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Demographic Transition and Its Socio-Economic Impact in India: Pathways to Securitisation in National Policy and Discourse (1980–2025)

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this dissertation is to examine how India's demographic transition from the 1980s to the 2020s has affected major socio-economic sectors, and in what ways these shifts have been securitised in national policy and discourse. The research provides an answer by combining a demographic and human security approach. The demographic perspective examines multiple trends, focusing on the subcontinent's population, to assess India's youth bulge (demographic dividend) and ageism, as well as the working environment. What emerges from this perspective is that India, by entering Stage 3 of the Demographic Transition Model, is facing an increase in its share of the working-age population, and a significant concern about unemployment has arisen due to the non-optimisation of the demographic dividend. Additionally, the share of elderly dependents (adults aged 65 and over) is projected to increase to 133 million by 2050, and, as noted by Poonam Muttreja (2024), India is not prepared for it. The research further highlights how insecurities have developed, also in terms of the gender gap and religious divide. In this regard, the human security approach offers insight into how issues related to gender, religion, unemployment, and ageism are addressed at the central government level. What is emphasised is that different governments have made multiple attempts to address these themes. However, the majority of policies or programmes implemented have not solved the existing issues and, in some cases, have further exacerbated them. It is, for example, the case of the Pre-Conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act (1994), which has failed its objective to increase the child sex ratio, or Article 48 of the Indian Constitution on the prevention of cow slaughtering, which has incentivised Hindu vigilantes' violence against Muslims, especially under the Bharatiya Janata Party era.

Key words

India; Demography; Youth Bulge; Demographic dividend; Ageing; Ageism; Gender Gap; Religious Divide; Unemployment

INTRODUCTION

> “For most people today, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Job security, income security, health, environmental security, security from crime- these are emerging concerns of human security all over the world” (Human Development Report, 1994, p.3)

These are significant words to introduce the following dissertation, which focuses on the major demographic trends in India from the 1980s to the present day and the need to translate them into terms of human insecurity.

The relevance of this analysis is manifold. On the one hand, it emphasises the internal socio-economic dynamics of a country that has now surpassed China with 1.4 billion inhabitants and is still set to grow, at least until 2100. India is considered the largest democracy in the world, but its trends reveal substantial inequalities that necessitate intervention to achieve sufficient levels of development. On the other hand, internal development is proving to be significant considering India's external geopolitical scenario. Since its Independence, the country has chosen to maintain a policy of hedging, i.e., not aligning itself with any particular faction, but implementing relations with all players in the international framework, with the hope of establishing itself as a major global power (Di Muro, 2025a). Recent developments, following the entry into force of Trump's tariffs and the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), confirm this direction. India has not given up on embracing relations with China, despite concrete territorial and rare earth issues. For instance, the Indian authorities' statement following the SCO meeting announced, among other things, that the development of stable and predictable bilateral relations [between China and India] serves to forge a multipolar Asia. There is no trace of the same desire in the corresponding document issued by Beijing. Following Trump's impositions, the subcontinent has also decided to improve its relations with the European Union. In the days following the summit in Tianjin, Modi insisted that Commission President von der Leyen conclude negotiations on establishing bilateral ties between India and the EU and sought support in Germany, which sent its foreign minister to the subcontinent. Finally, despite the current critical issues with Washington, Trump himself stated that: "Modi and I will always be friends... India and the US have a special relationship... there is nothing to worry about”. These words refer to a purely territorial dynamic, according to which New Delhi and Washington need each other's help to hinder China's advance (Di Muro, 2025b). These dynamics extensively explain the importance of a demographic and security study within the subcontinent. Understanding national dynamics enables a critical evaluation of the stability and growth forecasts for the subcontinent, which in turn impacts future dynamics of cooperation.

In practical terms, this study aims to answer the following research questions: “How has India's demographic transition affected major socio-economic sectors, and in what ways has that transition been securitised in national policy and discourse?”. The field of research proposed, while taking into account the territorial heterogeneity that characterises India, will focus on a more general and all-encompassing discourse of the demographic and socio-economic dynamics that define the subcontinent as a whole.

The dissertation is divided into four chapters.

The first chapter lays the foundations for the study as a whole. It aims to introduce the research objective, the timeline, which spans from 1980 to the present day, according to data availability, and to discuss the methodology used, particularly in constructing the data necessary to respond to the first dependent variable. What will be emphasised is that India has undergone substantial changes since the 1980s: it has entered Stage 3 of the Demographic Transition Model, creating the conditions for a slowdown in population growth and a consequent youth bulge; it has significantly increased its GDP growth, even becoming the third largest economy in terms of Purchasing Power Parity in 2024; and it has faced several political changes, starting with the centrality of the Indian National Congress, moving on to coalition governments and ending with three consecutive victories for Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party. Additionally, this chapter will explain why it is often difficult to find data for developing countries, due to endogenous and exogenous problems. Finally, the research methods employed in this thesis and the primary databases utilised will be clarified.

The second chapter focuses on both the independent and the first dependent variables, primarily by analysing how demographic trends have changed and evolved from the 1980s to the present day. Methodologically, the variables will be examined in both quantitative and qualitative terms. This section will discuss, first and foremost, the main demographic trends characterising the Indian population in terms of growth, literacy, urbanisation, Total Fertility Rate, etc. Subsequently, it will focus on how demographic changes affect specific socio-economic dynamics, such as the increase in young people of working age without the generation of effective employment opportunities, the prospect of ageing, the existence of profound gender gaps in the social, reproductive and working spheres, and finally the violent problems linked to religious majorities and minorities in the country.

The third chapter is considered more theoretical and is fundamental to understanding the concept of human security and its application on the Indian subcontinent. The origins of the human security concept will be examined, along with an understanding of its various approaches, including their relationship to basic human rights, the need for investment in development dynamics, and humanitarian interventions in conflict scenarios. The study will also examine the nexus between

security and development and how, in this scenario, economic and demographic factors can have a significant impact. Finally, the Indian scenario will be analysed based on the human security approach most conducive to its understanding. The hypothesis is that this observation will focus on the minimum need for security and human rights protection.

The final chapter will focus on the second dependent variable and provide a comprehensive answer to the research question. Starting from the conceptualisation of human security that best suits the Indian scenario, this section will seek to understand how various Indian national governments have attempted to implement policies or discourses to address issues such as unemployment, the gender gap, religious divides, and ageism. The policies and programmes considered to be of most significance will be analysed, together with an assessment of their actual impact. Attention will also be given to the Indian Constitution, widely regarded as one of the most comprehensive in the world. The study may reveal that different governments have adopted varying approaches over the years, and not always to peaceful or positive outcomes.

On a final methodological note, before delving into the study, it is important to acknowledge that the support of two technological instruments facilitated the writing process of this thesis. The first one is DeepL Translator, which provides translations between English and Italian, and vice versa. The second is Grammarly, a helpful tool for checking grammar and improving the writing style.

CHAPTER 1: ASSESSING THE RESEARCH AND ITS DESIGN

This first chapter lays the foundations for the study as a whole. The focus of this part is on understanding the research question and the methodological choices that will guide the analysis, particularly from a quantitative perspective. To analyse the demographic aspects of the Indian subcontinent and their consequences in socio-economic and security terms, it is indeed necessary to examine why the chosen timeline begins in the 1980s, rather than, for instance, at Independence, and the methodology used to construct the entire quantitative research framework.

The study has been divided into three main parts. The first section will discuss the research question and its variables. The second one will delve into observing the chosen timeframe and its main characteristics in terms of demographic transitions, as well as macroeconomic and political trends. The third part will further focus on explaining the methodology used for constructing the quantitative observations and the presence of structural limitations to the research.

1.1 INDIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION AND NATIONAL SECURITISATION PROCESSES

The research question at the basis of this entire analysis is the following: "How has India's demographic transition affected major socio-economic sectors, and in what ways has that transition been securitised in national policy and discourse?"

The independent variable, meaning the one that creates the foundation for the development of the research as a whole and that is not subject to variations by possible intervening variables, is represented by "India's demographic transition". This transition is a reference to the population explosion that India is currently facing. Such a scenario has its origins in the aftermath of India's Independence and has further emerged since the 1980s. Moreover, this exceptional population growth is expected to continue at least until 2060.

Branching from this population "boom", there are two dependent variables that emerge and whose possibilities will be analysed. The first one is related to the study of the socio-economic consequences of such a profound change in a country's demography. The second one, instead, will delve into how the abovementioned socio-economic "results" have been securitised in terms of "national policy and discourses".

As a preliminary consideration, it could be said that the first variable will highlight how demographic changes from the 1980s to the post-COVID-19 era have caused profound socio-economic consequences, especially in terms of missed opportunities and structural inequalities. Considering the current situation in India, significant dynamics could certainly emerge concerning employment and the gender gap, as well as in the area of religious nationalism. The second variable

should instead focus on human security dynamics and demonstrate how the major socio-economic issues have been transformed into "threats" by the various governments that have succeeded one another over time. These dynamics will be addressed considering the perspective of a growing Hindu nationalism. What may ultimately emerge is that, despite the politicisation of demographic trends and government attempts to implement policies for change, positive results do not always prevail, and the transformation of socio-economic dynamics into threats further aggravates the existing scenario.

1.2 MODERNISATION AND DEVELOPMENT FROM 1980 TO 2024

The timeline considered, as mentioned earlier, spans from the 1980s to the present. The upper limit, referred to as the "present day," is defined as the range of years following the COVID-19 pandemic, ranging from 2020 to 2024, depending mainly on the availability of data.

The decision to initiate this study in the 1980s was largely influenced by various demographic, economic, and political trends, which will be further explained below.

1.2.1 DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Starting from the 1980s, India has faced significant changes in terms of crude birth and death rates.

If the subcontinent's population growth was relatively slow in the early 20th century, due to high mortality and fertility rates, substantial changes became visible between the 1950s and the 1980s. During those years, India has progressed to the second stage of the demographic transition model (DTM), a process that will be further explained in *Chapter 2*. What can be mentioned in this introductory section is that India, in the two selected decades, witnessed a "population explosion", with a growth rate averaging around 2.2% (Purohit, 2023, p. 178). The crude death rate rapidly declined from 27.1% during 1950-55 to 13% during 1975-80, while the slower decline in the crude birth rate resulted in increasing population growth at the same time (Lonarkar, 2018, p. 84).

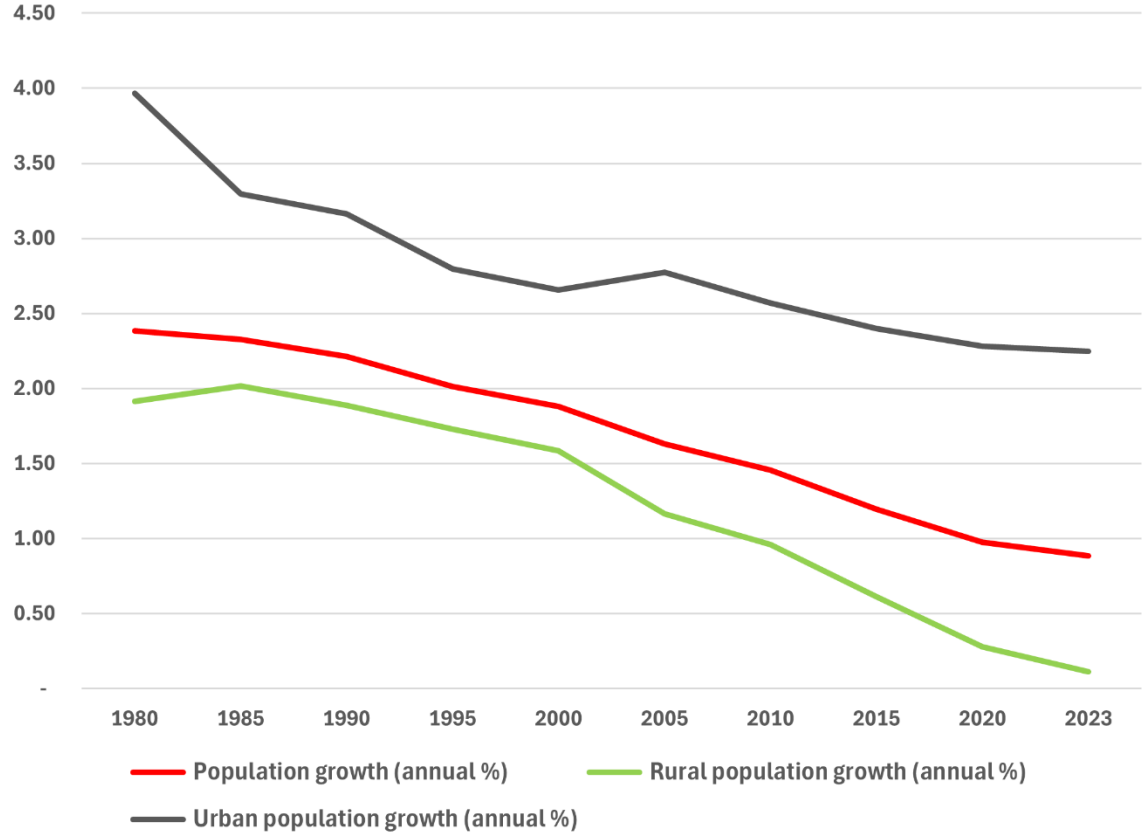
Starting from 1981, another change became evident to demographers. India, in fact, transitioned to the third stage of the DTM. In this phase, which is still ongoing today, the crude death rate initially, around 2010-2015, slowed its decline, but later showed a new increase, while the crude birth rate kept decreasing. In absolute terms, the population is expected to continue growing until 2100, with a peak of 1.7 billion people around 2064, according to the UN's medium variant projection (Ro, 2023, p. 1). The growth rate, instead, is already showing clear signs of decline by reaching, in 2023, a 1% growth rate, compared to the 2.50% growth rate of 1980 (Lonarkar, 2018, p. 84).

Thus, by starting the following analysis in the 1980s, the evolution and development of the third stage of the Demographic Transition Model can be observed. More specifically, the data will

enable the study of how India is addressing a working-age population expected to peak at 64% by 2030 and a share of old dependents that is projected to increase significantly starting from 2050 (Lonarkar, 2018, pp. 85-86). What will be further discussed is that, while a youthful population carries the expectation of generating innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic dynamism, the lack of appropriate economic opportunities creates harsh social unrest and economic stagnation. The youth bulge and the consequent demographic dividend, expected outcomes of the current DTM, in the absence of economic integration and social securities, can translate into competition for scarce resources, increased income inequality and human capital loss through the "brain drain" phenomenon, where skilled professionals migrate to better-off nations seeking greater opportunities (Juneja, 2025, p.108). Moreover, having a constantly ageing population without the means to deal with it generates additional scenarios of social and economic crisis.

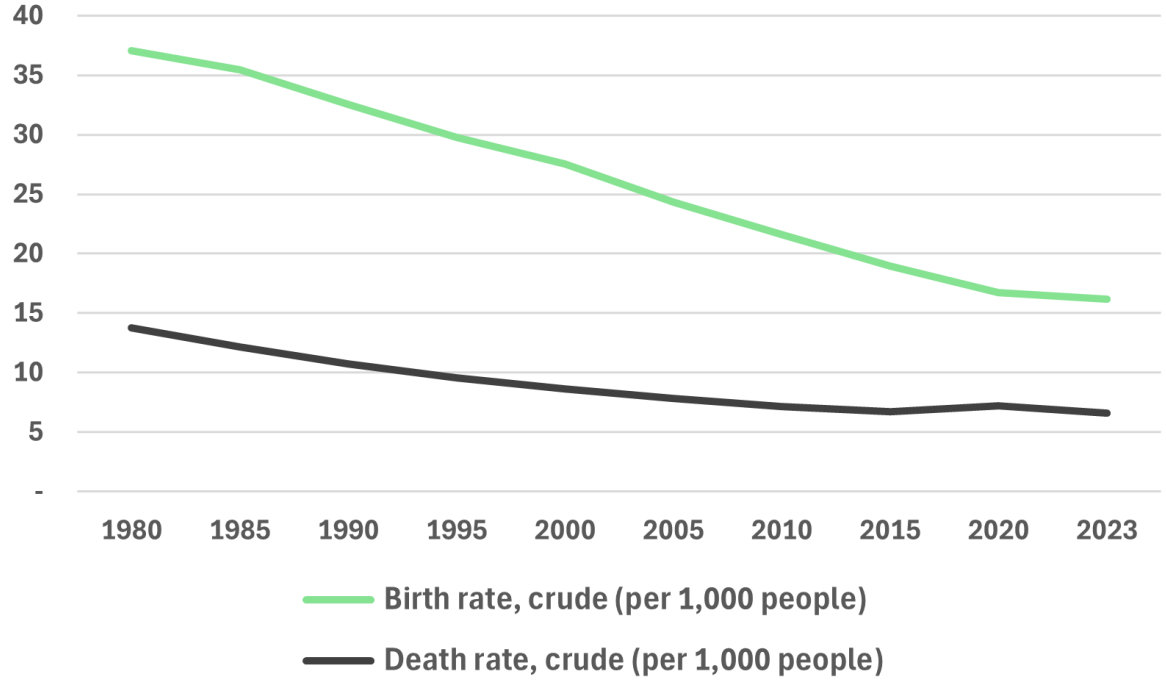
All the trends mentioned above can be seen in more detail through the following graphs.

Figure 1. *Population growth in India (annual percentage) (1980-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link: https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

Figure 2. *Crude birth and death rates (per 1,000 people) in India (1980-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link:
https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

1.2.2 ECONOMIC FACTORS

To achieve a better understanding of the choice to start the timeline in the 1980s and to assess what major events characterise this periodisation, economic macrotrends should be taken into consideration.

In the first half of the 20th century, India's economy struggled, and it was only after Independence that it began to show a growing rate of around 3% to 4% per annum (Kohli, 2006, p. 1251). From 1951 to 1981, GDP grew at a 4% rate, with per capita GDP growth at only 1.8% annually. By observing more disaggregated data, it is noticeable that the years 1951-1965, coinciding with the legacy of the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, saw a slightly higher growth rate, while the years from 1965 to 1981, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was in office, were characterised by a lower rate, synonym of decades of socialism and strict governmental planning (Panagariya, 2024, p.82).

This trend changed starting from the late '70s/early '80s. From 1982, there was a clear sign of acceleration in terms of GDP growth, with India's per capita GDP (PPP-adjusted) rising from the 90th rank to the 75th rank by 2004. If, in 1985, India's PPP-corrected[1] GDP was the 8th largest in the world, by 2004 it had become the 4th largest, reaching that of the USA, China, and Japan (Basu & Maertens, 2007, p. 6). Currently, India holds the third position, after China and the United States

[1] Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is a macroeconomic analysis metric used to compare economic productivity and standards of living between countries (Investopedia, 2024).

(Global FirePower, n.d.). The change in the '80s was fundamental, as it triggered a shift in global perception, both in academic writing and in the media and popular business publications. India was perceived as a newly emerging and dynamic economy and began to be compared to China (Basu & Maertens, 2007, pp. 6-7). The abandonment of left-leaning, anti-capitalist rhetoric and policies, and the prioritisation of pro-business strategies also emphasised this growth acceleration. Furthermore, the economic growth of the '80s contributed to a "rightward drift" in Indian politics (Kohli, 2006, p. 1252). Starting in 1985-1986, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi made, in fact, efforts to diminish the socialist legacy, but had limited success due to strong opposition within his own Congress Party. Concretely, despite the obstacles, the limited liberalisation he achieved increased India's growth rate to 4.9%. In the last three years of the 1980s, he also favoured a significant fiscal expansion and continued import liberalisation, which brought India to an unprecedented growth rate of 7% (Panagariya, 2024, p. 83).

The liberalisation in import licensing and investment rules promoted by the PM Rajiv Gandhi, coupled with fiscal expansion, was exceptionally positive for the Indian economy. However, the Gulf War in 1990, along with the return of Indian workers, laid the foundations for the foreign exchange crisis. The fiscal expansion of the 1980s was, in fact, financed by external borrowing, which increased the demand for foreign exchange to service the rising external debts (Bardhan, 2002, as cited by Siddiqui, 2025, p. 1). Due to the crisis, by 1990, economic growth had reached an *impasse*, and the state was facing difficulties in sustaining it. The severe balance of payment crisis and pressure from international financial institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, forced India to shift away from dirigisme[2] and move towards pro-market reforms. In 1991, the subcontinent transitioned to a neoliberal regime, advancing the removal of licensing restrictions and the liberalisation of cross-border flows of goods, services, and capital. Key aspects of the reforms included the privatisation of public companies and an increase in support towards private entrepreneurs. Moreover, tariffs on industrial production were significantly reduced (from 355% in 1991 to 50% in 1996), and several sectors were opened to foreign capital and foreign ownership (Siddiqui, 2025, p. 1).

In the post-reform era, India witnessed once again accelerating growth. The GDP grew at an average annual rate of 5.8% from 1992-1993 to 2002-2003 and then at 6.9% from 2003-2004 to 2019-2020 (Panagariya, 2024, p. 83). Progress was particularly impressive between 2003 and 2010, as India reached growth rates above 7.8%. The data experienced a decline from 2011 to 2016, but remained within a 6-8% range (Dasgupta & Kar, 2018, p. 2). Between 2003 and 2023, including the COVID-19 years, GDP in current dollars grew at an average annual rate of 10.22%. However, despite India

[2] Defined by Merriam-Webster Online as economic planning and control by the state.

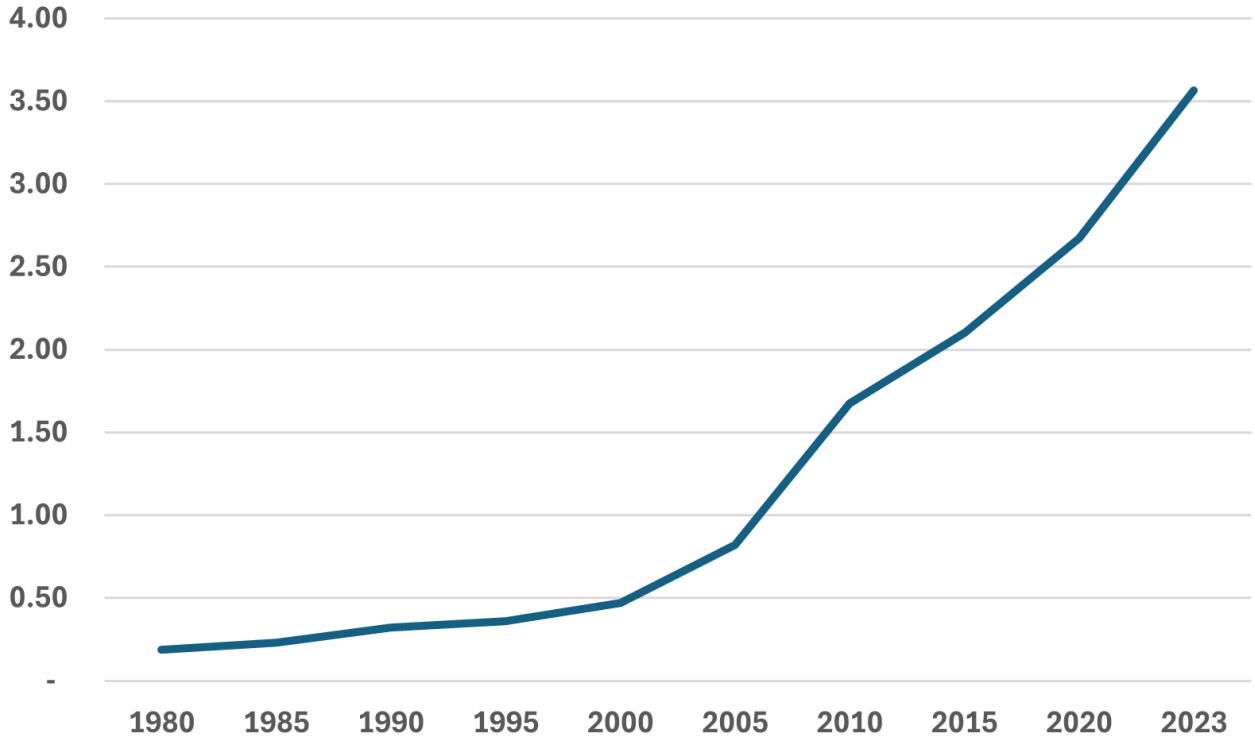
experiencing a decisive break in its growth rate, its performance remained worse than that of the miracle economies of Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and China (Panagariya, 2024, p. 83).

All these positive trends were once again disrupted by the outbreak of a new crisis in 2019-2020, the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic led to a 5.7% decline in GDP between 2019 and 2020, resulting in a decrease in the average growth rate, despite a rebound to 9.69% in 2021 (Panagariya, 2024, p. 83).

In the post-COVID-19 period, the economy is expected to recover, as argued by multilateral institutions, rating agencies and economists, including the chief economic advisers of the Government of India. According to these voices, the Indian market is supposed to emerge stronger than ever in the coming years, given the liquidity support and future demand. This revival can be linked to the stimulus and reforms announced by the government for all the productive sectors. However, the effectiveness of such measures depends on their implementation and remains a matter of debate. Given the GDP bounce back visible in the years following 2021, it can be said that the subcontinent's economy, particularly its productive sectors—agriculture, industry, and services—has followed its historical growth trajectory. These sectors are still expected to grow at their historical averages of 7.5% for agriculture, 9% for industry, and 11.4% for services (Soni & Subrahmanya, 2020, pp. 312-313).

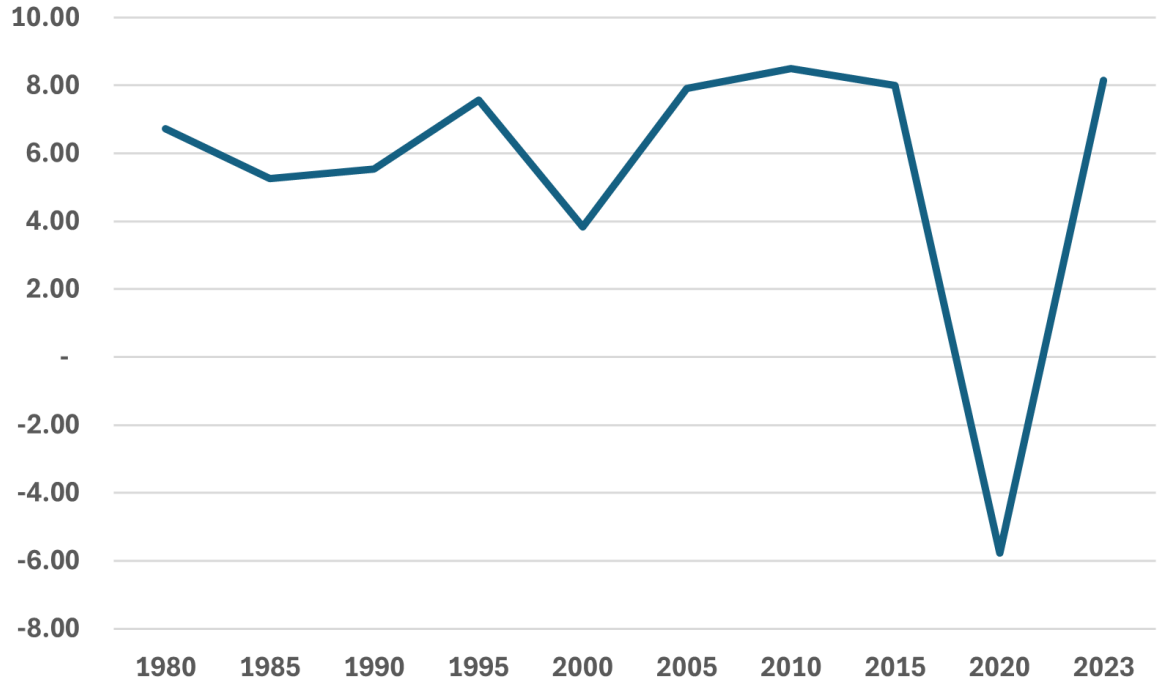
Once again, the trends hereby described can be seen in more detail through the following graphs.

Figure 3. *GDP in India (current US$) (values in trillions) (1980-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link:
https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

Figure 4. *GDP growth in India (annual percentage) (1980-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link:
https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

1.2.3 POLITICAL FACTORS

To complete the analysis and contextualise the chosen timeline, the last macro trend to be discussed addresses the significant political determinants that have affected the Indian subcontinent. Once again, to understand the changes that began in the 1980s, it is necessary to examine the political evolution of India following its Independence.

During the 1950s, India's nationalist and main party, the Congress, was particularly focused on establishing patronage links with regional and local influencers, thereby expanding a chain of authority that extended from the capital city to villages (Kohli, 2012, p. 89). This system underwent a significant change when it was affected by the 1967 debacle of the Congress, and the party lost its monopolistic hold on the government (Sridharan, 2002, p. 57).

Between the 1970s and 1980s, control over governmental decisions became centralised into the figure of the "leaders", who ruled by personal popularity and found it challenging to transform their power into a problem-solving political resource. Governmental legitimacy became especially difficult to sustain due to high leadership turnover at lower ranks. Thus, the state was performing at a low level of efficacy in terms of accommodating conflicting interests and solving developmental problems. Political violence, as well as poverty, dominated the political landscape, while the process of

centralisation was weakening the links between the centre and the vast social periphery. Considering India's internal diversity, the erosion of both traditional authority in the social structure and of the nationalist party created a highly fragmented political society. In such an adverse scenario, leaders with a populist and personal appeal emerged to offer a semblance of political coherence. Once in power, however, they did not perceive the need for building political institutions. Without parties or similar institutions, the link between leaders and their supporters remained fragile and specific policies were difficult to implement. Significant to the period is the figure of Indira Gandhi, daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, who served as India's Prime Minister from the 1960s. She was one of the first leaders to practice a strong centralisation of power system (Kohli, 2012, pp. 89-92). The significant victory of the Congress under Indira Gandhi in 1971 wasn't enough to restore the party's dominance. Still, given the political actors it brought into prominence, it laid the groundwork for the second electoral system (Sridharan, 2002, p. 57). The old Congress Party was marginalised, and the new Party of Indira never became a real one. The PM's popularity was linked to her populist posture and the establishment of direct linkages with the masses. Under her guidance, issues of personal loyalty and favouritism became crucial in a top-down political system. Over the 1970s and 1980s, nearly all members of the cabinet, parliament, as well as Congress Party officers and chief ministers of states, lost their political autonomy (Kohli, 2012, p. 92).

In 1989, the third electoral system was inaugurated through the formation of Vishwanath Pratap Singh's minority government[3]. The main change was that any single party or combination that achieved a majority in parliament had disappeared, and the anomaly of political democracy -the dominance of the minority[4]- became the rule (Sridharan, 2002, p. 57). From 1989 onwards, Indian politics was no longer defined by a single party winning the majority of seats in the Lok Sabha (India's lower house of Parliament). The outcomes were fractured verdicts and minority/coalition governments. The process of alliance formation was enhanced with the creation of the Janata Dal (JD), which soon became the primary opponent of the Indian National Congress (INC). The formation of the JD government in 1989 was a landmark defined by two main features: the existence of a pre-electoral coalition comprising the National Front (JD, Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal and Janata Party), three regional parties (Telugu Desam Party, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, and Asom

[3] Singh was the principal founder in 1988 of the Janata Dal (JD), a merger of three small centrist opposition parties. After 1988, he assembled a nationwide opposition coalition called the National Front (NF), which contested the general parliamentary elections of November 1989. After that election, Singh, as the leader of the NF, was able to form a coalition government and achieve control of both houses of India's parliament. The coalition was soon riven by disputes related to religious and caste issues. Singh resigned on November 7, 1990, after receiving a vote of no confidence in the Lok Sabha (Schwartzberg et al., 2025).

[4] Minority governments are governments in which the party or parties that hold cabinet posts in the executive do not simultaneously hold a majority of seats in the legislature (Field & Martin, 2022).

Gana Parishad) and the Congress; the informal seat adjustement between the National Front and the Bharatiya Janata Party and among the Left parties, even though they were ideologically incompatible (Dutta, 2021, p.185). For the first time, state-level leaders were asserting themselves, and regional parties were becoming central to the shaping of the government. Participation peaked as more and more socially deprived groups entered the electoral arena. This era is usually defined as the post-one-party dominant system or post-Congress polity. It is in this specific context that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged, and Indian politics ceased to be a debate merely among pro-Congress or anti-Congress forces. Voters had more choices, and religion started to be seen as a key propeller of events, thus indicating an evident polarisation between secularism and communalism[5] (Sridharan, 2002, pp. 57-58).

After its creation, the BJP reached its peak in 2014 and 2019, when Narendra Modi led the party to win two consecutive general elections. These years were significant because, after three decades, there were two successive single-party majorities in the Lok Sabha. No other party in India, apart from the INC, has achieved such a result. However, since the BJP government took office in 2014, there have been signs of democratic backsliding, particularly in the context of Modi's rise to power. Deleterious trends have, in fact, intensified under his guidance: excessive concentration of power in the hands of the executive, decay in the autonomy of independent institutions, clampdown on political dissidents and individual freedoms, and rising Hindu majoritarianism (Vaishnav, 2021, as cited in Vaishnav, 2024, p. 62).

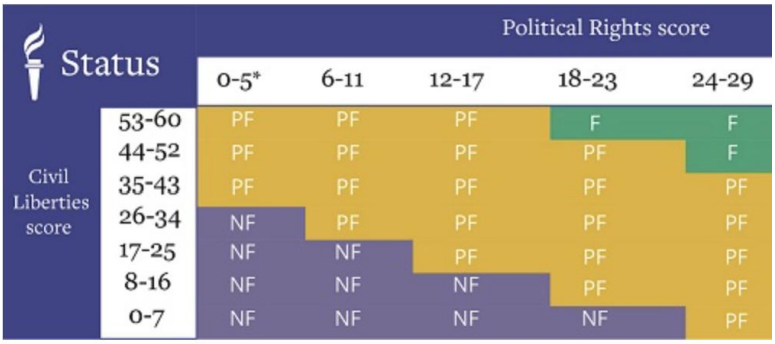
In June 2024, this tendency was disrupted: the BJP failed to secure a parliamentary majority in the most recent general election. Despite pre-election surveys and exit polls indicating a crushing BJP victory, the party won only 240 seats in the 543-seat Lok Sabha. Modi was still re-elected as Prime Minister, but had to form a government with the help of coalition allies. More than two dozen opposition parties, led by the INC, organised themselves under the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) to contest the elections. This electoral verdict appears to have injected new life into India's democracy (Vaishnav, 2024, pp. 61-62).

An objective way to "measure" the level of democracy in a country is offered by Freedom House, an American think tank founded in 1941 and focused on researching and advocating global threats to democracy and freedom. The organisation publishes two main scores annually: *Freedom in the World* and *Freedom on the Net*. The first one offers a detailed study on political rights and civil liberties, while the second index is focused on internet freedom (Freedom House, n.d.-a). For the sake of this research, only the first indicator has been considered. *Freedom in the World*'s methodology derives from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948 by the UN General Assembly. It

[5] Defined by Merriam-Webster Online as loyalty to a sociopolitical grouping based on religious or ethnic affiliation.

assesses the real-world rights and freedoms, rather than the governments' performances per se. To generate its yearly results, it uses a two-tiered system based on scores and status. A country is awarded 0 (the smallest degree of freedom) to 4 (the greatest degree of freedom) points for each of 10 political rights indicators and 15 civil liberties scores. The political rights questions are divided into three categories: Electoral Process (3 questions), Political Pluralism and Participation (4 questions), and Functioning of Government (3 questions). Civil liberties are divided into Freedom of Expression and Belief (4 questions), Associational and Organisational Rights (3 questions), Rule of Law (4 questions), and Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights (4 questions). The highest score possible for political rights is 40, while for civil liberties is 60. The results from the previous edition are used as a benchmark. A score is typically changed only if there has been a real-world development during the year. The combination of both scores determines the status of a country, which can be Free, Partly Free, or Not Free (Freedom House, 2025).

Figure 5. *Country's democratic status according to Freedom House*



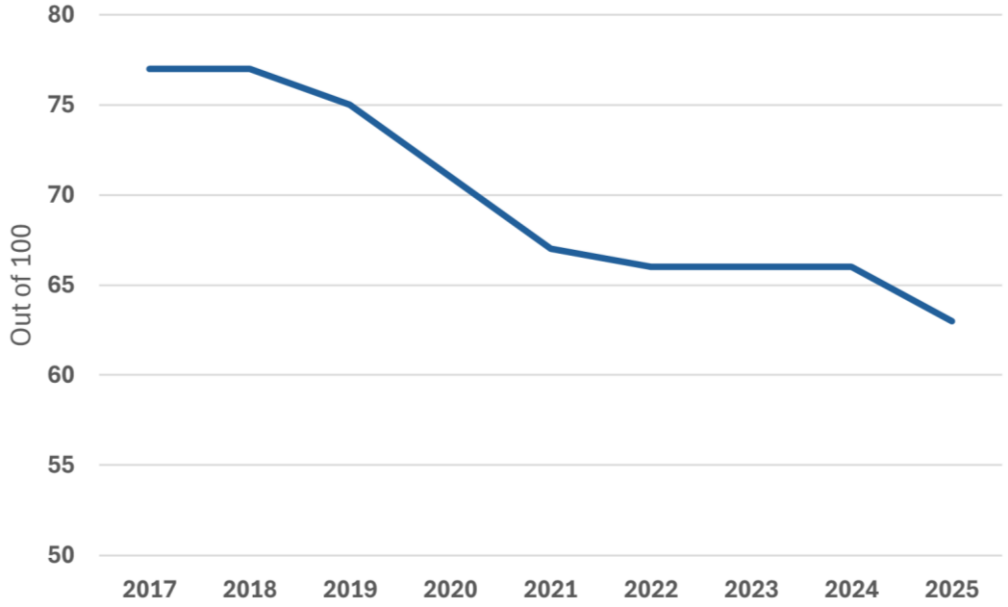
KEY: F = Free, PF = Partly Free, and NF = Not Free

Source: Freedom House (2025). Freedom in the World Research Methodology. In *Freedom House*. https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology

In the case of India, the *Freedom in the World* index has been registered since 2017. What is primarily detectable is that, up to 2020, the country was considered Free, with a score ranging from 77 to 71. Starting from 2021, instead, the country has shifted to a Partly Free status, with its score decreasing to 63 in 2025. A multiyear pattern influenced the change due to the governmental decision, under the BJP, to sustain Hindu nationalist policies centred on rising violence and discriminatory measures against the Muslim community. In addition, expressions of dissent by the media, academics, civil society groups and protesters were limited (Freedom House, n.d.-b). The 2025 score indicates a negative trend compared to the scholars' optimistic expectations, as previously mentioned. According to Freedom House, there has been a rise in the persecution of Muslims, the harassment of journalists, nongovernmental organisations and government critics. The BJP has increasingly used government institutions to target political opponents. On top of that, Muslims, scheduled castes

(Dalits), and scheduled tribes (Adivasis) have remained economically and socially marginalised (Freedom House, n.d.-c).

Figure 6. *Global Freedom Score for India (2017-2025)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from Freedom House, data retrieved at the following links: https://freedomhouse.org/country/india; https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2024; https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2023; https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2022; https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2021; https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2020; https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2019; https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2018; https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2017

1.3 BUILDING THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK: DATA, METHODS, AND CHALLENGES

As already mentioned, an essential step in the following dissertation consisted of analysing quantitative secondary data generated by governmental institutions, healthcare facilities, and international organisations, among others. Generally, it is easier to work with this type of information since it is already gathered and classified, making it quicker to search and more economical in terms of time and resources (Benedictine University Library, 2025). However, as this research itself has highlighted, comprehensive databases can be challenging to find, especially for developing countries.

In the following section, the main limitations of searching for secondary data related to developing countries will be explained, along with how this study has attempted to overcome existing constraints.

1.3.1 THE ISSUE OF LIMITED DATA AVAILABILITY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

When observing the nature of data gathered in the Global South, it becomes apparent that data collection is primarily undertaken by state institutions, mainly due to the private sector's limited

capacity, especially in terms of economic resources. Regarding the gathering process itself, difficulties can be seen both endogenously and exogenously. In the first case, institutional and organisational issues are often detected due to a lack of resources and infrastructure or operational inadequacies. In the second scenario, the problem lies in the perception of civil society regarding the administration's inability to provide reliable and timely data. Additional points can be provided to address these internal and external scenarios (Elahi, 2007, pp. 297-299).

Endogenous weaknesses:

- Lack of understanding of the importance of data collection, mixed with a low level of literacy and a general cultural *ethos* of not sharing personal information.
- Areas inaccessible by law for data collection.
- Cultural constraints in rural/tribal societies.
- Remote and scarcely populated areas with accessibility difficulties.
- Large informal economic sectors, which can be challenging to measure.
- The establishment of autonomous statistical structures is often discouraged by a lack of political will and/or administrative support.
- Developing countries offer a rapidly changing scenario, primarily when referring to their structural and administrative setup. Therefore, the scopes, items, and concepts of statistics and questionnaires require more frequent adjustments. This hampers civil society's ability to carry a particular statistical burden.

Exogenous weaknesses:

- National statistical offices do not attract quality human resources since they are considered a government task of minor rank. As a consequence, the salaries, as well as the career planning and motivation of staff, are low. Capacity building, including technological upgrades, modern training facilities, and linking performance with rewards, is given low priority.
- Infrastructure for internal information and communication is severely underdeveloped. Microcomputers and client-server systems have begun to impact work performance in some countries. Decentralised data entry is not yet the norm. Access to the internet, as well as internal networks, is often still in the process of development.
- Allocation of financial resources is inadequate.
- Statistical organisations lack autonomy, while the legal framework is outdated to meet the requirements of a modern statistical structure.

To these general points provided by Asad Elahi (2007), a further analysis by Suzana Brown, Deepak Saxena, et al. (2022) can be added. When comparing data gathering procedures between the Global North and South, it is noticeable that research entities in developed countries often have unrealistic and disconnected standards, which are expected to be followed regardless of geographical location and socio-cultural, political, and economic realities. Moreover, when conducting field data collection, one should consider the possibility of "black swan" events, namely conditions such as epidemics, pandemics, political unrest, elections, and governmental changes that can obstruct and delay the work. In the case of India, for example, the 2021 Census, which was expected to take place, has been postponed by six years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is now scheduled to occur in 2027. Thus, the last available census is that of 2011, providing now outdated data and missing recent developments (Yadav, 2025).

1.3.2 CONSTRUCTING THE DATASET: SOURCES AND ACCESS

Considering the theoretical foundations just discussed, the quantitative research applied for this thesis project has been conducted by expanding the data search and observation to various online databases, which will be presented here.

Before delving into their description, it is worth noting that expanding the study through so many databases has made the overall research challenging. One of the issues was, for example, the fact that different databases have the indexes registered under different names or may be difficult to trace, if one is not an expert in the sector. Given these circumstances, researching all the indicators necessary for studying the Indian subcontinent, or even just evaluating them and their impact on the research, was a long and scattered process. What has emerged is that, first and foremost, there is a lack of comprehensive data for both the past and the present, and, secondly, there is no database that brings together all official data on the country in a single "space". This poses a substantial limitation not only in terms of the "ease" of academic research, but also in terms of the ability of analysts or the government itself to access immediate and reliable sources.

Table 1. *Databases used for designing the research*

Family Planning Program Effort Scores	The Family Planning Effort Index (FPE) is a long-standing measure that quantifies the strength of national Family Planning Programs. Since 1972, it has been collected periodically, providing results across four key components: policies, services, evaluation, and access (Track20, n.d.).
International Labour Organization	The ILO Department of Statistics develop international standards for better measurement of labour issues and enhances comparability among

	states. It provides relevant and timely labour statistics, helping Member States develop and improve their data collection and usage (ILOSTAT, n.d.). Labour statistics are particularly important for the development and evaluation of policies, as well as for assessing progress towards achieving decent work (ILO, n.d.).
National Censuses	Census Operations are supposed to occur once every ten years under the legal authority of the Census Act, 1948, and the Census Rules, 1990 and amendments made thereunder (*Census Division | Government of India*, n.d.). Since 1991, they have been published in the form of an extensive collection of Excel files, organised by series. To a large extent, census tables maintain the same design over time to foster comparability of census outputs (*Census Tables | Government of India*, n.d.).
National Family Health Survey	The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) is a large-scale, multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India. Five rounds of the study have been undertaken since the first survey in 1992-93. The survey provides state and national information for India on fertility, infant and child mortality, family planning practices, maternal and child health, reproductive health, nutrition, anaemia, utilisation, and quality of health and family planning services. They have two specific goals: to provide essential data on health and family welfare and to gather information on emergency health (IIPS, n.d.).
National Sample Survey	The National Sample Survey (NSS) is responsible for conducting large-scale sample surveys in diverse fields on an all-India basis. Primarily, data are collected through nationwide household surveys on various socio-economic subjects, as well as the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), among others (National Sample Survey (NSS)	Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation	Government of India, n.d.).
Periodic Labour Force Survey	It was launched in April 2017 by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) to make labour force data available more frequently. The objective is to estimate key employment and unemployment indicators and to observe changes in status in both urban and rural areas (MoSPI, 2023).
United Nations Department of	**Household size and composition**: This compilation presents indicators on household size and membership composition worldwide, estimated

Economic and Social Affairs	using both tabulated data and microdata from household rosters in censuses and surveys. The estimates represent approximately 98 per cent of the world's population in 2022, with reference dates ranging from 1960 to 2021(Household Size and Composition | Population Division, n.d.). **Living arrangements of older people**: It is a compilation of indicators on the household composition and living arrangements of individuals aged 60+. The indicators have been estimated using both tabulated data and microdata from household rosters in censuses and household surveys (Living Arrangements of Older Persons | Population Division, n.d.). **World Urbanisation Prospects**: This publication comprises revised estimates and projections of the urban and rural populations of all countries worldwide, as well as their major urban agglomerations. The World Urbanisation Prospects are widely used throughout the United Nations and by many international organisations, research centres, academic researchers, and the media (World Urbanisation Prospects, n.d.).
World Bank Data	It provides access to global economic and social statistics, including the World Development Indicators, International Debt Statistics, Millennium Development Indicators, and data on poverty, education, and gender. World Development Indicators are presented in six dimensions: World View, People, Environment, Economy, States/Markets and Global Links (European University Institute, 2024). This was the first database from which the whole research process started.

