigation procedures.
4. **Institutional accountability:** Ensure minority organisations remain answerable to beneficiaries, donors and communities.
5. **Protection of rights:** Safeguard religious freedom and minority autonomy while preventing financial misuse.

Conclusion: Transparency and institutional autonomy are complementary, not contradictory. A democratic regulatory framework must ensure that minority institutions enjoy constitutional protection while maintaining accountability to the communities they serve.