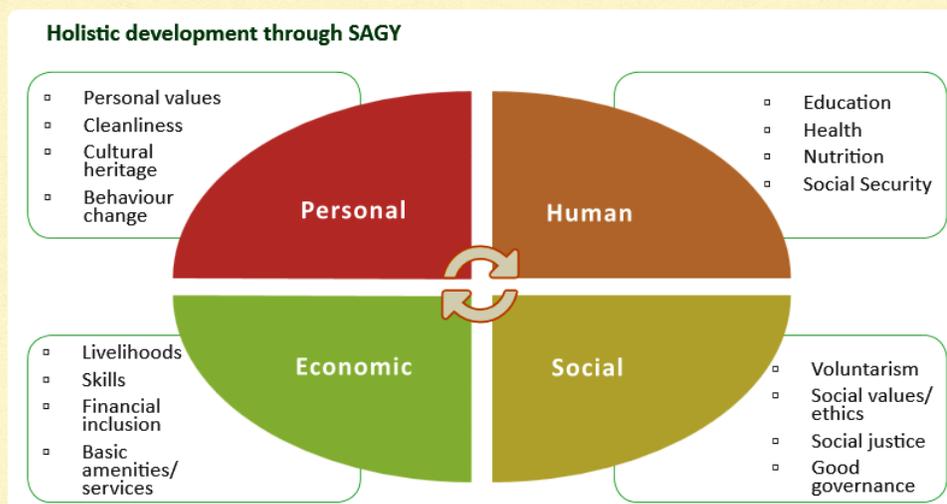


Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) - Analysis

Recently, a study by the Ministry of Rural Development has observed that the Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) has not been able to achieve the desired objectives and failed to make a significant impact.

The study was conducted as part of the Fifth Common Review Mission (CRM) for "independent assessment" of the progress of various programmes and schemes of the Rural Development Ministry.



Key Points

Study/Assessment: The study was conducted by a team comprising retired bureaucrats, academics and research organisations etc. The team visited around 120 villages, in 21 districts across eight states

Major Findings:

Low selection of Panchayats: Since the launch of the scheme only 1,855 gram panchayats have been selected across five phases, with only seven in Phase 5.

Lack of Interest and Funds: Model villages under the scheme are hit by lack of interest and funds. In many of SAGY villages, the MPs did not give any significant fund from Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS). Example:

In Arood village of Khandwa district in Madhya Pradesh, out of 118 activities planned in 2014, only about 60 % have been achieved and the rest are pending for lack of funds.

Lack of Political Will: The concept of SAGY has not percolated down to field officials due to lack of accountability and political will.

Issues with Declaration: Even villages declared as Adarsh Grams in some districts were found yet to be declared Open Defecation Free.

Limited Impact: In some cases, where MPs have been proactive, some infrastructure development has taken place, but the scheme has not made any perceptible impact.

Low Convergence of MGNREGA with MPLAD: Lesser convergence of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with MPLAD was observed in few villages.

Rural Roads: The study expressed concern over the quality of roads constructed under schemes of state governments and maintenance of rural roads under central Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY).

Positive Impact: Progress of work was better in the Gram Panchayats where the MP has taken keen interest and allocated substantial amounts from MPLAD. Example:

A village in Bhilwara Rajasthan was found to be very urbanised due the various development schemes taken up at the initiative of the Ex-MP.

Reccomendations:

Need to Enhance Impact: The report recommended that the Ministry of Rural Development may review the scheme for enhancing its impact.

Uniform Norms: It has urged the Centre to frame a "National Rural Road Policy" to ensure uniform norms of construction and maintenance, irrespective of whether the road belongs to a state scheme or PMGSY.

Additional Funds: The Centre should examine if the Finance Commission can provide funds for maintenance of rural roads, as many states have requested that the Centre should share the cost of maintenance.

Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana

SAGY is a village development project which was launched on 11th October, 2014 on the birth anniversary of Jai Prakash Narayan.

Goal:

Under the Yojana, Members of Parliament (MPs) are responsible for developing the socio-economic and physical infrastructure of three villages each by 2019, and a total of eight villages each by 2024.

Objectives:

To substantially improve the standard of living and quality of life of all sections of the population through Improved basic amenities, higher productivity and better livelihood

opportunities.

To generate models of local level development and effective local governance which can motivate and inspire neighbouring Gram Panchayats to learn and adapt.