1.3.3 LIMITATIONS STEMMING FROM THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Having looked into the different databases used for the definition of the quantitative research process, it is now possible to delve more deeply into the constraints that have stemmed and that are linked with the issue of limited data availability in developing countries. In the case of this particular thesis project, four limitations to the research can be highlighted.

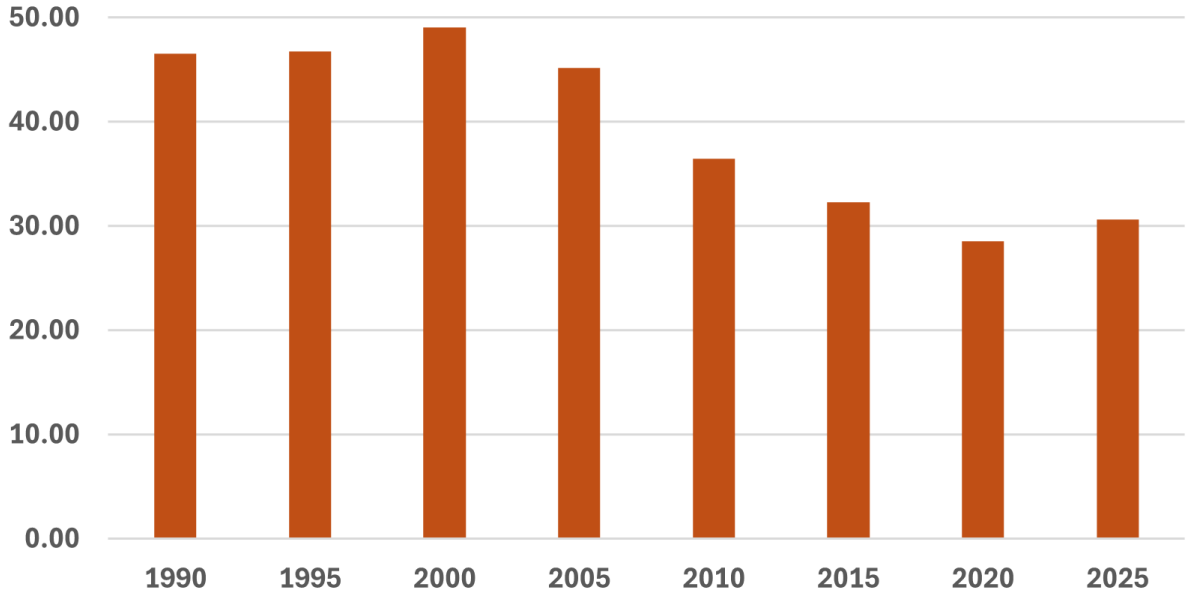
The first one refers to the difficulty, when looking at some indicators, in finding data that either starts precisely from the 1980s or offers comprehensive information beyond the COVID-19

pandemic. This is the case, for example, with the labour force participation rate, which, as provided by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), only began to be collected in the 1990s. However, if the same data is searched within national databases, it can be analysed from 1983. Unemployment rates also face the same issue, and in this case, national estimates do not prove an exception. Furthermore, all data collected through the National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) can only be traced back to the 1990s. Similarly, all NFHS surveys, the UN DESA databases, and the Family Planning Program Effort Score do not cover an extended timeline after the COVID-19 era. To overcome such limitations, where possible, the gaps have been filled through qualitative research.

Another problem is related to the changes in structural and administrative setups. Translated in practical terms, this issue refers to the variations, within consecutive years, in the questionnaires and the data of interest to the government. For example, when researching family planning access efforts through the Family Planning Program Effort Scores, it became noticeable how, before 2014, there was no generalised interest in counting access to injectables, emergency contraception, safe abortion, sterilisation permanence, and IUD or implant removal. As a consequence, it is not easy to make comparisons within the same indicator across different decades, and it is necessary to supplement the data by consulting other databases, which may not yield the same results in terms of measurements. Similar challenges were also noticeable in the use of the NFHSs. For example, data regarding the sources of health care in India were not accessible in NFHS-1 (1992-93), but only for the following ones. Similarly, the percentage of households covered by a health scheme or health insurance was only available starting from NFHS-3 (2005-06). Once again, if the issue is considered of essential importance for the overall aim of the research, the theme is implemented qualitatively; otherwise, only a general presentation of the trend is provided.

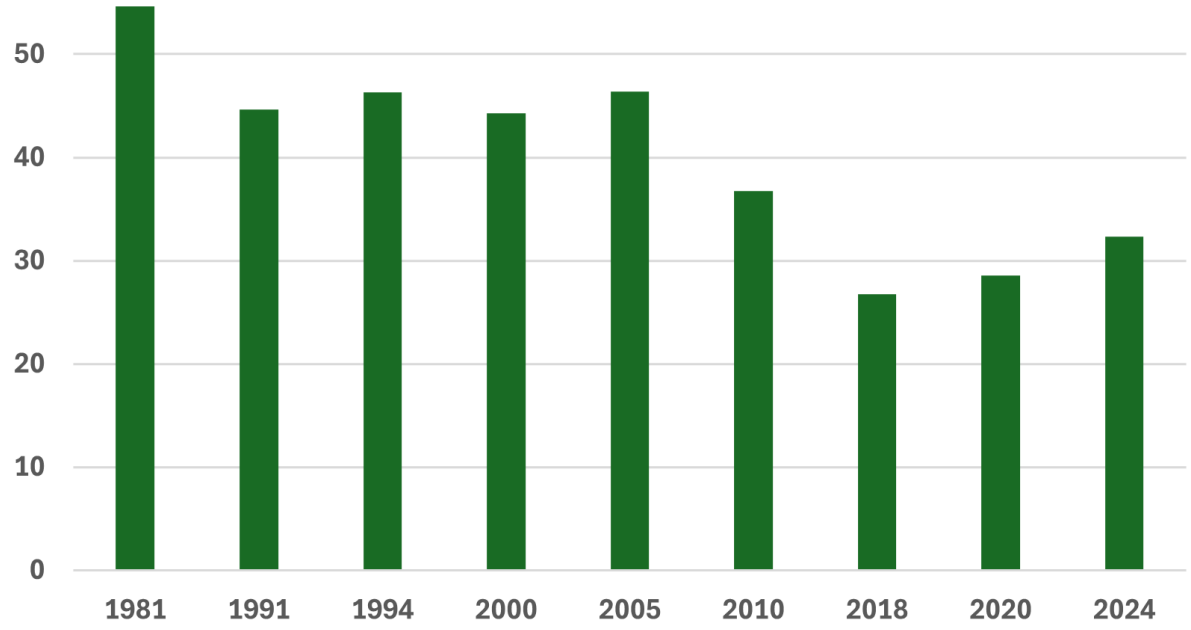
The second-to-last limitation to consider is the already mentioned difference between national and ILO estimates. This is detectable especially in the labour force participation rate and the unemployment rate by sex.

Figure 7. *Labour force participation rate in India (15-24) (ILO estimates) (values in per cent) (1990-2024)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from ILO estimates, data retrieved at the following link: https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/

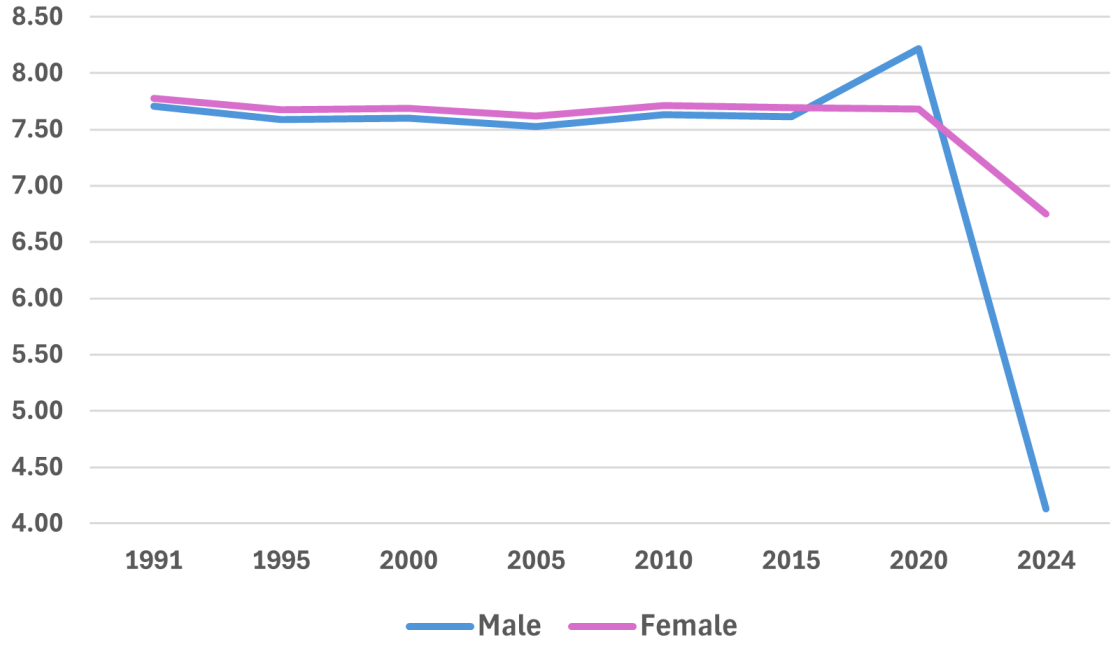
Figure 8. *Labour force participation rate in India (15-24) (national estimates) (values in per cent) (1983-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from Periodic Labour Force Survey and National Sample Survey, data retrieved at the following link: https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/

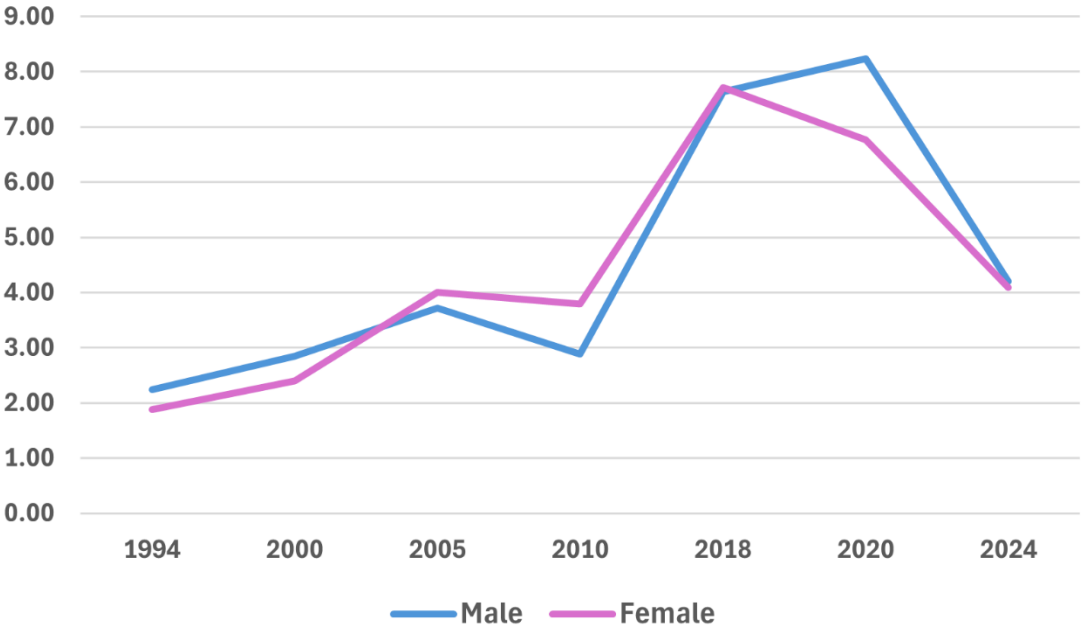
As can be seen in these two graphs, although the trend shows some similarities in the general pattern, the data differ. For example, if the ILO registers a percentage of 49.05 in 2000, national estimates have one of 44.3% in the same year.

Figure 9. *Unemployment rate by sex in India (15+) (values in per cent) (ILO estimates) (1990-2024)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from ILO estimates, data retrieved at the following link: https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/

Figure 10. *Unemployment rate by sex in India (15+) (values in per cent) (national estimates) (1994-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from Periodic Labour Force Survey and National Sample Survey, data retrieved at the following link: https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/

In the case of the unemployment rate by sex, the data difference is even more noticeable, considering the variability in both the general trend and the specific data.

Given the nature of this dissertation, which primarily uses demographic data as a starting point to discuss socio-economic changes in India and their security repercussions, we will not explore in depth the reasons why such a difference exists. However, it is interesting to note the divergence between

databases. Moreover, for the purposes of this study, the ILO graphs will be preferred over the national estimates.

The last issue that needs to be pointed out in this research is that, in some instances, accessing governmental databases, such as national censuses, required using a VPN; in fact, connections outside of Indian territory were not permitted. Such a procedure may not only require possible additional expenses for the researcher but also significantly limit access to crucial information for reconstructing databases, particularly in terms of "historical series".

CHAPTER 2: INDIAN DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENT

In this chapter, the focus will be on both the independent and the first dependent variables, primarily by analysing how demographic trends have changed and evolved from the 1980s to the present day. The need to discuss these topics together has emerged during the writing process itself. Initially, the plan was to treat the first two variables in separate chapters. However, while connecting the data, it appeared clear that it was not easy to discuss the constructed databases without analysing how they have direct consequences on the social and economic landscape. Therefore, right from the outset of this research, it became obvious that the various elements were and are closely intertwined.

Methodologically, the variables will be analysed in both quantitative and qualitative terms. For the quantitative observations, special tables and graphs were created. On the qualitative side, various papers and analyses were considered. Furthermore, the study is divided into three main sections. The first one will delve into the observation of the Indian population in terms of growth, the demographic transition model's phasing, and the subsequent development of the youth bulge and demographic dividend. The second part will focus on social issues at large. By defining "social issue" as a state of affairs that negatively affects individuals' lives or the well-being of communities within a society, and about which there is usually public disagreement as to its nature, causes, or solution (Kulik & M, 2023), we can consider trends regarding gender issues, religious disparities, and healthcare accessibility. The last section will be the shortest, as it has already been partly discussed in the first chapter, and it will focus on the economic developments of the Indian subcontinent.

Before delving into the study, one last thing needs to be emphasised: the field of research proposed here, while taking into account the territorial heterogeneity that characterises India, will focus on a much more general and all-encompassing discourse of the demographic and socio-economic dynamics that define the subcontinent in its entirety. Therefore, the difference between North and South India and the presence of the BIMARU states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh) marked by high population growth rates, low literacy rates, high infant and maternal mortality rates, low per capita income, high poverty levels, and inadequate infrastructure (Staff, 2023), were not considered explicitly in the research and data assembly. An attempt has been made to maintain a broader outlook to understand the general dynamics that dominate India and guide its future.

2.1 INDIA'S POPULATION TRENDS

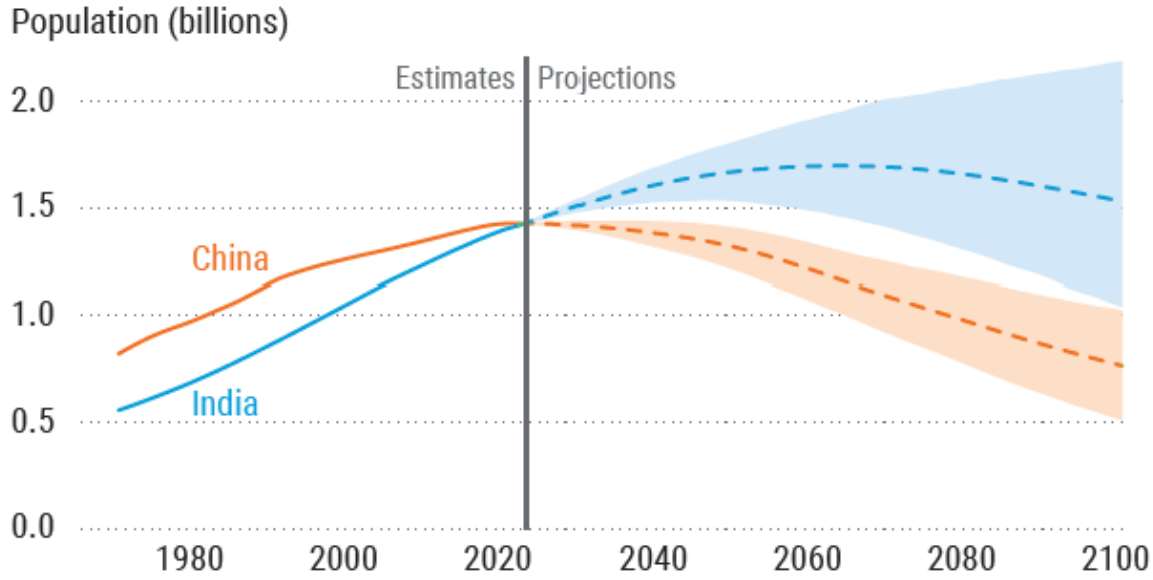
In the first section of this chapter, the focus shifts to a more active analysis of the demographic data collected for the Indian subcontinent. The objective is to observe the major trends contributing to India's population growth and shifts, as well as the creation of the "window of opportunity", namely

the period during which a country's population experiences age structures favourable for development and working-age structures (Chalise, 2018).

2.1.1 INDIA'S POPULATION TODAY

In 2023, India's population surpassed that of mainland China (Hertog et al., 2023), making it the most populous country, with a projected population of 1.7 billion by 2060 (Pande, 2025).

Figure 11. *Trends in total population for China and India, estimates for 1970-2022 and projections for 2023-2100 (with 95 per cent prediction intervals)*



Source: Hertog, S., Gerald, P., & Wilmoth, J. (2023). India overtakes China as the world's most populous country. UN DESA Population Division.

With a middle class of over 500 million, a labour pool of 600 million, and a median age of 29, the country is experiencing a "window of opportunity" that is expected to last for the next three decades (Pande, 2025).

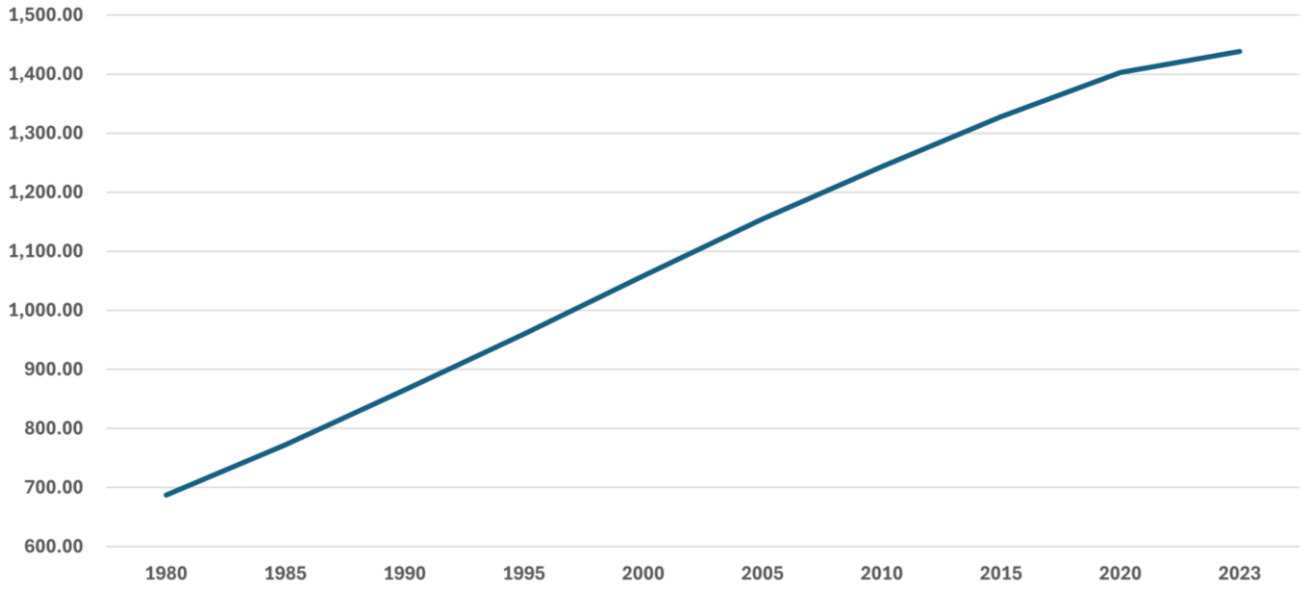
Currently, the Indian population is estimated at 1.4 billion, constituting 17.78% of the total world population (Worldometer, n.d.) and encompassing approximately 76% of the South Asian population (Navaneetham & Dharmalingam, 2012).

The following graphs, based on World Bank data, clearly depict the demographic trend in terms of population growth both in percentage and absolute numbers. India is indeed facing a positive population momentum. This phenomenon occurs when a population that has achieved replacement or below-replacement fertility -as will be further demonstrated in this section- continues to grow for several decades because past high fertility leads to a high concentration of people in the youngest age groups. Total births continue to exceed total deaths as these youths become parents. Eventually, this

large group becomes elderly and deaths increase to equal or outnumber the number of births. Thus, it may take two or three generations (50 to 70 years) before a death in the population offsets each new birth (Testa, Demography and Social Challenges, 2024). This explains why, although actual growth has decreased since the 1980s (due to lower total fertility rate and crude birth rate), the total population is still considered high. Specifically, population growth has decreased from 2.38% in 1980 to 0.88% in 2023, with a significant shift visible after 1995; while the total population has increased from 687 million in 1980 to 1.4 billion in 2025.

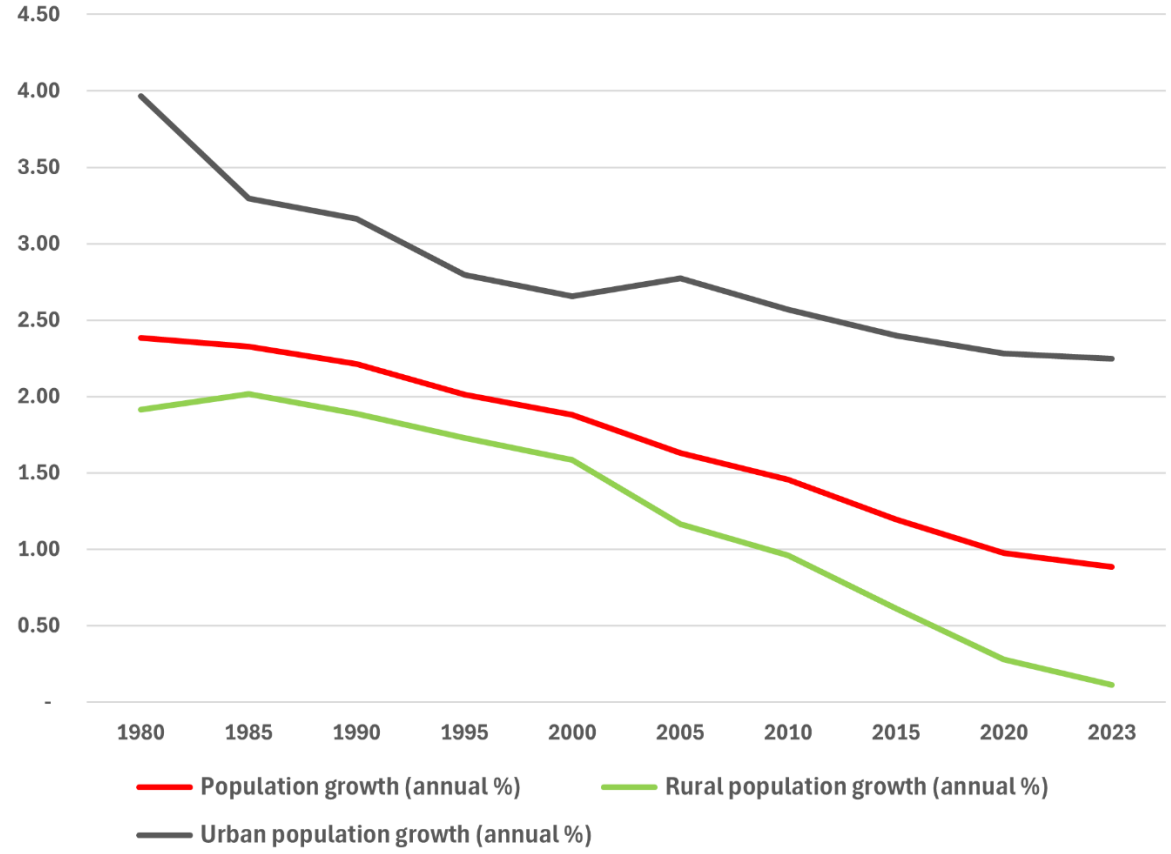
The data further highlight how urban population growth, despite showing signs of decline, remains higher than rural growth, which is indicative of active internal migration and the urbanisation phenomenon.

Figure 12. *Total population in India (values in millions) (1980-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link: https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

Figure 13. *Population growth in India (annual percentage) (1980-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link:

https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

2.1.2 THE FACTORS BEHIND THE ADVANCEMENT IN THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION MODEL

Beginning this dissertation with a general overview of population growth facilitates the comprehension of the Demographic Transition Model and its consequences. Partly, the DTM has already been explained in the first chapter; however, it will be further elaborated upon in the following paragraph to help understand how India is currently facing a "window of opportunity".

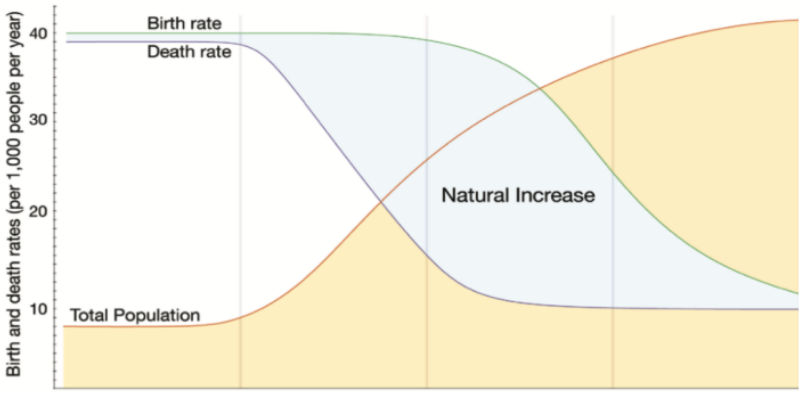
The Demographic Transition Model is a fundamental construct for studying population dynamics. It was initially developed in the mid-20th century and outlines the four stages of demographic transition by linking them to societal development and industrialisation. The mentioned stages have some conventional characteristics that help define them. Stage 1 is characterised by high birth and death rates, resulting in a relatively stable population. High mortality rates are often linked to the spread of diseases, malnutrition, and low medical technology. Similarly, high fertility rates are a response to high child mortality and a need for a labour force in agrarian societies (Purohit, 2023, pp.176-177). In terms of the rural-urban divide, during the pre-demographic transition period, rural-urban migration is considered the primary factor driving urban growth, given the high mortality rates

in urban areas and the resulting negative natural increase[6] (Jiang & O'Neill, 2018, p.364). Declining death rates denote Stage 2, while birth rates remain consistent with the previous phase. This step, combined with improvements in healthcare, sanitation, and food production, leads to rapid population growth (Purohit, 2023, p. 177). Furthermore, rural population growth generates socioeconomic and environmental pressures that increase migration to urban areas, thereby favouring urban growth (Jiang & O'Neill, 2018, p. 364). During Stage 3, birth rates start to decline, slowing the rate of population growth. The visible decline in the fertility rate can be attributed to urbanisation, lower child mortality, increased access to contraception, and changes in societal norms and values that favour smaller household compositions (Purohit, 2023, p.177). Concerning the urbanisation process, during stage three, natural growth outweighs the influence of migration on urban growth. However, urban-rural migration appears to increase in the face of rural-urban migration, due to the narrowing of rural-urban disparity, the issue of urban congestion, and the phenomenon of counter-urbanisation[7]. (Jiang & O'Neill, 2018, p. 364). Lastly, Stage 4 is characterised by both low birth and death rates, leading to a stagnant population. In this phase, ageing, higher living standards, and advanced economies are recurring elements (Purohit, 2023, p. 177). Additionally, rural-urban migration shows further signs of decline, and its contribution to urban growth stabilises (Jiang & O'Neill, 2018, p. 364).

[6] Population natural increase (or natural change) is the difference between the number of births and the number of deaths over a period of time, without considering net overseas migration. If there are more births than deaths, the natural increase will be positive. Otherwise, the population will decline (*Natural Increase | Centre for Population*, n.d.).

[7] Counterurbanisation is the transformation of a settlement system or urban region from a concentrated (urban) to a more deconcentrated (counterurban) state. It occurs when an inverse relationship exists between the size of a settlement area and population growth—a scenario resulting from higher levels of net migration and/or net natural increase in smaller settlement areas (Mitchell & Bryant, 2020).

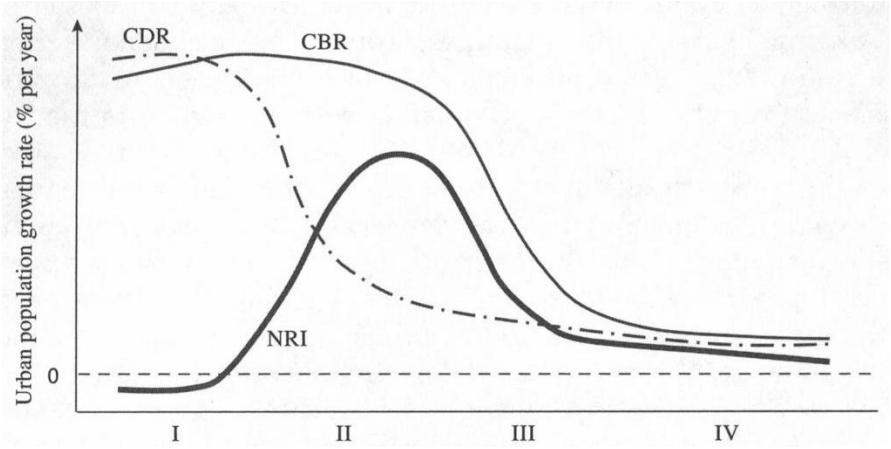
Figure 14. *Visualisation of the Classical Demographic Transition Model*



	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Birth rate	*High*	*High*	*Falling*	*Low*
Death rate	*High*	*Falls rapidly*	*Falls more slowly*	*Low*
Natural increase	*Stable or slow increase*	*Very rapid increase*	*Increase slows down*	*Stable or slow increase*

Source: Testa, Demography and Social Challenges, 2024

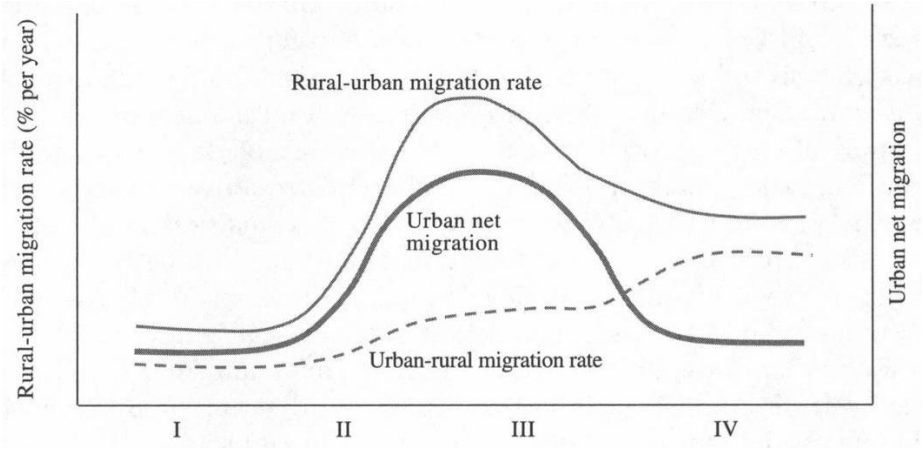
Figure 15. *Natural increase of the urban population*



Source: Jiang, L., & O'Neill, B. C. (2018). Determinants of Urban Growth during Demographic and Mobility Transitions: Evidence from India, Mexico, and the US. Population and Development Review, 44(2), 363–389.

Note: NRI= natural rate of increase

Figure 16. *Migratory growth of the urban population*

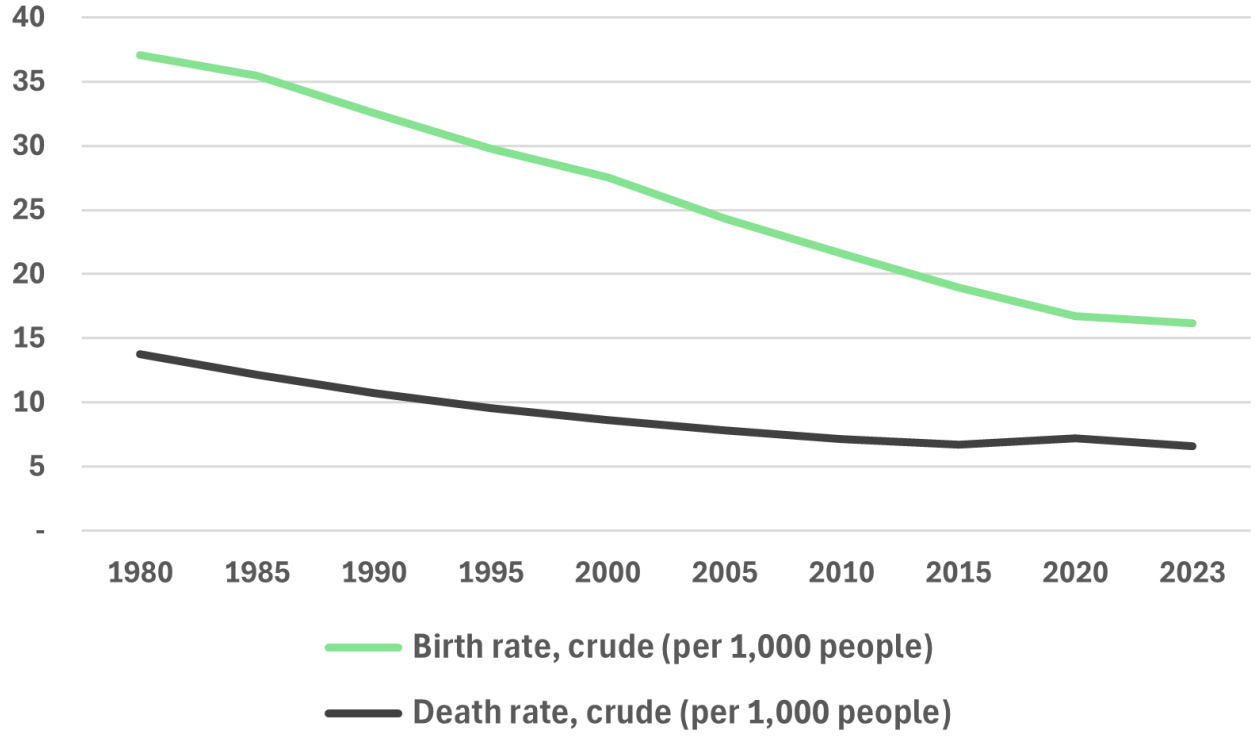


Source: Jiang, L., & O'Neill, B. C. (2018). Determinants of Urban Growth during Demographic and Mobility Transitions: Evidence from India, Mexico, and the US. Population and Development Review, 44(2), 363–389.

From a methodological perspective, these models present one issue: they are based on Western nations, thus posing challenges when applied to countries with distinct sociocultural and economic contexts. This is why, when applying such a theory to the Indian sub-continent, it is necessary to address a comprehensive examination and nuanced interpretation of the demographic background.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, India had high birth and death rates, with cultural preferences for large households and poor health infrastructures contributing to a Stage 1 demographic profile. Around the 1950s, it transitioned into Stage 2, characterised by a decline in death rates resulting from improvements in public health, nutrition, and sanitation. Currently, India is considered to be in Stage 3, with a significant decline in birth rates attributed to urbanisation, improved female literacy and broader access to family planning services. Such a change, however, is not uniform all over the country and presents variations among different states and socioeconomic groups (Purohit, 2023, p. 178).

Figure 17. *Crude birth and death rates in India (per 1,000 people) (1980-2023)*

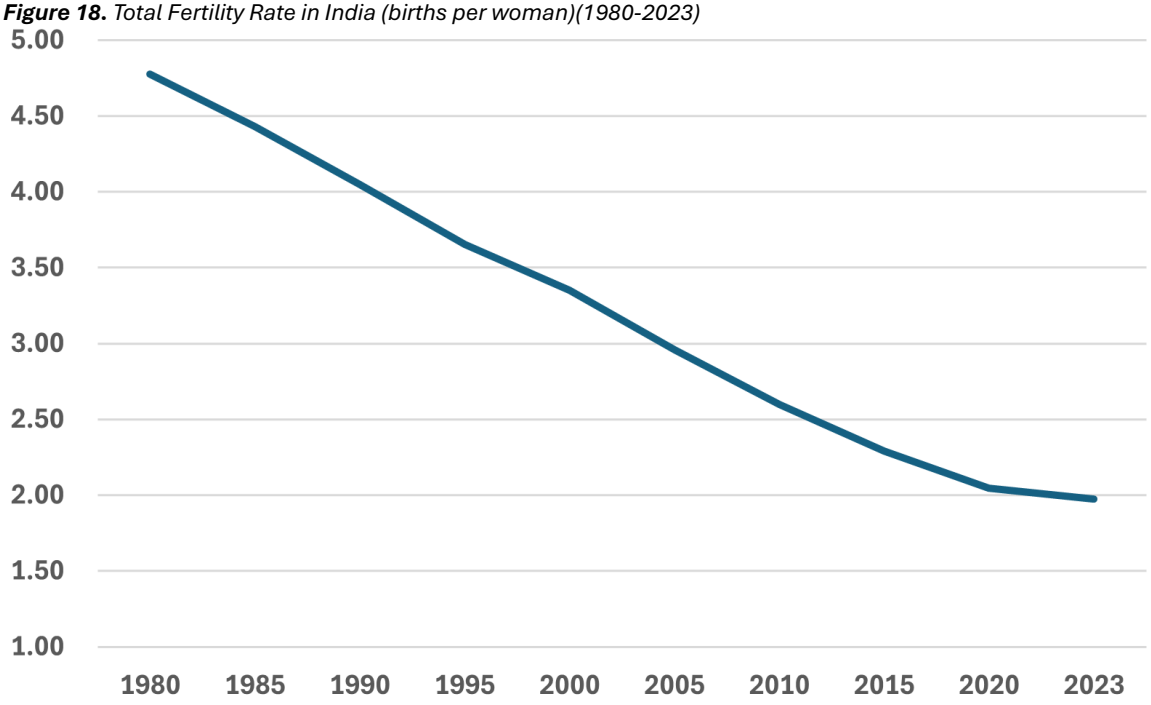


Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link: https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

Upon observing the different stages, it is noticeable how various indicators interact during the transition from one phase to the next. Among these, the main ones to investigate are the total fertility rate, the access to family planning, and finally, the levels of urbanisation and literacy.

The total fertility rate (TFR) is the average number of children a hypothetical cohort of women would have at the end of their reproductive period if they were subject to the fertility rates of a given period throughout their lives and were not subject to mortality. It is expressed as children per woman (*Indicator Metadata Registry Details*, 2025). In India, the TFR has suffered a relatively gradual decline in the 1950-90 period, going from 6.0 children per woman during the 1950s to 4.78 in 1980 and arriving at 1.98 in 2023, which is below the replacement rate[8] (Dharmalingam et al., 2014, p.4). The replacement level was reached between 2017 and 2019, and it then declined immediately afterwards.

Figure 18. *Total Fertility Rate in India (births per woman)(1980-2023)*



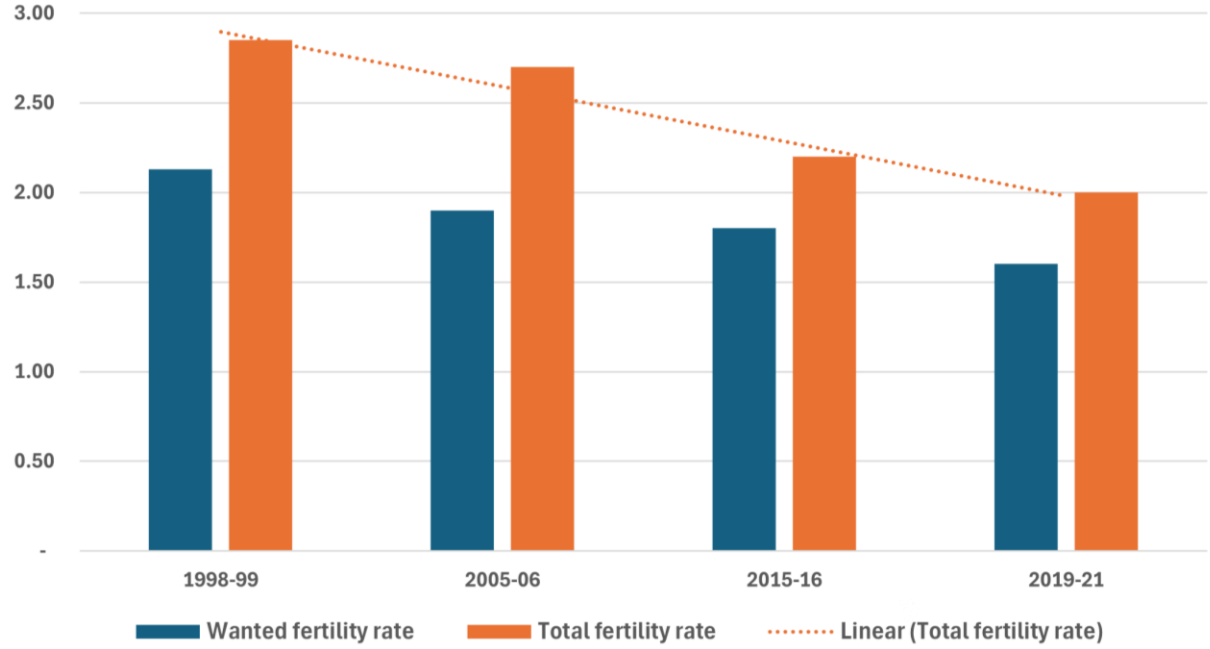
Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link:
https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

Overall, fertility reduction is driven by four key factors: the pace of social and economic development, changes in economic aspirations and expectations, the provision of birth control services, and the reduction of the moral and social costs associated with birth control (Chatterjee & Mohanty, 2021, p. 135). There are also two other indicators to consider when analysing the changes

[8] The replacement-level fertility rate (the total fertility rate needed to keep the population size stable over time, without migration) is commonly stated to be 2.1 (*Replacement-level Fertility Rate*, n.d.).

in the fertility patterns: the desired family size and age at marriage. Regarding the former, it is observable that an attitudinal change among Indian women has undoubtedly influenced the TFR. According to data gathered from 4 of the 5 NFHS, the desired fertility rate has declined from 2.13 to 1.6 since the end of the 1990s, resulting in a corresponding decrease in the Total Fertility Rate (Radkar, 2020, p. 416).

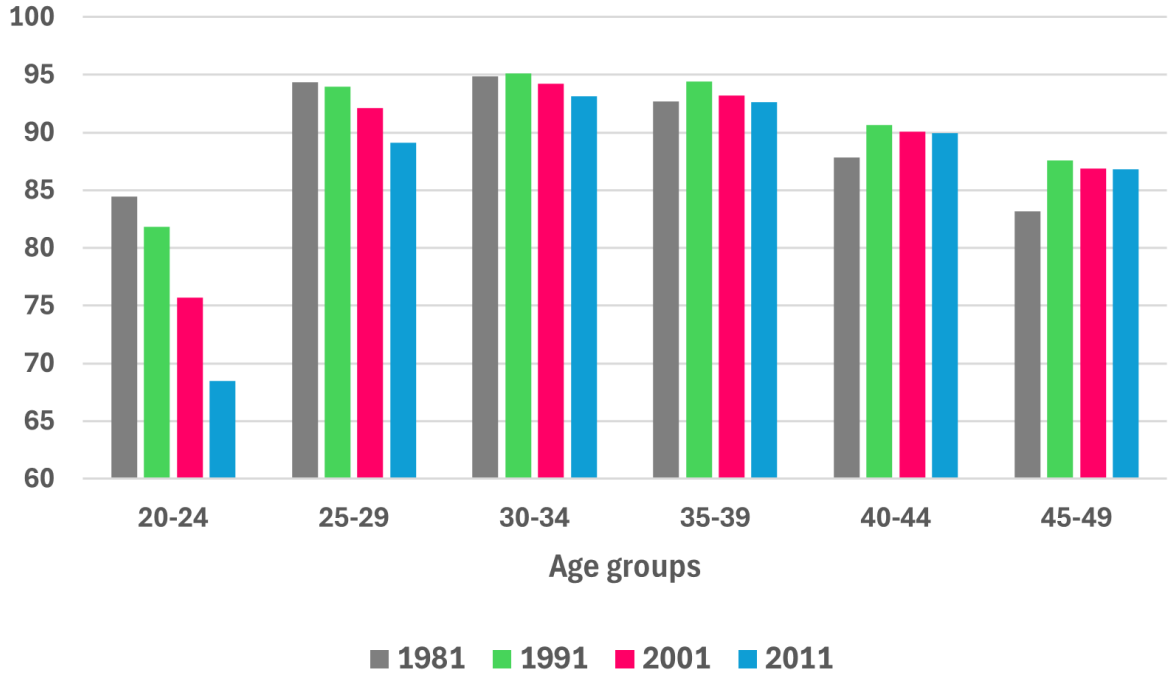
Figure 19. *Wanted and Total Fertility Rates in India (births per woman) (1992-2021)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from National Family Health Surveys 1-5, data retrieved at the following link: https://www.nfhsiips.in/nfhsuser/publication.php

Age at marriage should also be considered for its influence on TFR. Starting from 1981, it is evident that the proportion of women getting married for the first time in their early 20s has decreased, dropping from 84.46% to 68.5% by 2011. The percentage of women getting married from their late 20s onwards has, instead, remained high and stable. Especially in the 30-39 age range, first-time married women account for around 93%. Lastly, an apparent increase is visible for the age range 40-49, with a mean of 87.9% women getting married in their 40s.

