

BRIDGING THE VALLEYS

India's infrastructural landscape is undergoing a transformation, weaving together disconnected valleys and remote regions through ambitious projects. The government's focus on enhancing connectivity, especially in the northeastern states, the Himalayan belt, and other isolated regions, has gained momentum with new bridges, tunnels, and highways reshaping the nation's transport network. These projects are not just about linking places; they represent progress, economic growth, and national security.

One of the most significant projects is the Atal Tunnel, which has revolutionized connectivity in Himachal Pradesh. Stretching over 9.02 km, it is the world's longest tunnel at an altitude above 3,000 meters, providing an all-weather link between Manali and Leh. This engineering marvel has drastically reduced travel time and improved access for tourists, traders, and defense personnel. Previously, heavy snowfall would cut off these regions for months, but the tunnel now ensures year-round movement, boosting economic activity and strategic military operations.

Further east, the Dhola-Sadiya Bridge, also known as the Bhupen Hazarika Setu, is India's longest bridge, spanning 9.15 km across the Brahmaputra River. This vital link has reduced travel time between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, fostering trade, tourism, and security in the region. Similarly, the Bogibel Bridge, India's longest rail-road bridge, has strengthened connectivity between the northern and southern banks of the Brahmaputra, enhancing accessibility to Arunachal Pradesh. These projects are crucial for improving the region's infrastructure, given its strategic importance along the international border.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the Chenab Rail Bridge, the world's highest railway bridge, is set to redefine transportation. Rising 359 meters above the Chenab River, this marvel of engineering is a crucial part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link. The bridge will allow all-weather access to the Kashmir Valley, making transportation easier for locals and strengthening connectivity between Kashmir and the rest of India. Its construction is also a strategic achievement, ensuring seamless movement of goods and personnel in an otherwise difficult terrain.

As India builds bridges—both literal and figurative—the nation moves towards greater unity, economic prosperity, and sustainable development. The melody of connectivity plays on harmonizing the aspirations of a billion people.

Kailash Temple: A Sacred, Ancient and Spiritual Gem in Jammu

■ VIVEK KOUL

The city of Jammu is renowned for its ancient temples and numerous Hindu pilgrimage sites. With a wealth of sacred places and temples, Jammu attracts tourists from across India year-round, earning it the title of the City of Temples.

Notable tourist attractions and sacred sites in Jammu include Bahu Fort, Khali Mata Mandir, Mahamaya Temple, and Hari ki Podi Temple by the Tawi River; as well as Raghunath Temple, Ranbishwar Shiv Mandir, Pheer Kho Shiv Temple, Hanuman Temple, Aap Shambu Temple, Shiv Dham on Canal Road, and many more. Among these, the ancient and revered Kailash Mandir is located in the Chinore area of Jammu, just 6-7 kilometers from the Jammu Bus Stand.

This temple is close to the well-known Aap Shambu Mandir, where devotees visit daily to seek blessings from Lord Shiva. The Kailash Temple is located in a quiet and scenic area surrounded by dense forests, rather adding to its beauty. An interior road connects this Kailash Temple with the famous Aap Shambu Temple, allowing people who frequent Aap Shambu to visit Kailash Temple and pay their respect to Lord Shiva. This sacred place possess spiritual and cultural importance, drawing huge crowds of devotees every Monday to offer milk to the Shiva Linga. Famous for its architectural beauty and divine atmosphere, the temple draws devotees and tourists from all around the country to seek peace, blessings, and communion with Lord Shiva. Kailash Mandir is said to have been built cen-

turies ago in dedication to Lord Shiva. This temple occupies a revered place in the minds of devotees since it represents the abode of Lord Shiva-Mount Kailash, the creature of fashion and a revered mountain in sacred Hindu realms said to be the residence of Shiva and Parvati. Although precise details about the temple remain, the age of the shrine provides an antiquated dictation worthy enough to make it a treasure in Jammu. I had visited this pious temple at the beginning of this week along with my family. A visit to this temple was nothing short of a mind-altering spiritual experience. As I approached the temple, through a canopy of green and dense forests, I felt serenity sweeping over me. The natural scope of beauty around this area again merged with the serene atmosphere of this temple to make the experience all the more enthralling.

The Kailash Mandir is a typical example of Northern Indian temple architecture, with elaborate stone carving and a soaring tower that depicts the ascent of the spirit. In the innermost part of the temple is the Sanctum Sanctorum, where a beautiful Shivalinga—a representation of Lord Shiva—is placed, concentrating the whole devotion demanded by the Lord. Inside the temple, there is also a cave through which pilgrims may pass in order to have darshan of Lord Shiva. The cave is beautified with various images of Hindu gods and goddesses, adding to the beauty of the place. The use of local stone and carvings that depict mythological stories further splendedored the temple's beauty. With an abundance of

green trees and dense forests, it provides an ambient surrounding-ideal for meditation and prayers. The temple is very sacred for the devotees of Lord Shiva, especially during the holy month of Shravan (July-August) and on Mahashivratri, when masses congregate at the temple premises to offer their prayers, fluid, and flowers to the Deity. This is a place for rituals, prayers, and the seeking of blessings. On Mahashivratri, immense crowd and enthusiasm swell into the ambiance of the temple, where devotees keep a day-long fast and offer special prayers, bhajans, and cultural programs within the temple complex. During this time, it is an energetic atmosphere of an undeniable spiritual essence, manifesting in chants of "Om Namah Shivaya."