To nurture the identified Adarsh Grams as schools of local development to train other Gram Panchayats.

Process:

Gram Panchayat: The basic unit for development.

Lok Sabha MP: Chooses a Gram Panchayat from within his/her constituency.

Rajya Sabha MP: Chooses Gram Panchayat from the rural area of a district of his/her choice in the State from which he/she is elected.

Nominated MPs: Choose a Gram Panchayat from the rural area of any district in the country. The MPs engage with the community, facilitate the Village Development Plan and mobilise the necessary resources particularly from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and philanthropies. MPs also fill up critical gaps in the plan using the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADs) funds.

Adarsh Gram: Model Village

A Model village is one which has adequate physical and institutional infrastructure (sustainable environment, sanitation, clean water and livelihood) in which minimum needs of all sections of the society are fully met so that they live in harmony with each other.

Way Forward

The vision behind the evolution of SAGY villages was to create model villages by ensuring convergence and dovetailing of schemes and its proper implementation on priority basis. However, the seriousness required to achieve the motto is lacking. There is a need for MPs to be more responsible towards the scheme.

SAGY gives focus to community participation and social mobilization of the village community can trigger a chain of other development activities in the village.

At the same time, the Ministry of Rural Development should ensure that the SAGY villages are dealt with the vision envisaged under the scheme and are not left behind.

SECRECY OF BALLOT

In a recent judgement, the Supreme Court has held that secrecy of ballot is the cornerstone of

free and fair elections.

The choice of a voter should be free which is ensured by the secret ballot system in a democracy.

Highlights of the Judgement:

The SC held that the principle of secrecy of ballots is an important postulate of constitutional democracy and referred to Section 94 of the Representation of People Act (RPA) 1951.

The section upholds the privilege of the voters to maintain confidentiality about their choice of the vote.

The law must protect the right of voters to the secrecy of the ballot. Even a remote or distinct possibility that a voter can be forced to disclose for whom she/he has voted would act as a positive constraint and a check on the freedom to exercise the franchise.

However, a voter can also voluntarily waive the privilege of non-disclosure.

The privilege ends when the voter decides to waive it and decides voluntarily to disclose their vote.

The court held that voters can neither be prevented from disclosing nor can be subjected to a complaint by anyone.

Background:

The judgment came on an appeal against the Allahabad High Court decision, setting aside the voting of a no-confidence motion in a Zila panchayat in Uttar Pradesh in 2018.

A no-confidence motion or vote of no-confidence or a no-trust vote can be sought to express that there is no longer confidence in the government.

Allahabad HC found that some of the panchayat members had violated the rule of secrecy of the ballot.

The SC referred to Section 28(8) of the Uttar Pradesh Kshettra Panchayat and Zila Panchayat Adhiniyam, 1961 and ordered a re-vote of the motion within the next two months, by the secret ballot system.

This provision states that a motion of no confidence shall be put to vote in the prescribed manner by secret ballot.

Restoring Secrecy of Ballot:

Secrecy of ballot has become a notional concept after the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).

Since voters believe that only they themselves and their trusted ones know who they voted for which is not true actually because EVMs give a near accurate idea of voting patterns.

Each EVM is used for about 1,400 electors and votes cast in the EVMs are individually counted and tallied booth-wise.

Before the introduction of EVMs, ballot papers were often mixed to prevent intimidation of voters by disclosure of voting patterns.

The idea of voting patterns gives an advantage to political parties which can be neutralised if totalisers are deployed to count votes in a constituency.

Totaliser:

It is a mechanism which allows votes from 14 booths to be counted together.

This result obtained is without disclosure of votes polled by candidates at particular voting booths/stations, which will allay the fears of voters against any pre-poll intimidation or post-poll victimisation by any candidate.

Representation of the People Act 1951

The holding of free and fair elections is the sine-qua-non of democracy. To ensure the conduct of elections in free, fair and in an impartial manner, the constitution-makers incorporated Part XV (Articles 324–329) in the constitution and empowered Parliament to make laws to regulate the electoral process.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is the watchdog of free and fair elections in the country and Article 324 of the Constitution provides for its establishment.

In this context, the Parliament has enacted the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1950 and Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Key provisions of the RPA 1951:

It regulates the actual conduct of elections and by-elections.

It provides administrative machinery for conducting elections.

It deals with the registration of political parties.