Figure 20. *Marital status per age-class in India (values in per cent) (1981-2011)*



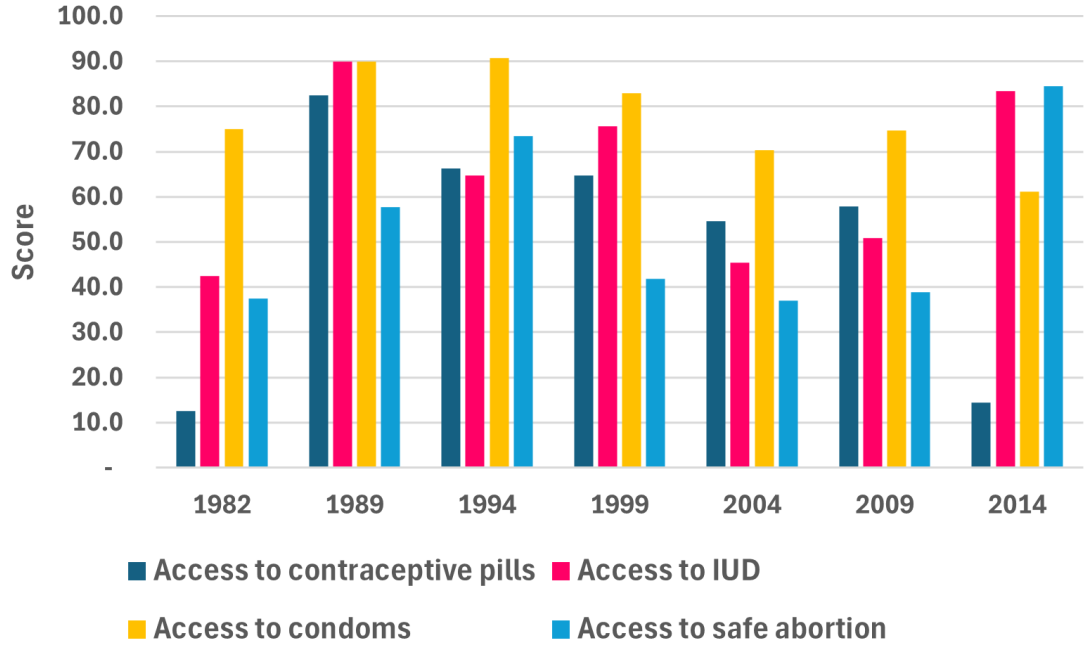
Source: Author's own elaboration from National Censuses, data retrieved at the following links: https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/10301; https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/21598; https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/35512; https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/28122

The result of such a change consists of a reduced exposure to conception. A woman in her early to mid-20s has a 25-30% chance of getting pregnant every month. Fertility starts to show signals of decline in the early 30s, and after the age of 35, the rate speeds up. From the 40s, the chance of getting pregnant in any monthly cycle is around 5% (Department of Health, n.d.). By age 45, it is unlikely for a woman to conceive naturally (Clinic, 2025).

Another significant indicator contributing to the onset of Stage 3 of the DTM is the increased access to family planning[9] efforts. India is one of the most populous countries actively trying to curb its population growth, which led to it being the first country in the world to adopt a national family planning programme in 1952. The endorsement process was lengthy, but it has created an evident transition in the subcontinent (Radkar, 2020, p. 414).

[9] Family planning allows people to attain their desired number of children and determine the spacing of pregnancies. Having access to family planning programs supports people's right to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health. Through the use of contraceptives and the treatment of infertility, it plays a vital role in achieving broader development goals, aligning directly with SDG 3.7, which calls for universal access to sexual and reproductive health care (World Health Organization: WHO, 2025).

Figure 21. *Access to Family Planning Methods in India (1890-2014)*



Source: Author's elaboration from Family Planning Program Effort Scores, data retrieved at the following link: https://www.track20.org/pages/data_analysis/policy/FPE.php

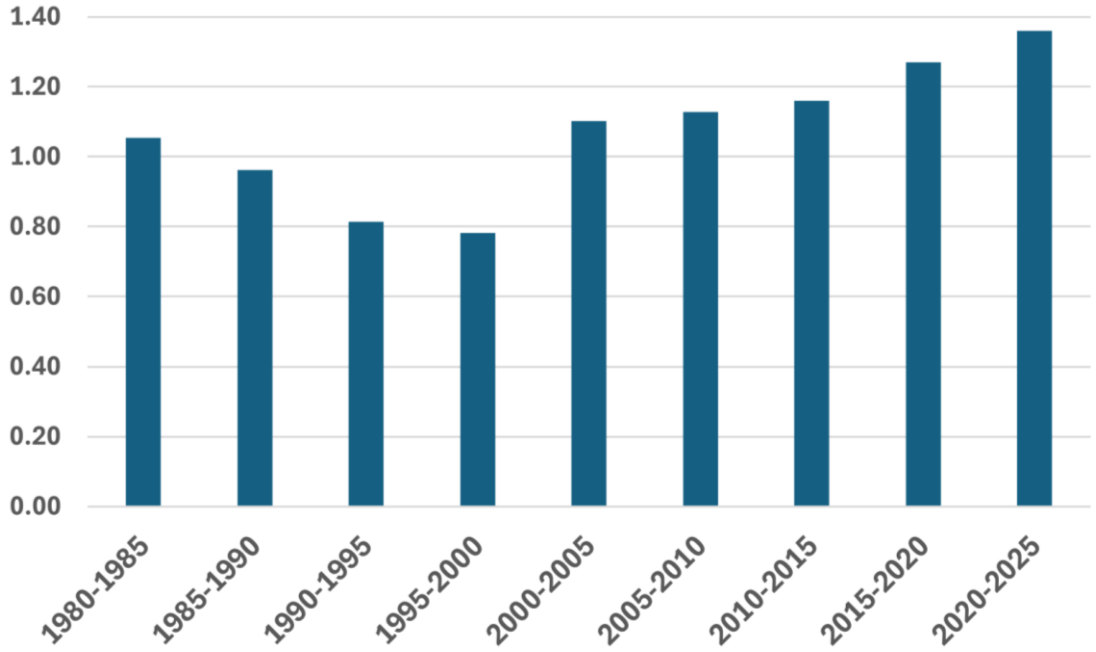
As shown in the graph, there is considerable variability in accessibility[10] to contraceptive methods in India from 1982 to 2014. In 1982, access to contraceptive methods was limited, except for condoms. A peak in method usage is visible in 1989, with IUDs and condoms leading the trend, suggesting a preference for long-term and non-invasive contraception. In the same year, access to contraceptive pills reached its maximum level of usage. The 1990s maintained a positive momentum, with access to condoms reaching its highest score in 1994. Access to safe abortion also saw a rise in its score. From 2004 to 2009, the use of contraceptive pills, IUDs, and safe abortion saw a continued but stable decrease, while condom accessibility continued to have a high score, compared to the others. In 2014, the trend changed significantly once again with an apparent diminishment in access to contraceptive pills and an equally important increase in access to IUDs and safe abortion. Overall, it is visible how family planning programs have developed unevenly, but still, they have left a "mark" on fertility levels and the DTM phases.

The second last element to consider for a better understanding of the DTM is the urbanisation process throughout India. Urbanisation has played a pivotal role in influencing the subcontinent's demographic transition in Stage 3. Despite the theoretical expectation of an increase in the urban-rural migration process, urban growth remains high. Large sections of the population are, in fact, still

[10] Referred to as the extent to which various methods, method-specific services and safe abortion (regardless of legality) are available to the whole population (Kuang & Brodsky, 2016, p.34).

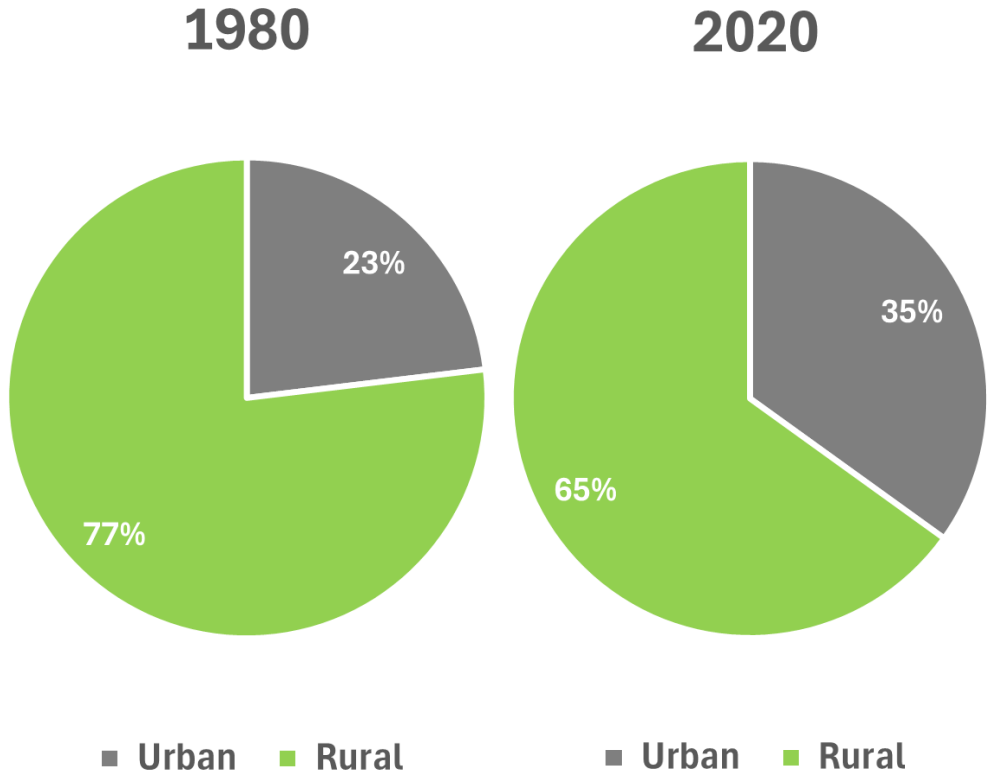
migrating from rural to urban areas, seeking better living conditions and job opportunities (Purohit, 2023, p.178).

Figure 22. *India's urbanisation prospect (1890-2025). Average annual rate of change of the urban percentage*



Source: Author's own elaboration from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, data retrieved at the following link: https://population.un.org/wup/

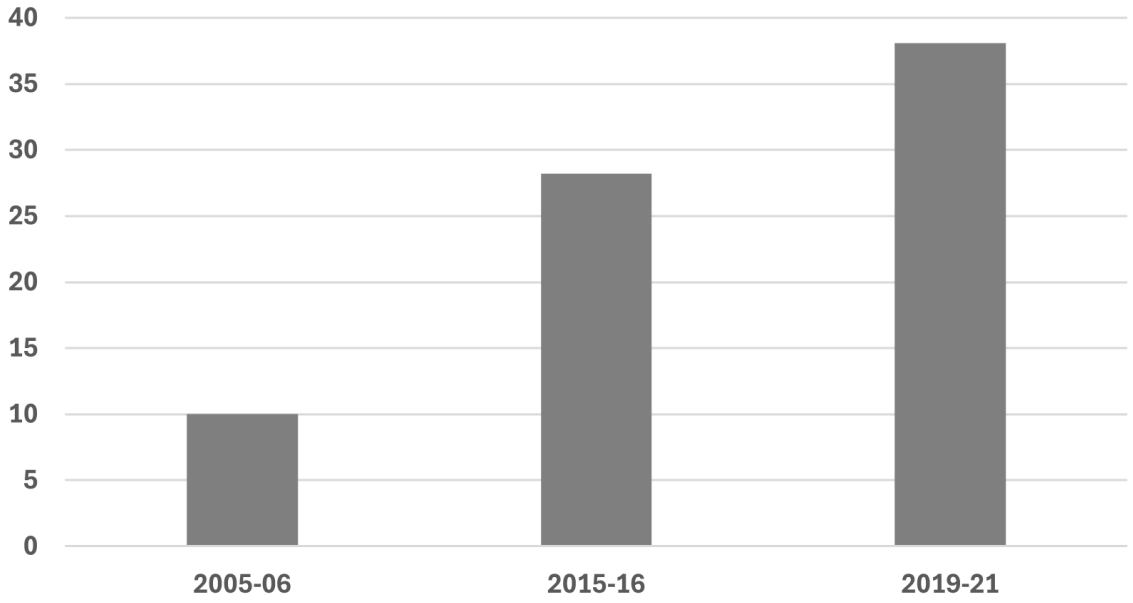
Figure 23. *Urban vs. Rural population distribution (values in per cent) (1980 vs. 2020)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link:
https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

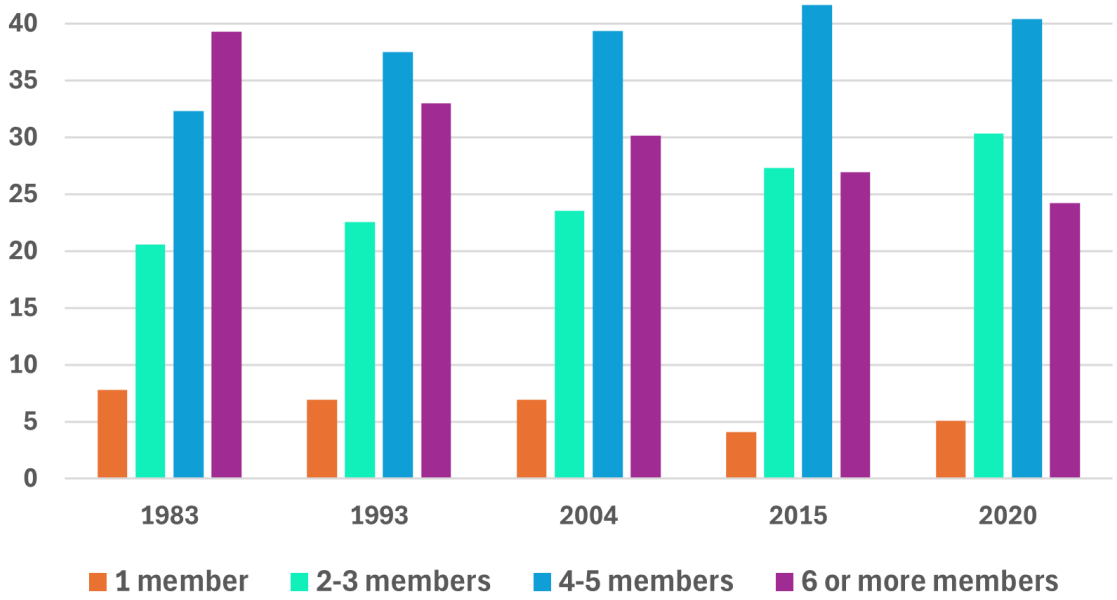
The graphs themselves illustrate the increase in population living in urban areas from 1980 to 2020, with a 12% rise. There were some moments of decrease in the trend, but overall, people continue to seek better opportunities in larger cities. Specifically, a continued process of urban population concentration in cities with 100,000 or more inhabitants is detectable (Bhat, 2025, p. 10). This tendency has different outcomes. On one side, urban areas are offering better access to education and healthcare and promote smaller households, given the high cost of living and limited space availability, thus contributing to a lower TFR (and lower CBR) (Purohit, 2023, p.178). On the other hand, urbanisation has led to significant proportions of the urban population living in slums.

Figure 24. *Urban households covered by health schemes or health insurance in India (values in per cent) (2005-2021)*



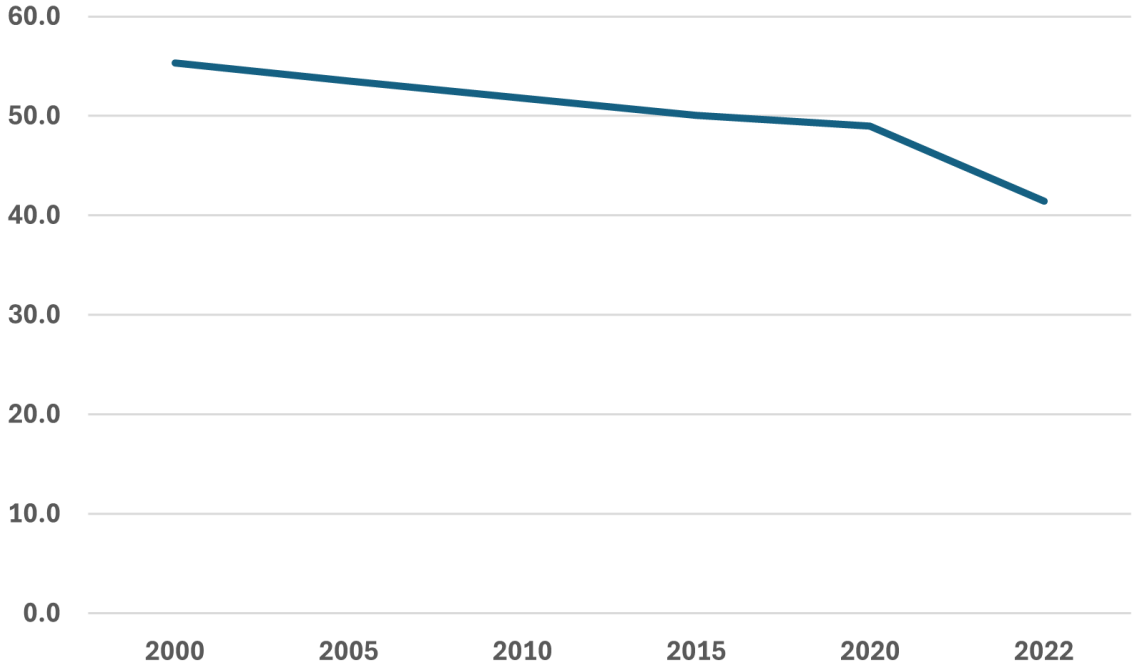
Source: Author's own elaboration from National Family Health Surveys 3-5, data retrieved at the following link:
https://www.nfhsiips.in/nfhsuser/publication.php

Figure 25. *Household by size in India (values in per cent) (1983-2020)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, data retrieved at the following link: https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/data/households-and-living-arrangements-data

Figure 26. *Percentage of urban population living in slums or informal settlements in India (in per cent) (2000-2022)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link: https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

As shown in Figure 26, up to 2022, nearly 40% of the Indian urban population was living in slums, defined by Habitat for Humanity (2018) as living environments characterised by:

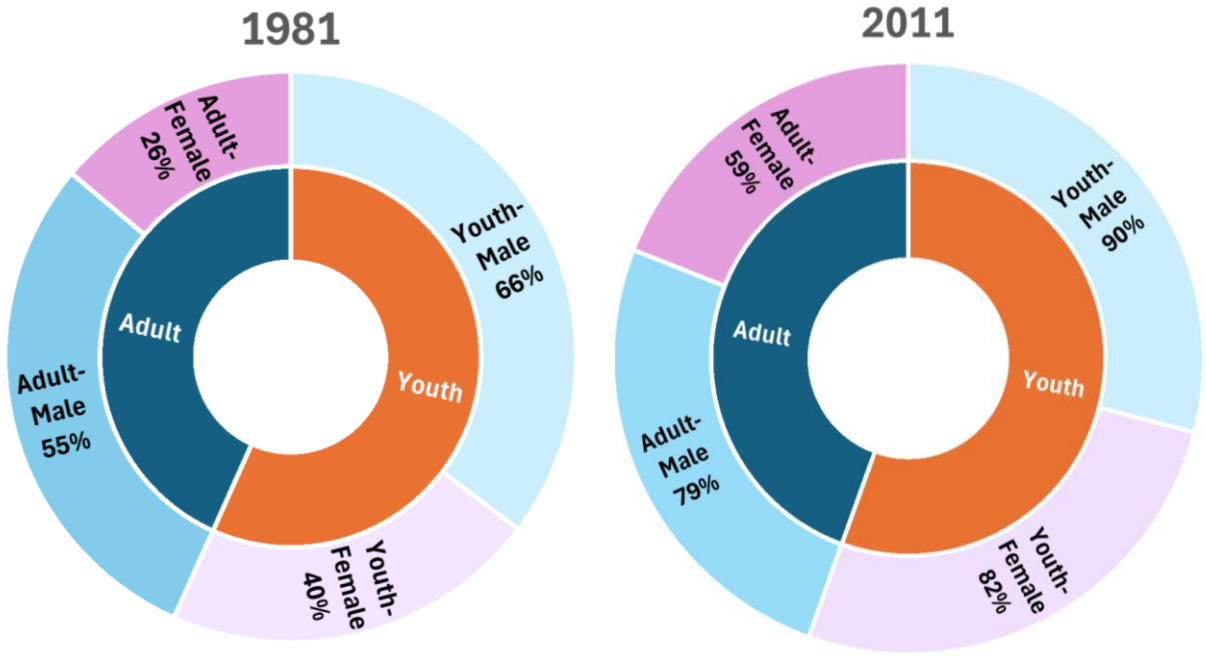
- unsafe and/or unhealthy homes (e.g. lack of windows, dirt floor, leaky walls and roofs);

- overcrowded houses;
- limited or no access to basic services: water, toilets, electricity, transportation;
- unstable homes: weak structures are often blown away or destroyed during storms and earthquakes;
- no secure land tenure (i.e. the land rights to live there).

A range of different factors sustains this condition. One of the primary drivers of slum growth is the significant influx of people from rural to urban centres, which has already been analysed. Rural to urban migration has drastically overwhelmed cities' ability to provide housing and basic services. Another element impacting the field is the lack of an affordable housing market: real estate prices have become prohibitive for low-income individuals and families. Inconsistent government policies, poor urban planning and the emergence of unemployment further worsen the issue (Mhtadmin, 2023). For a better understanding of how it is like to live in one of Asia's largest slums, Mumbai, the report released in 2023 by Progetto Happiness[11] is worth considering.

The last indicator to observe regarding India's entrance into Stage 3 of the Demographic Model Transition is the literacy rate. Higher levels of education, particularly among women, are correlated with fewer children, increased women's participation in the workforce, delayed marriage age, and the promotion of knowledge related to family planning and health (Purohit, 2023, pp. 178-179). Figure 27 illustrates an increase in literacy rates among women, with a nearly 30% rise for adult women and a 40% increase for young girls, thereby further confirming the theory.

Figure 27. *Literacy rates among adults and youth by gender in India (values in per cent) (1981 vs. 2011)*



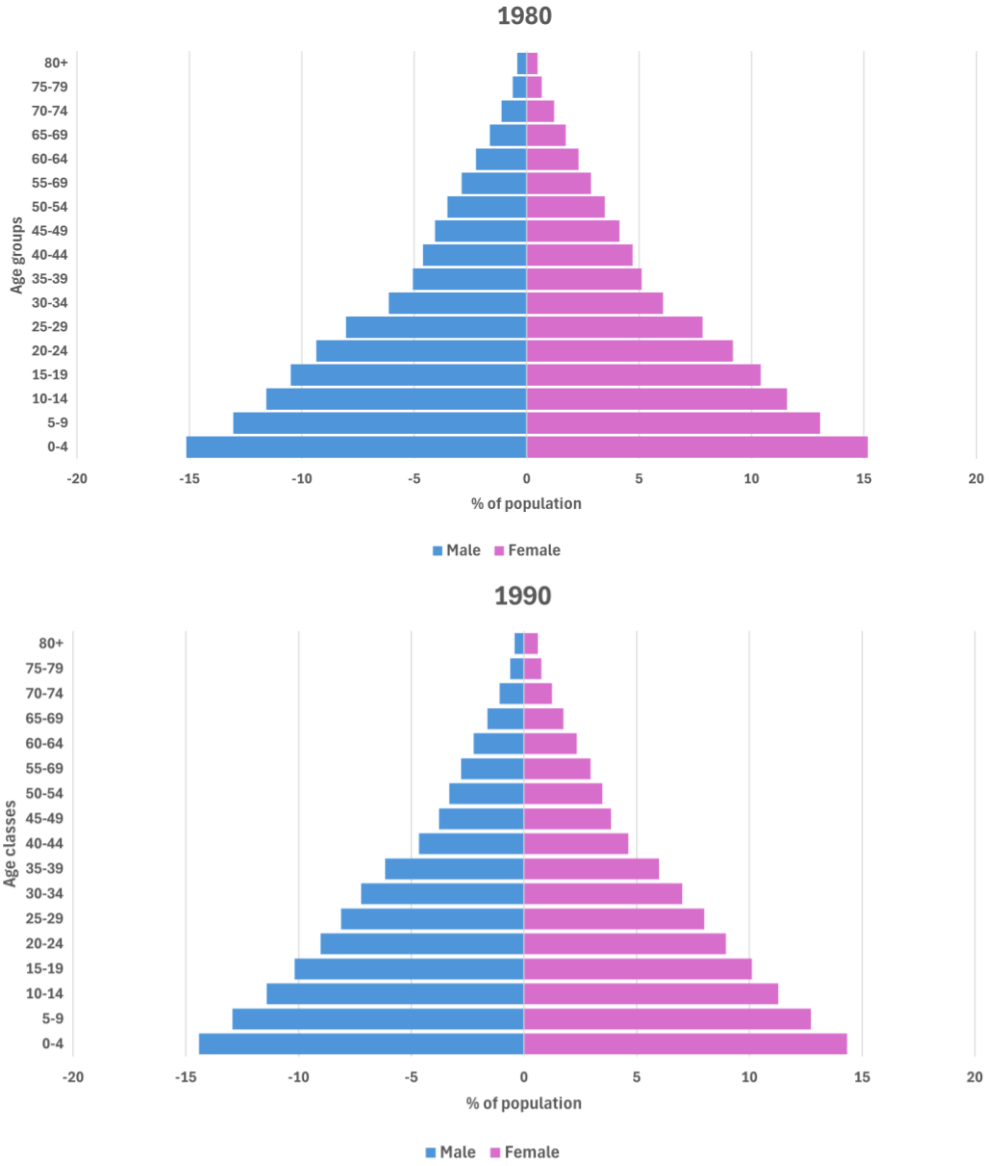
[11] https://youtu.be/y-JNuzJlYRo?si=pXGtiBHYSwQD2srh

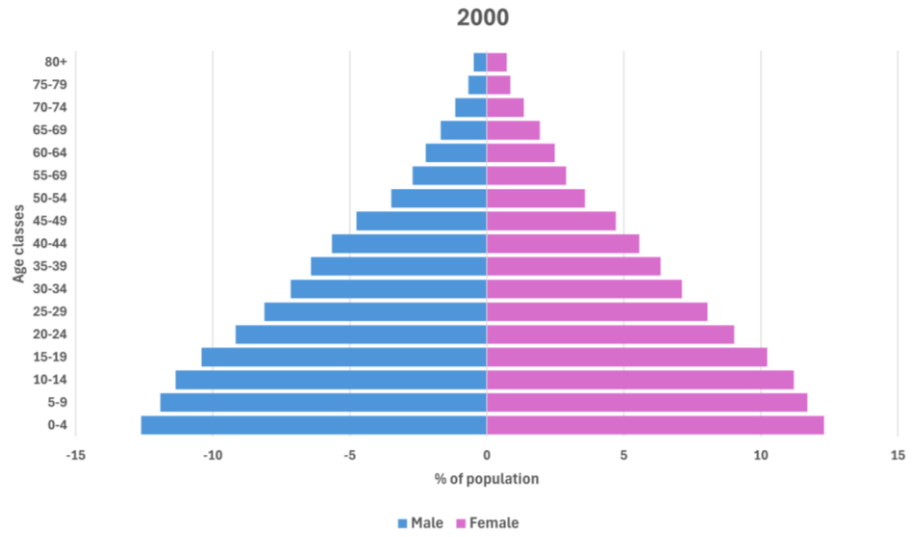
Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link:
https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

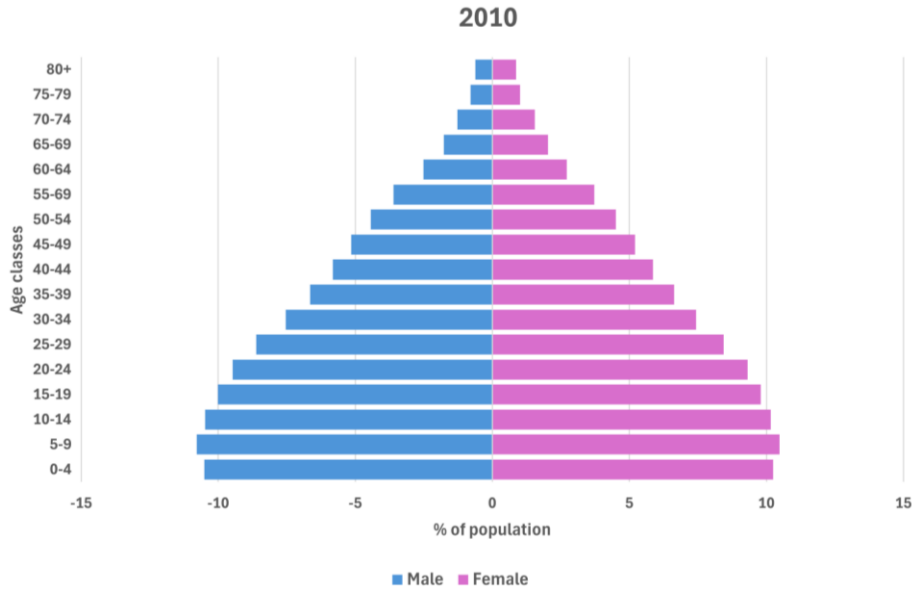
2.1.3 INDIA'S EVOLVING AGE STRUCTURE

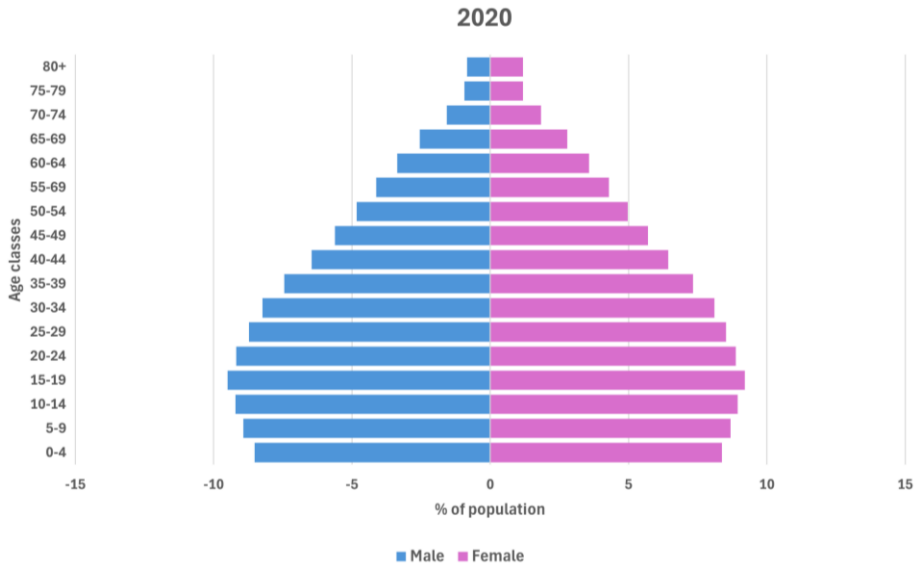
Another way to understand how the Indian population trends have changed from the 1980s to today is by examining age-sex pyramids. This kind of chart, also known as an age structure diagram, is a graphical illustration, typically in the shape of a pyramid, that depicts the distribution of various age groups (usually considered in five-year cohorts) for each gender in a geographical area. The oldest age group is positioned at the top, and the youngest at the bottom; men are typically located on the left side, while women are on the right (Glossary: *Population Pyramid - Statistics Explained - Eurostat*, n.d.).

Figure 28. *Age-sex pyramids for India (1980-2020)*









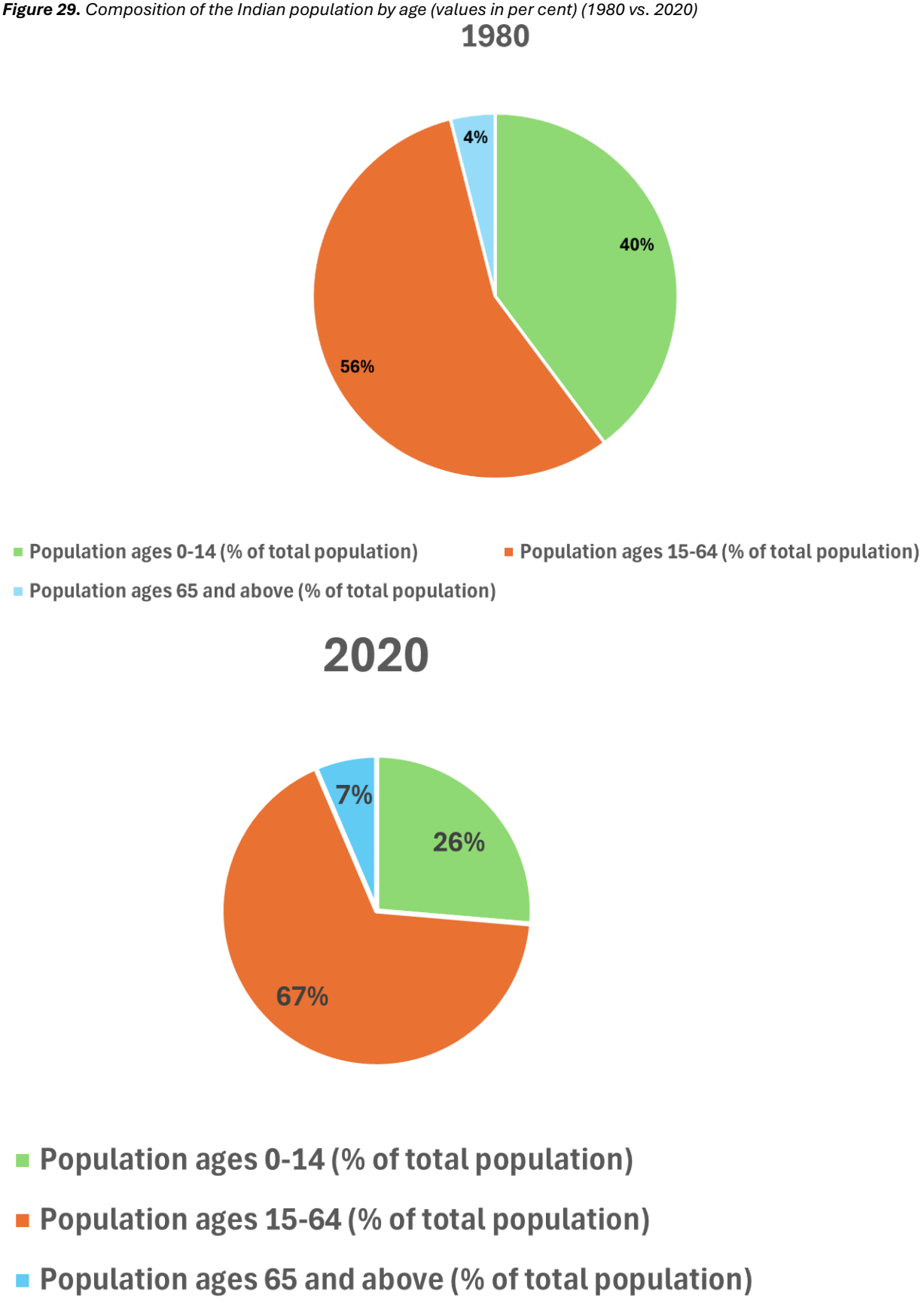
Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link:

https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

To examine the age-structural transition in India, the population should be divided into three main groups: children (0-14 years old), working-age individuals (15-64 years old), and the elderly (65 years old and above). More specifically, the working-age section can be further disaggregated into youth (15-24), young working-age (25-49), and mature working-age (50-early 60s). This division is helpful for gaining a better understanding of how different age groups interact with one another. The child population, for example, is considered dependent on adults for their care and support, as they incur expenses for health and education, among others. Similarly, the elderly population often relies on others to meet their daily consumption needs. On the other hand, working-age groups also have their patterns of dependency. The youth population consumes health and education. The prime working-age group is not prone to savings, given that their consumption is higher than their earnings. Lastly, the middle-aged group is likely to earn and save more (Navaneetham & Dharmalingam, 2012, p.284). It is thus evident how different age groups exhibit distinct economic behaviours, and there are various channels through which a growing share of the working-age population can have a positive impact. First, for example, a bigger working-age population segment generates an increase in the labour supply. Secondly, as already mentioned, it incentivises the creation of savings channels. Thirdly, it increases the stock of human capital: with fewer children and a longer expected working life, parents are more likely to invest in their descendants' health and education (Kumar, 2013, p. 187).

By looking at the above-mentioned graphs, it is visible that, from the 1980s until the early 2000s, the child segment, particularly the 0-4 cohort, constituted a significant portion of the overall population. This indicates that in those years, the Indian population was on the expansive side, with a wide base and a pointed apex. It was only after the early 2000s that a difference began to appear in the youth section. The graphs from the late 2000s to 2020 highlight how a significant bulk of the Indian population is moving into the working-age group, leading to a decline in the number of young dependents and to an increase in the elder population.

Figure 29. *Composition of the Indian population by age (values in per cent) (1980 vs. 2020)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link:

https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

By observing the percentages, it appears that the 0-14 cohort has decreased by 14% between 1980 and 2020; the working-age segment has faced an increment of 11% and the elderly have increased by 3%. In absolute terms, the working-age population increased from 387 million in 1980 to 978 million in 2023, while the elderly population grew from 27 million to 99 million (World Bank data).

In the coming years, the base of the age-sex pyramid is expected to narrow further. Between 2021 and 2030, the age structure diagram will transform into a constrictive pyramid, witnessing a reduction in the younger age groups and a subsequent increase in the working-age segment (Roy et al., 2024, p. 404). Additionally, the elderly population is expected to increase to 133 million by 2050. The subcontinent is projected to undergo an unconventional ageing process, which will create significant economic and healthcare challenges (Chakravorty et al., 2021, p. 7).

These transformations are further contributing to the already presented "window of opportunity", namely by creating a youth bulge and subsequently generating a demographic dividend.

2.1.4 THE CURRENT INDIAN YOUTH BULGE

Youth bulge refers to a demographic pattern in which children and young adults comprise a significant proportion of the population (MoSPI, 2022, p. 4). Individuals under the age of 25 generally characterise it (KPDC, 2025, p. 2), and it is often associated with a stage of development where a country achieves success in reducing infant mortality, while mothers still have high fertility rates.

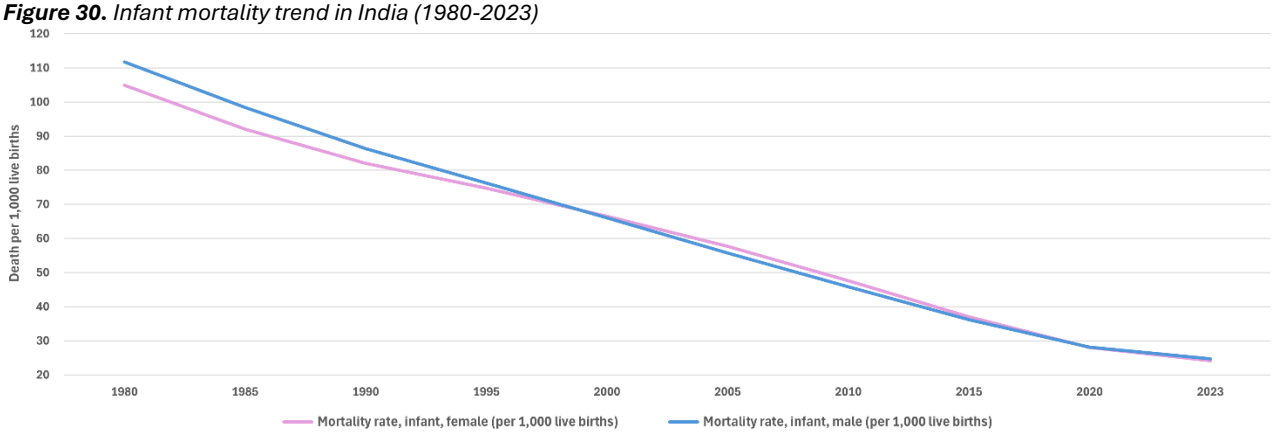
As shown in Figure 17, this condition was in place at least until 2017, when the TFR fell below replacement level. Nonetheless, the youth bulge has not stopped. As illustrated by the age-sex pyramid figures, the youth and early working-age segments have significantly increased since the 2000s and continue to follow this trend, being the most prominent segment, against infants and the elderly. Once again, this scenario could be linked with the positive population momentum already discussed in reference to Figure 12. Moreover, Figure 30 displays how infant[12] mortality has steadily decreased over the years, dropping from 108.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1980 to 24.5 in 2023 (World Bank data).

If all these trends are studied together, it can be observed that, despite lower birth rates and total fertility rates, the Indian population is still experiencing a positive growth momentum. In

[12] Merriam-Webster defines an infant as "a child in the first period of life", but does not give any age specifics. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) refers instead to infancy as the stage between birth and 1 year old (Corley, 2025).

addition, even if fewer children are born, there are more chances related to their survival and their entry into the workforce. All together, these elements support the youth bulge pattern.

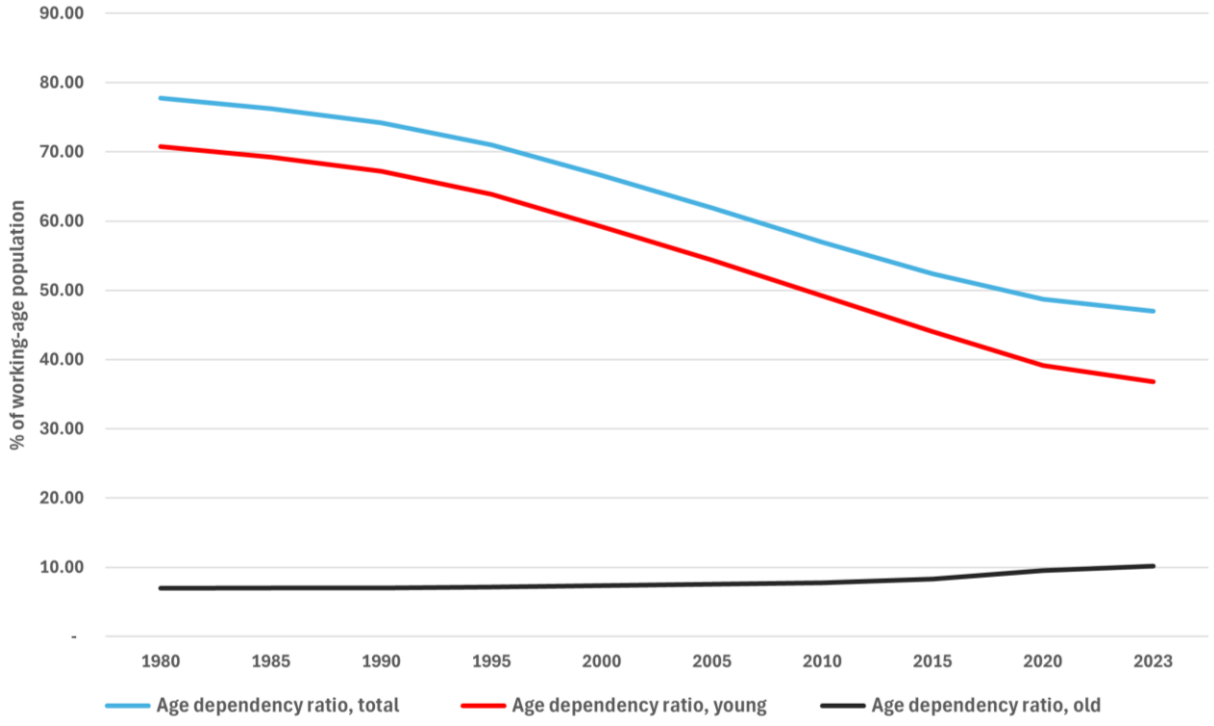
Figure 30. *Infant mortality trend in India (1980-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link: https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

The main consequence of the youth bulge is that today's children will be tomorrow's adults. In a country with such a structure, as young adults enter the working-age population, the country's dependency ratio is expected to decline (Lin, 2012), as the following graph clearly depicts.

Figure 31. *Age dependency ratio in India (1980-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link: https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

This pattern is also often associated with an increased risk of conflict when opportunities for young people are limited, such as restricted access to participation in governance and inadequate education (Testa, Demography and Social Challenges, 2024). On the other hand, if there is an increase in the number of working-age population, then the level of average income per capita should increase, leading to a demographic dividend (Lin, 2012).

2.1.5 ASSESSING INDIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND AND ITS EXPLOITATION

The concept of demographic dividend or bonus is correlated to the shift of a state's economy from Stage 2 to Stage 3 of the Demographic Transition Model. The result of a low share of the dependent population creates a bulge in the working-age segment (youth bulge). Such a consequence, if optimised correctly, generates the potential for numerous economic benefits. Firstly, it increases the labour force, which can produce more than it consumes. Secondly, lower TFR induces women to enter the workforce. Thirdly, more investment is supposed to flow into health, education, and skills enhancement, especially since the birth rate is declining. Lastly, household savings increase (Jain et al., 2025, p.3). These are some essential foundations characterising the so-called demographic dividend, which is the economic growth resulting from a shift in a country's population age structure (Kenton, 2024). However, the realisation of the demographic dividend is also conditional on the application of specific policies aimed at incentivising investments in various sectors, such as education, skills, and health, as well as growing employment opportunities and a flexible labour market for a rapidly growing young population. Other essential elements are also good governance, efficient infrastructure, a well-developed financial market, family planning, trade openness, and effective fiscal and macroeconomic management (Jain et al., 2025, p.3).

Concerning the Indian scenario, scholars hold both optimistic and pessimistic views on the country's potential for realising the demographic dividend. Studies by Acharya (2004), Bloom (2012), Chandrasekhar et al. (2006), Desai (2010), Goli & Pandey (2010), James & Goli (2016), and Mitra & Nagarajan (2005) argue that a demographic window of opportunity alone cannot bring an impetus to economic growth in the country. The demographic bonus helps create a supply-side potential, but it cannot be fully accomplished unless the working-age population's skills have been thoroughly enhanced and accommodated in employment. Other studies have estimated how India was expected to be subjected to the window of opportunity from the 1960s until 2005. However, the majority of these analyses have assessed the demographic dividend before the real onset of such a scenario. K.S. James (2008) used state-level data to study the incidence of the demographic bonus for the period 1971-2001. He underlined the positive impact of the working-age population on economic growth, despite considering the gaps in education, health and employment availability. Similarly, Aiyar and

Mody (2011), by focusing on a similar timeline (1961-2011), discovered that around 40-50% of the per capita income growth in India since the 1970s is due to the demographic dividend. In their opinion, moreover, such a structure does not depend on the policy environment. Scholars, however, also brought forward more negative notes. Thakur (2012) highlighted how growth in the working-age ratio negatively impacted economic development from 1981 to 2011. The issue was linked with the absence of appropriate policies and institutions in the Indian states experiencing a significant rise in the share of the working-age population. Kumar (2013), considering once again the rise in the working-age population in the economically weaker states, stated that, despite noticing a positive demographic impact for the period 1971-2001, he was still sceptical about future growth prospects for the sub-continent. Lastly, Bisht & Pattanaik (2023) examined the challenges of India's younger population considering the increasing economic development and educational attainment in the post-liberalisation period. They specifically underlined the need for a smoother transition from school to work to utilise human capital; otherwise, the demographic bonus will be lost.