Kailash Mandir is situated amidst the forest area, which is quite scenic and offers an escape from the city's chaos. The cool breeze, chirping of birds, and surrounding lush green will leave a strong spiritual imprint on the mind of the visitor. Kailash Mandir Chinore is, however, not just another temple. It is a spiritual retreat, representing peace, devotion, and the eternal presence of Lord Shiva. Given its tranquil surroundings as well as its historical and religious significance, it has become a must-go destination for those searching for themselves and the divine. For the visitors to Jammu, this is a journey towards the heart of spirituality and peace. The gentle mountain air carried a perfume of incense and was full of the suggested sacredness waiting beyond those doors. On

entering the temple, I was left utterly stunned by its magnificent architecture. The towering spire of the mandir erupted grandly into the prove of the crystal clear blue sky. The enchanting carvings telling legends from Hindu mythology on the outer walls of the temple were touched with the craftsmanship of a bygone era. The atmosphere lifted me into the reverential domain as I walked in. The shrine where the Shivalinga is lodged radiated divine energy. There was a powerful aroma from the flowers and the sounds of the devotees chanting "Om Namah Shivaya" was palpable. I was moved to the core of my being, offering namaz before the Shivalinga, seeing the very face of the divine.

One thing that discouraged me and made me a bit uneasy is the lack of parking space for vehicles near the temple. Additionally, there are no basic facilities or amenities for devotees and tourists, which urgently needs the attention of the relevant authorities and the department of archaeology. The interior link road leading to the temple is also in poor condition and requires improvement. Proper lighting should be installed both inside and outside the temple. It would also be beneficial to have a guide available to provide directions and insights about this sacred place. Moreover, lot of developmental works need to be undertaken by the authorities, and the administration must allocate sufficient funds for these improvements. This will ultimately enhance the area around the temple and attract a huge number of tourists.

Purmandal: A Sacred Cultural and Religious Gem of Shivratri Celebrations

■ RISHI YADAV

An ancient and religious pilgrimage site of Jammu, situated on the banks of the Devika River, this part of Jammu is also called 'Chota Kashi.' This place is considered extremely sacred, especially for the devotees of Lord Shiva. There are many temples and shrines here. Historically and culturally rich, Paramandala also finds mention in the Puranas and other religious texts. It is believed that this temple existed even before the Mahabharata period. In the Padma Purana, Lord Shri Krishna has said that when the Ganges fills with sinful bathers, they themselves bathe in the Devika to get rid of these sins. This place is popular as Chhota Kashi,

where a large number of Hindus perform rituals for the peace of the departed souls.

The popularity of this place is as long ago as its original name Pur, the Govan Mandal adjacent to Pur was added to it, due to which this place is now known as Purmandal, the architectural style of the ancient temples located here confirms that this area was protected and developed by different dynasties. Raja Gupta period, Maurya period, and later Dogra Maharaja Ranbir Singh was so impressed by the glory of Lord Shiva that he wanted to make Purmandal like Kashi, but for some reason he could not fulfill his resolution. The founder of the state of Jammu and

Kashmir, Maharaja Gulab Singh, built 108 Shiva temples in the temple complex. A group of Shivalingas is installed in each of these temples.

According to the priest of the temple, the construction of the original structure was done by the king of Kashmir: Veni Dutt, about 1400 years ago. Veni Dutt had a daughter who suffered from a headache from birth. He consulted a sant (astrologer), who told him that his daughter was a vulture in her previous birth and had died after being hit by an arrow in the head. When the king reached Purmandal with the saint, he found the skeleton of a vulture with an arrow in its head. As soon as the arrow was removed from the skull, her daughter's headache sub-

sided. After this Raja Veni Dutt got the Umapati Shiva temple constructed at that place and installed the idol of Gidhri on a wall, which is present even today. Another proof of the sanctity of Purmandal is that people here immerse the ashes of their loved ones in the Devika River, while according to Hindu tradition, this is usually done in Haridwar or Kashi. From this, it is clear that Purmandal is compared to Kashi; local folklore and religious texts describe

Purmandal as Shivalingam. In addition to the attractive idols of Shiva and Parvati in the sanctum sanctorum of the golden-domed Umapati Shiva temple in Purmandal, there is also a Shiva Kund, a small self-made stone idol of

Nagdev is seen inside the Kund, in which the water level neither decreases nor increases, Shiva offers hundreds of tons of water mixed with milk, honey, sesame seeds, etc. in the Kund, but miraculously the water level remains the same, which increases the reverence of the people. On the day of Mahashivratri, a huge crowd of devotees gathers here.