It specifies the qualifications and disqualifications for membership of the Houses.

It provides provisions to curb corrupt practices and other offences.

It lays down the procedure for settling doubts and disputes arising out of elections.

Way Forward

In a democracy, there is perhaps nothing more important than the credibility of the electoral process therefore elections should not only be fair but should be seen to be fair.

The Election Commission needs to bat for making democracy truly vibrant and for voters' rights to free and fair elections as well as secrecy of their ballot. It cannot afford to allow parties the room to punish and reward voters on the basis of their voting patterns or indulge in what politicians euphemistically call booth management.

Chaolung Sukapha

Recently, there has been a controversy in Assam regarding Chaolung Sukapha who founded the Ahom kingdom.

Amidst the ongoing India–China border tension, he has been repeatedly referred to as a Chinese invader.

Chaolung Sukapha:

He was a 13th century ruler who founded the Ahom kingdom that ruled Assam for six centuries. The Ahoms ruled the land till the province was annexed to British India in 1826 with the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo.

Sir Edward Gait, in his book 'A History of Assam', wrote that Sukapha is said to have left a place called Maulung (Burma which is now known as Myanmar) in 1215 AD with eight nobles and some people.

He and his people reached Brahmaputra valley and in 1235 AD, finally settled in Charaideo in upper Assam.

Sukapha established his first small principality in Charaideo, sowing the seeds of further expansion of the Ahom kingdom.

Ahoms:

They created a new state by suppressing the older political system of the bhuiyans (landlords). The Ahom state depended upon forced labour. Those forced to work for the state were called paiks.

Ahom society was divided into clans or khels. A khel often controlled several villages.

Ahoms worshipped their own tribal gods but instead of imposing their own language, religion and rituals on communities living in Assam, they accepted the Hindu religion and the Assamese language.

However, the Ahom kings did not completely give up their traditional beliefs after adopting Hinduism.

Ahom society was very sophisticated. Poets and scholars were given land grants and theatre was encouraged. Important works of Sanskrit were translated into the local language.

Historical works, known as buranjis, were also written, first in the Ahom language and then in



Assamese.

Most of the Sukapha's people were men who later married women from communities living in Assam. Intermarriage also increased assimilation processes.

Significance:

Sukapha successfully assimilated different communities and tribes. He developed very amiable relationships with the tribal communities of Assam especially the Sutias, the Morans and the Kacharis.

He is widely referred to as the architect of 'Bor Asom' or 'Greater Assam' because he consolidated power, culture and religion in the region and managed to group a diverse mix of people in such a politically sensitive region crisscrossing South Asia and South-East Asia.

Assam celebrates 'Asom Divas' on 2nd December every year to commemorate Sukapha and his rule.

Way Forward

Chaolung Sukapha was the architect of greater Assam and he laid the foundation for a robust and vibrant Assam through his policy of amity, unity and harmony.

Offensive remarks on social media and misinterpretation of historical facts can lead to a rift between different communities in an ethnically diverse state like Assam and hurt the sentiments of people which should be avoided at any cost.

Presena Glacier

Giant sheets of tarpaulin (tarps) are being used to cover Presena glacier in northern Italy to slow melting caused by global warming.

It is a part of the conservation project (undertaken by Italian firm Carosello-Tonale) which was launched in 2008 – at that point only 30,000 sq metres of the glacier was covered.



Covering of the Glacier:

Tarpaulin sheets (tarps) are being laid over 1,00,000 sq metres of the Presena glacier.

Rs. 34,091 tarpaulin sheets will be sewn together once they are stretched over the snow to keep warm air out. Bags of sand are used to weigh them down.

This six-week process is repeated every year once the ski season is over and summer begins in full force.

A ski season is a period when skiing, snowboarding and other alpine sports are viable in an alpine resort.

The process of removing the protective tarps will begin in September, and will take six months.

Tarpaulin Sheets:

Tarpaulin is a large sheet of strong, flexible and water-resistant material, often coated and made of plastics such as polyethylene.

Geotextile tarpaulins reflect sunlight, maintain a temperature lower than the external one, and thus preserve as much snow as possible.

There are similar glacier cover systems on a few Austrian glaciers, but the surface covered by the tarpaulins is much smaller.

Concern:

Since 1993, the Presena glacier has lost more than one third of its volume.

The area is continuously shrinking, so the efforts are made towards covering the area as much as possible.