Considering this concise literature review on the matter, it appears that the empirical estimation of the demographic dividend in the Indian sub-continent is subject to different interpretations regarding its onset, duration and consequences for the economy. For example, an IPSOS study conducted by Shruti Patodia (2025) reports that the dividend began in 2011 and is expected to peak around 2041, representing a significant opportunity for economic growth. According to Jain et al. (2025), instead, the dividend has remained steadily around 1.9 percentage points per year for the period 1981-2021, representing the average share of annual GDP growth explained by a change in the age structure of the population. Moreover, the population shift in question had a growing positive economic impact after 2011, but it diminished between 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To gain another perspective, Figure 28 reveals that the change in terms of an increase in the working-age population becomes more pronounced after the 2000s, particularly after 2010. However, we cannot say precisely how it impacted the economy.

Regarding different conceptualisations of the demographic dividend for the Indian subcontinent, Navaneetham and Dharmalingam (2012) further explain the possibility of the existence of two demographic dividends. They start their study by stating that, since India is in Stage 3 of the DTM, the increase in the workforce resulting from the shift of children born during the high fertility period into the working-age stage of life is leading to a period of demographic opportunity. If this "window of opportunity" is optimally utilised through increased savings and investments for economic growth, then demographic dividends will occur. The first demographic bonus, according to their observations, is characterised by an increase in the workforce and its productive employment.

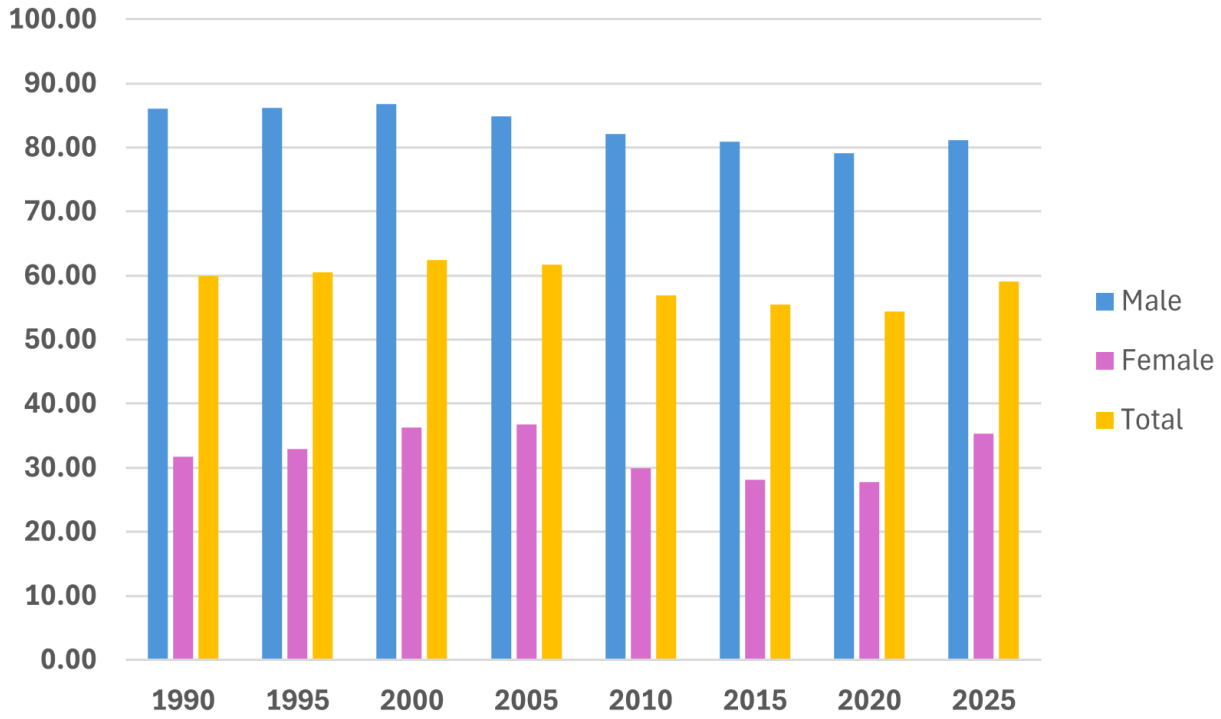
In more technical terms, this opportunity arises when the rate of growth of producers exceeds that of consumers. This initial demographic dividend can be exploited in three different ways:

1. By making the available workforce productively employed, thus increasing the Gross Domestic Product.
2. By directing savings and accumulated wealth into productive investments,
3. By promoting and incentivising the formation of high-quality human capital.

This "window of opportunity" will be available only once, and its duration will depend on the speed of demographic transition. If none of the above-mentioned interventions are applied, the workforce increment will instead have negative implications for the economy and society. The opportunity for such a scheme opened up as early as the 1970s, and it is expected to last until 2030, thus leaving just 5 years to derive the potential benefits from increased labour supply.

The increase in the workforce has already been proven empirically in this chapter. What is interesting to prove now is whether, up to 2024, the demographic dividend has been exploited through the employment of the increased workforce.

Figure 32. *Labour force participation in India (15-64) (ILO estimates) (values in per cent) (1990-2025)*

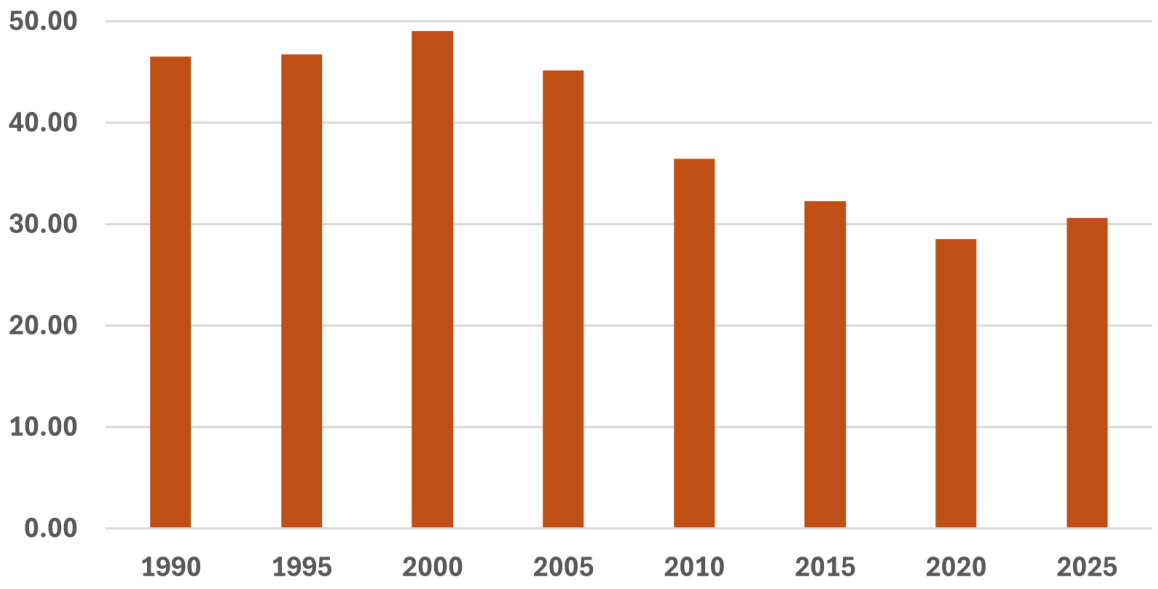


Source: Author's own elaboration from ILO estimates, data retrieved at the following link: https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/

This graph, based on ILO estimates, displays the transition in the labour force participation rate from the age of 15 to 64. It sums up the trend for the total workforce, without breaking it down into youth and mature working-age groups as discussed earlier. At first sight, it is noticeable how the estimates keep declining, especially after the 2000s and even more specifically concerning the female

labour participation. In addition, as explained by Dasgupta and Kar (2018), an overwhelming proportion of the labour force works in the informal sector, and there is little evidence of a sustained rise in wages for unskilled rural or factory workers. The disaggregated data highlights how the female labour force participation rate remained stable within a low 34-37% range between 1990 and 2005, but then declined sharply, reaching 29.9% in 2010 and going further down to 27.8% in 2020. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, a positive trend has emerged again, with the female workforce rising to 35.2% by 2024. The male counterpart has a different and less eventful trend. It also fell, but more modestly, going from 86% in 1991 to 85% in 2005 and 79% in 2020. After COVID-19, the rate has shown signs of recovery, reaching 81%. Overall, for the 15-64 segment, it is visible that, by 2024, only 59% of the total population is employed, and female workers are notably excluded from the demographic dividend (Dasgupta & Kar, 2018, pp.1-3).

Figure 33. *Labour force participation rate in India (15-24) (ILO estimates) (values in per cent) (1990-2025)*

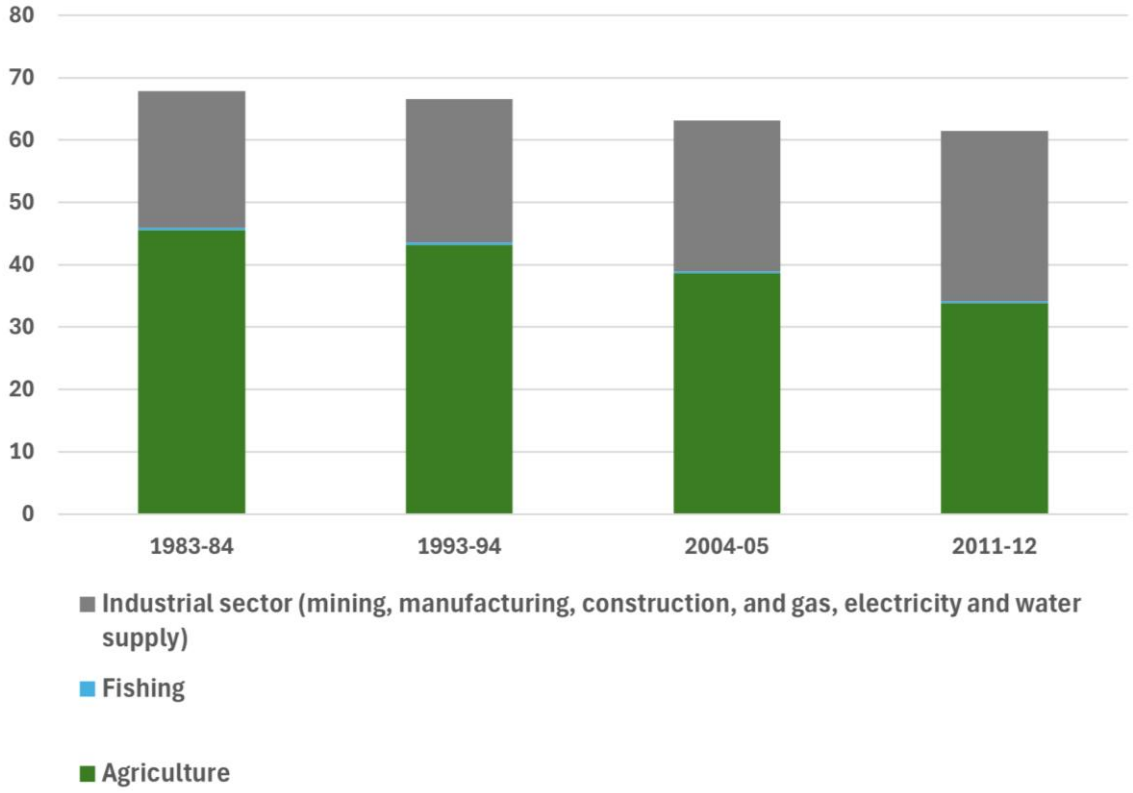


Source: Author's own elaboration from ILO estimates, data retrieved at the following link: https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/

The decline in the labour force participation rate, which was especially highlighted around and after 2005 in the previous graph's examination, is even more pronounced among young people (15-24). Beginning with an average of 47.4% employment between 1990 and 2000, the rate has fallen since 2005. In 2010, it reached 36.5% and in 2020, it further decreased to 28.5%. Only after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic did the rate show signs of recovery, reaching 30.6%. Once again, it is evident that the demographic dividend has not been fully leveraged.

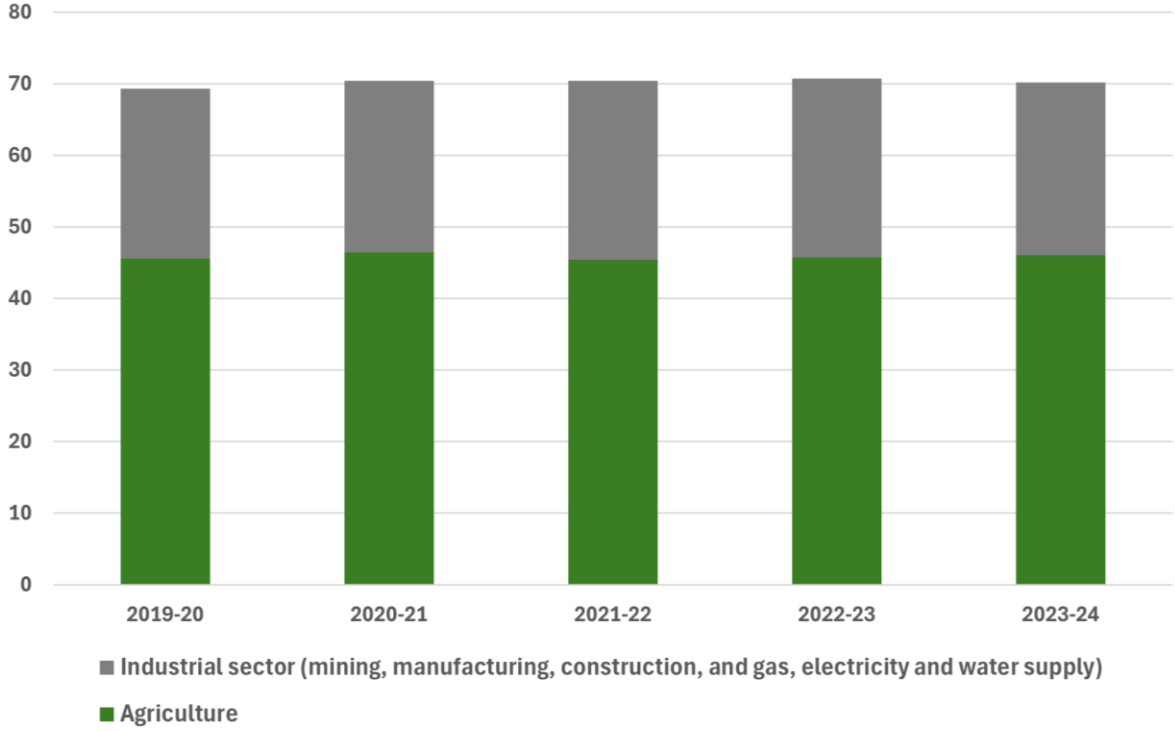
Changes in terms of employment can also be noticed through the analysis of the sectoral composition of employment.

Figure 34. *Distribution of workers across sectors in India (values in per cent) (1983/1984-2011/2012)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from Pérez et al. (2025)

Figure 35. *Distribution of workers across sectors in India (values in per cent) (2019/2020-2023/2024)*



Source: Author's own elaboration based on the Periodic Labour Force Survey (July 2021-June 2022) and (July 2024-June 2024), data retrieved from NSSO. (2022). Annual Report Periodic Labour Force Survey 2021-22. In *MoSPI*, NSSO. (2024). Annual Report Periodic Labour Force Survey 2023-24. In *MoSPI*.

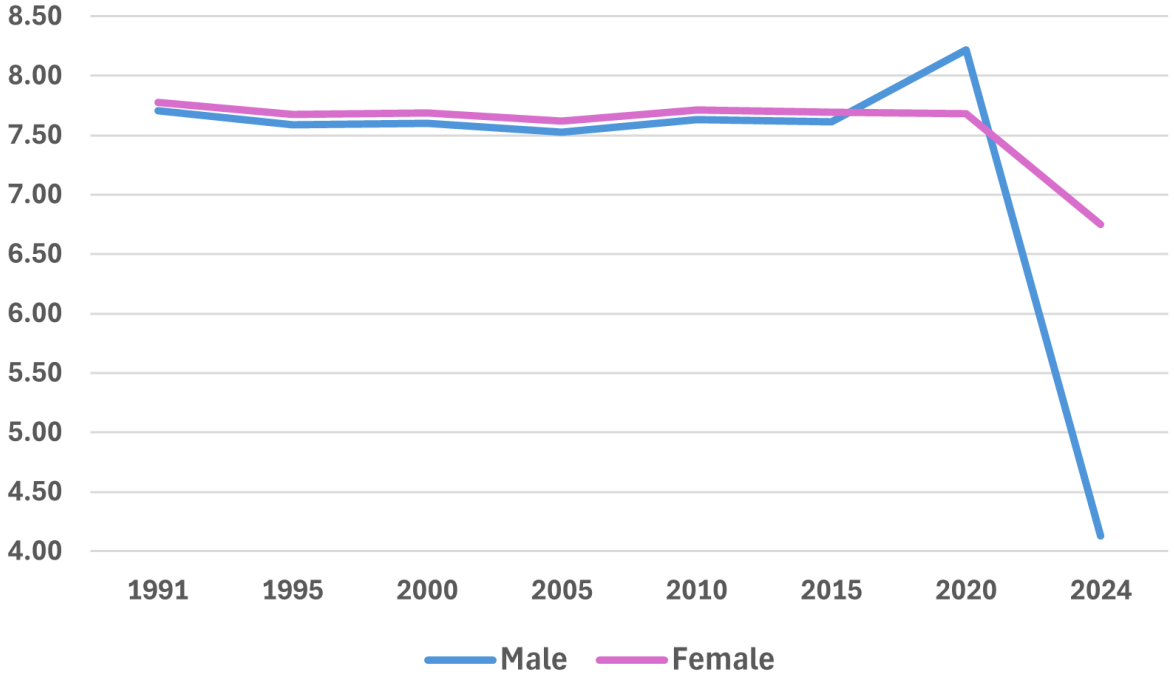
The sectors considered in Figure 34 are agriculture, fishing, and industry (mining, manufacturing, gas, electricity, and water supply). The focus is solely on these occupations because India is considered to be a rural society based primarily on agriculture and industrial activities (Dasgupta & Kar, 2018, p.5). The sector employing the majority of the workforce is agriculture, with its share decreasing from 45.5% in 1983-84 to 33.8% in 2011-12, according to NSS data reinterpreted by Sarkar and Pérez in *Global Trends in Job Polarisation and Upgrading: A Comparison of Developed and Developing Economies* (2025). Fishing accounts for approximately 0.3%, and the industrial sector employed 27.3% of the workforce in 2011-12. It is evident that, between 1983 and 2012, the working-age population growth was not optimised in terms of the demographic bonus. Figure 35 illustrates a similar scenario, where the agricultural sector employs approximately 46% of the workforce, and the industrial sector maintains a 24% share.

The only sector in which employment is thriving is the informal one, as already mentioned. According to the ILO, informal employment refers to "working arrangements that are in practice or by law not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, or entitlement to social protection or other employment guarantees; for example, advance notice of dismissal, severance pay, or paid annual or sick leave" (ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2023, p.1). Workers of the "formal" sector who lack of social protection coverage or other employment benefits are also considered informal (ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2023, p.1). The Indian scenario is characterised primarily by urban informal employment, in line with the urbanisation framework, which has offered refuge to the unemployed, migrants and urban poor. However, it is worth noting that non-farm sector activities in rural areas have increased significantly over the last three decades, laying the groundwork for rural informal employment. The rise of such a scenario was recorded in the 55th round of the NSSO Employment-Unemployment Survey (1999–2000). In those years, it became noticeable that the proportion of rural informal employment was higher than that of urban areas, with non-agricultural workers rising to 71% in rural areas, compared to 68% in urban centres. The trend persisted with minor changes also in the 61st round (2004–05), with 95% of the self-employed workers being active in the rural areas compared to 97% in the urban areas (Mukhopadhyay, 2022, pp.117-121). As of 2017-18, 90% of all workers were employed under informal arrangements (Raveendran & Vanek, 2020, p.2). Currently, according to the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) 2023-2024, the informal sector is an integral part of the Indian economy, comprising a large number of establishments and generating a substantial number of jobs. ASUSE also estimates the tremendous potential of this sector to grow further.

Overall, the data confirm that if the workforce is not formally employed, it is not possible to discuss positive effects in economic and social terms, thus making the demographic dividend unexploited and increasing the risk of internal crisis and inequalities.

One last element to consider while discussing the first demographic dividend, as described by Navaneetham and Dharmalingam, is the unemployment rate.

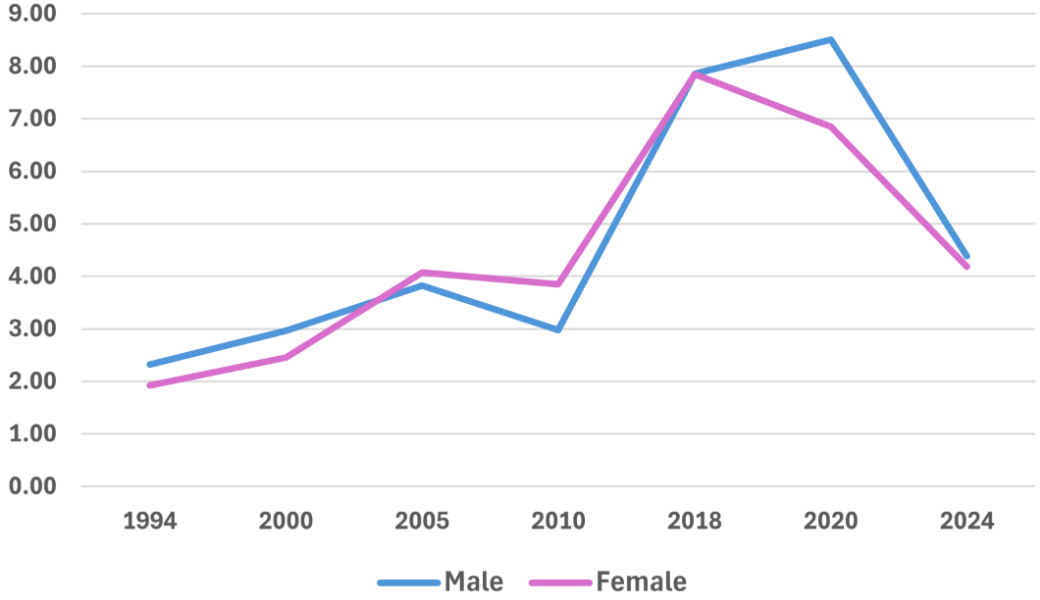
Figure 36. *Unemployment rate by sex in India (15+) (ILO estimates) (values in per cent) (1990-2024)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from ILO estimates, data retrieved at the following link: https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/

Figure 36, considering the 15+ category, shows that the unemployment trend is around 7.3% for men and 7.5% for women. Moreover, it is evident that the male trend reached its peak around 2020 and has subsequently declined, decreasing from 8.22% to 4.13%. The female case has instead maintained a relative uniformity and has only slightly diminished. It is peculiar and will be further discussed in the society section, since women's work is usually not officially recognised (i.e. housework).

Figure 37. *Unemployment rate by sex in India (15-64) (National estimates) (values in per cent) (1994-2024)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from Periodic Labour Force Survey and National Sample Survey, data retrieved at the following link: https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/

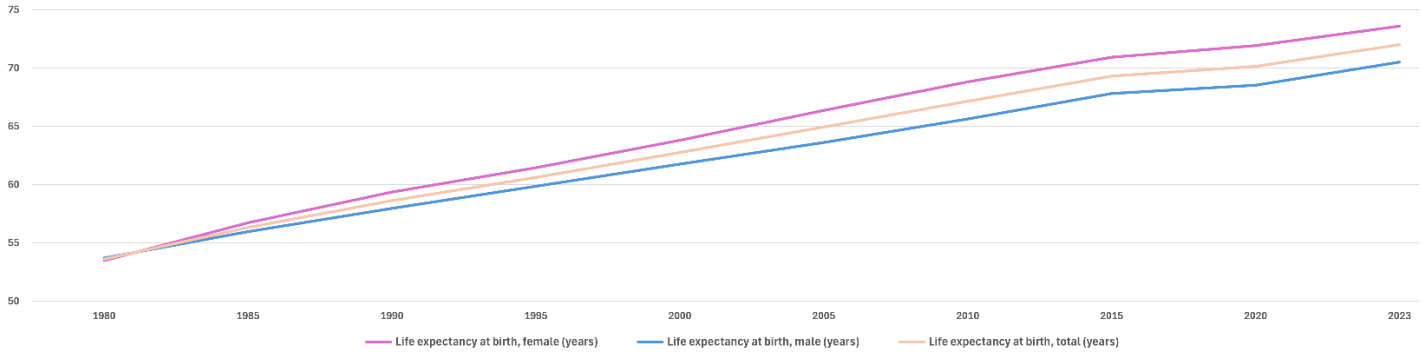
A brief mention of the National estimates is now necessary to observe the data concerning the workforce age composition (15-64). For this specific age segment, the data show more variability than in Figure 36. Both trends have exhibited a consistent increase from 1994 to 2018/2020, followed by a subsequent decrease. In 2024, the male rate of unemployment is at 4.38% and the female rate at 4.18%.

What both graphs emphasise is that, in the Indian scenario, there is a persistent structural problem linked to the inadequacy of state infrastructure in absorbing the growth of the working-age population.

Navaneetham and Dharmalingam (2012) also mentioned a second demographic dividend in their study. This bonus is generated from improved health, longevity, the need for smaller family sizes due to urbanisation, and the increase in savings. Mason and Kinugasa (2008) were the first to discuss the possibility of a second window of opportunity due to the ageing of the population. They argued that the prospect of a longer life and an extended retirement period offers a savings incentive in the absence of familial support systems. In this scheme, the window of opportunity is not transitory, given the permanent nature of capital deepening and the higher per capita income. Moreover, the demographic phenomenon is supposed to be larger than the first one (Navaneetham & Dharmalingam, 2012, pp.290–291).

India is still facing small increases in the old dependency ratios, so it is too early to apply a concrete evaluation of this theory. However, some general data can be analysed to see if there is at least a chance for this second dividend.

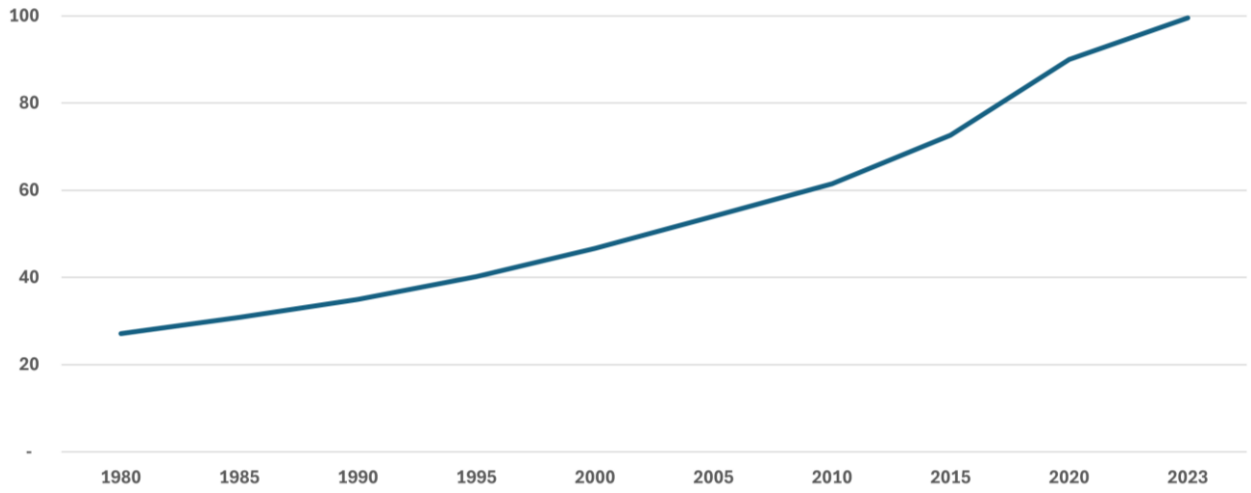
Figure 38. *Life expectancy at birth in India (1980-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link:
https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

Life expectancy at birth has increased, moving up from 53.6 years in 1980 to 72 years in 2023. If the trends are disaggregated, it is visible that female life expectancy is slightly higher.

Figure 39. *Population aged 65 and over in India (in millions) (1980-2023)*

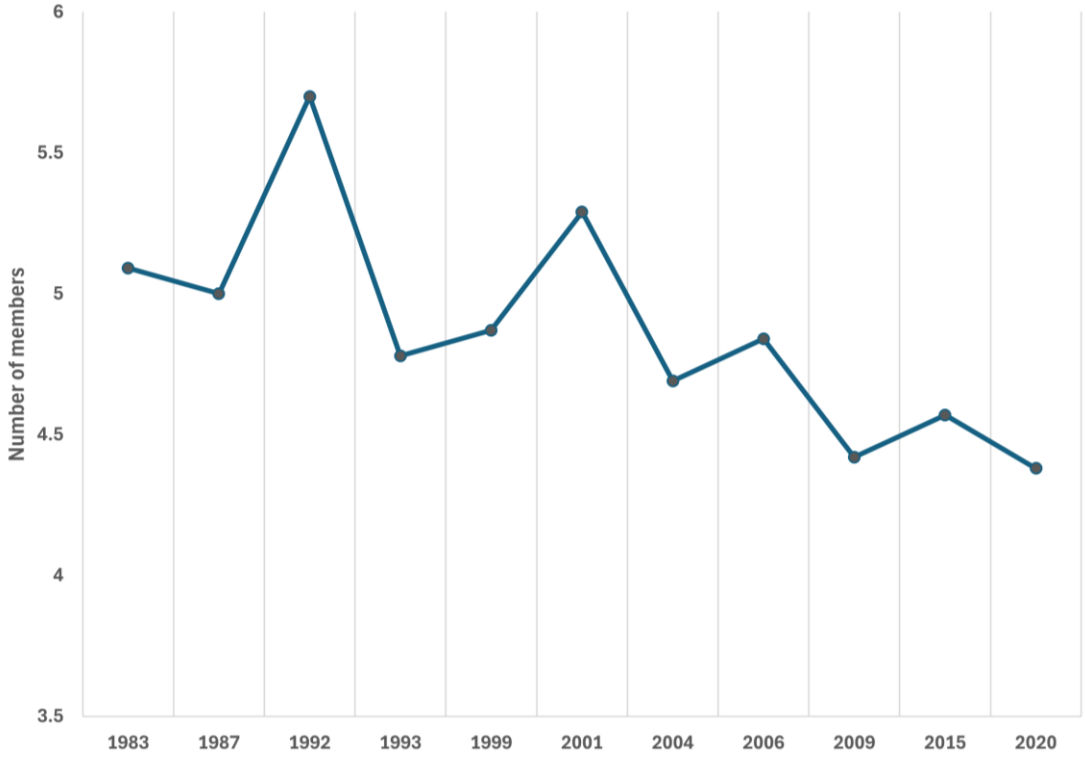


Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link:
https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

Older people's estimates also show a growing trend, increasing from 27 million in 1980 to 99 million in 2023. In this context, however, it should be emphasised that, while on the one hand the ageing population could generate positive economic outcomes, on the other hand, it must face a reality that is currently unprepared to deal with the phenomenon of ageism. As underlined by Andrea Wojnar in 2023, in India, the loss of financial security is deeply witnessed, with 40% of the elderly being in the poorest wealth quintile, while about one-fifth have no income at all. Moreover, the vulnerability of older individuals is increased by the persistence of social-cultural mindsets and norms that label the elderly as a "burden", coupled with issues of elderly abuse and a lack of comprehensive safety nets (*India's Ageing Population: Why It Matters More Than Ever*, n.d.). Poonam Muttreja,

interviewed by the podcast Grand Tamasha in 2024, further addressed the issue of ageism and India's unpreparedness for it. According to her analysis, the older population of the subcontinent will rise to 20% by 2050, thus placing enormous pressure on the healthcare and social security systems. The country also needs to prepare itself by creating a better pension system; otherwise, the current lack of a comprehensive national strategy could leave millions of elderly citizens vulnerable to poverty and neglect.

Figure 40. *Average household size in India (1983-2020)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, data retrieved at the following link: https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/data/households-and-living-arrangements-data

One last indicator to consider is the change in the household size. As already predicted in previous sections addressing the changes connected with urbanisation, the number of members per household is indeed decreasing, moving from a household size of 5.09 in 1983 to one of 4.38 in 2023.

Overall, the elements for discussing a second demographic dividend are in place. However, it is still too early to discuss concrete effects, and it is only possible to advance speculations regarding the pros and cons of such conditions.

2.2 INDIA'S SOCIETY TRENDS

In the second section of this chapter, the focus will shift towards the most significant social issues that define India. As already mentioned in the introductory paragraph, the study will delve into the topics of religion, healthcare, family planning, sex ratios and female labour participation.

2.2.1 THE CLASH OF RELIGIONS

To begin the overview of Indian society and its major trends, it is first necessary to analyse some issues related to the religious framework. The importance of this matter is related particularly to the rise of Hindu nationalism. After Partition, the Indian National Congress tried to integrate religious minorities into a "secular" Indian culture, inclusive of all those who resided in the sub-continent irrespective of religion or ethnicity, to create a substantial difference between the "secular" India and the "communal" Pakistan. However, with the rise of the BJP and the victory of Narendra Modi in 2014, Indian nationalism was redefined as the nationalism of its majority religious community: the Hindus. This nationalistic agenda has been constructed around the principle of *Hindutva*, which is focused on assimilating India's religious minorities into a Hindu national culture. The *Hindutva* interpellates all Indians as members of a Hindu civilisation based on a common pan-Indian Hindu national identity. This principle is also associated with violence, due to the desire to assimilate India's ethno-religious "others" into the Hindu "self". Overall, the BJP aims to create a homogeneous political identity, where the Muslim community, which has continued to have strained relations with its counterpart since Independence, is seen as a "constitutive outside", thus allowing a Hindu nation to be imagined. Muslims became the target of policies of cultural homogenisation and communal attacks (Shani, 2021). Additionally, they have faced discrimination in various areas, including employment, education, and housing. Many are stopped from achieving political power and wealth, and lack access to healthcare and basic services. Moreover, Muslim communities struggle to secure justice after suffering discrimination, despite constitutional protections (Maizland, 2024).

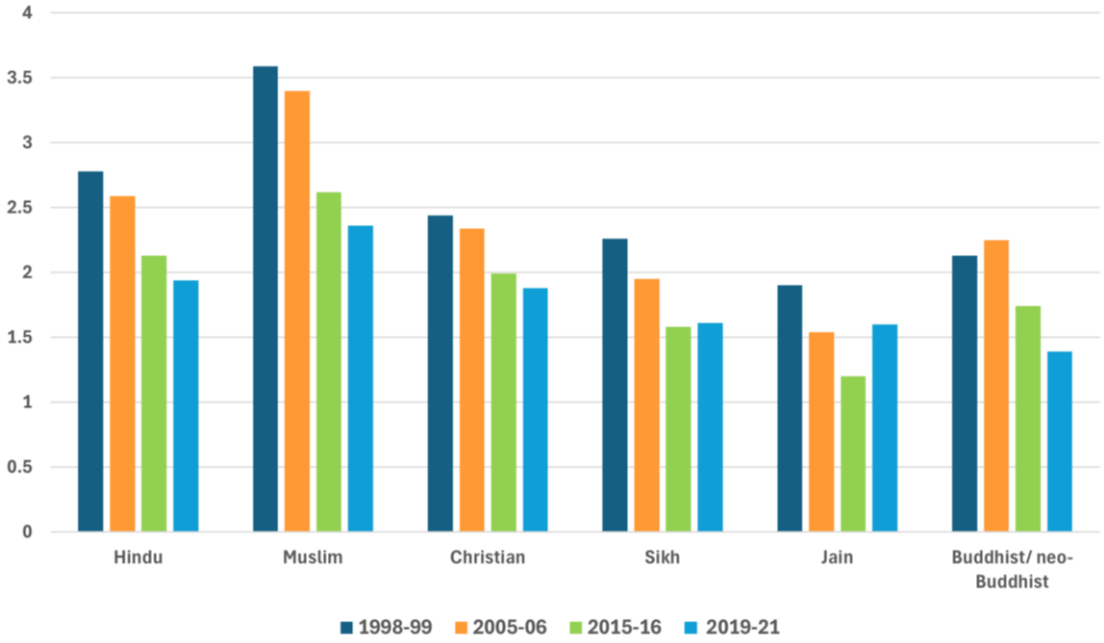
The data proposed here has two purposes. The first one is to debunk the myth that the Muslim community is taking over the Hindu population. This narrative has been directly supported by the government, with the publication of a report during the 2024 election period, based on statistics from the Association of Religion Data Archive. The study, which analyses global demographic trends between 1950 and 2015, supposedly states the risk of a Muslim population "boom" in India, and further highlights how "minorities [in India] are not just protected but thriving" (Sharma, 2024). The study is in contrast with the reality of events such as the Gujarat riots in 2002[13] or the New Delhi

[13] After a train of Hindu pilgrims travelling through the western state of Gujarat caught fire, nationwide clashes broke out, killing dozens of people. Muslims were blamed for starting the fire, and hundreds of them ended up

clashes of 2020[14]. The second aim is to understand the reality of population distribution by religion in India and why the Muslim community is the primary "opponent" to Hindu nationalism.

One of the first topics to look at is the fertility rate among the major religious groups in India: Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists. As Poonam Muttreja (2024) mentioned, one of the most talked-about issues in Indian politics and society is whether Muslims are overtaking Hindus in terms of fertility. To answer this query, the following graph can be observed.

Figure 41. *Fertility by background characteristic (religion) in India (births per woman) (1998-2021)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from National Family Health Surveys 2-5, data retrieved at the following link: https://www.nfhsiips.in/nfhsuser/publication.php

Overall, it is visible how Muslims have maintained the highest fertility rate among India's major religious groups since the late '90s; however, it should also be noted how all groups are facing visible declines. For instance, TFR for Muslims has decreased from 3.59 in 1998-99 to 2.36 in 2019-21. Similarly, the Hindus' TFR has diminished from 2.78 to 1.94. Jains had the lowest TFR in 2015-16, but are now aligned at 1.61 together with the Sikhs. Buddhists have reached a TFR of 1.39 in 2019-21. What this trend is portraying is that, although it is clear which religious groups have higher TFRs, namely Muslims and Hindus, at the same time, the gaps in terms of childbearing between all

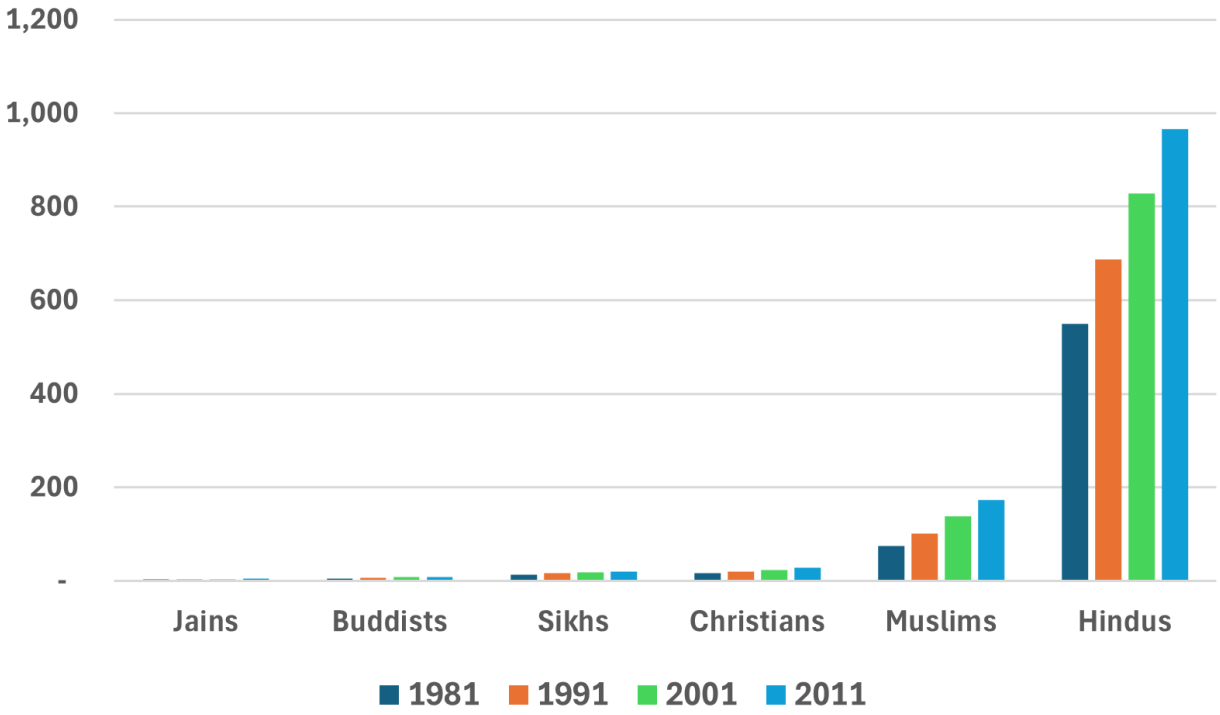
being killed by Hindu mobs, raped, and their Muslim businesses and places of worship were destroyed (Maizland, 2024).

[14] Violence broke out as Muslims and others protested the Citizenship Amendment Act in New Delhi. Around fifty people were killed, most of them Muslim, in the capital city's worst communal violence in decades. Some BJP politicians helped incite the violence, and police reportedly did not intervene to stop Hindu mobs from attacking Muslims (Maizland, 2024).

the abovementioned religions have narrowed considerably (Kramer, 2021). This also means that, while it is true that in the past Muslims in India had a higher growth rate than other groups, it is also true that in recent years, with the decline in fertility rates, this growth has slowed considerably.

The second element to consider when analysing the religious scenario in India is the population distribution by religion.

Figure 42. *Population distribution by religion in India (in millions) (1981-2011)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from National Censuses, data retrieved at the following links: https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/28122; https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/32995/download/36813/48848_1991_REL.pdf; https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/21462; https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/11361

Observing the graph, two trends are immediately detectable. The first one is that the majority of India's population is Hindu. The second trend refers to the fact that every major religious group in the subcontinent has experienced an increase in its numbers. A further observation is, however, necessary, together with a distinction between absolute numbers and growth rate. Despite the increase in absolute numbers, with all the country's major religious groups gaining millions of adherents, growth rates have consistently declined over the past few years.

Table 2. *Population distribution by religion in India (1981 vs 2011)*

	1981	2011	Increase in absolute numbers
Hindus	549,724,717	966,257,353	+416 million

Muslims	75,571,514	172,245,148	+ 96 million
Christians	16,174,498	24,080,016	+11 million
Sikhs	13,078,146	20,833,116	+7 million
Buddhists	4,719,900	8,442,972	+3 million
Jains	3,192,572	4,451,753	+1 million

Source: Author's own elaboration from National Censuses, data retrieved at the following links: https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/28122; https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/11361

Table 3. *Percentage increase in India's population size between census years (1981/1991-2001/2011)*

	1981-91	**2001-11**	**Decrease in growth rate**
Hindus	22.7%	16.7%	-6%
Muslims	32.9%	24.7%	-8.2%
Christians	17.8%	15.7%	-2.1%
All	23.9%	17.7%	-6.2%

Source: Kramer, S. (2021). Religious Composition of India. In *Pew Research Center*.

According to a study published in 2015 by the Pew Research Center, 94% of the world's Hindus live in India. Furthermore, the subcontinent hosts the largest Muslim population, surpassed only by Indonesia (Kramer, 2021, p.17).

Figure 43. *Largest religious groups and their share by state and territory in India (2011)*

Note: Telangana (not shown) has since been created from part of Andhra Pradesh. Jammu and Kashmir has been divided into two territories, and Daman and Diu has merged with Dadra and Nagar Haveli.
Source: Census of India, 2011.
"Religious Composition of India"

Source: Kramer, S. (2021). Religious Composition of India. In *Pew Research Center*.

In terms of geographical distribution, all major religious groups have remained relatively stable after Independence. Christians reside mainly in the smaller Northern states bordering China, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, while also having some presence in the Southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Muslims are located in Jammu and Kashmir due to the proximity to Pakistan. They also have a presence in the archipelago of Lakshadweep. Buddhists and Jains reside primarily in Maharashtra, while Sikhs have settled in Punjab. Every other state has a prevailing Hindu majority (Kramer, 2021, p.20).

By 2050, this scenario is not expected to develop further; however, the numbers will increase. The Muslims will rise by 76%, the Hindus will reach 1.3 billion (+ 33%), the Christians will increase by 8%, and the remaining religions will gain an additional 5% (Kramer, 2021, p.22).