Presena Glacier

Situated between the regions of Trentino and Lombardy in Northern Italy, the glacier is part of the Presanella mountain (Alps) group.

It has a high altitude natural environment.

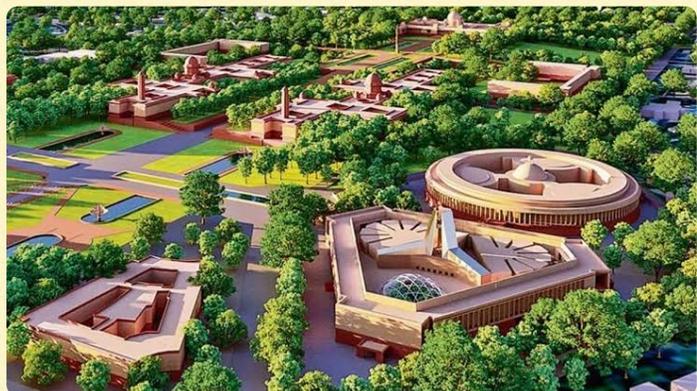
Central Vista Project

The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs proposed a Central Vista redevelopment project in 2019.

Proposed cost of the project is ₹922 Crore.

The project envisages

Constructing a triangular Parliament building next to the existing one.



Constructing Common Central Secretariat.

Revamping of the 3-km-long Rajpath – from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate.

North and South Block to be repurposed as museums.

The government's argument for revamping Central Vista:

The Parliament building's facilities and infrastructure are inadequate to meet the current demand.

The offices of the Central Government are spread over different locations which affects inter-departmental coordination, and unnecessary travel leading to congestion and pollution.

Most of the existing buildings have outlived their structural lives.

Central Vista

Currently, the Central Vista of New Delhi houses Rashtrapati Bhawan, Parliament House, North and South Block, India Gate, National Archives among others.

In December, 1911, King George V made an announcement in Delhi Durbar (a grand assembly) to shift the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi.

Delhi Durbar was hosted to mark the coronation of King George V.

The task of constructing a new city was given to Edwin Lutyens, known for his strong adherence to European Classicism and Herbert Baker, a prominent architect in South Africa.

Herbert Baker is also the architect of the Union buildings at Pretoria, South Africa.

Parliament House building was designed by both Lutyens and Baker.

Rashtrapati Bhavan was designed by Edwin Lutyens.

The Secretariat which includes both north and south block was designed by Herbert Baker.

Delhi Urban Art Commission has returned the Parliament project for final detailing.

Ambubachi Mela

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the annual Ambubachi Mela in Assam will not be organised this year.

The fair is organised from 21st to 25th June, every year.

The festival marks the annual menstruation of the presiding Goddess in the Kamakhya Temple, Guwahati, Assam.

The temple's sanctum sanctorum houses the yoni (female genital) symbolised by a rock.



Kamakhya is one of 51 shakti peethas or holy sites for the followers of the Shakti cult, each representing a body part of the Sati, Lord Shiva's companion.

The temple is situated on the Nilachal Hills, whose northern face slopes down to the Brahmaputra river.

According to the legends, it was built by the demon king Narakasura but records are available only from 1565 when Koch king Narayanaraya rebuilt the temple.

Importance

Cultural: The ritualistic fair celebrates the Goddess' period due to which taboo associated with menstruation is less in Assam compared to other parts of India.

The attainment of womanhood of girls in Assam is celebrated with a ritual called Tuloni Biya, meaning small wedding.

Social: The fair is also an occasion to promote menstrual hygiene among the visitors through the use of sanitary pads.

Financial: Assam records a footfall of at least 5 lakh devotees during the fair mainly from West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand. Foreigners also visit which boost the state tourism and the revenues associated.

NAMDA

Achievements of Arifa Jaan from Jammu and Kashmir- who revived the traditional Namda craft of carpet weaving- were shared on Social media by PM Modi under #SheInspiresUs.

Namda is a form of matting.

They are made from wool by practice of felting the wool rather than weaving it. The Felted carpets are predominantly made of pure wool

Namda is usually a sandwich of many layers of wool flattened over each other. After a layer is spread, it is sprinkled homogeneously with water and pressed with a tool known as 'pinjra'(woven willow wicker)

It is said to have originated in the 11th century when Akbar ordered for suitable coverage for his horse who was affected by biting cold