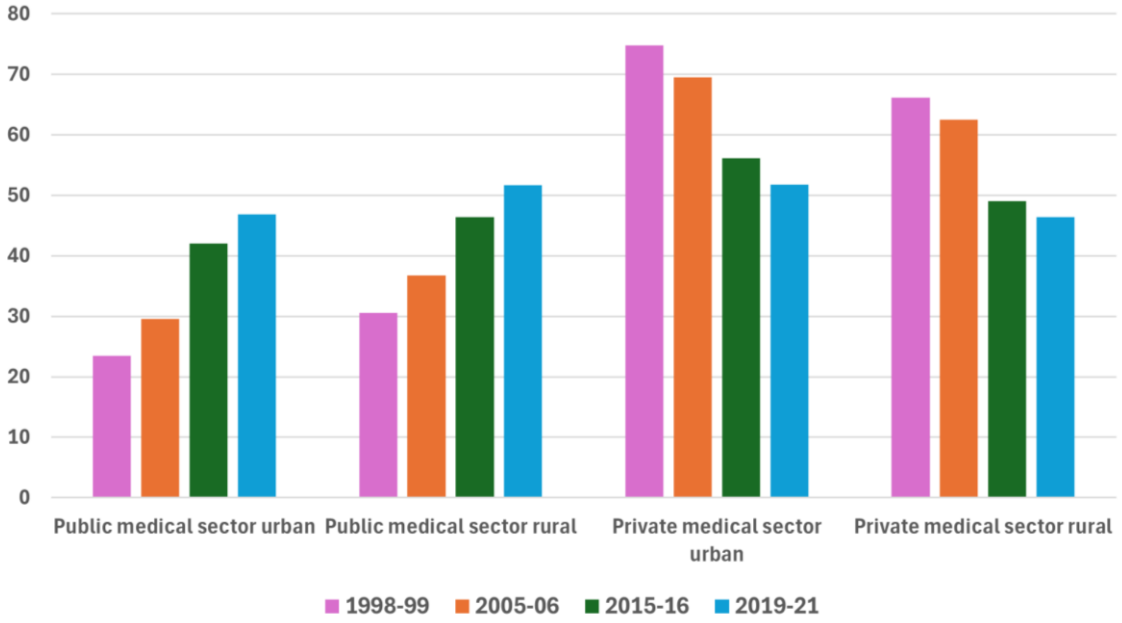
What these data indicate is that, although Muslims are considered the largest minority community, due to the high TFR and growth rate, they are far from overtaking the country. Hindus are and will remain the prevailing majority.

2.2.2 HEALTHCARE ACCESSIBILITY: THE DOMINANCE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Another topic to discuss, when examining major social issues in India, is healthcare accessibility. The matter has already been partly observed when studying the positive effects of increased urbanisation; however, the sources of healthcare in India, namely, which healthcare channels the Indian population relies on most, should be further discussed to provide a more detailed scenario. There are different perspectives on this issue, especially when analysing more recent data from after 2010.

For example, by taking the National Family Health Surveys 2-5 as a reference, the primary healthcare sources appear to be the public and private medical sectors, although with visible disparities.

Figure 44. *Sources of health care in India (values in per cent) (1998-2021)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from National Family Health Surveys 2-5, data retrieved at the following link: https://www.nfhsiips.in/nfhsuser/publication.php

The graph illustrates the evolution of the trend in terms of accessibility to the public and private medical sectors, both in urban and rural areas. What is visible is that, while in the late 1990s access to public services was significantly lower than in the private sector – 23.5% for urban public healthcare compared to 74.8% for urban private healthcare, with an additional 35.6% difference between the public and private sectors in rural areas – in the 2019-21 period, the trend seems to have reversed and almost reached equilibrium. NFHS-5 data highlight that access to the public medical sector increased by 23.4% in urban areas and 21.1% in rural regions, while the private sector showed a decrease of 23% in urban centres and 19.8% in rural areas. Overall, access to the urban public

healthcare sector stands at 46.9% compared to 51.8% for the urban private sector, and access to the rural public healthcare sector has risen to 51.7% compared to 46.4% for the private sector.

However, taking other data into account, the private sector appears to be much preferred over the public sector, despite not necessarily meeting the quality standards required in the public sector, and its staff ranging from unqualified medical practitioners operating in rural areas to single-doctor clinics, nursing homes, trust hospitals, and multi-speciality large corporate hospitals. According to data collected by the National Sample Survey Office in 2016 and presented by Sarit Kumar Rout et al. (2019), the private medical sector treats 75% of outpatients and 62% of inpatients requiring medical care. Another study proposed by K. Sujatha Rao in 2023 supports this scenario, highlighting that the private sector provides services to almost 70% of the population. Furthermore, it has been reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the private medical sector played a substantial role in providing hospitalisation and Intensive Care Units (Rao, 2023, p. 8).

There are many reasons behind this scenario, highlighting how the intense shift from the public to the private sector is not linked to higher quality or lower costs in private facilities - factors that are, moreover, denied by Rout et al. (2019) - but rather to structural problems in the public sector. These include inadequate infrastructure, limited access to medicines, long waiting lists (Rout et al., 2019, pp.1-6), and insufficient medical staff, with only 1.7 nurses per 1,000 people and a doctor-to-patient ratio of 1:1,500 nationwide (*Indian Healthcare Industry Analysis | IBEF*, n.d.). The problem with such widespread dependence on the private sector is that, due to the excessive strain placed on these facilities and the government's decision not to impose cost controls, 230 million people have been pushed below the poverty line in an attempt to pay the high costs of hospitalisation, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Rao, 2023, p.8).

2.2.3 FAMILY PLANNING: EFFORTS, UNMET NEEDS AND MEN'S PARTICIPATION

Going into more detail regarding the social dynamics here under analysis, the subject of family planning arises. In this section, FP's efforts, the unmet needs, and the gender disparity within its programs will be discussed.

India launched its Family Planning Program in 1952, with the intention of stabilising the population growth rate, reducing fertility levels, and improving maternal health (Population Foundation of India, n.d., p. 3). Since the access to contraceptive methods has already been discussed, here the focus is more on the effectiveness of the program as a whole and what social flaws are incorporated within.

The Family Planning Effort Index (FPEI) will be used to analyse how effectively such programs have been implemented in the country. Since 1972, the FPEI has provided standardised

periodic measurements regarding the strength of national-level family programs worldwide. The score measures inputs, rather than outcomes; thus, it can be used to determine whether newer or greater efforts are needed. The process for creating the FPEI is a relatively lengthy one. First, it is necessary to identify a study manager for each country interested. Subsequently, the study managers select 10 to 15 experts who will serve as respondents for their country. The chosen experts have to complete a questionnaire, rating the level of effort dispensed on selected features of their country's family planning program. Until 1999, the respondents monitored 30 indices, divided among the four components of the FPEI: policies (8 scores), services (13 scores), evaluation (3 scores), and access (6 scores).[15] Starting from 2004, the access category has been expanded to include three more scores. Additionally, two brief sets of variables were introduced in 2004 and 2014. The new macro-categories are: LTM and LPM effort (3 scores), program influences (6 scores), justifications (7 scores), and special pops (5 scores)[16]. For easier comparisons, all scores are measured as a percentage of the maximum value. From 1972 through 1999, each score ranged from 0 to 4; after that, the questions were modified to a 1 (minimal effort) to 10 (maximum level of effort) score. To minimise bias, respondents are instructed to leave unanswered questions for which they are unsure. Finally, for each country, the ratings on each question are averaged to produce the scores for the four main components. The Total Effort Index (TEI) is measured as the average of the scores of all four main components. Since 2014, the TEI has also considered the LTM and LPM effort (*Track20*, n.d.). Overall, this index faces multiple limitations: the data collected are the results of subjective ratings, the respondents vary from one cycle to another, and the questionnaires have changed over the years (Kuang & Brodsky, 2016, pp. 33-36).

As shown in the graph below, representing the progression of the Total Effort Index score, India has shown some variability over the years. If in the first ten years (from 1980 to 1990) there seemed to be an improvement in the overall score, the effort diminished gradually between the early

[15] The four components are (Kuang & Brodsky, 2016, p.34):

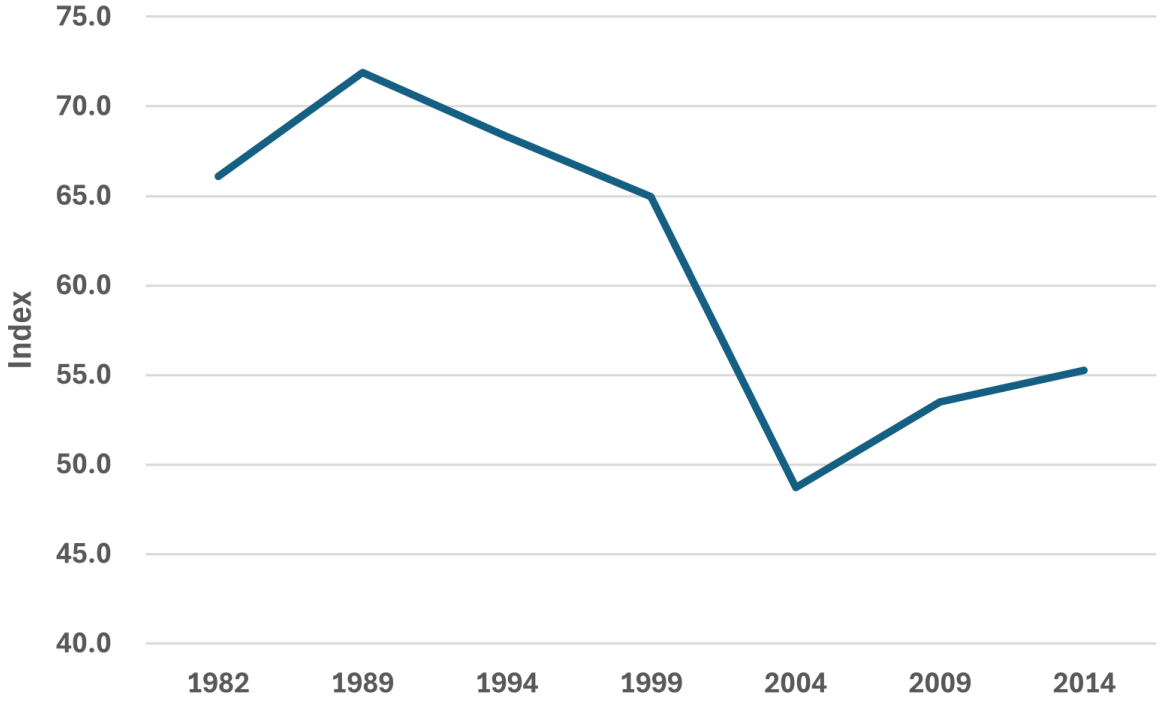
- Policy context: measuring the support from in-country leaders, the regulatory guidelines and budget allocations.
- Services: controlling how the entire healthcare system regarding FP programs is implemented.
- Evaluating: assessing the extent to which data are collected and used to improve operations.
- Access: focusing on which various contraceptive methods are available to the whole population.

[16] The new components are:

- LTM and LPM Effort: analysing the capacity of removing contraceptive methods such as IUDs and implants.
- Program influences: measuring how the implementation of other healthcare programs or changes in funding may affect FP programs.
- Justifications: addressing the reasons behind the implementation of FP programs.
- Special pops: examining extra services provided and less checked population groups.

and late 1990s, facing a drastic negative change around 2005. Since then, the trend seems to be recovering, but has not returned to the initial values of the 1980s.

Figure 45. *Total Effort Index for Family Planning Effort Index in India (1980-2015)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from Family Planning Effort Index, data retrieved at the following link: https://www.track20.org/pages/data_analysis/policy/FPE.php

Considering the definition of family planning given in section 2.1.2, the overall analysis of the FP Effort Score reveals a pessimistic scenario, in which there is once again a disparity in the treatment of women and their desires regarding the use of their bodies and fertility.

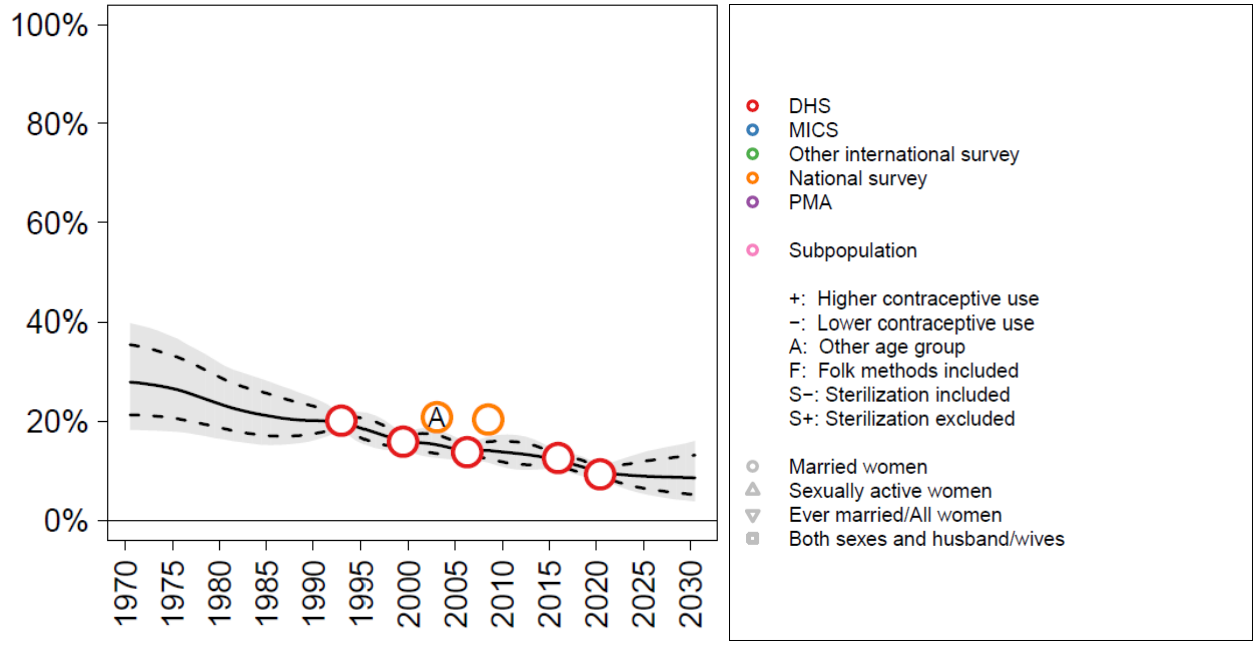
This topic leads to the study of the unmet need for family planning. The sub-continent program, despite some of its successes, has had to face major misconceptions, a lack of information around contraceptives and an underwhelming public perception concerning the importance and need of such a project.

The concept of "unmet need" was introduced with the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994 (Population Foundation of India, n.d.-a, pp.1-2). The meaning of it refers to the "condition of wanting to avoid or postpone childbearing but not using any method of contraception" to achieve the objective (Casterline & Sinding, 2000, as mentioned by Population Foundation of India, n.d.-a, p.1). Basically, it concerns the perceived gap between women's reproductive intentions and their contraceptive usage. According to the NFHS-4 (2015-16), the concept can be further specified as "the proportion of women who:

1. Are not pregnant and not postpartum amenorrhoeic, are considered fecund, and want to postpone their next birth for two or more years or stop childbearing altogether, but are not using a contraceptive method, or
2. Have a mistimed or unwanted current pregnancy, or
3. Are postpartum amenorrhoeic and their last birth in the last two years was mistimed or unwanted.

Women's unmet need is a dynamic index, which is subject to changes over time due to variations in fertility desires or contraceptive usage. For a more detailed analysis, the concept can be further disaggregated into the unmet need for limiting births and the unmet need for spacing them. It may also vary across parameters, meaning geography, age, education, religion, caste, and economic status. For example, women living in rural communities in India have a higher unmet need compared to their counterparts in more urbanised settlements (Population Foundation of India, n.d.-a, p.1).

Figure 46. *Unmet need in India (1970-2030)*



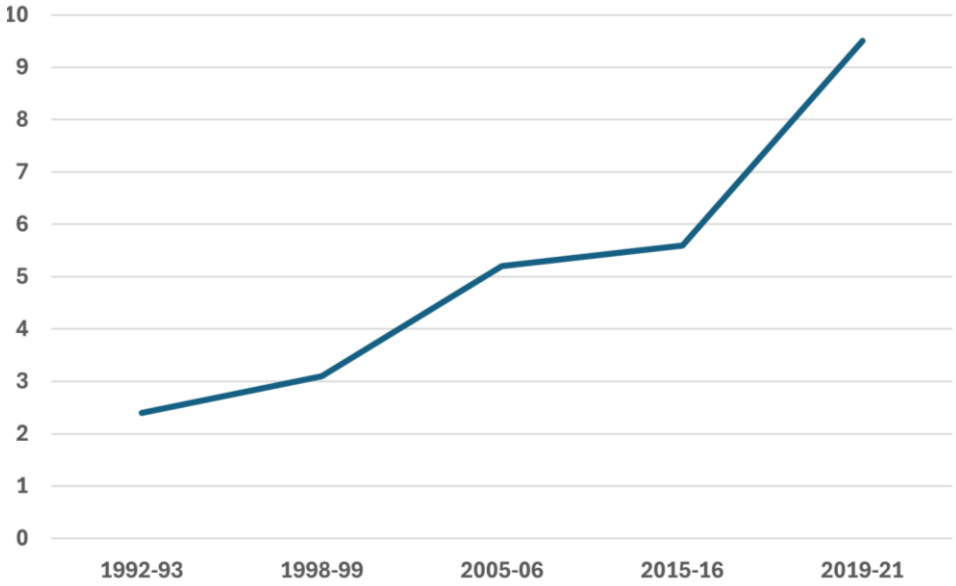
Source: *Family Planning Data | Population Division*. (n.d.). https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/data/family-planning-indicators

The picture shows how the unmet need is decreasing in India, moving from 30% in 1970 to less than 20% in 2020. It is further projected to decrease by 2030.

Lastly, to provide a final outlook on the family planning scenario in India, it is relevant to understand the role that males can play in its implementation. Looking at the current use of contraceptive methods, especially the male/female sterilisation practice and condom usage, will help explain male involvement.

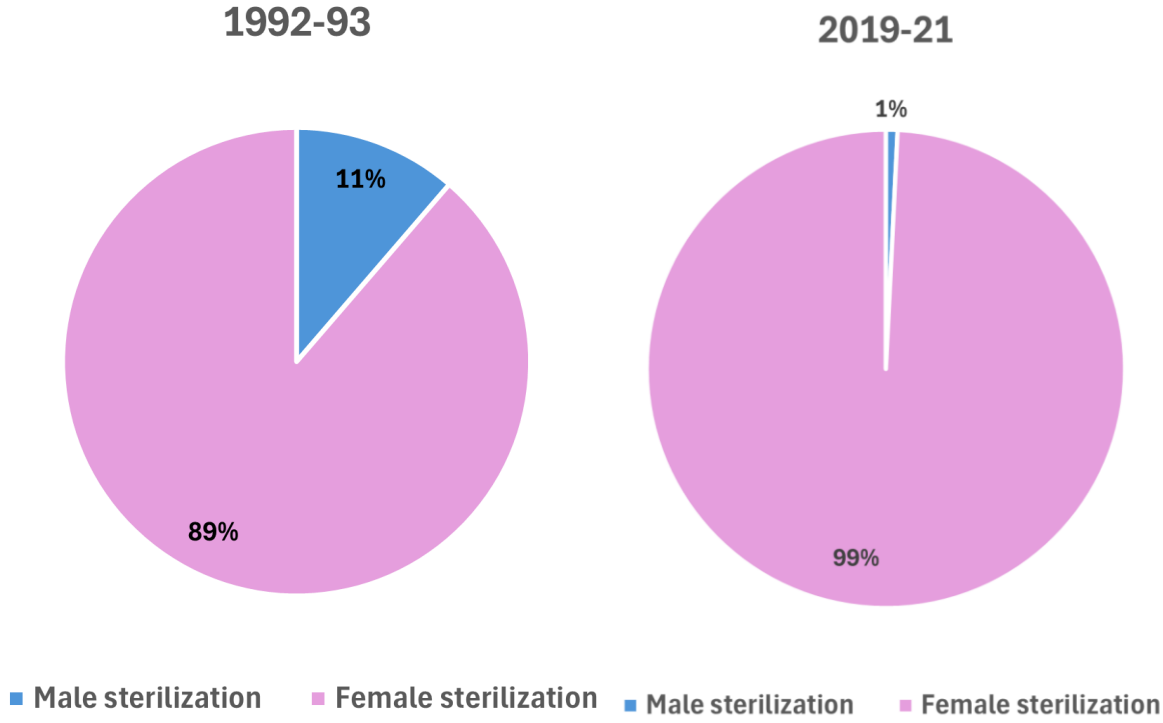
According to NFHS-3 (2005-06), the current level of contraceptive usage, namely the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) -better described as the percentage of currently married women within the age of 15-49 who, at present, are using a contraceptive method or whose husbands are in the same condition- is one of the leading indicators of the success of family planning programs. In this scenario, the first practice that will be analysed is female/male sterilisation. Female sterilisation refers to the removal of the fallopian tubes, while vasectomy consists of tying the vas deferens tubes that carry sperm from the testicles. Tubal sterilisation has some risks associated with it, given that, if a rare chance of pregnancy does occur after the procedure, there is an increased danger of ectopic pregnancy. Vasectomy, on the other hand, is not reported to have negative impacts; moreover, it does not affect men's sexual functions, and its effectiveness in preventing pregnancies after 1 year is slightly higher than that of female sterilisation (ACOG, 2022). The other practice to be considered is condom usage, which will not need further explanation.

Figure 47. *Current use of condoms in India (values in per cent) (1992-2021)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from National Family Health Surveys 1-5, data retrieved at the following link: https://www.nfhsiips.in/nfhsuser/publication.php

Figure 48. *Male and female sterilisation in India (National Family Health Survey 1 vs. National Family Health Survey 5)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from National Family Health Survey 1 and National Family Health Survey 5, data retrieved at the following link: https://www.nfhsiips.in/nfhsuser/publication.php

The graphs present two very different attitudes of men towards contraceptives. In the case of condoms, their usage is spiking, and it has never been subjected to particular decreases in the trend. Vasectomy, instead, has decreased from 11% to 1%, meaning that the entirety of the people who chose sterilisation as a contraceptive method are women.

The importance of engaging men in FP was already articulated during the ICPD, as well as in the National Population Policy 2000 (Population Foundation of India, n.d.-b, p.1). However, the results are lacking, mainly due to multiple myths and misconceptions that men are used to. Masculinity has a significant role in this deficit. While perception of masculinity might accord a superior social status to men, it can, at the same time, enforce peer pressure to fulfil certain social expectations. Men evaluate themselves based on specific indicators of masculinity, and an inability to perform them might become a cause of distress. Among these "indicators", sex plays a pivotal role: quick consummation of marriage is a signifier of a healthy and stable relationship; failure to perform such a duty leads to repercussions such as emotional or physical coercion, isolation, etc. Precisely concerning the topic of "sex", however, a profound gap in knowledge has been noted. In particular, given the preference for informal sources of information, various beliefs have become deeply rooted over time, first of all, the thought that family planning is only women's responsibility. Another issue is that men regard the use of contraceptives, especially male sterilisation, as an attack on their

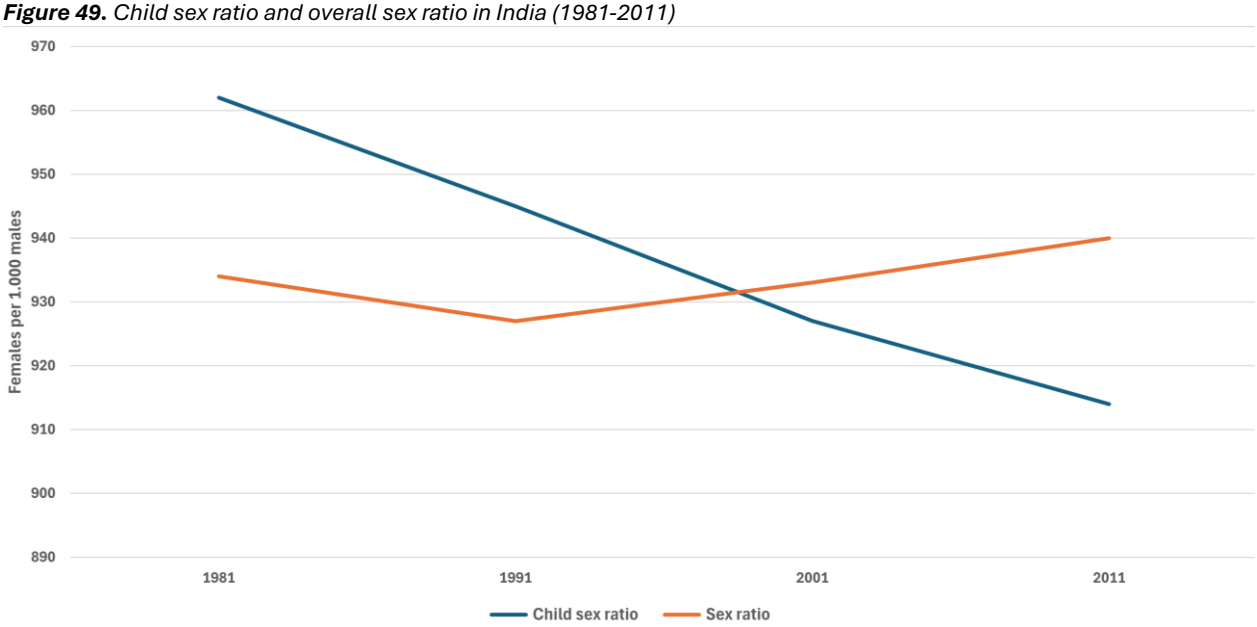
manhood, resulting in decreased sexual performance or impotence. Moreover, they think that such a practice can compromise their role as "breadwinners", hampering their economic productivity (Seth et al., 2020).

Given these sociological findings, it is therefore understandable why male participation in family planning practices is very low, leaving the burden once again solely on women.

2.2.4 CHILD SEX RATIO AND OVERALL SEX RATIO: INCENTIVISING A MALE-DOMINATED SOCIETY

Despite not being studied in strict correlation with the topic of family planning, the child and overall sex ratios contribute to depicting the multifaceted Indian society. In particular, if family planning is mainly responsible for curbing the birth ratio, sex ratios show how, especially in the under-5 segment of the population, there is a strong preference for males.

Figure 49. *Child sex ratio and overall sex ratio in India (1981-2011)*



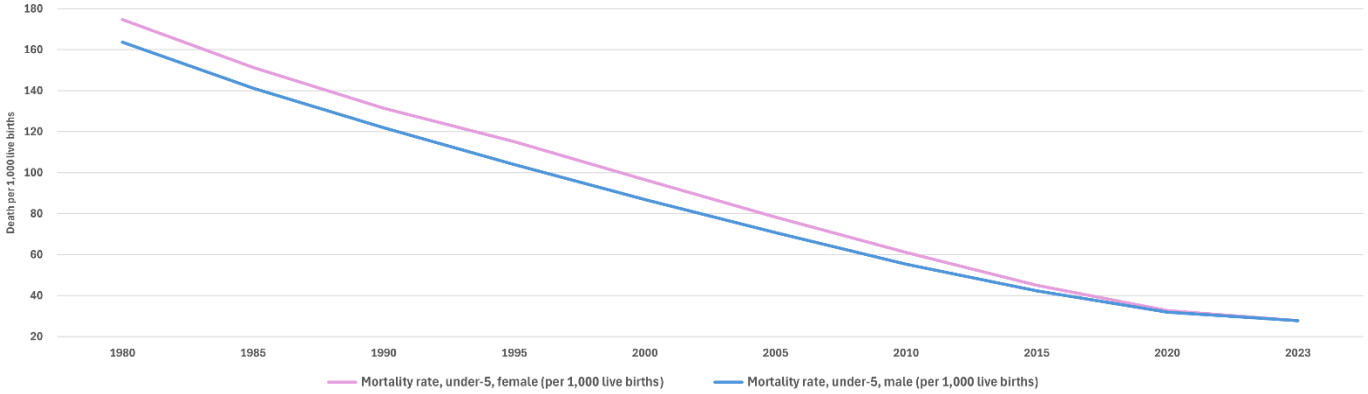
Source: Author's own elaboration from National Censuses, data retrieved at the following links: https://www.mospi.gov.in/sex-ratio-population-census-1901-2011-1; https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/42610/download/46272/Census%20of%20India%202011-Child%20Sex%20Ratio.pdf

Sex ratio is usually utilised to define the number of females per 1,000 males. In the sub-continent, this ratio was balanced until Independence. After Partition, the trend began to decline, and the negative trend persisted into the 1980s and early 1990s. Only from 1991 did the sex ratio show some improvements. It increased from 927 females per 1,000 males in 1991 to 940 females per 1,000 males in 2011 (Rai et al., 2014, p. 138).

Child sex ratio refers instead to the sex ratio of children under-5 years of age (Testa, Demography and Social Challenges, 2024). On average, it is normal for women to give birth to more boys than girls. Accordingly, the natural sex ratio at birth is usually around 950 girls per 1,000 boys (Tong et al., 2022, p. 4). However, Figure 47 illustrates that in India, the child sex ratio has deviated significantly from this natural ratio. Considering the 2011 census data, the subcontinent has dropped from 927 female children to 914 female children per 1,000 boys in the last decade alone. In percentage, it is a 1.4% decrease, the lowest since Independence (Rai et al., 2014, p.138).

Until the 1990s, this imbalance in the child sex ratio was linked to the excess of under-five mortality and the undercounting of females (Mohanty & Rajbhar, 2013, p.754).

Figure 50. *Children's mortality rate trend in India (1980-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link: https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

However, given the decrease in the under-5 mortality rate after the 1990s, another issue has emerged. Demographers started to attribute the lower child sex ratio to technological advancements and sex-selective abortion practices (Mohanty & Rajbhar, 2013, p.754). Since the introduction of ultrasound technology in the 1980s, gender testing has become more widespread and affordable. As a consequence, sex selection has taken off. An analysis conducted on UN estimates has visualised how, between 2000 and 2020, the subcontinent has had, on average, one of the world's most skewed sex ratios at birth, after Azerbaijan, China, Armenia, Vietnam and Albania (Tong et al., 2022, pp. 8-9).

These trends are overall indicative of India's traditional patriarchal institutions that value sons as more valuable than daughters for two main reasons. Firstly, because they have a greater economic utility, especially in terms of employability. Secondly, due to a sociocultural foundation that considers having sons preferable to birthing daughters, given patriarchal family structures, religious beliefs and dowry systems (Dharmalingam et al., 2014, p.1460).

2.2.5 THE LACK OF FEMALE LABOUR PARTICIPATION

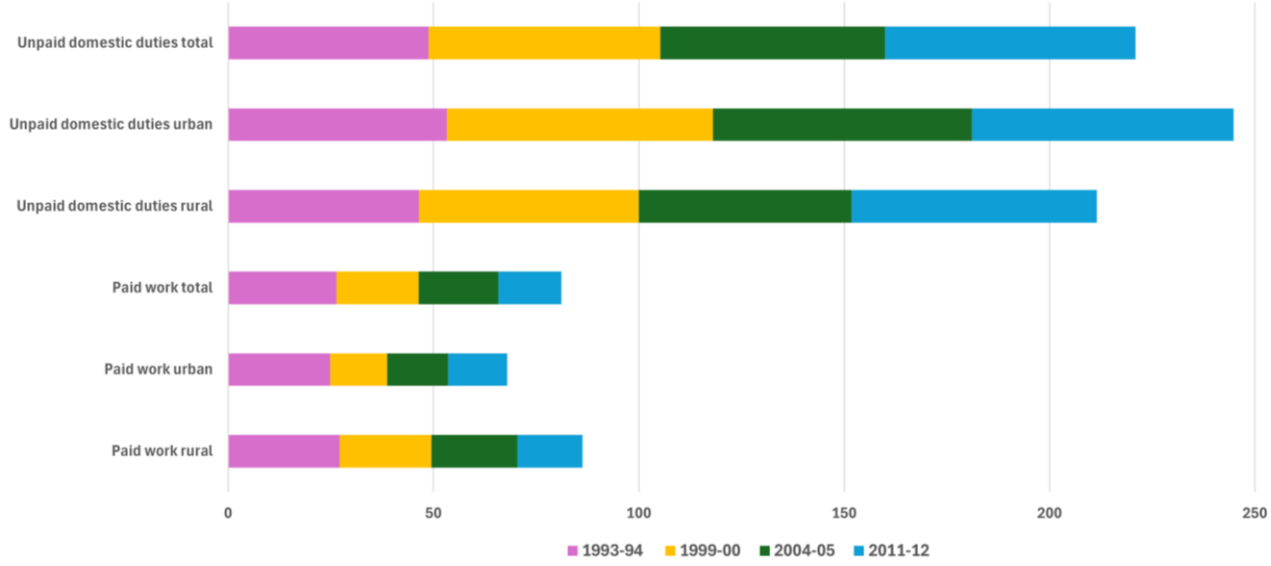
The final focus for this section is a reference to a previously discussed topic, which will now be explored from a more gendered perspective: women's labour force participation rates. As discussed in Figure 32, this indicator is considered to be particularly low. The reason is that the majority of the female population in India is engaged in activities defined as "unpaid domestic duties".

Unpaid household work has three components:

1. Household maintenance, including cooking, cleaning, and shopping.
2. Taking care of the household's components, like children, the elderly, the disabled, etc.
3. Voluntary or free services offered to other households.

For both the Classical and Neoclassical economic theories, unpaid work is not acknowledged as part of the mainstream economy, since it is not an economic or market good. However, from a structural perspective, it should be considered that household work takes time and energy, thus incurring an opportunity cost. Additionally, women who perform house chores contribute to the division of labour at both the household and societal levels. Lastly, domestic work can be a male prerogative too. Neo liberal macroeconomic policies were formulated without recognising, reducing, and redistributing unpaid work in the economy to both decrease the burden on women and impact economic development. This lack of recognition affects the existence of hierarchies in gender relations and gender inequalities. Only starting from the 1960s, through the feminist lens, such obligations started to be seen as work and not leisure. This process of incorporating and breaking down sexual divisions in the labour field requires three important steps: "gender polarisation", "gender freedom", and "gender integration". During the first phase, the division of labour and roles is considered rigid, with men performing paid duties and females executing the unpaid ones. In the second phase, women gain the capacity to perform both paid and unpaid work. In the last phase, integration is reached. The timeline for these changes is subject to variations, and it is not universal. In India, most of the women's unpaid work is still defined as informal and invisible. The lack of adequate public provisioning in critical sectors, like energy, health, water and sanitation, food security, and livelihoods, also supports it. Overall, this condition further marginalises the position of women within society (Singh & Pattanaik, 2020).

Figure 51. *Magnitude of women engaged in paid and unpaid activities in India (values in per cent) (1993-2012)*



Source: Singh, P., & Pattanaik, F. (2020). Unfolding unpaid domestic work in India: women's constraints, choices, and career. *Palgrave Communications*, 6(1). [17]

Women's participation in paid work has declined by 11.1%, while the magnitude of unpaid domestic work has increased by 12.2% from 1993-94 to 2011-12. 60.9% of the female population was engaged in unpaid domestic work in 2011-12, compared to 48.8% in 1993-94. The increment is visible among both the rural and urban women engaged in unpaid domestic work. The data shows that 63.7% of urban women were engaged in unpaid domestic work in 2011-12, compared to 59.7% of their rural counterparts. The issue with women residing in urban areas is related to the reduced opportunity cost of unpaid work in the cities. In contrast, in rural sectors, women are engaged in agriculture, which is considered informal work, not unpaid. On top of that, low literacy levels are strongly related to higher participation in unpaid work procedures. Girls performing a higher proportion of domestic work have low levels of schooling. Additional data also show that the incidence of unpaid domestic activities is much higher in the 25-34 age group, and that, in 2011-12, 61.3% of women justified their unpaid domestic work due to a lack of other household members carrying out that job (Singh & Pattanaik, 2020).

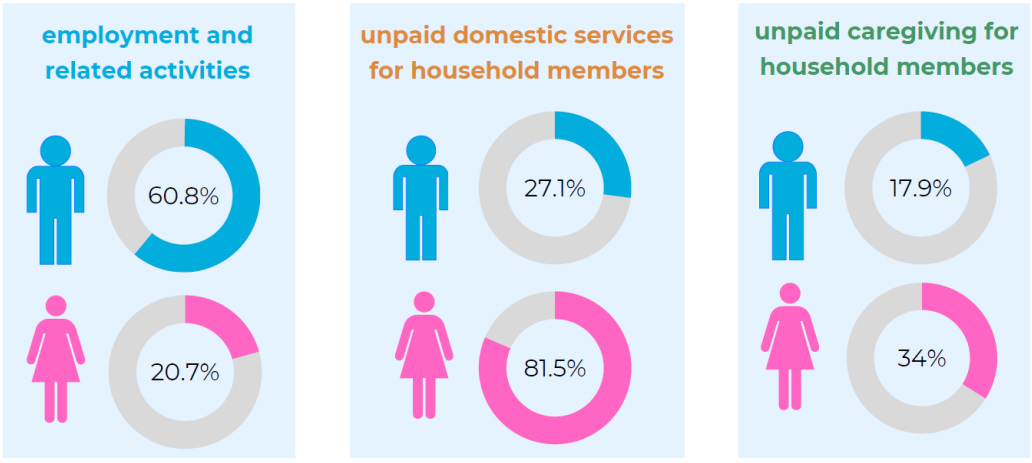
To delve into more recent data and complete the background regarding women's unpaid domestic work, the Time Use Survey (TUS) comes into attention. This instrument provides a framework for measuring how the population of a specific country spends its time on different activities. It counts for paid, unpaid, and other activities (i.e., learning, socialising, leisure activities, self-care, etc.), and

[17] Pushpendra Singh, Falguni Pattanaik compilation based on Unit Level data of 50th round (1993-94) to 68th round (2011-12) of NSSO

in recent times, it has gained impetus among policymakers. It was first introduced in India in 2019 by the National Statistics Office (NSO). For the 2024 edition of the TUS, the leading indicators were:

- Participation rate: percentage of people of certain categories performing specific activities during the 24 hours of the reference period.
- Average time spent in a day per participant.
- Average time spent in a day per person: the data are collected regardless of whether the person performs the activity or not (MoSPI, 2024).

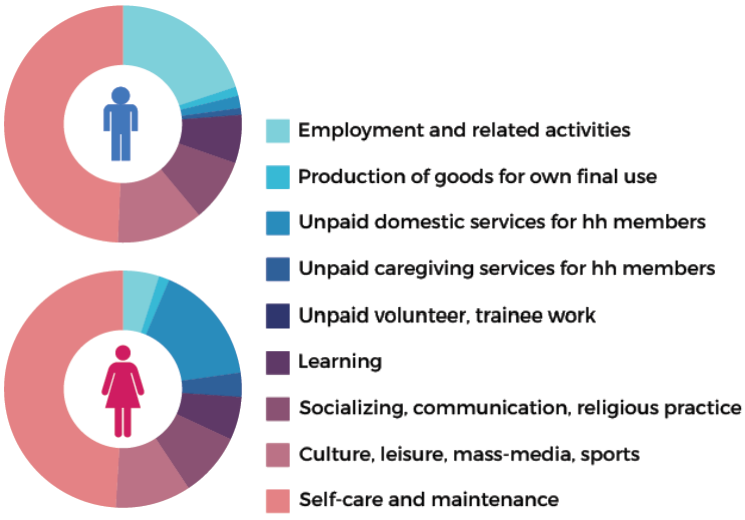
Figure 52. *Participation Rate in different activities by persons of age 6 years and above in India (2024)*



Source: MoSPI. (2024). *Time Use Survey- 2024.*

As shown in the graphs, female participants spend 341 minutes on work activities, compared to the 473 minutes spent by men. Concerning unpaid work, instead, women spend 289 minutes on average on such activities, while men spend only 88 minutes. Females, moreover, spend 137 minutes a day caring for their family members, compared to the 75 minutes spent by male members (MoSPI, 2024).

Figure 53. *Distribution of 24 hours over different activities in India (2024)*



Source: MoSPI. (2024). *Time Use Survey- 2024*.

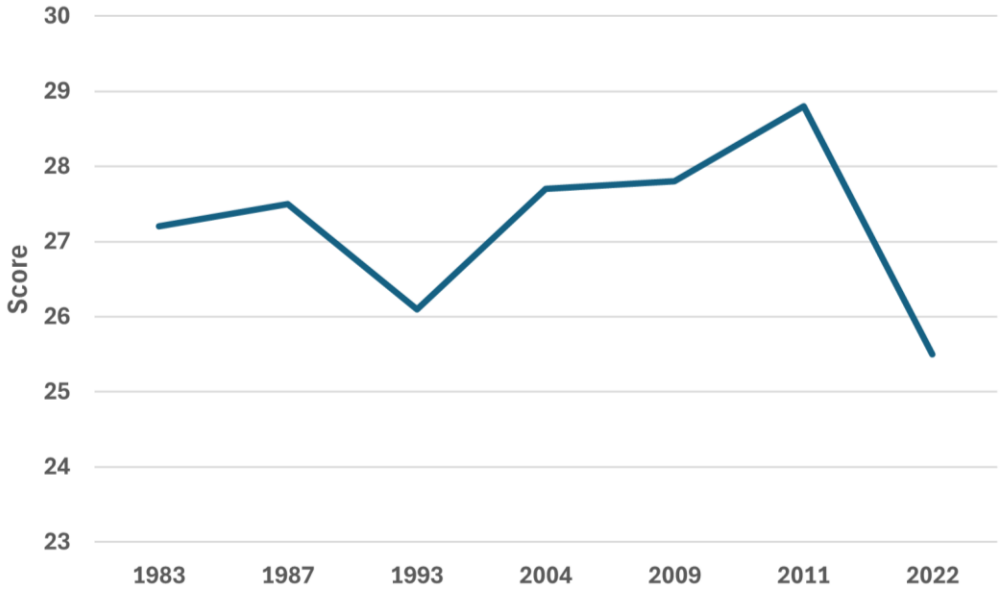
2.3 INDIA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This final section will provide an economic overview of the Indian subcontinent. Since the GDP has already been discussed in the first chapter, the focus here will be primarily on the Gini Index and the poverty headcount ratio.

2.3.1 INDIA'S GINI INDEX

The Gini index is a measure of income inequality in a given country. It defines the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 indicates perfect inequality (*Glossary | DataBank*, n.d.-a). It ultimately reflects the socioeconomic composition of the nation, rather than merely providing a numerical snapshot of income disparity. Various factors influence the Gini index, including disparities between rural and urban areas, caste-based inequality, gender disparities, and the vastness of the informal sector (Khan, 2025, pp.1-2). In the Indian scenario, scholars have analysed how the urban elites have disproportionately reaped economic benefits from urbanisation and industrialisation, worsening the wealth gap between rural and urban inhabitants (Chancel & Piketty, 2019, as cited by Khan, 2025). Government interventions also influence the Index, for example, by providing social services or food and education subsidy schemes. Similarly, persistent structural issues such as tax evasion and the lack of redistributive policies create difficulties in the attempt to reduce the index's value. In addition, globalisation and the expansion of technology-driven economies have introduced new forms of inequality, with access to technology and digital literacy as a critical determinant of economic mobility (Khan, 2025, p. 1).

Figure 54. *Gini Index in India (1983-2022)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link: https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

According to the graph, it is visible how the Gini Index in India tends to fluctuate. Such a condition is related to the intricate relationship between social policies, structural changes and economic development. In the decades following Independence, given the state's focus on agrarian reforms and redistribution, the Gini Index was relatively stable. However, the trend has suffered major ups and downs with the deregulation of the 1990s, when market-driven prosperity began to reveal income disparities. The economic liberalisation of India marked a fundamental change toward a market-oriented economy. The market deregulation allowed India to achieve economic growth and development; however, it also created inequalities among the population. If economic advancement enabled millions to rise from poverty, it also exacerbated income disparity. There was an increase in the general income levels, but only the richer segment of society was able to reap the maximum benefit from the situation. The increase in the Gini Index after 1993 clearly indicates a widening gap between the rich and the poor (Khan, 2025, pp.1-2).

From 1993 to 2013, there has been a visible increase in inequalities, with the Index rising from 26 to 29. The wealthiest individuals in the country have collected a significant portion of the nation's wealth through inheritance and crony capitalism[18]. On the opposite side, the lack of funding has pushed those who are in poverty to struggle to achieve a minimal wage or access to healthcare

[18] Crony capitalism can be defined as an economic system in which individuals and businesses with political connections and influence are favoured in ways seen as suppressing open competition in a free market (i.e. tax breaks, grants, and other forms of government assistance) ("Crony Capitalism," 2025).

institutions and education. The widening divides and inequalities particularly impact women and children (Khan, 2025, p.2).

If the data are further divided into urban and rural components, it appears that the rural population is the primary factor leading to the drop at the lower end of the income distribution. In 2019, according to Sahasranaman and Kumar, the real average income decreased by 4.3% annually, causing a fall of 41% in the income segment of the lowest decile within the income distribution of rural India. Differently, the income shares at the lowest end of the urban distribution have increased throughout different historical periods. Moreover, the disparities in income have been significantly impacted by the drop in real earnings at the lowest tier, showing how rural incomes form the predominant component of the lowest ventile in India's aggregated income distribution. Another aspect of the rural-urban divide is represented by how metropolitan regions have achieved better economic growth compared to rural areas. Urban centers have, in fact, better access to medical care and educational and employment opportunities (Khan, 2025, p.2).

From 2014 to 2023, the Gini Index has experienced a decline, showing a drop in income inequality. Different socio-economic policies, economic growth, better access to education, and other factors could have caused this change and incentivised a more equitable income distribution. Initiatives for poverty reduction, economic inclusion and minimisation of disparities in development seem to be effective. However, although improvement is visible, considerable obstacles persist in tackling the fundamental factors contributing to inequality. For instance, India has moved toward a regressive redistribution, causing continued deprivations among the poor segment of the population and enabling significant income rises among the richest. The rural-urban divide has also remained a vital issue, since intrastate income discrepancies persist (Khan, 2025, p.5).

One last element to consider when evaluating the Gini Index is the COVID-19 impact. The economic disruptions caused by lockdowns and restrictions have significantly affected low-income workers in the informal sector, with many experiencing job loss or wage reductions. At the same time, individuals in the higher-income brackets have faced a reduced impact. The epidemic has exacerbated existing inequalities, underscoring the need for enhanced social safety nets and inclusive economic policies (Khan, 2025, p.7).

2.3.2 DECREASING POVERTY RATE IN INDIA

In relation to the measurement of inequalities in India, the issue of poverty and the analysis of its rate can be further examined.

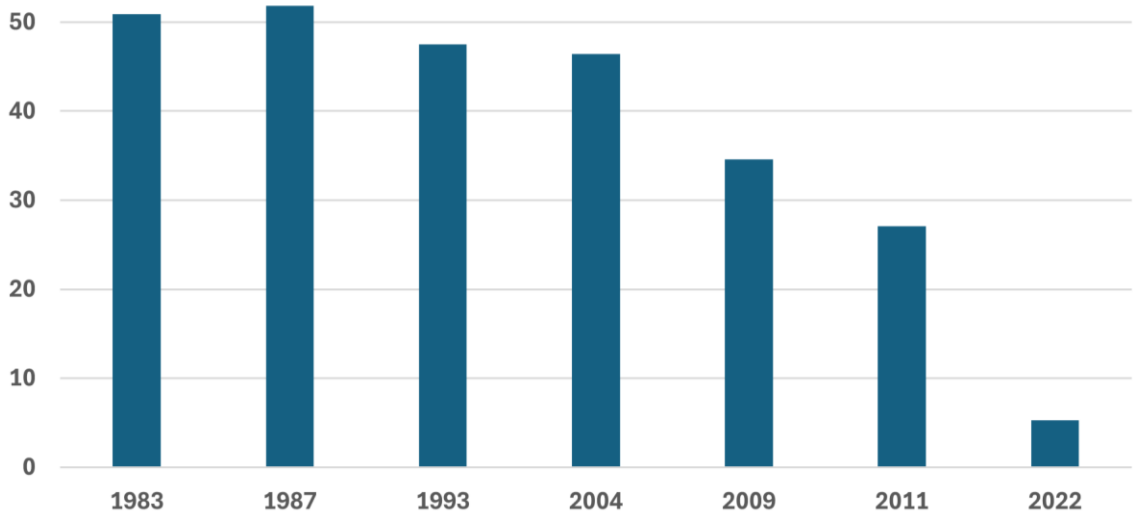
Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon where a section of society cannot fulfil the basic needs of life. India, among the developing countries, is exemplary of such a condition, with nearly

70% of its population living in poverty, especially in rural areas. From 1983 to the present day, there have been many poverty reduction initiatives (Barman, 2024, p.51).

The concept of poverty for the subcontinent was first developed in 1972. A specific study group established by the Planning Commission in 1971 and led by Professors Dandekar and Nilkanta Rath, defined impoverished individuals as people whose daily caloric intake does not exceed 2435 calories in rural and 2095 in urban areas (Barman, 2024, p.52).

In this study, to analyse the level of poverty in India, the headcount ratio will be considered.

Figure 55. *Poverty headcount ratio in India (values in per cent) (1983-2022)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link: https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

Poverty headcount ratio at $3 a day is the percentage of the population living on less than $3 a day at 2021 purchasing power adjusted prices. This limit was lastly adopted in September 2022, in an attempt by the World Bank to create an index which applies common standards in measuring extreme poverty and is anchored to the definition of poverty given by the world's poorest countries (*Glossary | DataBank*, n.d.-b).

The graph proposed above clearly shows how the poverty headcount ratio has constantly decreased since 1983, reaching 5.3% of the total population in 2022. This result is particularly significant, as it indicates that between 2011-12 and 2022-23, 269 million Indians have moved out of poverty. The majority of the progress came from Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh, which, in 2011-12, accounted for 65% of India's extreme poor. The decline in the poverty rate has been widespread in both urban and rural areas. Rural poverty has diminished from 18.4% to 2.8%, while urban poverty has fallen from 10.7% to just 1.1%. The country has also seen improvement in reducing multidimensional poverty, which includes factors such as health,

education, and standard of living. The Multidimensional Poverty Index dropped from 53.8% in 2005-06 to 16.4% in 2019-21, and further down to 15.5% in 2022-23 (Admin, n.d.).

Overall, the research has highlighted how India's population growth is related to the presence of different social and economic issues related to gender disparity, unemployment, ageism, and religious diversity. The following chapters will explore how these issues have been framed in terms of human security.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUALISING HUMAN SECURITY AND ITS RELEVANCE IN THE INDIAN SCENARIO

This chapter aims to lay the foundations for understanding the dynamics of the second dependent variable, focused on the securitisation of specific socio-economic issues (ageism, unemployment, gender gap, religious divide) through national policy and discourses, which will be further addressed in *Chapter 4*. The goal is to fully understand what is meant by the conceptualisation of the term "human security" and to what extent it is attributable to the Indian scenario.

The first two sections of the chapter will primarily focus on theory. They will present the existing definitions of "human security" and debate the aspects that define them, also in relation to the dynamic of "development". The last section will focus empirically on the Indian subcontinent to understand which definition of human security best suits the country's reality and in which areas insecurities are most visible.

3.1 UNDERSTANDING HUMAN SECURITY AND ITS BROADER AIM

In this first section, the focus will be on analysing how the concept of human security has evolved and developed historically and theoretically, as well as its connection to discourses on state development.

3.1.1 THE FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN SECURITY

Human security can be discussed both as a normative and ethical movement. The terminology itself suggests that there is an ethical responsibility to implement security discourses in a redistributive sense around the individual, especially considering changes within political communities and the emergence of transnational norms related to human rights. Furthermore, it is based on empirical reasoning concerning the foundations of stability within and between states. It generally argues that the deprivation of human security, such as socioeconomic deprivation or exclusion, human rights abuses, and epidemiological threats, has a direct impact on peace and stability. Therefore, there should be a universal interest in addressing such needs and building capacity for others, conforming with the interconnected nature of the globalised world (Newman, 2001, pp. 240-241). According to Acharya (1995), human security requires a change in the securitisation process. More specifically, it calls for a shift in perspective from state security to the security of individuals and communities, both in terms of personal safety and community well-being. This conceptualisation is not only bound to protecting the existence of entire social groups (i.e. children, civilians in a war zone, ethnic minorities...) from persecution and violence, but it also places a premium on human dignity. As a doctrine, it cannot condone the pursuit of economic and

communitarian approaches at the expense of the safety and dignity of individuals and peoples. The emphasis on the concept of "dignity" is also peculiar to human security. This focus owes to four crucial developments that have contributed to the emergence of the doctrine itself:

a) The growing incidence of civil wars and interstate conflicts;
b) The spread of democratisation;
c) The advent of humanitarian intervention led by the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (R2P), a principle according to which the international community is justified in intervening in the national affairs of states accused of severe violations of human rights;
d) The diffusion of poverty, unemployment and social dislocation caused by the economic crises of the 1990s.

To discuss the historical roots and the evolution of this security vision, one has to go back to the end of the Cold War, also known as the event which gave a boost to the foreign policy circles that were challenging the state-centric, power-based model of international policy and security, focused solely on "high politics"[19]. The change sought was supposed to be both empirical and normative, given that the concept of human security needed to be observed as an extension of the older tradition, while also aiming for a broader perspective. Only by modifying the perspective through a process of broadening and deepening[20] the agenda, an increased opportunity to address global issues (ethnic strife, weapons of mass destruction, environmental and population concerns, narcotraffic, HIV/ AIDS and the COVID-19 pandemic) at the international level was possible. Fundamental in such a procedure was the mechanism of "globalisation". The path to "complex interdependence" has become more prominent after 1989, and it has incentivised the practice of multilateralism in foreign policy, along with the *ethos* of the collective management of common issues. The majority of governments have now acknowledged that the current international agenda, centred on the themes mentioned above, necessitates collective management and that it is not limited to a military and state-centric discourse of security. The process of normative change should also be considered to the extent that it

[19] The word "high politics" usually refers to issues of vital importance for the survival of the state, i.e. national and international security. It is considered in contraposition to the concept of "low politics", which generally indicates secondary non-security issues, such as economic policy and social policy ("High and Low Politics," n.d.).

[20] Broadening the agenda refers to the process of studying and observing more and different sectors than the military one, such as the environment, economy, migration, politics, society, etc. Deepening the agenda is instead connected to the practice of recognizing more referent objects (object to be rescued/protected) other than the state. After the '80s five new levels were conceptualised to describe the depth of security:

- International system (UN);
- International subunits (EU, NATO);
- Units (states);
- Sub-units (tribes, minorities);
- Individuals.

(Amicelle, Critical Security Studies, 2024)

underpinned and resulted from these developments. The growing importance of transnational norms has expanded the scope of political discourse beyond the state's territorial boundaries. Ethical standards have been internationalised and have acquired pre-eminence over national laws and norms. Forms of government, human rights, gender equality, rights to development, and education have all become international issues. The cumulative effect is that the human needs and rights at the foundation of human security are slowly being incorporated into the matrix of decision-making in terms of security. Individuals' expectations and needs are starting to impact politics concretely, through a bottom-up approach (Newman, 2001, pp.241-242). In policy terms, the first trace of the concept of human security at the international level can be found in the 1994 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme. This document was possible thanks to the Brandt Commission[21], the Brundtland Commission[22] and the Commission on Global Governance[23], whose work shifted the focus of security analysis from national and state security to the protection of the people. This process was followed by a growing recognition of non-military threats in global security debates (Acharya, 2001, p. 444).

In terms of direct conceptualisation and definition, it is worth noting that human security is subject to different interpretations. The multiple approaches to this field are not mutually exclusive or incompatible, as they complement each other in the evolving understanding of such a complex and vast paradigm, constantly exposed to shifts in national and international policies. However, for the scope of this analysis, it is necessary to reconcile the different meanings of human security and understand which one better suits the Indian scenario (Acharya, 2001, pp. 442-443).

[21] The Independent Commission on International Development Issues, found in 1977, and also known as the Brandt Commission, had the purpose to influence public opinion to help change government attitudes, as well as to make proposals for revitalising North-South negotiations. Its reports underscored the dual relationship among the North/South divide: the northern nations dependent on the poor countries for their wealth, and the poor countries dependent on the North for their development. The members created emphasis on food and agricultural development, aid, energy, trade, international monetary and financial reform, and global negotiations (*The Brandt Equation: 21st Century Blueprint for the New Global Economy*, n.d.).

[22] In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published a report entitled "Our Common Future", also known as the "Brundtland Report". By acknowledging that critical global environmental problems were primarily the result of the enormous poverty in the South and unsustainable patterns of consumption and production in the North, it developed guiding principles for sustainable development (Are, n.d.).

[23] The Commission on Global Governance was established in 1992 to suggest new ways in which the international community might cooperate to further an agenda of global security. The commission's understanding of security was based on a broad definition that included human and planet well-being. Its primary aims were to secure peace, sustainable development, and universal democracy (Unterhalter & Erin, 2013).

3.1.2 DEFINING HUMAN SECURITY

The first definition of human security is called the "basic human needs" approach. It was derived from the scholarship of Mahbub ul Haq and directly influenced the United Nations Development Programme in the writing of its 1994 report (Acharya, 2001, p. 444).

To gain a first general idea regarding the aim of such an approach, a reference could be made to the Human Development Report, which stated that:

> "For most people today, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Job security, income security, health, environmental security, security from crime- these are emerging concerns of human security all over the world" (Human Development Report, 1994, p.3)

Stemming from this passage, Acharya (2001) mentions that the basic human needs approach is focused on seven separate components:

1. Economic security (assured basic income);
2. Food security (physical and economic access to food);
3. Health security (relative freedom from disease and infection);
4. Environmental security (access to sanitary water supply, clean air and non-degraded land system);
5. Personal security (freedom from physical violence and threats);
6. Community security (protection of cultural identity);
7. Political security (guarantee of basic human rights and freedoms).

All the components mentioned above have to be understood as interdependent. Furthermore, this approach states that severe threats to human security are not circumscribed to single communities, and they are easier to prevent through preventive measures. Considering these principles, the UNDP's recommendations were based on linking overseas aid to poverty reduction and welfare, creating social safety nets by allocating existing foreign assistance to the poorest nations, establishing a World Social Charter, achieving commitments based on the "peace dividend"[24], and creating a global human security fund based on international sources of revenue (Newman, 2001,p.243).

Critics of this approach often argue that the UNDP definition is too broad and lacks explicit links to human rights and humanitarian law (Acharya, 2001, p. 445).

[24] A peace dividend is an economic boost that a country will get from a peace that follows a war (Chen, 2025). The premise is that as an economy resurfaces from a conflict, budget spending for defence is redirected to social programs. The redistribution of capital to more "efficient means" spurs greater economic activity, paving the way for long-term economic benefits (Team, 2024). However, such a measure is difficult to achieve. As an example, the global financial crisis of 2008 demonstrated how the political and economic unity that was necessary for a recurring peace dividend was shaken by populist movements (Chen, 2025).

The second definition of human security is the assertive/interventionist focus. It is centred on the idea that sovereign prerogatives can be encroached upon to alleviate gross human suffering deriving from modern conflicts and the high rate of victimisation and displacement of civilians, especially women and children, that they generate. Thus, the act of "humanitarian intervention" and other forms of coercion should be considered in the context of human security (Newman, 2001, p. 244). This vision was mainly supported by the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy, and by the Norwegian government. Both administrations sustained the argument that focusing too much on threats generated by underdevelopment diverts resources from human insecurity linked to violent conflict (Acharya, 2001, p. 445). Thus, together with the Austrian government, they decided to establish the Human Security Network in 1999. Over the years, other countries have joined the partnership, including Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Panama, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Thailand, with South Africa participating as an observer. Initially, the network urged its members to accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Convention and the International Criminal Court, and to intensify their attention towards the control of small arms and light weapons. More recently, its activities have focused on promoting women, peace, and security, protecting children in armed conflict, respecting international human rights and humanitarian law, and fostering continued dialogue among UN member states on the concept of human security (Österreich, n.d.).

The third approach to human security is the social welfare/developmentalist focus, based on the concept of development as a fundamental value that generates and improves other public goods and freedoms. Individual agency and security are central to this vision. Generally speaking, this approach lies quite close to the "basic human needs" definition already mentioned. However, in its theorisation, social welfare and the development of policies extend beyond critical human needs and are not limited to the bare minimum of safety or survival. Development is conceived as a means to an end, not just in itself. It should be judged to the extent to which it promotes the advancement of human welfare and the growth of equity of all human beings materially, culturally and intellectually. Sustainability is deeply present in this focus. Individuals and communities have a right to work and live without depriving future generations of the ability to do likewise. One final element to note is the respect for cultural diversity and the need to ensure that national and international policies, along with liberalisation and deregulation, do not negatively impact indigenous ways of political, economic, and social organisation (Newman, 2001, p. 245). The Japanese government sustained this view: in 1995, Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama promoted human security as a necessary strategy within the United Nations. Initially, his conceptualisation was close to the interventionist approach, especially when addressing the growing incidence of civil conflicts and their human cost. Later on, however, he disagreed with the Canadian formulation. The Prime Minister openly criticised those who consider

only the concept of “freedom from fear” and the related concerns regarding small arms control and war crimes prosecution, and highlighted how, in Asian culture, human security encompasses a broader spectrum, where “freedom from want” is no less critical than its counterpart. Thus, the focus is not only on protecting human lives in conflict situations, but also ensuring the survival and dignity of human beings (Acharya, 2001, p. 446). The concept of “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want” were two of the four freedoms[25] addressed by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt on January 6, 1941. “Freedom from want” signifies that individuals are in a condition where they do not have to worry about their next meal, how to clothe themselves and their children, or if a roof will protect them. "Want", in this context, refers to dire poverty (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), 2016). “Freedom from fear” is instead related to the worldwide reduction of armaments and the building of a collective security mechanism. After World War II, it was believed that all UN members would undertake common commitments to settle their disputes peacefully and refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of other nations (Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, n.d.).

The fourth and last “new security” interpretation addresses issues related to “non-traditional” security and “uncivil society”, with reference to epidemiology, drugs, terrorism, small arms, inhuman weapons (i.e. antipersonnel landmines, cyberwar, etc.) and trafficking in human beings. The process of globalisation, currently fostered by economic, political, and technological changes, can be subject to the negative consequences of the same opportunities that generate it and can pose serious challenges to democracy, development, and security. In this conceptualisation, the referent object is both the state and the individual. Considering that the context is characterised by weak state institutions (resulting from underdevelopment or corruption), the remedy lies in strengthening the capacities of states and individuals to contain spillovers (Newman, 2001, pp. 245-246).

Overall, all the different definitions addressed in this section reflect a multitude of concerns and outlooks, along with specific sociological contexts. The typologies show dissimilarities in terms of focus, methodology, institutions, actors involved, and policies introduced (Newman, 2001, p. 246). However, scholars like Astrid Suhrke have tried to find a common denominator among all these visions. What Suhrke stressed is that the general notion of human security has “vulnerability” as its defining feature. What varies is who “vulnerability” affects, being them the victims of internal conflicts, those living at or below subsistence levels or those who suffered natural disasters (Acharya, 2001, p. 447). In the following section, it will be further analysed how different conceptualisations highlight existing theoretical disagreements between the West and the East of the world.

[25] Freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

3.1.3 THE DE-WESTERNISATION OF HUMAN SECURITY

Some Asian governments and analysts have criticised the subject of human security for potentially being another attempt by Western countries to impose their liberal values and political institutions. The newness of the concept is also prone to criticism, as earlier notions of "comprehensive security" were formulated by regional governments before the emphasis on human security and non-military threats began (Acharya, 2001, p. 443).

During the Cold War, several Southeast Asian governments formulated different versions of "comprehensive security". The Japanese administration focused on the analysis of economic issues, including the supply of energy and food, reflecting their principal vulnerabilities linked to the denial of access to markets for Japanese goods, the expropriation of Japanese property and the exclusion of their investments abroad. Similarly, the Association of South-East Asian Nations developed its doctrine around economic insecurities. The novelty, in this case, was the mention of the political dimension in connection to domestic stability and regime survival. Singapore was another country developing its own doctrine of "Total Defence" by involving several non-military instruments (i.e., psychological defence), augmented military deterrence and defensive capabilities. In the entire Asian Pacific region, the concept of "comprehensive security", despite its claim to offer an alternative to conventional national security, has been developed as a statist instrument. (Acharya, 2001, pp. 451-453).

Another distinctive feature of the Asian security vision is the emphasis on addressing "human needs" following the 1997-98 economic crisis[26]. The "Asian Contagion" increased the incidence of poverty, caused widespread political instability, and aggravated economic competition and interstate tensions over refugees and illegal migrants. Furthermore, it highlighted the need for good governance, free from corruption and nepotism, and emphasised the necessity of sustaining development in an environmentally sustainable manner (Acharya, 2001, p. 448).

The East-West controversy was also linked to the belief that the human security notion, at least as it is applied in already developed countries, reflected the individualistic *ethos* of liberal democracy. Thus, the concern was that Western countries were campaigning for their idea of human rights and democracy, which could conflict with the old "Asian approach to human rights" developed through a universalistic conceptualisation. In the early 1990s, in response to these concerns, some Asian governments suggested promoting and defining human security in light of diverse cultural

[26] The Asian financial crisis, also called the "Asian Contagion," was a sequence of currency devaluations that began in July 1997 and spread across Asia. The event started in Thailand and quickly affected also Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia by compelling the local governments to let their currencies fall as speculative market pressure built. By October, the crisis spread to South Korea, where a balance-of-payments crisis brought the government to the brink of default. Other economies also came under pressure, but those with solid economic fundamentals and hefty foreign exchange reserves fared much better (Investopedia Team, 2024).

contexts and historical experiences. Furthermore, they supported the principle of "non-selectivity", declaring that human rights should not be selectively focused on political rights, but rather should be promoted in accordance with the communitarian *ethos* of Asian society and the "society-before-the-self" tradition (Acharya, 2001, p. 449).

3.1.4 PROVIDING A MEASURE OF HUMAN SECURITY

Considering the different conceptualisations analysed on human security and the divide between the West and the East, it should be understandable how it is difficult to provide a unilateral measurement of the index. Different challenges need to be observed. First of all, the various dimensions that constitute human security create a conceptual overstretch. Another issue is represented by practicality: if the focus is on the individual, the gathering of granular data faces limitations and necessitates a trade-off. Furthermore, existing attempts to measure human security are considered too broad, too narrow, or too bespoke (focused only on specific aspects, such as food or the environment). Several examples can be analysed in this regard (Reinsberg et al., 2022, p.77).

Starting from a broader approach, the first scholar worth mentioning is Bajpai, who, in the 2000s, developed the Human Security Audit index. He stated that an efficient way to measure human security involves considering the growth or decline of several threats and estimating the capability to address such problems. This type of measurement should further assess the rise and fall of insecurities, along with the degree to which norms, institutions, and democratisation have been advanced at the global, regional, national, or sub-national level. Moreover, he incentivised the use of the threats/capabilities schema to make cross-national and intra-national comparisons. However, such a typology of Human Security Audit was not free from limitations regarding the duality of validity and reliability, as well as the issue of topic aggregation and the difficult separation between the objectivity of the index and the subjectivity of the problematics (Bajpai, 2000, pp. 55-59). Following Bajpai's path, in 2001, King and Murray used "generalised poverty" to define human security, thus implementing the mainstream definition of the theory. They decided to measure several themes, including income, health, democracy, education, and political freedom. Their concept took into consideration different dimensions, but it did not focus sufficiently on the individuals or the topic of violence itself (Reinsberg et al., 2022, p. 77). Stemming from a broader approach, two additional measures have been conceived: the Fragile State Index and the State Fragility Index and Matrix. The Fund for Peace conceptualised the Fragile State Index (FSI) in the 1990s, aiming to provide a framework for policymakers and experts in the field to understand and study the dynamics of complex environments and conflict drivers. It highlights the everyday pressures that all states experience, but also analyses whether those events are outweighing a state's capacities. The FSI allow for the

implementation of risk assessment and early warning measures. Its analysis is based on the CAST (Conflict Assessment System Tool) system, which triangulates and integrates pre-existing quantitative datasets, content analysis, and qualitative research to obtain the final scores. The Index is based on the following indicators: security apparatus; factionalised elites; group grievance; economic decline and poverty; uneven development; human flight and brain drain; state legitimacy; public services; human rights and rule of law; demographic pressures; refugees and internally displaced persons indicator; external intervention (*Methodology | Fragile States Index*, n.d.). The State Fragility Index and Matrix, instead, was originally introduced in the "Global Report on Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility 2017" written by Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall. It observes four major topics (security, political, economic, and social), each subdivided into two categories: effectiveness and legitimacy. The different indices are organised as follows (Marshall & Elzinga-Marshall, 2018):

- Security Effectiveness Score: it is a measure of general security and vulnerability to political violence (Total Residual War);
- Security Legitimacy Score: it provides a measure of state repression,
- Political Effectiveness Score: Regime/Governance Stability;
- Political Legitimacy Score: Regime/Governance Inclusion;
- Economic Effectiveness Score: Gross Domestic Product per Capita;
- Economic Legitimacy Score: Share of Export Trade in Manufactured Goods;
- Social Effectiveness Score: Human Capital Development;
- Social Legitimacy Score: Human Capital Care.

These measurements are supposed to provide objective, empirical evidence of comparable levels of the "under-development" of individual societal systems in the global framework (Marshall & Elzinga-Marshall, 2017, p.35). The issue with both the Fragile State Index and the State Fragility Index and Matrix, however, is that they are not strictly focused on human security, and their indicators remain close to a more traditional notion of security (Reinsberg et al., 2022, p. 77). One last broad index considered in this dissertation is the Human Development Index (HDI). This is the Index officially used by the United Nations Development Programme. It is defined as a measure of average achievements in three key dimensions of human development: long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. The life expectancy at birth indicator measures the long and healthy life dimension. Knowledge is assessed by the expected and mean years of schooling. A decent standard of living is based on Gross National Income per capita (PPP $). The scores for the three HDI dimension indices are aggregated into a composite index using geometric mean. Its general aim is to question national policy choices. However, since it simplifies and captures only part of what human

development entails, it does not fully reflect inequalities, poverty, human security, empowerment, etc. This is why it is usually associated with the Human Development Report, where additional data can be found (United Nations, n.d.).

Switching instead to bespoke indices, visible issues also persist in this category, as they are usually focused on specific themes under the broader human security umbrella and fail to capture the breadth of the overall doctrine (Reinsberg et al., 2022, p. 77). An example is the Global Environmental Change and Human Security Project by Michael Carolan. He developed the Food and Human Security Index, designed to challenge the classical understanding of food security. It was initially calculated for 126 countries, and it revolved around indicators concerning individual and societal well-being, ecological sustainability, food dependency, nutritional well-being, and food-system market concentration. More in detail, it is calculated by considering (Carolan, 2012, p.181):

- Life expectancy at birth;
- Total per capita water food-print as a percentage of total per capita renewable freshwater supply;
- Daily per capita consumption of oils, fats and sugars;
- Supermarket concentration.

Multidimensional indices of human security also exist, but they are not widely used. It is, for example, the case with Hastings' index (Reinsberg et al., 2022, p. 78). His idea was to enhance the HDI schema by incorporating additional components. The result should be a combination of the HDI and the Social Fabric Index, constituted by the Gender Equality Index, the Peace Index, the Environmental Index, the Corruption Control Index, and the Information Empowerment Index (Hastings, 2009).

3.2 THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HUMAN SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Scholars like Tschirgi, Lund, and Mancini (2010), along with a more generalised IR audience, have theorised a clear connection between levels of underdevelopment and insecurity. Specifically, if there is an increase in development, there are lower chances of violent conflict, and vice versa. The primary evidence suggests that 80% of the world's poorest countries have been affected by conflicts since the early 1990s. However, despite this evidence and a certain detectability in the cyclical relationship between development and security, the results are considered far from clear, as it is difficult to provide an empirical measure of how much development impacts conflicts and vice versa. Different international organs have dealt with this nexus and tried to frame it through *ad hoc* terminologies, such as "structural stability", "secure development" and "structural prevention" (Tschirgi et al., 2010, pp.3-4).

Historically, the security-development nexus was theorised in response to the interconnected humanitarian, human rights, security and development crises that emerged in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. During the 1990s, policy documents and bilateral and multilateral donors requested concerted international actions to address these complex, multidimensional challenges. In the early 2000s, the UN emphasised the connection between security and development, and the Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change noted that there is an inextricable link between the two elements, with a more secure environment being achievable only by promoting development (Tschirgi et al., 2010, p. 5).

In this section, the security-development nexus will be further analysed by examining some specific scenarios and assessing a broader discussion on violent internal conflicts and their prevention.

3.2.1 DIMENSIONS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SECURITY-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS

Several dimensions contribute to the connection between security and development. This analysis aims to examine how the economy, demographics, and other factors may actively influence the scenario.

In the early 1990s, scholars introduced the idea that the economy might intervene in the causal relationship between development and conflict. Development agencies, including the World Institute for Development Economics Research of the UN University and the World Bank, incentivised policy-oriented studies such as the 2000 publication *War, Hunger, and Displacement: The Origins of Humanitarian Emergencies* and the 2003 *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*. These reports brought an economic perspective to the understanding of the origins, evolution, and impact of conflict, further contributing to the assessment of how economic and political-economic factors can cause or exacerbate hostilities (Fukuda-Parr, 2010). In empirical terms, several scenarios exist where this reality can be observed and proven. For example, as stated by Besançon (2005), the most adverse effects of economic inequality are visible in revolutions. Concerning the theme of ethnic uprising, her study shows that a higher degree of economic equality precedes escalations of violence. In general terms, this signifies that, if increasing economic equality might be a mitigating factor in states concerned by revolutions, in a scenario of ethnic divisions, it creates instead conditions for combat. Another study, written by S. C. Jung (2022), observes that a weak economy (defined by high inflation and unemployment rates) can prompt political leaders to address domestic challenges arising from a dissatisfied electorate. This scenario leads governments to search for diversionary targets and to attack junior trade partners, which are less likely to retaliate harshly. Overall, if there is a slowdown in economic growth, a state is more likely to initiate a military conflict.

Especially starting from the 2000s, multiple references to this theorisation have been observed in real-life events, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea and its deployment of troops to Syria, or the Chinese assertive actions in the South China Sea. Lastly, Abbott et al. (2017) addressed a more specific socio-economic topic by studying how resource insecurity (in terms of food, energy and water availability) is linked to political instability. Availability and accessibility to food, energy, and water are crucial in a developing scenario, and according to the authors, there is growing evidence that insecurity in this domain generates threats and incentivises internal conflicts. The data can be further disaggregated to observe their impact. For instance, the global increase in food prices between 2010 and 2011 has significantly contributed to social unrest, particularly in the Middle East. Similarly, water scarcity has contributed to domestic and social tensions by driving an increase in rural-to-urban migration, as was analysed at the beginning of the Syrian Civil War. Finally, energy resources have also been considered a driver of conflict since the 20th century. Between 1973 and 2013, nearly 50% of interstate conflicts were caused by oil-related causal mechanisms.

Another topic that scholars have recently begun to consider for its contribution to the development-conflict nexus is demography. In fact, contributions published in the early 2000s emphasised how the phenomenon of demographic transition (population demarcated by large families and low life expectancy transitioning to the opposite trends) initiates changes in the secondary and tertiary economic sectors and has a substantial impact on the political stability, welfare and individual security of several countries. Multiple are the demographic factors that challenge the political stability of a specific nation, such as the declining availability of natural resources, the rapid growth and deteriorating human conditions in urban slums, the high rate of death in the working-age population, ageism, the decline in population size, different growth rates among ethnic populations, cross-border and domestic migration, and high marriage-age sex ratio. All these indicators can concretely impede social and economic development, while also eroding the legitimacy of governments and increasing already existing ethnic divides. Overall, although these trends taken individually may not directly lead to violence, if they occur together over a prolonged period, they might reach their most challenging stages. The most distressing indicator observed so far has been the evidence of youthful age structures and of a youth bulge. A study directed by Richard Cincotta and Elizabeth Leahy has highlighted how, starting from the 1970s, 80-85% of conflicts have emerged in nations with an ongoing youth bulge. Different analyses have also demonstrated that trying to limit or impose a decline on the youth bulge does not reduce the risk of conflict; however, an increase in age-structural maturity might help settle the conflict environment. In general, the youth bulge is associated with political volatility, further impeding a country from attaining liberal democracy and incentivising governments to focus all their effort only on limiting dissent and maintaining order. Moreover, in

younger societies, there is a higher risk of having educated young people underemployed, frustrated, and resentful towards individuals who enjoy more privileges, thus being more prone to mobilisation and recruitment by criminal and political organisations. In a similar scenario, other demographic stresses should also be considered. For instance, high rates of urban growth were twice as likely to contribute to the uproar of civil conflicts in the 1990s. Alongside the urbanisation phenomenon, ethnic shifts, migration and the possibility for a skewed sex distribution should also be considered. Ethnoreligious shifts are considered politically salient by the group with whom the state has identified when changes in the ethnic or religious composition start to be perceived as threats. Tensions could arise, and political protests and violence become more likely to occur. Also, an increase in the influx of refugees and cross-border migrants evokes fear and anti-immigrant tensions. Lastly, in regions where sons are strongly preferred to daughters, the development of a high sex ratio leaves many men unmarried, creating a generation of male individuals more likely to be involved in violent crime, compared to their married counterparts (Cincotta, 2010, pp.77-92).

Aside from economic and demographic factors, other elements can be considered in this dissertation. Low incomes and stagnant growth create large numbers of disaffected people, who are more easily mobilised into armed rebel groups. Horizontal inequalities and the exclusion of cultural-identity groups contribute to the rise of grievances, political tensions and violence. Environmental pressure and the struggle over resources can also lead to the escalation of violence and green wars. Ultimately, the failure to manage spillovers from wars in neighbouring countries affects both political instability and development (Fukuda-Parr, 2010, pp.21-25).

3.3 HOW DOES THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN SECURITY APPLY TO INDIA

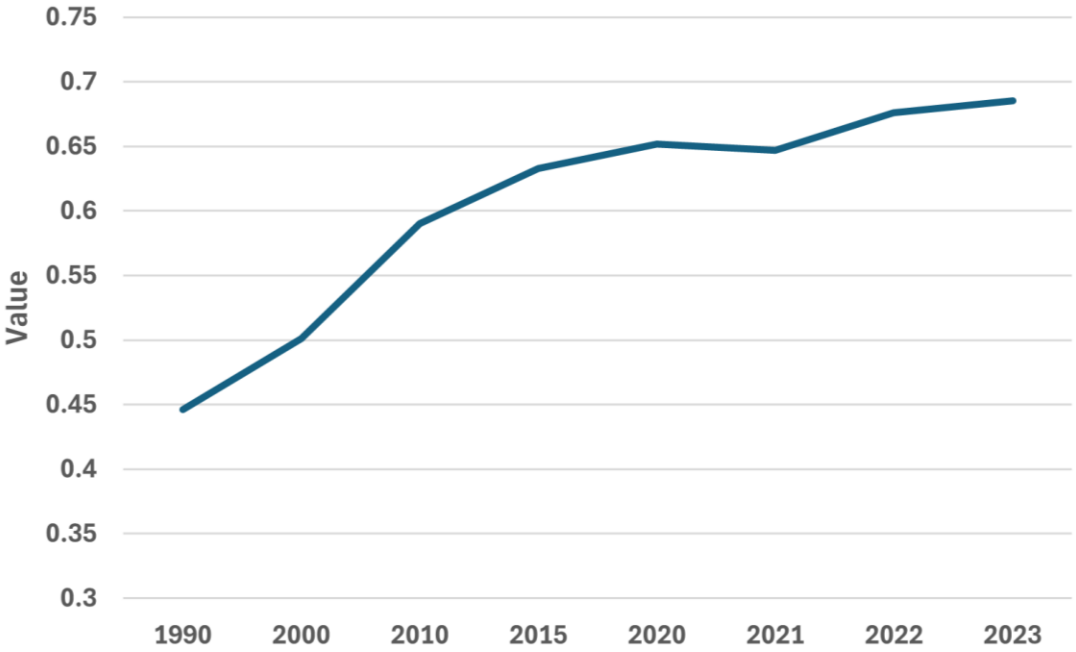
To understand why the conceptualisation of human security is important in the study of the Indian subcontinent, one should briefly consider whether the economic growth that the country has been experiencing since the ‘80s, which has enabled India to hold the third position in terms of Purchasing Power Parity, along with a GDP growth of 8.15%, is a sustainable model. This configuration must be capable of supporting the nation's international competitiveness while also allowing policies to address ongoing internal socio-economic issues (Narain Roy, 2007, p. 88).

What this study primarily addressed in *Chapter 2* highlights that this is not the case for India. Economic growth is undeniable, but it is not accompanied by positive internal developments. Various policies exist, as will be highlighted in *Chapter 4*, but certain aspects of human insecurity and underdevelopment persist. As an example, demographic data have emphasised how issues related to ageism, gender gap, the under-funding and over-stretching of public health, jobless growth, and ethnic divides are still pre-eminent themes of India’s society.

In the following sections, by addressing the "basic human needs" approach, which corresponds best to the Indian reality, some insights into significant development and human security issues will be proposed.

3.3.1 MEASURING SECURITY IN INDIA

Figure 56. *Human Development Index for India (1990-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from Human Development Report 2025, data retrieved from: United Nations Development Programme. (2025). *Human Development Report 2025- A matter of choice: People and possibilities in the age of AI*.

Starting the discussion by providing a measure of human security in India through the latest Human Development Report, published in 2025 by the United Nations Development Programme, it is evident that India is positioned in the "Medium Human Development" category, ranking 130th out of 193 countries. From 1990 to 2023, its score has improved, rising from 0.45 to 0.29, representing a positive increase of 1.31% (United Nations Development Programme, 2025).

The country's life expectancy is the highest since the index began (it rose from 58.6 years in 1990 to 72 years in 2023), indicating a positive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Nowadays, children are expected to remain in the schooling system for 13 years on average, compared to the 8.2 years in 1990. Economically speaking, the Gross National Income per capita has increased from $ 2,167.22 (1990) to $ 9,046.76 (2023), based on 2021 PPP$. More than 135 million Indians have successfully escaped multidimensional poverty (*India's Human Development Continues to Make Progress, Ranks 130 Out of 193 Countries*, n.d.).

The report has presented a generally positive image of the subcontinent. However, as already discussed in this chapter, the HDI alone does not measure all the possible components of human security, and by following the “basic human needs” approach, it is necessary to consider other dimensions as well.

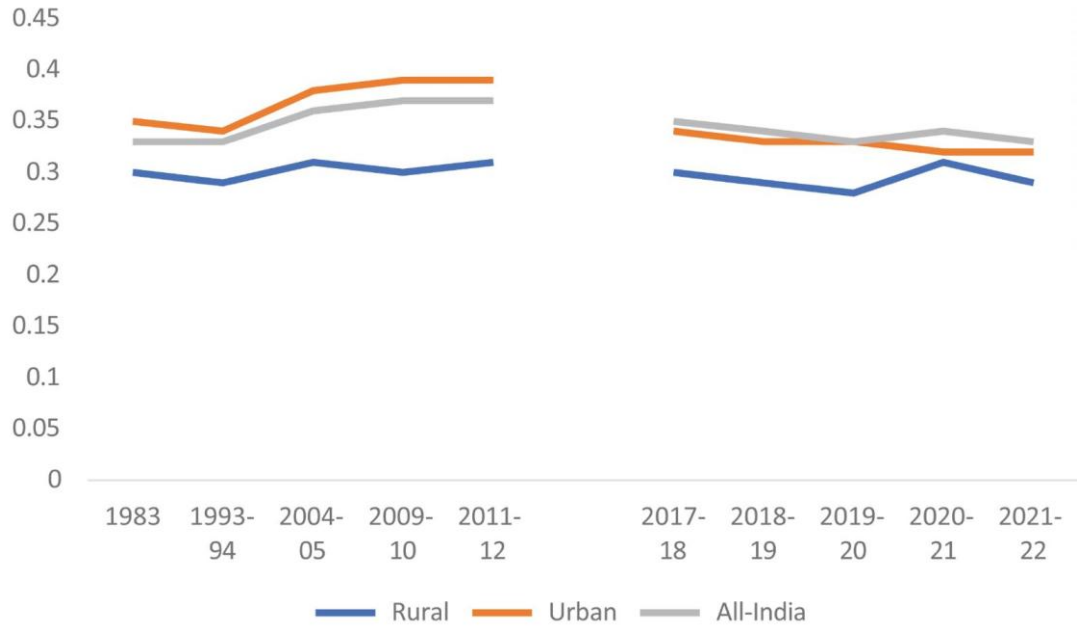
3.3.2 ECONOMIC (IN)SECURITY

The distribution of economic growth within the country has had significant implications for the dynamics of inequality. Having already addressed the GDP growth and the PPP index, the topic can be further assessed by observing the emergence of very high net worth individuals and comparing India’s average incomes with those of China. Regarding the presence of billionaires in the subcontinent, Forbes rankings have shown that the number of Indians with net wealth exceeding US$1 billion increased from 1 to 52 to 162 between 1991, 2011, and 2022. In the same timeframe, the share of adults filing an income tax return has risen from <1% to 9%. In terms of incomes, up to 1975, the average incomes of both the Chinese and the Indians were considered equal; however, starting from the 2000s, incomes in China grew 35%-50% higher than those of their counterparts. Considering the overall period from 1960 to 2022, incomes in China have grown faster than those in India (Bharti et al., 2024, p. 2).

By creating a consistent framework through the combination of national income accounts, wealth aggregates, tax tabulations, rich lists, and surveys on income, consumption, and wealth, the results indicate the presence of extreme levels of inequality in India, compared to international standards. Inequality declined post-Independence until the early 1980s, but it rose again around the 2000s. Between 2022 and 2023, only 1% of the population benefited from 22.6% of the national income. The top 1%'s wealth share in 2022-2023 was at its highest level since 1961, at approximately 40.1%. The “Billionaire Raj” is currently considered more unequal than the British Raj, defined by the colonialist presence (Bharti et al., 2024, pp. 1-3).

Concerning inequalities in consumption expenditures, income and wealth, both individual and group-based, further data can be discussed. Interpersonal inequality in India increased between 1991 and 2012 in terms of consumption, income/earnings, and wealth. In addition, the urban sector has experienced sharper growth in these trends (Vakulabharanam & Motiram, 2024, p. 10). By disaggregating the individual data, different tendencies are further visible.

Figure 57. *Individual inequality (Gini) in monthly Per-Capita Consumption Expenditure in India (1983-2021/2022)*



Source: Vakulabharanam, V., & Motiram, S. (2024). In Jodhka, S. S., & Rehbein, B. (Eds.), *Global Handbook of Inequality*. Springer Nature Switzerland[27]

Between 1983 and 2012, a visible increasing trend was observed, particularly in terms of urban inequality. For the period 2017-2023, there is instead an uneven development and a slight decrease (Vakulabharanam & Motiram, 2024, p.6).

Concerning income/earnings inequality, the focus of many scholars has been on the shares of national income held by the bottom and top groups, as measured by the World Income Database. For the lower half of the population, there is a decreasing trend since the 1990s, whereas for the top groups (10%, 1% and 0.1%) the opposite condition has been noted. If the data are instead divided between rural, urban, and all-India levels, the estimates from the India Human Development Survey highlight that income inequality is higher than consumption inequality for all three sectors (Vakulabharanam & Motiram, 2024, pp. 7-8).

Lastly, individual wealth inequality is considered even higher than the other two indices, with an increase at all levels (rural, urban and all-India) between 1991 and 2012. Once again, the increment has been driven by the urban sector (Vakulabharanam & Motiram, 2024, pp.9-10).

Table 4. *Individual wealth inequality (Gini) in India (1991-2018)*

Year	Rural	Urban	All-India
1991	0.62	0.73	0.65

[27] For the period 1983-2012 the source is NSS Consumption Expenditure Surveys, while for 2017-2022 the reference is to PLFS.

2002	0.63	0.71	0.66
2012	0.67	0.77	0.74
2018	0.64	0.71	0.68

Source: Vakulabharanam, V., & Motiram, S. (2024). In Jodhka, S. S., & Rehbein, B. (Eds.), *Global Handbook of Inequality* (pp.1-18). Springer Nature Switzerland[28]

Group-based inequalities are instead considered in broader terms and include different typologies:

- Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) [29] and Other Backward Classes (OBCs)[30];
- Space as sector (rural and urban divide) or geographical region;
- Gender gap.

Table 5. *Average consumption and population shares by social groups in India (2021-2022)*

	Rural		**Urban**	
	Share (%)	**Average (Rs.)**	**Share (%)**	**Average (Rs.)**
STs	12.14	6130.643	3.90	10311.39
SCs	21.86	6759.376	15.17	10726.67
OBCs	46.04	7264.036	45.06	11801.37
Other Hindu	14.57	8662.718	28.18	15044.13
Other Muslim	4.45	7285.091	5.80	11196.12
Others	0.95	14348.44	1.90	17817.89
Total	100.00	7287.793	100.00	12572.82

Source: Vakulabharanam, V., & Motiram, S. (2024). In Jodhka, S. S., & Rehbein, B. (Eds.), *Global Handbook of Inequality* (pp.1-18). Springer Nature Switzerland[31]

Starting once again with inequality in consumption data, as evident from Table 4, for the most recent period available (2021/22), a clear hierarchy exists between rural and urban trends. STs and

[28] Data based on NSS All India Debt & Investment Survey.

[29] Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are classifications used within Indian society to identify social groups historically subjected to social and economic discrimination. Scheduled Castes, often referred to as Dalits, are considered "Untouchables" and are subject to severe restrictions on their rights, including limitations on access to public services and education. Scheduled Tribes encompass India's various indigenous communities, defined by distinct languages and cultural practices and located in remote areas (*Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes | Research Starters | EBSCO Research*, n.d.).

[30] The Other Backward Classes (OBCs) comprise those sections of the population socially and educationally discriminated against. They differ from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and can include Christians and Muslims (Pillai, 2007, p.33).

[31] Data based on PLFS 2021-22 unit level data.

SCs have lower levels of consumption both in the rural and urban environments, while "Others" (mostly Christians) are at the top, although representing the smallest percentage of the population. It is also evident how upper-caste Hindus ("Other Hindu") have higher indices of consumption than STs, SCs, OBCs, and "Other Muslim" in both rural and urban sectors (Vakulabharanam & Motiram, 2024, p. 11). Data further proposed by Vakulabharanam & Motiram (2024) reveal how inequalities among these groups increased between 1993/1994 and 2004/2005, but later slightly reversed the trend. Between 2017/2018 and 2021/2022, inequality among these classes has stabilised.

Concerning existing inequalities in earnings, Vakulabharanam & Motiram (2024) observe evident gender disparities. The Labour Force Participation Rate is low for girls and women, specifically in urban areas. Moreover, in both rural and urban environments, earnings are significantly lower for casual workers and higher for self-employed individuals. Regarding the social groups division, upper-caste Hindus have higher earnings compared to STs, SCs, OBCs, and upper-caste Muslims; however, they are once again surpassed by the "Others" category (non-Hindu and non-Muslim upper castes) (Vakulabharanam & Motiram, 2024, pp. 13-14).

Wealth inequality also shows similar patterns in terms of class division. Upper-caste Hindus have an average wealth of Rs. 659,385.9 across both rural and urban sectors, which is higher than that of STs, SCs, OBCs, and upper-caste Muslims. However, it does not compare to the average wealth of "Others", which is approximately Rs. 1.5 million (Vakulabharanam & Motiram, 2024, pp. 15-16).

In conclusion, this section has analysed the persistence of inequalities within Indian society, despite evident economic growth. Between the 1980s and 2012, there has been a significant increase in inequality in terms of consumption, earnings, and wealth, both for individuals and social groups (Vakulabharanam & Motiram, 2024, p. 16). Concurrently, the number of billionaires has risen, but tax evasion remains a significant concern.

3.3.3 SECURING CULTURAL IDENTITIES

Another aspect related to the "basic human needs" approach to human security, and that deeply interests the subcontinent, is the protection of cultural identities. The following issue will be analysed both in terms of religious and caste divisions.

The 2020 Pew Global Religious Restrictions Report signalled that India has the highest score for social or society-based restrictions on religion in the world (9.6 out of 10) and is undergoing a trajectory of "popular persecution". Religious restrictions have become a chronic problem in Indian society and politics, and data strongly highlight that intense religious persecution is a pervasive

feature on the subcontinent since the 1990s. Both India's Social Hostility Index (SHI)[32] and Government Restriction Index (GRI)[33] scores have remained high since 2007 (Shah, 2021, p. 8). In 2022 alone, the score on the SHI was 9.3/10, and the GRI score was 6.4/10 (Hindu Data Team, 2025). Further studies of religious restrictions and violence suggest that the incidence and severity of these kinds of conflicts are subject to significant regional variations. Usually, the states most affected by these phenomena are concentrated in northern, western and central India, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Jharkhand. If, usually, these episodes are studied mainly with a focus on the Muslim-Hindu divide, it is important to note that also Christian groups are suffering. Between 2011 and mid-2020, the United Christian Forum and the Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India documented 1,676 incidents aimed at intimidating and harassing Christian groups. The 50% of these incidents occurred in Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Jharkhand. Other areas of interest were in the northern and central states.

The discrimination between castes and tribes is another important reality concerning human security. The caste system is one of the oldest instruments of social stratification in India and in the world more broadly speaking. The Hindu order of *varna* hierarchy was formally explained by a sage named Manu in the *Manusmriti*, a manuscript dating back to the first or second century CE. The book described four major divisions of the Hindu society, defined as a hierarchy of *varnas*. The upper class comprises *Brahmins*, who are scholars and priests by occupation. Below the *Brahmins* were the *Kshatriyas* (warriors), the *Vaishyas* (traders) and the *Shudras* (peasant/artisan/labouring groups). A fifth category was later on added: the *achhot*, or "untouchables". This last category was considered outside of the Hindu religious system. Overall, all groups are immutable, and participation is determined by birth (Jodhka, 2024, p.3). Formally, the Constitution of India prohibited this system in 1950; however, the cultural embeddedness of caste in the social and institutional framework is inescapable. The most disadvantaged classes, as already discussed, are the Scheduled Castes (Dalits) and the Scheduled Tribes. They are characterised by disadvantages in educational achievements, limited upward mobility in employment, and restricted land ownership. Unemployment rates are definitely higher for SCs and STs, and most elite universities and technical schools refuse to enrol Dalits. Moreover, in rural India, Dalits are usually settled in restricted hamlets, and they do not have access to waterways. They are impeded from accessing temples and public domains more generally.

[32] The Social Hostility Index (SHI) is based on thirteen indicators describing ways in which non-state groups and individuals infringe on religious beliefs and practices. Some of these acts include religiously biased crimes, mob violence, and attempts to prevent religious groups from growing or operating (Shah, 2021, p.12).

[33] The Government Restriction Index (GRI) is formed by twenty indicators examining how national and local governments restrict religious practices (Shah, 2021, p.12).

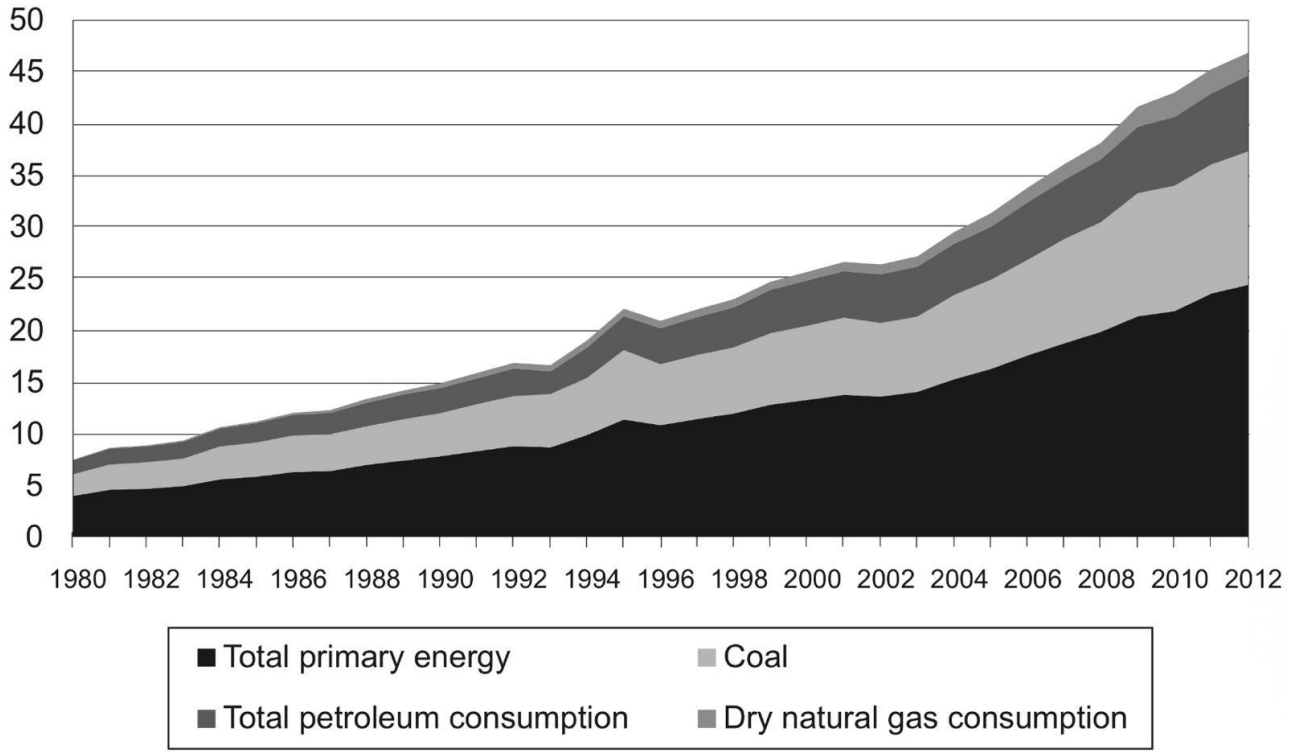
Caste violence is also an intrinsic problem and one of the most brutal manifestations of social stratification. Abuses afflict Dalits and STs, along with caste-inflected speech, economic boycotts, systemic rape, lynching and mass atrocities. Government reports from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) observed that in 2020 alone, more than 50,000 crimes were reported against SCs (Sato, 2025).

3.3.4 ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

One final topic to address to fully understand which human security dynamics structurally affect India is environmental security.

According to Sikdar and Mukhopadhyay (2016), India's economic growth, particularly since the early 2000s, is expected to be accompanied by increased energy use and higher air pollution in the near future. Currently, the subcontinent is highly reliant on fossil fuels to meet its energy needs and sustain the average annual growth of industries, including mining, manufacturing and electricity. The country's production of cold, lignite, crude petroleum, and natural gas has increased from 3.1 quadrillion British thermal units (BTU) in 1980 to 15.9 quadrillion BTU in 2012 (Sikdar & Mukhopadhyay, 2016, p. 107).

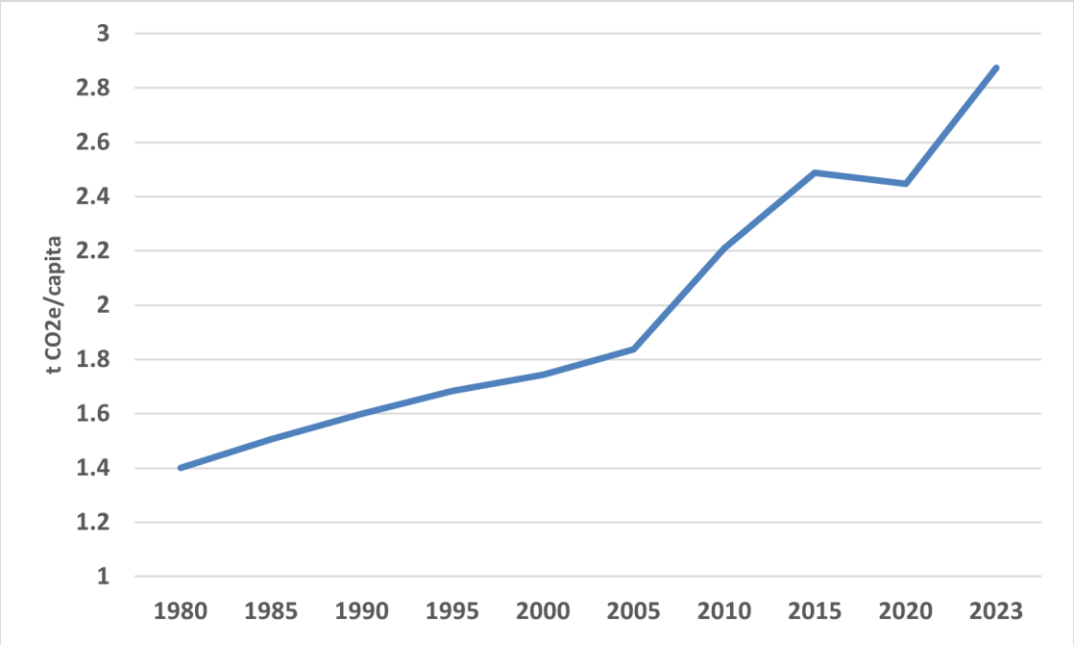
Figure 58. *Energy consumption in India in quadrillion British Thermal Units (1980-2012)*



Source: Sikdar, C., & Mukhopadhyay, K. (2016). Impact Of Population on Carbon Emission: Lessons From India. *Asia-Pacific Development Journal*, *23*(1), 105–132.

Such a high reliance on fossil fuels clashes with the need to address climate change issues. India, considering the importance of the agricultural sector and the consequences of decreased wheat and rice yields, as well as increased sea levels and water stress, is particularly vulnerable to environmental threats. Moreover, one of the most significant challenges the country faces is the high percentage of greenhouse gas emissions, which have increased significantly in the current century (Sikdar & Mukhopadhyay, 2016, p. 107).

Figure 59. *Total greenhouse gas emissions excluding LULUCF per capita (t CO2e/capita)[34] in India (1980-2023)*



Source: Author's own elaboration from World Bank, data retrieved at the following link:
https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&country=IND

While the analysis so far has focused on energy consumption patterns and greenhouse gas emissions, another dimension to consider is environmental protection, which promotes human development. The Bhopal disaster is a significant example. In 1984, 45 tons of methyl isocyanate escaped from an insecticide plant owned by the Indian subsidiary of the American firm Union Carbide Corporation. The gas spill caused the immediate death of thousands of people and further killed between 15,000 and 20,000 individuals. Some half a million survivors suffered respiratory issues, eye irritation or blindness, and other maladies resulting from exposure to the toxic gas.

[34] Total annual emissions of the six greenhouse gases (GHG) covered by the Kyoto Protocol (carbon dioxide (CO2), methane (CH4), nitrous oxide (N2O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), and sulphurhexafluoride (SF6)) from the energy, industry, waste, and agriculture sectors, standardized to carbon dioxide equivalent values divided by the economy's population. This measure excludes GHG fluxes caused by Land Use Change, Land Use, and Forestry (LULUCF), as these fluxes have larger uncertainties (*World Development Indicators | DataBank*, n.d.).

Investigations later established that a lack of safety procedures and understaffing contributed to the disaster (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025a). Currently, the remaining toxic waste resulting from the spillover has been buried in and around the plant, contaminating residents' water supplies and harming their health. The tragedy has also exacerbated the poverty of the surrounding communities. In many families, the primary wage earner died or became too ill to work, and women and children suffered the aftermath (Dummett, 2024). In January 2025, the tragedy was reignited when 337 tonnes of toxic waste from Bhopal were moved to Tarapur. Protests have immediately erupted and have escalated into stone-throwing and attempted self-immolations (Tiwari, 2025).

CHAPTER 4: THE NATIONAL SECURITISATION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC SECTORS

The fourth and final chapter of this dissertation focuses on the second dependent variable and attempts to provide a conclusive answer to the question that has guided the entire research: “How has India's demographic transition affected major socio-economic sectors, and in what ways has that transition been securitised in national policy and discourse?”

The previous chapter provided an in-depth explanation of the concept of human security. It established that, in the case of India, it is necessary to adopt an approach linked to “basic human needs” since the issues highlighted by the demographic transition concern economic, personal, and communal security, as well as health. If they are not addressed, they will have a significant impact on the nation's development. Therefore, the objective of this chapter is to assess how governments, from the 1980s to the 2020s, have securitised the themes of unemployment, religious divide, gender gap, and ageism, and whether they were successful in addressing or exacerbating the existing socio-economic issues. This final section will be divided into four parts, each focusing on a different highlighted topic.

4.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL POLICIES TO ADDRESS UNEMPLOYMENT

According to Article 39(a) of the Indian Constitution, “The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood”. In addition, Article 41 also provides that “The State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want” (*Constitution of India | Legislative Department | India*, n.d.). These two principles represent what, according to the data reported in *Chapter 2*, appears to be a unfulfilled promise on the part of the Indian government. Between the 1950s and the 1980s, employment growth was perceived as inevitable in relation to the country's rapid economic growth. However, the effective growth was too low to adequately absorb the growing labour force. Thus, the issue of unemployment was rising, but the governments were not ready to prioritise the theme due to some resource constraints. Although not a priority, some employment programs were occasionally implemented at the national level. However, they were considered too specific in nature and had a limited impact on the generational issue of unemployment. Moreover, proper national planning was missing. As a result, the majority of these ad hoc policies suffered from poor maintenance and failed to have any lasting impact (Deskar, 2025, p.1).

This section aims to analyse different policies implemented between the 1980s and 2000s to tackle unemployment and the lack of skills. The discussion will be divided into three parts: 1980s-1990s, 1990s-2000s, and 2000-2020s.

4.1.1 UNEMPLOYMENT POLICIES IMPLEMENTED BETWEEN 1980s-1990s

The first section is dedicated to the national policies implemented between the 1980s and the 1990s.

The first measure of interest is related to the Indian project of implementing a system of planned economy. Theoretical efforts in this direction can be traced back to prior to India's independence, including the National Planning Committee established by the Indian National Congress in 1933, the Bombay Plan and the Gandhian Plan in 1944, the People's Plan in 1945, and the Sarvodaya Plan in 1950. The proper introduction of the First Five-Year Plan happened in 1951, under the socialist influence of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The objective was to promote a rapid rise in the standards of living through the efficient exploitation of the country's resources, the increased production and the creation of employment opportunities. There was a Planning Commission charged with the task of assessing all resources of the country, augmenting deficiencies, and formulating the actual plans and priorities (*FIVE YEAR PLANS | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government of India*, n.d.).

Table 6. *Outline of various Five-Year Plans (1951-2017)*

	Targets	**Highlights**	**Assessments**
First Plan (1951-1956)	Target Growth: 2.1 % Actual Growth 3.6 %	- Based on the Harrod-Domar Model; - Aim: rehabilitation of refugees, rapid agricultural development to achieve food self-sufficiency, and inflation control.	- Successful plan; - Active role of the state; - Five Indian Institutes of Technology were funded.
Second Plan (1956-1961)	Target Growth: 4.5% Actual Growth: 4.3%	- Based on the Nehru-Mahalanobis Model; - Conceived in an atmosphere of economic stability;	- It could not be fully implemented; - Hydroelectric power projects were implemented.

		- Supporting rapid industrialisation with a focus on heavy and basic industries.	
Third Plan (1961-1966)	Target Growth: 5.6% Actual Growth: 2.8%	- Aimed at making India self-reliant; - Focus on agriculture to support exports and industry;	- Considered as a failure; - Unforeseen events: Chinese aggression (1952), Indo-Pak war (1965), severe drought (1965-1966).
Three Annual Plans Plan Holiday (1966-1969)	/	- Devaluation of the rupee due to the 3rd Plan failure; - Inflationary recession; - Emphasis on agriculture.	- A new agricultural strategy based on the widespread distribution of high-yielding varieties of seeds, extensive use of fertilisers, exploitation of irrigation potential and soil conservation; - The previous economic shock was absorbed.
Fourth Plan (1969-1974)	Target Growth: 5.7% Actual Growth: 3.3%	- Emphasis once again on the agricultural sector; - Implementation of Family Planning Programs; - Nationalisation of fourteen major banks.	- It was a failure, also related to the constant issue of Bangladeshi refugees arriving in India due to the Indo-Pak war.
Fifth Plan	Target Growth: 4.4%	- Economic crisis;	- High inflation and the plan failed.

(1974-1979)	Actual Growth: 4.8%	- Two objectives: decreasing poverty and reaching self-reliance; - Promotion of a better distribution of income.	
Rolling Plan (1978-1980)	/	- The emphasis was on **employment**; - Creating conditions of economic expansion.	- Issues with the succeeding governments.
Sixth Plan (1980-1985)	Target Growth: 5.2% Actual Growth: 5.7%	- Increasing national income, modernising technology, and ensuring decreases in poverty and **unemployment**.	- Most targets were achieved, but in many regions, severe famine conditions persisted.
Seventh Plan (1985-1990)	Target Growth: 5.0% Actual Growth: 6.0%	- Aimed at accelerating the production of food grains and increasing **employment** opportunities.	- The plan was successful.
Eight Plan (1992-1997)	Target Growth: 5.6 % Actual Growth: 6.8%	- The balance of payment worsens its position due to rising debt and widening budget deficits; - Liberalisation is introduced.	- Higher economic growth, also in agriculture, manufacturing, and import/exports.
Ninth Plan (1997-2002)	Target Growth: 6.5% Actual Growth: 5.4%	- It assigned priority to agriculture and rural development, trying to generate adequate productive **employment** and eradicate poverty.	- Overall successful, although the actual growth did not reach the target.
Tenth Plan (2002-2007)	Target Growth: 8 % Actual Growth: 7.6%	- Set 'monitorable targets' for 11 key indicators of development; - Some of these targets included reduction in	- Successful in reducing the poverty ratio and in increasing literacy

		gender gaps in literacy and wage rate, reduction in Infant and maternal mortality rates, improvement in literacy, access to potable drinking water, cleaning of major polluted rivers, etc.	rates along with economic growth.
Eleventh Plan (2007-2012)	Target Growth: 9% Actual Growth: 8%	- Aimed at sustaining economic growth, reducing poverty, creating **employment** opportunities, and providing access to essential services in health and education.	- There was an effective reduction in unemployment, headcount ratio of poverty, dropout rates, gender gap in literacy, infant mortality, total fertility, malnutrition, etc.
Twelfth Plan (2012-2017)	Target growth: 8%	- Second global financial crisis; - The priority was sustaining economic growth, while also ensuring inclusivity and sustainability.	- It acknowledged the ongoing failure of the manufacturing unit; - Despite a satisfactory growth in the GDP, the Planning Commission highlighted the loss of around 7 million jobs, incentivising the narrative of "**job-less growth**".

Source: FIVE YEAR PLANS | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government Of India. (n.d.). https://www.mospi.gov.in/five-year-plans-0, *Economic Planning in India- Five Year Plans*. (n.d.). byjus.com. Retrieved September 22, 2025, from https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/ias-preparation-economy-planning-in-india/ and Devm. (2021, May 27). CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE 12TH FIVE-YEAR PLAN - Jus Corpus. *Jus Corpus*. https://www.juscorpus.com/critical-analysis-of-the-12th-five-year-plan/

In 2015, the BJP government decided to discontinue implementing the Five-Year Plans and instead adopt a seven-year strategy, followed by a 15-year vision document. Overall, what is observable from these policies is that national economic interventions were complex and subject to international and regional events. Employment was not always a priority, and the last plan concluded with a negative note regarding the unemployment rate (Singh, 2021).

Three other programs are worth mentioning in this timeframe. The first one is the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP). It was introduced in 1980, during the sixth five-year plan, to replace the "food for work" programme. It was a centrally funded policy, with a 50:50 sharing basis among the national government of India and individual state governments. Its objectives were to generate more employment opportunities in rural areas for unemployed and underemployed men and women, and create durable community assets to sustain the rural infrastructure and foster the growth of the rural economy (Mishra, 2014, p. 73). Under NREP, preference in policy implementation was given to landless labour and, more specifically, to SCs and STs. Moreover, wages were paid partly in cash and partly in food grain, 1-2 kg/day/head (*National Rural Employment Programmes (NREP)*, n.d.). Later on, the program was merged with the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) to contribute to the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) (*[Solved] National Rural Employment Program (NREP) Was Launched* -, 2025).

The Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme was another project implemented in the 1980s, aiming to address rural poverty and provide employment opportunities for the landless. The objectives of the Government were to provide a guarantee of employment to at least one member of every landless household for up to 100 days per year and to strengthen existing rural infrastructure. The government entirely funded the policy, but it was up to the individual states to decide whether and how to implement it (Mishra, 2014, p. 73).

One last policy implementation to mention is the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, which was created from the merger of the NREP and the RLEGP. It was launched in 1989 and focused on expanding wage employment opportunities to rural villages. Its primary aim was to generate additional employment, and secondarily, it was supposed to create productive community assets for direct benefits. The share of assistance between the central and state governments was 80:20. The scheme undertook the development of road construction, irrigation, and other projects (Mishra, 2014, pp. 73-74). However, when the Ministry of Rural Development analysed the practical application of the JRY, many shortcomings were discovered concerning the critical areas of targeting, the inadequacy of resources, the insignificant employment generation and the existence of fictitious reports. Rural families below the poverty line were not effectively tackled through the provision or registration of

employment. Registrations were not carried out legally, and family cards were not issued to the beneficiaries under the schemes. Employment was often conducted through informal work arrangements. In most cases, the individuals concerned did not receive the necessary documentation or were unaware of the services to which they were entitled (Das, 2000).

4.1.2 UNEMPLOYMENT POLICIES IMPLEMENTED BETWEEN 1990s-2000s

The second section is focused on the policies developed between the 1990s and 2000s. After economic liberalisation, employment growth was consistently equal to or below labour force growth. Job growth in the urban sector generated a positive employment growth rate at the national level, capable of neutralising the negative growth rate in agriculture. Agrarian distress, in fact, was conditioning the shift of the working-age population to urban employment opportunities. This resulted in the overcrowding of the urban informal economy and the need to redistribute the existing employment rate. Moreover, the proportion of formal workers increased only in the informal sector (Kerswell & Pratap, 2018, p.20). In empirical terms, the share of informal workers increased from 57% in 1999/2000 to 68% in 2011/2012 (Goldar & Aggarwal, 2019, p.110).

During this timeframe, instead of focusing solely on comprehensive employment policies, governments were encouraged to implement strategies that targeted specific sectors crucial to creating new job opportunities. Sectoral strategies tried to target manufacturing, but they failed to follow a path of industrialisation. Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs), encompassing employment, training, subsidies, public employment programs, and entrepreneurship promotion, were highly promoted within the Indian subcontinent (Verick, 2019, p. 501). Within the subcontinent, their concrete application was facilitated through several programs, including the National Career Service and the National Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Policies (Verick, 2019, p. 515). However, they were unable to tackle the entirety of the issue alone, especially considering the additional problems, such as the low and declining female labour participation rate (Verick, 2019, p. 501).

Another important policy was the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojagar Yojana (SGSY), implemented in 1999 through the combination of several self-employment programs. SGSY sought to promote self-help groups which were trained in specific skills, thus allowing them to formulate micro-enterprise proposals. Activities were based on local resources, skills and market. Overall, the aim was to lift low-income families above the poverty line and provide them with support through bank loans and state subsidies (Mishra, 2014, p. 72).

4.1.3 UNEMPLOYMENT POLICIES IMPLEMENTED SINCE THE EARLY 2000s

In the final section of this timeline, three key elements are important for discussion: skill development initiatives, employment generation programs, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Starting from the skill development initiatives, their importance has grown after the ILO estimated that the country will probably face a shortage of 29 million skilled personnel by 2030 (*Skill India Mission | IBEF*, n.d.). Thus, different Indian governments have focused their interests on enhancing the skill development landscape. Several programs have been launched to equip the workforce with the relevant skills necessary to meet the demands of the job market and contribute to the country's economic growth. Some of these will be further discussed here (vajiramandravi, 2025).

- **National Skill Development Corporation** (NSDC): Established in 2008, it is a not-for-profit public limited company dedicated to enhancing comprehensive skill development among the younger generations. It provides funds, loans and other financial products to enterprises, start-ups and organisations. The primary aim is to support private sector initiatives invested in vocational training, ensuring that financial barriers do not limit access. This Corporation is considered the strategic partner of Skill India Mission (*About Us | National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)*, n.d.).
- **Skill India Mission**: the initiative, implemented in 2015 by PM Narendra Modi, aims at helping India in the process of self-reliance. It focuses on improving comprehensive skill development training programmes that help bridge the gap between industry demands and the preparedness of the employment force. Through this program, trainees gain certifications and can further expand their curriculum. The Mission has been implemented through multiple schemes, and the most recent results have led Modi to approve the continuation and restructuring of the Central Sector Scheme “Skill India Programme (SIP)” till 2026 with an overlay outlay of Rs. 8,800 crore (US$1.02 billion) (*Skill India Mission | IBEF*, n.d.).
- **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana** (PMKVY): This project was also launched in 2015 to encourage skill development by providing free short-duration training and monetary rewards dedicated to the younger sections of the population. The program was renewed in 2016 with the intention of providing its support until 2020. The newer version was supposed to address broader sectors and more geographical areas. Key components of the PMKVY are short-term training, recognition of prior learning, and special projects. Overall, the scheme is implemented through “Centrally Sponsored Centrally Managed” and “Centrally Sponsored State Managed” components (*Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 2.0 (PMKVY 2.0) 2016-20 | Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship*, n.d.).

The employment generation programs define another sector essential for the Indian Government in relation to creating employment opportunities. Various measures have been implemented since the 2000s; however, only a few of them will be further analysed in this case.

- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** (MGNREG): This 2005 act aimed at enhancing the security of people in rural areas through the guarantee of 100 days of wage employment in a financial year, in exchange for unskilled work. The jobs created in this way were employed to increase land and water resources and improve living conditions in rural areas. The MGNREG had its foundations in the two principles of universality and self-selection. Anyone who requested a job would receive one within 15 days, along with a specified minimum wage. This measure was a novelty compared to previous policies since it eliminated targeting mistakes and was based on a demand-driven architecture. Additionally, it was expected to enhance transparency and accountability, while also reducing corruption. The costs were divided in a 75:25 ratio between the Central and State Governments, and the most salient features consisted of (a) provision of unskilled manual employment; (b) employment provided within 15 days and in case of malpractice, a daily unemployment allowance would have been paid; (c) 1/3 of people employed had to be women; (d) the assured minimum wages had to be paid weekly; (e) each district was supposed to prepare some employment project in the field of environmental security. The MGNREGA is still being implemented, and the data have shown that, up to 2024, 417.7 million people have found employment opportunities, with a 13% increase compared to 2023. According to experts, the programme has the potential to absorb employment requests and create assets in rural India (Deskar, 2025, pp. 2-3).
- **Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme** (PMEGP): The PMEGP, launched in August 2008, is a credit-link subsidy mechanism aiming at generating self-employment through the creation of micro-enterprises in the non-farm sector. Any individual above 18 years of age can apply and will receive a loan for his/her company. For example, in the category "setting up new micro enterprise (units)", the maximum amount in the manufacturing sector is ₹50 lakh. For the business/service sector, it is ₹20 lakh (*1. Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme, PMEGP | Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises*, n.d.).

The last element to discuss, in order to fully understand how different Indian governments have attempted to address the issue of unemployment through national policies and whether they have been successful, is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has increased livelihood insecurity among workers. Even if the economic growth shares have recovered after the pandemic, individuals

are still suffering the consequences in their daily activities. Due to this event, India has suffered a severe economic contraction, followed by a consistent increase in the unemployment rate, particularly among young workers in low-income urban areas (Dhingra & Kondirolli, 2022, pp. 223-224). Active Labour Market Policies were renewed during and after this period, aiming to sustain existing programs, such as the MGNREG, and to prevent the employment rate from dropping further. Concurrently, new proposals were addressed, particularly for the urban environment (Dhingra & Kondirolli, 2022, p.230). An example is the Decentralised Urban Employment and Training Programme (DUET) suggested by Jean Dreze in 2020 (Katakam, 2022). The idea behind this scheme was for the government to issue "job stamps", convertible into one person-day of work in a specific period, and distribute them across approved institutions (schools, government departments, health centres, etc.). Those institutions would be in charge of organising the work demand, and the government would sustain them by paying wages directly into the employees' accounts (Drèze, 2020). Later, in 2021, Drèze revised his proposal by theorising a new DUET capable of prioritising the need for women's employment. This kind of involvement should be organised on a part-time basis and would guarantee them to gain some economic independence (Drèze, 2021). Along with the suggestion still under analysis, some additional concrete measures were also implemented. It is the case of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana (ABRY) Programme, launched in 2020 and aimed at increasing the creation of new jobs and positions through the guarantee of governmental loans (*Employment Generation Schemes/ Programmes of Government of India | Directorate General of Employment (DGE) | GOI |India*, n.d.).

Overall, what has been analysed for the entirety of the timeline (1980s-2020s) is that numerous policies, more or less effective, have been implemented to guarantee economic security, as in the "basic human needs" approach, to the Indian population. However, long-term unemployment persists as a structural feature of the subcontinent's labour market (Dhingra & Kondirolli, 2022, p. 232). Thus, more debate is now necessary, especially if, as Tiziano Marino (CeSPI Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale, 2025) suggests, India needs to shift its focus to manufacturing and services to create more employment and further economic growth.

4.2 NATIONAL POLICIES FOR ADDRESSING THE RELIGIOUS DIVIDE

The theme of religious divisions has already been deeply explored in both *Chapters 2* and *3*. Thus, in the following sections, the focus will be mainly on the laws already existing regarding the guarantee of freedom of faith and the regulation of the existence and evolution of different religious groups, as well as on two governments that, during different years, have implemented or attempted to implement opposing policies and political philosophies.

4.2.1 ASSESSING EXISTING LAWS

Starting with a review of already existing laws, the first topic concerns "personal laws". These kinds of acts started to be applied under British colonialism and aimed at guaranteeing distinct family laws regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption, to the major religious communities in India[35]. These civil laws have been strongly criticised over topics of gender equality and the difficulties of applying reforms to their contents. Moreover, they attribute a certain degree of autonomy to the different groups (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, p. 2), in open contrast with Article 44 of the Indian Constitution, which states that "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India" (*Constitution of India | Legislative Department | India*, n.d.). In this regard, although not entirely successful, various measures have been taken to establish a standardised civil code. For instance, shortly after Independence, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the first Indian Law Minister, tried to reform Hindu personal laws, especially concerning some issues of sexual discrimination. The problem was related to some Brahmanical traditions. Eventually, some changes were made, but they were very limited in scope. Similar episodes are also traceable to Christian and Muslim personal laws. The latter were the ones who faced the most political fire from Hindu nationalist politicians. In particular, divorce laws sparked numerous controversies due to the many conversions that occurred shortly before them, in an attempt to fall under the umbrella of more lenient personal laws[36]. One of the most recent changes to Muslim personal laws occurred in 2017 and led to the ban of the "triple talaq". Through this practice, if a Muslim man says three times in one sitting the word "talaq", he can instantly divorce his wife. This technique was even applied through e-mails or text messages. The Indian Supreme Court implemented the ban. This choice led to a debate over the possibility of the state intervening in the personal laws of particular minorities, thereby limiting religious freedoms (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, pp. 6-8).

Further religious regulations need to be addressed within the broader context of the Indian Constitution.

> **Article 25. Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.**
>
> (1) Subject to public order, morality and health, and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.

[35] Within the religious communities recognised within the Indian territories, the Hindus were considered a supersized category including also Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. Other recognised communities included Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Parsis (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, p. 6).

[36] Depending on the religious community to which one belongs, one must abide by specific personal laws. Through conversion, one can change from one religious group to another and, consequently, the code of laws to be observed (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, p. 7).

(2) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the State from making any law—

(a) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice;

(b) providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

Explanation I.— The wearing and carrying of kirpans shall be deemed to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion.

Explanation II.— In sub-clause (b) of clause (2), the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly. (*Constitution of India | Legislative Department | India*, n.d.)

The first clause of the article emphasises that everyone is free to profess their religion. It is considered the most comprehensive clause in the world, as it also protects the right to "propagation". However, as will be analysed later in this chapter, in many Indian states, religious freedom or the right to conversion is limited. The second clause emphasises that the state has the right to intervene in discriminatory religious practices or those of national interest, as they are linked to economic, political and social sectors, etc. Interference by the state into religious matters is not limited to minority religions. Specific measures can be implemented on family law rulings, temple regulations, and restrictions on foreign funding. Ultimately, the two explanations underscore the complexity of Indian religious diversity in legal terms. The word "Hindu" is in fact an umbrella term for several different religious groups, and it is difficult to understand the distinction between majorities and minorities (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, pp. 2-5).

In clause 2(a) of Article 25, there is a reference to the word "secularism", which is actually one of the cardinal points of the Indian framework. After Independence, Jawaharlal Nehru strongly emphasised the importance of India defining itself as a secular country, inclusive of all those residing in the subcontinent, irrespective of religion or ethnicity, to create a substantial difference between "secular" India and "communal" Pakistan (Shani, 2021). However, it was only through the 42nd Constitutional Amendment of 1976, under Indira Gandhi's government, that the term "secular" was incorporated into the Indian Constitution, not only as an adjective linked to certain activities, but also as a regulatory principle governing relations between the state and religion. In 1991, the principle was further reinforced by the Supreme Court in the S.R. Bommai v. Union of India case. Nevertheless, despite such measures, the concept of secularism in India is highly debated, and a proper definition remains elusive (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, pp. 1-4).

In 1976, following the just implemented principle of "secularity" and the right of the State to intervene in religious practices, Indira Gandhi implemented the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). This policy monitors the inflow of foreign funds into India. Initially, the aim was to limit foreign interference in national elections. However, in 2010, the scope was broadened, and the number of regulatory guidelines increased, impacting thousands of NGOs. The FCRA has become an instrument for the government to control NGOs that are not in its favour. The new way in which the FCRA has been implemented states that government approval for foreign funds can be granted only if a "prior permission" by the Home Ministry is given. What is unclear within the legislative procedure is that the terminology "national interest" and "public interest" are not adequately defined, thus governments can use the policy according to their own interest and control dissenting voices that do not align with the mainstream ideology (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, pp. 5-6). Since 2014, Indian authorities have frozen the bank accounts of many organisations, and further data retrieved in 2018 have highlighted that approximately 20,000 NGOs are now prohibited from receiving foreign funds (Shah, 2021, p. 18).

The line between religion and state is not only blurred in the matter of foreign funding, but also regarding the regulation of education. The central and individual state governments manage half of the 1.5 million schools in the country. Articles 28 and 30 of the Indian Constitution address the relation between religion, the state, and education (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, p. 8).

> **28. Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions.**
>
> (1) No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds.
>
> (2) Nothing in clause (1) shall apply to an educational institution which is administered by the State but has been established under any endowment or trust which requires that religious instruction shall be imparted in such institution.
>
> (3) No person attending any educational institution recognised by the State or receiving aid out of State funds shall be required to take part in any religious instruction that may be imparted in such institution or to attend any religious worship that may be conducted in such institution or in any premises attached thereto unless such person or, if such person is a minor, his guardian has given his consent thereto.
>
> **30. Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.**
>
> (1) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
>
> (2) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language. (*Constitution of India | Legislative Department | India*, n.d.)

Once again, as addressed in Article 25, what is missing here is a clear definition of the concept of "minority". The status of "religious minority" allows specific groups to be eligible for social benefits, along with additional constitutional rights and protection under the National Commission for Minorities. However, if the definition is not precise, then it is up to the courts to decide the status and discriminatory policies may be enacted. One example is represented by the Jain community, which, although recognised as a minority by several territories, has never received a similar status at the national level. Furthermore, state intervention in minority educational institutions has increased regulations, the implementation of which is linked to the receipt of state aid. For instance, the Aligarh Muslim University, established in the 19th century as the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, has undergone multiple changes in its minority status (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, pp. 8-10).

Another important topic is related to the legislation governing the conversion process. The state-level "Freedom of Religion" statutes prohibit conversion via force, inducement or allurement. If one wishes to convert, they must file a report with the district magistrates and obtain prior permission. In addition, a way to block conversion is by allowing castes to access "reservations" (quotas in legislatures, government employment and higher education reserved for lower castes). Legally speaking, this measure stipulates that if a member of a lower caste decides to convert to a religion other than Hinduism, they become ineligible for quotas (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, p. 8).

Other regulations that further exacerbate existing inequalities both among different religious groups and inside the Hindu community are related to the limitation of religious appeals, to the consumption of cows, and to caste-protection policies. Article 123 of the 1951 Representation of the People Act (RPS) stated

> **123. Corrupt practices.**
>
> The following shall be deemed to be corrupt practices for the purposes of this Act:
>
> [(3) The appeal by a candidate or his agent or by any other person with the consent of a candidate or his election agent to vote or refrain from voting for any person on the ground of his religion, race, caste, community or language or the use of, or appeal to religious symbols or the use of, or appeal to, national symbols, such as the national flag or the national emblem, for the furtherance of the prospects of the election of that candidate or for prejudicially affecting the election of any candidate:
>
> [Provided that no symbol allotted under this Act to a candidate shall be deemed to be a religious symbol or a national symbol for the purposes of this clause.]
>
> (3A) The promotion of, or attempt to promote, feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of the citizens of India on grounds of religion, race, caste, community, or language, by a candidate or his agent or any other person with the consent of a candidate or his election agent for the furtherance of the prospects of the election of that candidate or for prejudicially affecting the election of any candidate.]

> [(3B) The propagation of the practice or the commission of sati or its glorification by a candidate or his agent or any other person with the consent of the candidate or his election agent for the furtherance of the prospects of the election of that candidate or for prejudicially affecting the election of any candidate. (*Representation of the People Act 1951*, 1951)

The RPS objective is to limit religious appeals in political campaigns. Moreover, it includes corrupt practices such as appealing for votes based on religion or religious symbols, inducing voters to fear divine displeasure, and promoting animosity on the grounds of religion (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, p. 13). Another important measure implemented by this article was the prohibition of the practice of *sati*[37]. A further act of the Indian Penal Code (295-A) further outlaws

> Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of citizens of India, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise insults or attempts to insult the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both. (*IPC Section 295A - Deliberate and Malicious Acts Intended to Outrage Religious Feelings of Any Class by Insulting Its Religion or Religious Beliefs*, n.d.)

Nationalistic Hindu activists have increasingly used this law to harass and threaten those who challenge dominant and upper-caste Hindu perspectives in their writings. For example, in 2017, some activists sued the production of *Padmaavati*, a Bollywood film, because it featured a love scene between a Rajput (a Hindu caste) princess and a Muslim king (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, p. 14).

Concerning the prohibition on slaughtering cows, the Indian Constitution states:

> **48. Organisation of agriculture and animal husbandry.**
>
> The State shall endeavour to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds, and prohibiting the slaughter, of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle. (*Constitution of India | Legislative Department | India*, n.d.)

The writers of the Constitution extensively debated the issue of bovine meat consumption, but ultimately, the mainstream nationalistic view prevailed. In recent times, the topic has resurfaced since political parties have engaged in cow protection rhetoric, further requesting a national ban on cow slaughter. The issue has even taken a violent turn, with self-appointed cow vigilantes committing attacks against Muslims, based on rumours regarding their consumption or selling of beef (Teater & Jenkins, 2019, pp. 14-15).

[37] *Sati* is part of a tradition called *Antyeshti*, according to which a woman can clean her and her husband's sins by entering the burning funeral pyre along with her husband's body. This practice was declared illegal in 1987 through the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act; however, it is still committed as a forced practice. It is estimated that there are many unreported cases each year (Shamsuddin, 2020).

Lastly, one law that tries to address the inequalities persisting inside the Hindu community is the Protection of Civil Rights Act (PCRA). This policy addresses the various ways in which "untouchability" is manifested through social, religious, educational, medical, and commercial spheres (Kothari et al., 2020, p. 11). Formally, it is based on Article 17 of the Indian Constitution:

> **17. Abolition of Untouchability**.—"Untouchability" is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "Untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. (*Constitution of India | Legislative Department | India*, n.d.)

> **1.2** In pursuance of the above Constitutional provision, the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955 (22 of 1955), was enacted and notified on 08.05.1955. Subsequently, it was amended and renamed in the year 1976 as the "Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955" (hereinafter referred as 'PCR' Act). Rules under this Act, viz, the Protection of Civil Rights Rules, 1977 (herein after referred to as PCR Rules) were notified in 1977. The Act extends to the whole of India and provides punishment for the practice of untouchability. It is implemented by the respective State Governments and Union Territory Administrations. (*Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955*, 1955)

In its Preamble, the PCRA clearly highlights its aim to punish the practice of untouchability. In addition, the act also tackles the issue of creating a favourable environment for SC and ST members to exercise their civil rights (Kothari et al., 2020, p.11). However, despite its positive provision, the last Union government Report on the PCR Act, dating back to 2022, observed how there are clear issues with underreporting (this could be caused by a lack of awareness, fear of retaliation, or reluctance), low conviction rates or high pendency, ineffective enforcement and lack of state initiatives in establishing the adequate infrastructures (NEXT IAS Current Affairs Team, 2025).

4.2.2 POLICIES (NOT) IMPLEMENTED UNDER THE UPA COALITION GOVERNMENT

In 2004, the Congress-led UPA coalition, led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, came to power[38]. This was especially symbolic for religious minorities because, at least initially, UPA's policies were focused on promoting a "paradigm shift" towards more equal opportunities (Kim, 2019, p. 16). In its decision-making process, this coalition government was deeply influenced by caste-based parties, such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP), as well as class-based parties, including the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI[M]). Class, caste, and regional groups within the Congress were also highly influential

[38] The centre-left alliance was formed following the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, whose indecisive outcome prompted the Congress Party and several small parties to present a united agenda known as the National Common Minimum Programme [NCMP]. The alliance received support from other left-leaning parties that were united against the right-wing National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025b).

(Kim, 2019, pp. 21-22). Precisely due to this combination of different parties and the persistence of strong opposition currents, the UPA failed to implement its manifesto commitments (Kim, 2019, p.16).

In terms of policy formulation, the Congress-led UPA coalition followed the conventions of Indian policymaking, including the use of top-down expert commissions and committees, as well as the engagement of emerging policy networks, academics, and politicians. Their policies were intended to be implemented on the basis of four reports written by expert groups: the Sachar Committee Report (SCR) (2006), the Ranganath Misra Commission Report (RMCR) (2007), the Equal Opportunity Commission Report, and the Report on the Diversity Index (2008). These four reports were focused on social inclusion, diversity and anti-discrimination, and they were specifically aiming to shift mainstream discourses on India's Muslims from an issue of "identity" towards a question of "social exclusion" and "development". The core elements of this framework included recognising religion as a category of social exclusion; creating more equal conditions for religious minority groups, as done for SCs, STs, and OBCs; ensuring the effective delivery of services; and establishing monitoring institutions. In 2004, the government also established the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which was tasked with three responsibilities: addressing development issues affecting socially and economically disadvantaged religious and linguistic minorities; recommending quotas to improve educational attainment and governmental employment opportunities for these groups; and suggesting policies to implement the necessary recommendations (Kim, 2019, pp. 69-72).

Figure 60. *Some of the main recommendations of the Sachar Committee Report and the Ranganath Misra Commission Report on education, finance, and infrastructure*

Area	*SCR*	*RMCR*
Education	Initiation of evaluating the content of the school text book to prevent religious intolerance and caste bias	Enactment of comprehensive law detailing minorities' etducational rights
	Creation of local community study centre	Revision of Madrasa Modernisation Scheme
	Setting up of high quality government schools in Muslim concentration areas	Amendment of the National Minority Educational Institutions Commission to widen its functions and responsibilities
	Creation of mechanism to link madrasas with higher secondary school board to enable students to shift to mainstream education	Lower eligibility criteria for admission and lower rate of fees available to SCs and STs applicable to minorities
	Mapping of Urdu speaking population and provision of primary education in Urdu in areas where Urdu speaking population is concentrated.	Selection of at least one institution in states and Union Territories with substantial Muslim population to ensure it promotes education at all levels
	Technical and educational training for non-matriculates, skill development initiatives of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) in Muslim concentrated area, making madrasa-educated children eligible for such programmes	Earmarking 15 per cent seats in all non-minority educational institutions for minorities (10 per cent for Muslims, 5 per cent for other minorities). If difficult, 8.4 per cent (6 per cent for Muslims, 2.4 per cent for other minorities)
	University Grants Commission to evolve a system that allocation is linked to diversity in recruitment	Provide enhanced aid to Muslim-run schools and colleges
	Creation of alternative admission criteria to improve minority recruitment	
	Provision of hostels at reasonable cost to minority students	

(*Contd.*)

(*Contd.*)

Area	*SCR*	*RMCR*
	Teacher training programme for sensitisation of marginalised communities	
	Running Urdu medium schools	
	Setting up of exclusive schools for girls	
Finance	Policy formulation in the micro-credit schemes of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development to enhance participation of minorities	Revision of Central Wakf Council to focus on educational development of Muslims
	Provision of incentives to banks to open more branches in Muslim concentration area	Earmarking proportionate distribution of funds of Maulana Azad Educational Foundation
	RBI's priority sector advances (PSA) reports to include data on 'sanctions or disbursements to minorities' along with the 'amount outstanding'	
	Promotion of Muslims' access in PSA	
Infrastructure	Introduction of schemes with large outlays for welfare of minorities	Development of an effective mechanism for the development and modernisation of industries where minority groups are involved and for training of artisans and workmen
	Sensitisation of service staff regarding social exclusion	
	Facilitation of registration of trusts set up by the community	
	Provision of basic amenities	

Source: Kim, H. (2019). *The Struggle for Equality*. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108235839

UPA further made efforts to establish an anti-communal violence bill to protect religious minorities, Muslims in particular, from communal riots and the general spread of nationalistic violence through anti-minority massacres. The bill was developed within an existing legislative framework that, in the early 2000s, was not being utilised effectively. The new act tried to implement a new offence of communal violence by redefining it as an omission or commission constituting a scheduled offence and identified the target groups within castes and communities. In addition, it

aimed to enhance the powers of state governments, increase the accountability of officials, and guarantee the rehabilitation and relief of victims (Kim, 2019, pp. 171-175).

All the above-mentioned instruments that the Congress-led UPA coalition attempted to create failed. The UPA was constituted by a party coalition considered too broad, and it had to accommodate diverse interests. In addition, the UPA's administration was facing a deep internal division between the PM Manmohan Singh and the President of the Congress Sonia Gandhi. In an already complicated scenario, the BJP succeeded in uniting a powerful opposition, and even the SCs, STs and OBCs lobbies opposed the bill, fearing they would lose their quotas. Both the SCR and the RMCR got discredited. They became embroiled in a controversy concerning the army and were accused of being a "minority appeasement" and not applicable. By the end of 2007, the UPA had distanced itself from both measures (Kim, 2019, pp. 77-80). The idea of the anti-communal violence bill was also abandoned, and the UPA turned towards strategic non-decision, especially in proximity to the 2009 and 2014 elections (Kim, 2019, pp. 192-193).

4.2.3 THE RESTRICTIVE BJP ERA

If, between 2004 and 2014, the BJP occupied the opposition benches, prompting nationalistic speeches and a strong vision on *Hindutva*, at the general elections of 2014, it achieved an important breakthrough and emerged as a significant actor in new parts of the country (Vaishnav, 2019, p.12). In 2024, the BJP won the elections once again, and at the beginning of its third mandate, some evident trends are detectable. Modi's government has strictly promoted Hindu nationalism through state-supported anti-conversion laws and by supporting mob attacks and vigilantes' actions against Muslims. Similar actions have also been condoned towards the Christian community. Christian Today has confirmed that since May 2023, in Manipur, religious and ethnic violence has led to the murder of 142 people, the destruction of 300 churches and hundreds of villages. More than 65,000 people have left their homes (Ellington & Mason, 2023).

One of the most important features of the BJP's policies on religious issues is constituted by the anti-conversion laws. They have already been discussed in a previous section, but here the analysis will focus on how they have also significantly addressed the Christian community. As of 2020, 9 out of the 29 Indian states had such laws implemented, and they were actually enforced in only seven states: Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand. Punishments for violating such policies vary from fines ranging from 5.000 to 50,000 rupees to prison sentences. Most of these policies are led by the *Hindutva* fear of seeing an increase in the activities of Christian missionaries, who, among many other precepts, allow marginalised Hindus to become more dignified and equal members of society. According to the nationalistic view,

such practices would increase the number of non-Hindus, to the detriment of the other side. Various BJP ministers have supported the introduction of such laws and have contributed to enhancing the idea that violence against threatening groups, like Christians or Muslims, is officially supported. Thus, within territories enforcing anti-conversion laws, Hindu vigilantes have carried out several violent attacks, without facing any legal limitation (Saiya & Manchanda, 2020, pp.592-595).

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act is yet another restrictive measure that has led to massive protests in February 2020 (Ellington & Mason, 2023). It was first introduced by the BJP in 2016 and subsequently enacted in 2019. Its provision selectively guarantees Indian citizenship to migrants from neighbouring countries, i.e. Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians, who have reached the subcontinent before December 31, 2014, except for Muslims. Legally, it is in complete contradiction with the Indian Constitution, as it relies on religion as a prerequisite for gaining citizenship. It is a clear symptom of the evolution of Indian society toward an ethno-religious majoritarian state. Starting from the application of this policy, millions of Indian Muslims are expected to become stateless, and the fear of mass deportation has taken root within the Muslim community. As already mentioned, protests erupted in 2019, especially in Assam, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh. In this scenario, the BJP has consistently used state power to repress the opposition and has ensured the policy implementation. Furthermore, as partially seen in *Chapter 2*, the government has published misleading information through social media (Amelia & Kartini, 2023). In international law terms, the CAA violates the country's international obligations arising from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that India has ratified and that compel the country to prevent the deprivation of citizenship based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin (Bajoria, 2023).

The BJP’s decision to enhance the CAA stemmed from the implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the Northeast. This measure, established in 2003, had as its primary objective the creation of a register of all Indian citizens, with the purpose of identifying and deporting undocumented migrants. Initially, the NRC was not the result of particular discriminatory policies against Muslims and Christians, and also Bengali Hindus were facing the risk of exclusion from the country. To curb this risk and secure its support, the government further introduced the CAA, providing a path to citizenship for all migrants, except those of Muslim faith. If the two measures are combined, the result is that individuals (Muslims) who cannot prove their citizenship become stateless (Amelia & Kartini, 2023).

4.3 NATIONAL POLICIES TO CURB THE GENDER GAP

This second-to-last section will examine whether existing policies and employment programs are effectively addressing the issue of the gender gap in employment and female discrimination.

4.3.1 A MOSTLY INEFFECTIVE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Starting from the Indian Constitution, different articles address the theme of providing and protecting social equality.

> **14. Equality before law.**
>
> The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.
>
> **15. Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste,**
>
> sex or place of birth.
>
> (1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.
>
> **16. Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.**
>
> (1) There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.
>
> (2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the State.
>
> **51A. Fundamental duties.**
>
> It shall be the duty of every citizen of India
>
> (e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. (*Constitution of India | Legislative Department | India*, n.d.)

Having addressed the existence of such provisions and rights, the focus of this analysis will be on the acts that governments have implemented from 1961 to 2013 and whether they are effective or not.

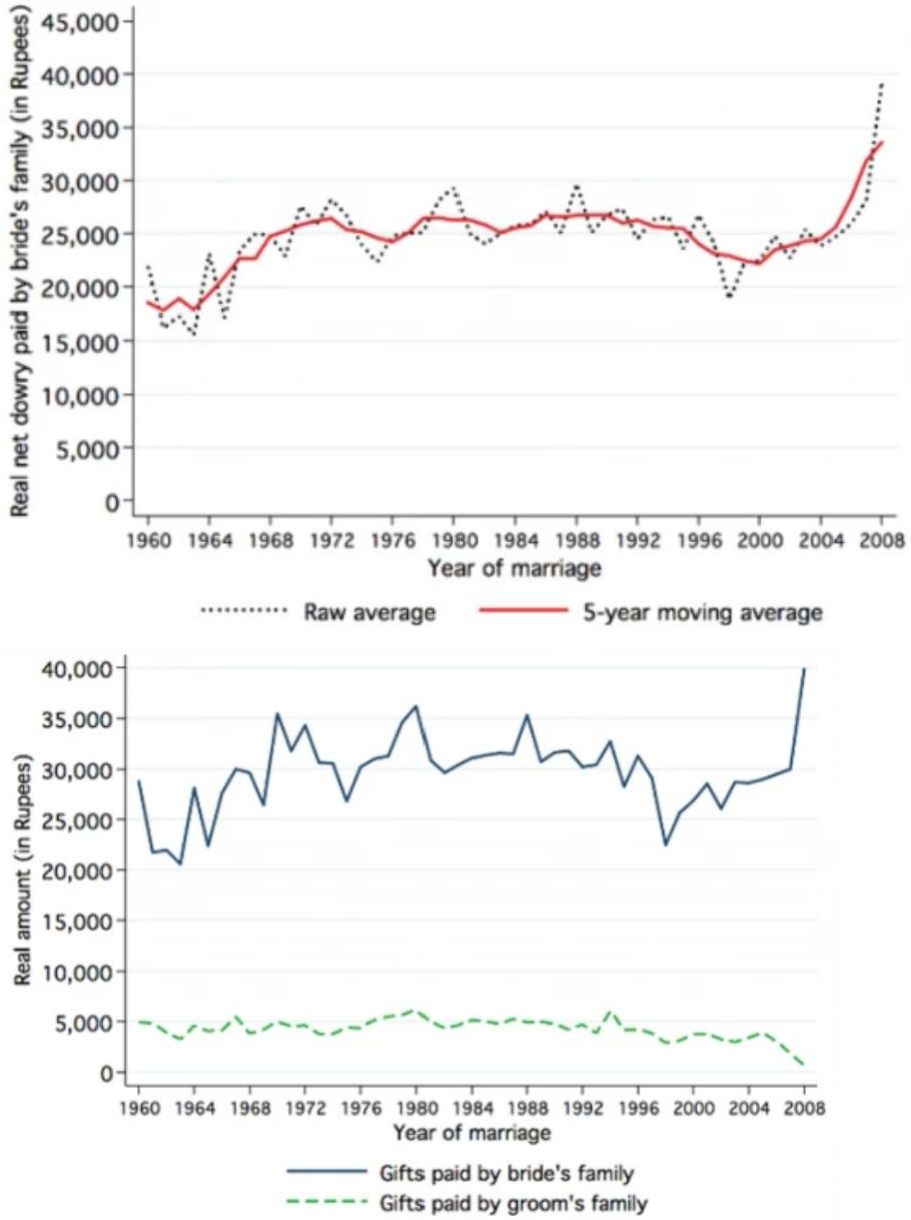
The first act is the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961). It prohibits the giving or taking of the dowry, and it provides a definition of the concept:

> In this Act, "dowry" means any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly
>
> (a) by one party to a marriage to the other party to the marriage; or
>
> (b) by the parents of either party to a marriage or by any other person, to either party to the marriage or to any other person;

at or before [or any time after the marriage] [in connection with the marriage of the said parties, but does not include] dower or mahr in the case of persons to whom the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) applies. (*Dowry Prohibition Act 1961*, 1961)

The penalty for not respecting the provision varies from fines ranging from 15,000 rupees to the value of the dowry to 5 years of imprisonment (*Dowry Prohibition Act 1961*, 1961). Despite the existence of this act, dowry remains a widespread phenomenon in India. According to the 2006 Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS), for the timeframe 1960-2008, dowry was paid in 95% of marriages and generally amounted to several years of household income (Anukriti et al., 2024).

Figure 61. *Trends in Real Net and Gross Dowry in India, by year of marriage (1960-2008)*



Source: Anukriti, S., Prakash, N., & Kwon, S. (2024, March 16). The evolution of dowry in rural India: 1960-2008. *World Bank Blogs*. https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/evolution-dowry-rural-india-1960-2008

As shown in Figure 61, the net dowry has remained relatively stable at around 25,000 rupees from 1975 to 2000. A certain level of inflation is visible after the 2000s. The trend is similarly followed by the gross payments made by the bride's family to the groom's side. The opposite flow is still positive, but substantially more limited. On average, the male part will spend Rs. 5,000, while the bride's family will provide an amount of Rs. 32,000 (Anukriti et al., 2024).

In 1961, the Maternity Benefit Act was also promulgated. It aimed to regulate the employment of women for specific periods before and after childbirth, and it established maternity benefits.

> **5. Right to payment of maternity benefit.**
>
> (1) Subject to the provisions of this Act, every woman shall be entitled to, and her employer shall be liable for, the payment of maternity benefit at the rate of the average daily wage for the period of her actual absence immediately preceding and including the day of her delivery and for the six weeks immediately following that day. (*Maternity Benefit Act 1961*, 1961)

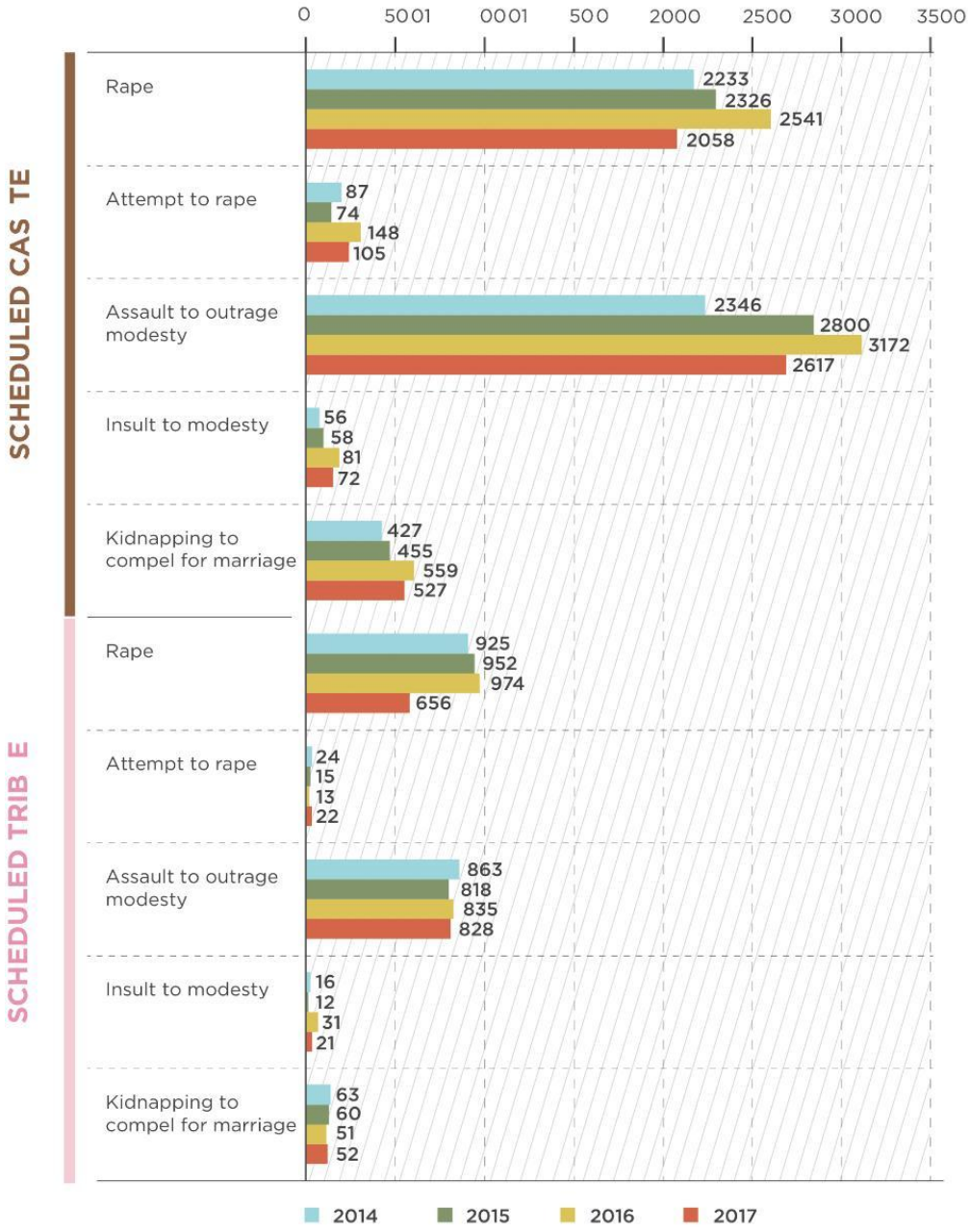
This act encourages the preservation of livelihoods by supporting the care of newborns and prioritising the well-being of women and children. In 2017, further amendments were made to facilitate women's participation in the workforce. The new maternity leave has been expanded from 12 to 26 weeks, and new quotas for hiring mothers have been enhanced. The objective is to promote equality and women's empowerment, while minimising discrimination and economic dependency. However, despite these provisions, the employment disparity has only worsened (Chaudhary et al., 2025, p. 3). Women have expressed concerns about the possibility of facing major discriminations in the hiring process due to the new provisions. Providing maternity benefits would, in fact, increase the financial burden of small businesses and start-ups (Chaudhary et al., 2025, p. 15).

Another act related to the employability of women is the 1976 Equal Remuneration Act. Its main objectives were to create an employer's duty to pay equal wages to men and women workers for jobs of a similar nature and to ensure that no discrimination persisted in the recruiting process. Furthermore, it incentivised the creation of an Advisory Committee to monitor the applicability of the act (*Equal Remuneration Act 1976*, 1976). Despite the existence of this policy, challenges persist; however, awareness of the gender pay gap has increased (Rani, 2023).

In 1989, the Scheduled Castes & Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was implemented as a response to the rise of violence against SCs and STs. Initially, the act was focused on punishing general acts of discrimination against these minorities. However, in 2015 it was amended and it further denounced specific atrocities against SC/ST women, such as "(a) performing or promoting the dedication of an SC/ST woman to a deity, idol or temple as a devadasi and (b) intentionally touching (of a sexual nature) a woman belonging to an SC/ST community, without the consent of the

woman or using acts, words, gestures of a sexual nature towards an SC/ST woman knowing that she belongs to such community" (Kothari et al., 2020, pp. 29-30).

Figure 62. *Specific offences against SC/ST women in India between 2014-2017*



Source: Kothari, J., Ganesan, D., Jayalakshmi, I., Balu, K., C P., & S A. (2020). *Tackling caste discrimination through law: A policy brief on implementation of caste discrimination laws in India*. https://doi.org/10.54999/gjkp8801

Concerning the issue related to the skewed child sex ratio, in 1994, the Pre-Conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act was promulgated. The Act legally prohibited the practices of sex selection and requested the regulation of prenatal diagnostic techniques "for the purposes of detecting genetic abnormalities or metabolic disorders or chromosomal abnormalities or certain congenital malformations or sex-linked disorders" that may potentially lead to female foeticide (*Pre-conception*

and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994, 1994). Fetal sex determination techniques were introduced in 1975, and they were widely used to facilitate the rapid abortion of female fetuses. The anti-sex-discriminatory campaign gained importance in the mid-'80s, particularly in urban areas, and contributed to the establishment of the 1994 Act. The ban, as observed in the data reported in *Chapter 2*, has not proven very effective. What is even more interesting is that, since the implementation of the PNDT Act, the child sex ratio has continued to decline (Nandi & Deolalikar, 2013).

In 2001, an additional policy was adopted to promote the advancement, development, and empowerment of women: the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women. Compared to previous ones, it was a broader socio-economic policy. Its goals were to promote the possibility for all women in India to have *de jure* and *de facto* enjoyment of human rights, as well as equality of access to healthcare, education, employment, and other essential services. In economic terms, it aimed to reinforce poverty eradication, create micro-credits, and support women's access to various sectors of employability. The central and state governments were considered responsible for converting the policy into a set of concrete actions (Garg, 2022). In 2016, a new draft for a National Policy for Women was revealed. The project was similar to the previous one (ClearIAS Team, 2024).

Lastly, one of the most recent policies aimed at protecting women's rights, especially in the workplace, dates back to 2013 and is the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace. The act was meant to provide protection against sexual harassment of women at the workplace and prevent or redress sexual harassment complaints (*Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013*, 2013). The act defines sexual harassment as

> **2. Definitions.**
>
> In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,
>
> (n) "sexual harassment" includes any one or more of the following unwelcome acts or behavior (whether directly or by implication) namely:—
>
> (i) physical contact and advances; or
>
> (ii) a demand or request for sexual favours; or
>
> (iii) making sexually coloured remarks; or
>
> (iv) showing pornography; or
>
> (v) any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature; (*Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013*, 2013)

Additionally, according to the policy, Internal Complaints Committees and Local Complaints Committees were required to be established (Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013).

In 2016, the Act was amended, and the Local Complaints Committees were renamed as Local Committees. Thus, these organs were no longer conceived only as complaint-resolving institutions, but were transformed into “machines” for generating awareness of women's rights. However, in 2018, a study by the Martha Farrell Foundation and the Society for Participatory Research in Asia, based on the Right to Information, discovered that several districts had failed to establish or constitute committees in line with the legal provisions. Even where they existed, it was difficult to find any information on websites or public spaces displaying their names and locations. Overall, there was a general lack of awareness concerning the implementation of the policy (Kelp, 2025).

4.3.2 GENERATING GENDER EQUALITY OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

A second element of analysis regarding the gender gap is represented by the employment, skills development and educational programs implemented nationwide. Compared to the previously discussed measures to curb unemployment, the initiatives discussed here, which represent a limited selection, are specifically dedicated to women.

Table 7. *Major initiatives, schemes, and measures taken by the national government for achieving gender equality in India*

PROGRAMMES	**OBJECTIVES**
Women Vocational Training Programme	It was launched in 1997 to bring women closer to the world of work through vocational training.
Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions	The scheme, launched in 2020, aims at promoting gender equality in science and technology.
Beti Bachao Beti Padhao	The programme, enhanced in 2015, is focused on providing protection, survival, and education to young girls.
Mahila Shakti Kendra	Approved between 2017 and 2020, this scheme aimed at empowering rural women through the provision of opportunities for skill development and employment.
Working Women Hostel	It ensures the security of working women by supplying safe accommodations and daycare facilities for children.
Scheme for Adolescent Girls	Devised in 2010, it enables adolescents between 11 and 18 years of age to access education, nutrition, health, and other basic human rights necessities.

Mahila Police Volunteers	This scheme facilitates the creation of a police corps dedicated to women in distress in all States and Union territories.
Deendayal Antyodaya Yojiana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission	Its mission is to provide shelter to urban homeless, including women and other vulnerable groups.
Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana	Founded in 2016, it ensures the availability of cooking fuel in rural households.
Mahila e-Haat	It is an online platform that uses technology to support women entrepreneurs and NGOs. It is a marketing platform for women.
One-Stop Centre Scheme	It was launched in 2015 to support women affected by private or public violence.
Ujjwala Scheme	It aims to prevent the commercial sexual exploitation of women and help their rehabilitation. It became effective in 2016.

Source: Garg, R. (2022, March 22). *Government policies for gender equality in India - iPleaders*. iPleaders. https://blog.ipleaders.in/government-policies-for-gender-equality-in-india/

4.4 ASSESSING IF INDIA IS PREPARED FOR AGEISM

As demonstrated through the demographic analysis in *Chapter 2*, it has been widely acknowledged that ageism is not an immediate concern for the Indian population and/or government. However, looking ahead, the importance of this emerging trend and the need for the subcontinent to be prepared must be recognised. In the current scenario, the decreasing number of children per household and the parallel increase in the migration of young adults away from traditional households for employment or educational reasons create concerns about the "burden" of elderly care. Another issue is the prevalence of older adults (65 and older) in rural areas. Traditionally, according to ancestral culture, the economic and emotional security needs of the elderly were met within households. However, with modernisation and the emergence of new trends, it has become increasingly difficult to care for older people. In creating this household void, it becomes essential to understand how the Indian government can intervene and ensure safety (Sonune & Ugargol, 2025, p. 74).

4.4.1 POLICIES INTERVENTION FOR OLDER PEOPLE

The attention of the Indian government towards the well-being of older citizens is expressed in Article 41 of the Indian Constitution.

> **41. Right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases.**
>
> The State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want. (*Constitution of India | Legislative Department | India*, n.d.)

In 1999, in response to the evolution of demographic trends and the anticipated increase in the older population, the central government implemented the National Policy for Older Persons. This policy was directed at both citizens and the government. It addressed the former group by requesting individuals to make provisions for their future, especially in economic terms. Additionally, it attempted to encourage family members to establish support systems for their elderly relatives. The government, in turn, created provisions guaranteeing various socio-economic benefits. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment coordinated the implementation of the Act (Rajan & Mishra, 2014).

A couple of years later, following international trends such as the Madrid Plan of Action and the United Nations Principles for Senior Citizens adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2002, the Shanghai Plan of Action 2002 and the Macau Outcome document 2007 adopted by UNESCAP, the subcontinent promoted a new National Policy for Senior Citizens (2011). This measure was based on the recognition of new demographic trends, such as the fact that elderly women experience more loneliness and dependency than their male counterparts and that phenomena like social exclusion, privatisation of the health sector, and changing patterns of morbidity are profoundly affecting the older population. The National Policy for Senior Citizens focused on income security, prioritisation of healthcare, and ensuring multiple levels of safety for the elderly (Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, n.d.).

4.4.2 OBSERVING THE EXISTENCE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL SECURITY SCHEMES

One of the tools most widely implemented by the Indian government to address the issue of ageism is social welfare schemes. These measures are crucial for meeting the needs of the most vulnerable members of society. Many programmes have been launched to improve the living conditions of the elderly, and the three most notable ones are the Indira Gandhi National Old Age

Pension Scheme, the Widow Pension Scheme, and the Annapurna Scheme (Sonune & Ugargol, 2025, p. 78).

The Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme is part of the five schemes composing the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP). It addresses people living below the Poverty Line who are 60 years of age or older. A monthly pension of Rs. 200 is provided up to 79 years, and later it is increased to Rs. 500 (*NSAP - Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme*, n.d.). State governments can provide additional sums (*Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme | Social Justice & Special Assistance Department | India*, n.d.). Another scheme under the NSAP is the Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS). It allows widows in the 40- to 79-year age group living below the Poverty Line to receive Rs. 300 per month (Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme | Social Justice & Special Assistance Department | India, n.d.). Lastly, the Annapurna Scheme provides food security to senior citizens who have remained uncovered by the National Old Age Pension Scheme. The elderly receive 10kg of food grains per month (*Annapurna | Social Security & Empowerment of Persons With Disabilities Department*, n.d.).

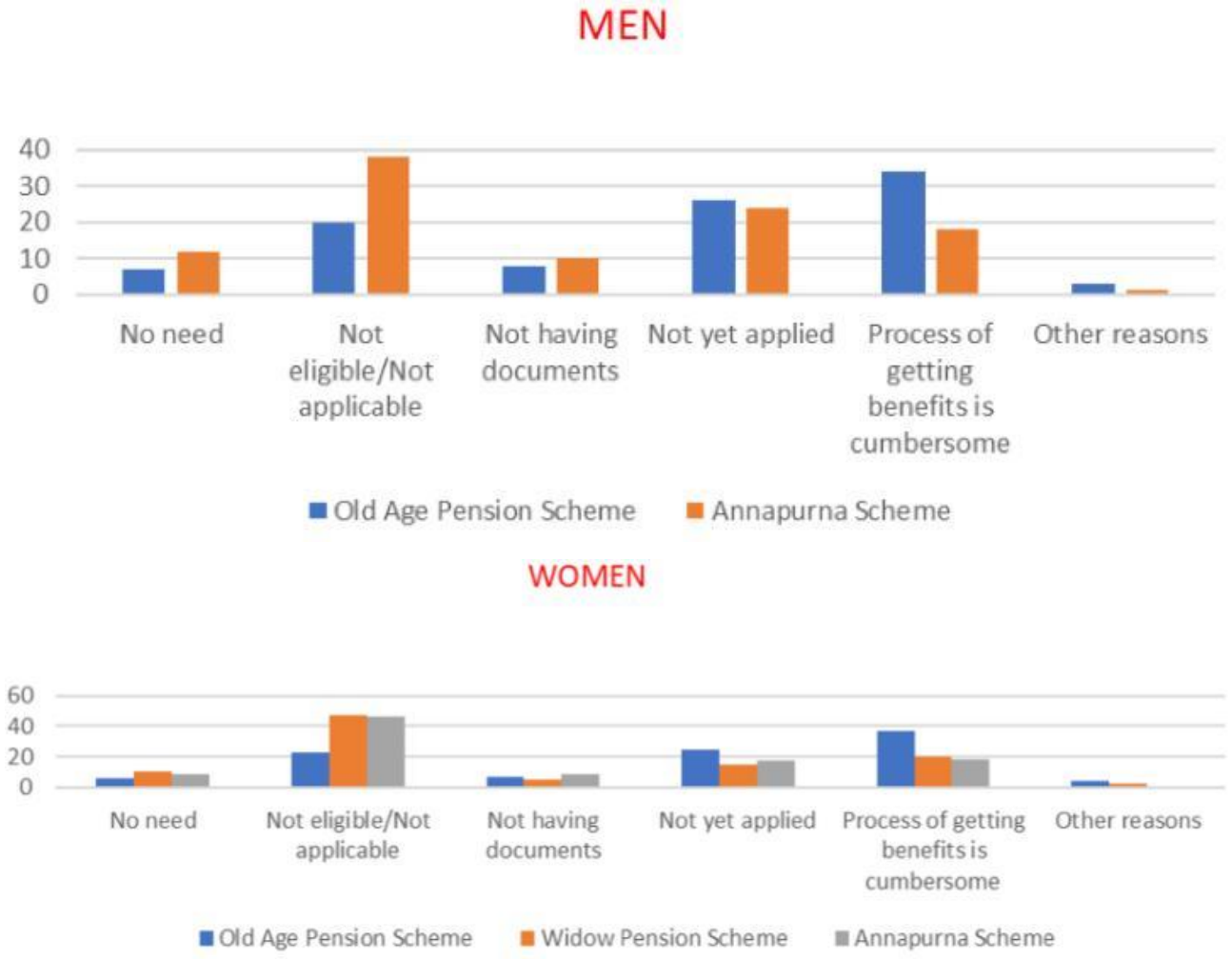
Figure 63. *Percentage of older adults aged 60 years and above receiving benefits from various social security schemes (2017/2018)*

Schemes	National Old Age Pension Scheme			Widow Pension Scheme			Annapurna Scheme		
States/Union Terroirs	BPL	Non-BPL	Total	BPL	Non-BPL	Total	BPL	Non-BPL	Total
India	28.7	16.1	22.6	23.7	13.9	19.2	2.3	0.2	1.3
Chandigarh	41.2	10.7	12.7	29.9	25.0	25.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Delhi	43.1	24.3	29.4	44.2	18.1	23.0	0.6	0.0	0.2
Haryana	60.1	49.8	53.0	39.3	50.6	46.6	0.0	0.1	0.1
Himachal Pradesh	28.0	15.8	19.3	41.6	10.3	23.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Jammu & Kashmir	35.2	9.4	22.7	42.7	16.0	29.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Punjab	54.8	34.0	35.9	20.9	15.8	16.1	0.0	0.8	0.7
Rajasthan	68.9	45.3	51.9	32.5	18.9	22.7	4.5	0.5	1.6
Uttarakhand	30.2	13.4	21.2	37.3	11.6	25.9	0.8	0.0	0.4
Chhattisgarh	32.3	13.0	27.5	35.8	16.6	31.5	10.7	0.9	8.3
Madhya Pradesh	43.7	10.0	28.5	36.2	8.8	25.6	3.0	0.4	1.8
Uttar Pradesh	15.2	9.0	11.5	20.0	17.0	18.2	0.6	0.0	0.3
Bihar	46.1	23.2	36.7	17.1	20.0	18.1	5.7	0.6	3.6
Jharkhand	34.9	18.1	27.5	30.3	33.8	31.7	2.3	0.2	1.3
Odisha	42.1	26.0	35.7	41.1	33.6	38.4	2.7	0.1	1.7
West Bengal	18.8	4.6	12.7	22.8	11.3	18.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Arunachal Pradesh	4.9	3.8	4.6	2.3	1.3	2.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Assam	29.2	11.1	21.7	3.7	0.7	2.7	5.4	2.0	4.0
Manipur	23.9	9.4	19.4	2.4	0.0	1.9	0.1	0.0	0.1
Meghalaya	37.4	19.2	30.9	7.2	3.2	5.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mizoram	28.8	12.5	19.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Nagaland	18.0	8.8	15.2	2.2	S.6	2.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Tripura	54.1	24.0	41.8	15.1	10.6	13.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	41.2	29.3	33.7	41.1	20.5	28.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Daman & Diu	51.2	39.8	43.4	47.2	27.7	32.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Goa	37.7	19.2	25.5	19.5	11.5	14.7	0.5	0.0	0.2
Gujarat	11.5	2.9	6.0	6.0	7.1	6.6	0.0	0.1	0.1
Maharashtra	4.3	2.5	3.3	9.6	6.6	8.0	0.1	0.1	0.1
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	29.0	32.1	31.2	14.6	26.5	23.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Andhra Pradesh	34.2	7.9	30.7	51.0	12.2	45.7	0.4	0.0	0.3
Karnataka	48.2	19.1	38.1	26.5	6.9	18.1	0.2	0.0	0.1
Kerala	34.7	23.3	27.9	35.3	20.1	27.2	0.2	0.1	0.1
Lakshadweep	9.3	5.7	6.9	25.8	22.6	23.8	1.9	0.0	0.7
Puducherry	53.0	34.0	44.7	16.8	18.5	17.3	2.3	0.1	1.3
Tamil Nadu	13.0	14.0	13.3	6.1	7.7	6.6	7.0	0.9	5.4
Telangana	24.8	8.1	21.2	41.3	28.6	38.9	0.1	0.5	0.2

Source: Sonune, M., & Ugargol, A. (2025). The need for age-inclusive and gender-sensitive social policies for India's longevity society. *Ageing & Longevity*, *1.2025*, 73–97. https://doi.org/10.47855/jal9020-2025-1-10

Despite the importance of such measures, evidence suggests that most eligible older adults are not aware of these schemes, or even if they are aware, they do not receive the benefits (Sonune & Ugargol, 2025, p. 78).

Figure 64. *Elderly aged 60 and above, below the Poverty Line, not utilising the social security schemes (India) (2017/2018)*



Source: Sonune, M., & Ugargol, A. (2025). The need for age-inclusive and gender-sensitive social policies for India's longevity society. *Ageing & Longevity*, *1.2025*, 73–97. https://doi.org/10.47855/jal9020-2025-1-10

More than a third (35%) of older adults experienced difficulties in receiving assistance, and a quarter (26%) had not even applied (Sonune & Ugargol, 2025, p. 80).

4.4.3 OPTIMISING THE OPPORTUNITIES OF PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE

Elderly people who lack a solid network or household capable of meeting their needs experience economic insecurity. Not having an assured source of income and property is a significant source of distress. Thus, they have a strong necessity to remain engaged in the workforce and not formally retire. Additionally, especially in rural areas, it has been noted that older adults continue to

work not only to achieve financial independence but also to maintain their social networks. However, the Indian government faces difficulties in addressing these demands, and the elderly often encounter discrimination in entering the labour force (Sonune & Ugargol, 2025, pp. 81-82).

4.4.4 HEALTHCARE INSECURITY FOR THE ELDERLY

As already mentioned, another insecurity deeply affecting the elderly is related to healthcare. In fact, not only are they particularly vulnerable to health shocks and higher morbidity and disability rates, but they also face increased hospitalisation rates and out-of-pocket expenditures. Furthermore, the government should address the issues of the public/private healthcare system emphasised in *Chapter 2*, given the changing patterns from infectious diseases to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the necessity of more complex services. The increase in the prevalence of NCDs, such as chronic respiratory diseases, heart ailments, and diabetes, is expected to continue, and sufficient preparedness is required to manage this eventuality (Sonune & Ugargol, 2025, p. 86).

In 2008, the Ministry of Labour and Employment launched the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), a scheme meant to provide health insurance to the workforce in the informal sector. In 2018, another programme, the Ayushman Bharat, was also implemented. It aimed to provide healthcare access to the most vulnerable sections of society and cover 40% of the country's population. In September 2024, the scheme was further expanded (Sonune & Ugargol, 2025, p. 87).

THE HUMAN SECURITY PROCESS IN INDIA IS STILL LONG

This chapter has provided an answer to the question of how key socio-economic insecurities emerged from the demographic transition initiated in the 1980s, have been addressed by national policies, and whether they have been effectively securitised. The answer is that the various Indian national governments have certainly dealt extensively with the various issues (unemployment, ageism, gender gap and religious divide), but the methods and objectives have often changed.

Concerning the workforce, while there was a lack of significant emphasis between the 1980s and 1990s, policies have increased in the following decades, but their implementation has proved uneven, and only two programmes have been considered truly effective. A similar argument can be made regarding the gender gap issue: although many policies are in place, they also face structural difficulties and are not particularly effective in practice.

In the religious sphere, on the other hand, although the Constitution protects freedom of belief and propagation, it also contains articles aimed primarily at protecting the Hindu majority and discriminating against minorities such as Muslims and Christians. In addition, opposing governments

have clashed over the religious divide and have either been defeated or sustained increased episodes of violence and extreme nationalism.

Lastly, in the area of senior citizens, as this is a relatively new issue in India, it has been noted that there are still few measures in place, and their implementation needs to be improved.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this analysis was to answer the following research question: “How has India's demographic transition affected major socio-economic sectors, and in what ways has that transition been securitised in national policy and discourse?”. The importance of such a focus lies in multiple aspects of the current geopolitical scenario. Indeed, as already mentioned in the introduction, India is interested in establishing itself as a growing power in Asia. In recent times, the subcontinent has also advanced its relations with some European countries, all in consideration of its dynamic of hedging or multi-alignment. However, to understand if India is capable of this growth and how the future may unfold, it is essential to understand the internal dynamics of the Indian subcontinent. This is the reason why this study sought to explore the major demographic trends that have interested the country since the 1980s and how different national governments have addressed them. The research is divided into four chapters.

The first chapter introduces the entire research project by providing the necessary tools to understand the study design. The analysis begins by explaining that this dissertation has the potential to uncover two possible outcomes. The first one is related to the assessment of the major socio-economic issues characterising the subcontinent, such as the prevalence of the gender gap, high unemployment rate and religious conflicts. The second one is instead connected to the dynamics of securitisation. It is theorised that national governments have framed socio-economic issues as human insecurities and have attempted to address them through various national policies, whose outcomes may result in negative consequences. The timeline chosen for the research spans from the 1980s until the “present day”, intended as the range of years following the COVID-19 pandemic. There are three main reasons behind the decision to observe this periodisation. The first one is a demographic choice. Since 1980, India has entered Stage 3 of the Demographic Transition Model, characterised by a slower decline in the crude death rate and a consistent decreasing trend in the crude birth rate. In absolute terms, the population is expected to continue growing until 2100, with a peak of 1.7 billion people around 2064, according to the UN’s medium variant projection (Ro, 2023). The growth rate, however, is already showing clear signs of decline, reaching a 1% growth rate in 2023, compared to the 2.50% growth rate of 1980 (Lonarkar, 2018). Thus, there is the potential for a “window of opportunity” whose consequences should be usefully discussed. In addition to demographic factors, significant economic and political events have marked the period from the 1980s to the 2020s, making this timeline particularly relevant for understanding Indian dynamics. In financial terms, it is worth noting that, starting from the 1980s, the GDP has shown a steady increase, interrupted only by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, since 1985, India’s Purchasing Power Parity has increased, placing India as third globally, after China and the United States (Global FirePower, n.d.). From a political

perspective, the period from the late 1970s to the late 1980s was dominated by the decline of Congress and the emergence of minority or coalition governments. Following the 2000s, the BJP gained prominence in the governmental landscape and contributed to the rise of populism (Vaishnav, 2021, as cited in Vaishnav, 2024). Lastly, the chapter focuses on discussing the methodology used for the development of the research, with special regard to the quantitative analysis. What is emphasised is how, when data on developing countries needs to be collected or processed, there are substantial endogenous and exogenous limitations. The first refers to a structural lack of resources, while the second issue is connected to the perception of civil society (Elahi, 2007). The possibility of "black swan" events, such as pandemics or conflicts, also significantly impacts the data collection process (Brown et al., 2022). In the particular case of this study, difficulties have emerged due to the lack of a unified online database where data on the subcontinent can be found. This necessitated the expansion of the research to multiple online databases, some of which contained missing or conflicting data. In addition, there were structural difficulties in accessing the various sources.

The second chapter focuses on the demographic analysis of India, aiming to provide a snapshot of the subcontinent from the 1980s to the post-COVID-19 era. Currently, India has a population of 1.4 billion people, which is expected to increase to 1.7 billion by 2060. The subcontinent has managed to surpass China in terms of absolute numbers and, since the '80s, has entered Stage 3 of the Demographic Transition Model. In practical terms, this means that various factors, including a lower Total Fertility Rate, improved utilisation of Family Planning methods, increased educational levels, and a sustained urbanisation process, have led to a decline in birth rates and consequently a decrease in population growth. All these changes have influenced the age-sex pyramid composition of India. The current and future trends are, in fact, defined by larger portions of the working-age population (causing the youth bulge) and the elderly (those 65 and above). This transformation has had two main consequences. The first concerns ageism and India's unpreparedness to face an ageing population, given the substantial lack of infrastructure and inadequate financial/social/medical security plans, as clearly highlighted by Poonam Muttreja (2024) and Andrea Wojnar (*India's Ageing Population: Why It Matters More Than Ever*, n.d.). The second consequence is connected to the creation of the "window of opportunity". The presence of a significant youth bulge opens up the possibility for a demographic dividend, namely a period of economic growth resulting from a shift in a country's population age structure. Scholars have shown different opinions regarding the onset of a similar event, both in terms of possibility and timeframe. For instance, while authors as Acharya (2004), Bloom (2012), Chandrasekhar et al. (2006), and others, sustain that a demographic window of opportunity alone cannot bring an impetus to economic growth in the country; other scholars like K.S. James (2008) and Aiyar and Mody (2011) have discussed the onset of such scenario between

the 1960s and the early 2000s. More recently, instead, Shruti Patodia (2025) reported that the dividend began in 2011 and is expected to peak around 2041. Overall, this research has demonstrated, through a process of data analysis, that the demographic dividend is not currently being optimised, given the large number of working-age individuals who are not employed or are employed only in the informal sector. Additionally, it is not even possible to discuss the chance of a second demographic dividend, concerning the older population, as debated by Navaneetham and Dharmalingam (2012). Given this general scenario, characterised by a growing population suffering from a missed opportunity, there are additional social issues to consider. The first one concerns Family Planning and its contribution to the perpetuation of gender inequalities. The Family Planning Program Effort Score has shown that there is a disparity in the treatment of women and their desired fertility levels. Men's participation in FP is also particularly low due to misconceptions and myths; thus, the weight of the whole process is carried out mainly by women (Seth et al., 2020). Moreover, FP has not only contributed to lowering the TFR and the birth rates of the subcontinent but has also incentivised a lower child sex ratio due to sex selection practices. Another issue is connected to the change in the age-sex pyramid and the possible onset of the demographic dividend. In this scenario, women are not considered, given their lower employment rates compared to men, and their segregation to informal and unpaid domestic work and duties. The phenomenon of ageism has also highlighted a problem of inadequacy. There is, in fact, a gap in healthcare accessibility. In particular, the private sector, although not superior in quality to the public sector, has become the primary source of medical care, highlighting a structural shortage of healthcare professionals and uncontrolled medical costs. A second-last issue is connected with the increase in the urbanisation process. On the one hand, it has generated improvements in the medical and educational sectors; on the other hand, it has favoured the creation of slums. Lastly, the overall phenomenon of population growth has generated deep misconceptions regarding the population division by religion. The governments have, in fact, sustained a type of nationalism based on the principle of *Hindutva* and the idea that for constructing a Hindu nation, there is the necessity of a “constitutive outside” represented by Christians and Muslims (Shani, 2021). In this regard, on the occasion of the 2024 general elections, the BJP has published a report stating that the Muslim minority is thriving and there is a risk of it overtaking the Hindu community. The data analysed in this chapter debunk this scenario; however, the governmental discourses still support the perpetuation of clashes between Hindus and Muslims. All the major social issues summarised here are reflected in the Gini Index. This indicator, despite showing visible improvements in the last ten years, still offers a snapshot of a country defined by significant structural inequalities and difficulties in optimising its large population. One final positive note, however, is the significant decrease in the poverty headcount ratio in recent years. Overall, the research has highlighted the relationship between India’s population

growth and various social and economic issues, including gender disparity, unemployment, ageism, and religious diversity.

The third chapter is more theoretical, as it aims to explain the concept of human security and its applicability to the Indian scenario. Starting from a historical analysis of the practice of human security, the study reveals that four distinct interpretations are available, each with a unique set of actors and objectives. The first approach is called "basic human needs". It is based on the scholarship of Mahbub ul Haq, and its theorisation is centred on security issues concerning the economy and politics, access to resources and healthcare, environmental protection, and identity safeguard. The second definition is labelled as the "assertive/interventionist" focus. Its objective is to implement humanitarian interventions to alleviate gross human suffering deriving from modern conflicts. It tends to overlook developmental issues. The second-last interpretation of human security is defined as the "social welfare/developmentalist" focus. It can be considered a further implementation of the "basic human needs" theorisation. The difference is that it emphasises the importance of development beyond the guarantee of only critical human rights or minimum safety needs. It is based on both the "freedom from fear" and the "freedom from want". The last approach is called "new security", it has been enhanced more recently, and it focuses on epidemiological threats, terrorism, the use of inhumane weapons and the trafficking of human beings and drugs (Newman, 2001; Acharya, 2001). Despite being generally acknowledged, these definitions have been criticised for allowing Western countries to impose their vision of democracy and liberalism on the global stage, without considering that other regions may have their own configuration of human security (Acharya, 2001). After discussing the theoretical foundations of the subject and acquiring the necessary tools for analysis, the focus shifted to the Indian subcontinent by stating that the conceptualisation that better defines it is the "basic human needs" approach, as the current economic growth model is not sustainable and exacerbates socio-economic issues concerning fundamental human rights and minimum safety needs (Narain Roy, 2007). Some sectoral examples have been provided to conceptualise the topic better. For instance, it has been discussed how wealth is concentrated in 1% of the population, while the rest of the country faces inequalities in terms of expenditure, income, and wealth (Bharti et al., 2024; Vakulabharanam & Motiram, 2024). Other concerns are underlined in terms of cultural identities (the religious divide that affects both Christians and Muslims, as well as the discrimination suffered by Scheduled Castes and Tribes) and environmental protection, with the issue of greenhouse gas emission and ecological disasters.

Lastly, the fourth chapter attempts to provide a final answer to the research question, combining the topics covered in the previous sections and examining the human security choices made by the national governments from the 1980s to the present day. Overall, the chapter has analysed

existing policies and programs for the four areas of unemployment, religious divide, gender gap and ageism. The analysis has examined the period from the 1980s to the 2020s and has revealed how methods and objectives have often changed. Concerning unemployment, between the 1980s and 1990s, there was a lack of consistent focus on job creation, and the projects implemented (the National Rural Employment Programme, the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, and the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana) were mainly based in rural areas. From the 1990s onwards, the programmes developed by governments increased exponentially, especially in terms of skills development and employment opportunities. Still, as the data itself showed, only the Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act were actually successful. Thus, the empirical research aligns with the findings stated by Vakulabharanam and Motiram (2024). Similar concerns were also raised regarding the issue of the gender gap. Starting from 1961, several policies have been implemented to reinforce women's position within working environments and in society. Still, efforts to enforce these laws have often been lacking, as in the case of the Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, whose committees were never established in several states (Kelp, 2025). Similarly, even when laws were observed, discrimination has nevertheless increased. This is the case for the Maternity Benefit Act, whose requests were not accepted by small businesses and start-ups due to the related financial burden (Chaudhary et al., 2025). In the sphere of religious divide, on the other hand, although the Constitution protects freedom of belief and propagation through Article 25, it also contains principles, such as the prohibition of slaughtering cows, aimed primarily at protecting the Hindu majority and discriminating against minorities such as Muslims and Christians. In addition, opposing governments have clashed over the religious divide and have either been defeated or sustained increased episodes of violence and extreme nationalism. It is the case of the Congress-led UPA coalition, which wanted to implement a "paradigm shift" towards more equal opportunities (i.e. the Anti-communal violence bill), but never succeeded due to internal fractures and a strong opposition (Kim, 2019); and the BJP government, which instead enhanced anti-conversion laws, the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Act, thus creating restrictive measures on the rights of Muslims to achieve citizenship (Ellington & Mason, 2023). Lastly, regarding the topic of ageism, empirical research has revealed some discrepancies with the views presented by Poonam Muttreja (2024) and Andrea Wojnar (*India's Ageing Population: Why It Matters More Than Ever*, n.d.). Without a doubt, this is a relatively new issue in India, and the measures are still few, but they are not entirely lacking. What can be assessed is the need to seek an improvement, especially in relation to social security schemes (i.e. the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme, the Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme, and the Annapurna Scheme) and healthcare access.

This research is not without limitations. The topics covered were numerous, and greater verticality could indeed be implemented for future studies on the subject. At the same time, this dissertation aimed to provide a general overview of the Indian framework; however, it would also be equally interesting to develop the topics covered based on territorial differences, especially between states in northern and southern India.

In conclusion, while attempting to provide a final answer to the research question, this dissertation has revealed that India's entry into Stage 3 of the Demographic Transition Model has exacerbated problems related to unemployment, religious differences, the gender gap, and population ageing. Various national governments have widely addressed these critical issues, but the results have not always been successful. A change of perspective is needed on how to implement certain principles more effectively and to better guarantee human rights, at the expense of nationalistic violence.

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