Special pujas, homas, and abhishekams are performed to the deity on the day. On this day, devotees observe a fast on this day and worship Lord Shiva. People observe a fast, offer milk and water to Lord Shiva, and chant "Namah Shivaya."

Mahashivratri is one of the most important Hindu festivals celebrated

in India to mark the wedding of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. On this day, devotees observe a fast on this day and offer prayers to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. Purmandal is not only a historical and religious site but also a symbol of spirituality and cultural heritage. During Mahashivratri, the grandeur of this place and the faith of the devotees are worth seeing. This place reminds us of Indian culture, traditions, and religious values. In such a situation, those who are ardent devotees of Lord Shiva or are interested in history and religion must visit Paramandala once.

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The Observance of World Day of Social Justice

■ DR PRIYA SHARMA

The World Day of Social Justice is observed annually on February 20 and serves as a reminder of the enduring quest for social equity and justice across the globe. This significant day emerged from the recognition of the need for inclusive development aimed at combating poverty, fostering gender equality, and ensuring opportunities for marginalized groups. The origins of the World Day of Social Justice date back to the 2005 World Summit, where United Nations member states emphasized the critical need for social justice as integral to fostering peace and security. In 2007, the General Assembly officially adopted the resolution declaring February 20 as the World Day of Social Justice. This initiative sought to galvanize international action surrounding social challenges affecting millions, especially in developing nations. The significance of celebrating this day lies in its role as a platform to highlight pressing global social justice issues. The objectives include: Educating communities about the importance of social justice in achieving sustainable development. Advocating for equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, irrespective of their background, gender, or socio-economic status. Mobilizing governments, organizations, and individuals to engage in actions that promote social inclusion and rectify injustices.

**Importance of Social Justice in Global Society**

Social justice is vital for creating stable, resilient societies. Its principles advocate for the fair distribution of resources and opportunities while addressing systemic inequalities that can undermine peace and progress. In today's world, where disparities continue to widen, the promotion of social justice fosters an environment where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, thus contributing to the overall development and harmony within global communities. The World Day of Social Justice serves as a catalyst for dialogue and action aimed at achieving a just world where every individual can live with dignity and equal rights.

**Historical Background and Origins**

The World Day of Social Justice was established against a backdrop of significant international events that shaped the global discourse on social equity and justice. Its creation is rooted in various key milestones within the framework of the United Nations (UN) and its ongoing commitment to promoting universal human rights and development.

**The Role of the United Nations**

The impetus for the observance of the World Day of Social Justice can be traced back to the 2005 World Summit, during which leaders from around the world con-

vened to address pressing issues of poverty, inequality, and human rights. This summit underscored the necessity of addressing social justice as a means to attain global peace and security. The discussions highlighted the intersection of social justice with various global challenges, including economic disparities, gender discrimination, and the marginalization of vulnerable communities.

**Adoption of the Resolution**

In 2007, following these deliberations, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that officially designated February 20 as the World Day of Social Justice. This resolution aimed to mobilize international awareness and action to combat social injustices that plague societies worldwide. It set forth a framework for recognizing the importance of social equity in combating poverty and fostering inclusive development. This date has since served as an annual reminder for governments, NGOs, and individuals to collaboratively engage in promoting social justice initiatives.

**Key International Events and Declarations**

Several landmark declarations and frameworks have also influenced the establishment of the World Day of Social Justice: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): This foundational document affirmed the rights and freedoms of all individuals, laying the groundwork for the principles that underpin social justice. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966): This treaty emphasized the role of social justice in ensuring the protection of economic, social, and cultural rights. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): These international frameworks underscored the importance of social equity in achieving development objectives aimed at eradicating poverty and fostering sustainable practices globally.

**Evolution Over Time**

Since its inception, the World Day of Social Justice has evolved into a significant platform for dialogue and action focused on various social justice issues across the globe. This evolution reflects the dynamic nature of social justice, incorporating new challenges as they arise and adapting strategies to address them effectively. Each celebration of this day brings renewed focus to the ongoing struggles for equality and fairness, emphasizing the need for sustained commitment and collective action towards achieving social justice goals.

**Significance of Social Justice in Indian Society**

Social justice is a foundational principle that underpins the fabric of Indian society, influencing various aspects such as eco-

nomie equity, caste dynamics, and women's rights. Addressing these issues is essential not only for upholding human dignity but also for fostering a harmonious and inclusive nation. Economic inequality in India remains a pressing concern, with significant disparities in wealth and access to resources. For instance, despite being one of the world's fastest-growing economies, a substantial portion of the population lives below the poverty line. According to the World Bank, around 22% of the Indian population falls under this category. Economic disparity exacerbates other forms of injustice, leading to limited educational and employment opportunities for marginalized communities. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. Programs such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) aim to provide a legal guarantee for at least 100 days of unskilled wage employment in a financial year to every rural household, helping to alleviate poverty and improve living standards. Caste discrimination remains a pervasive issue in India, where the caste system historically dictates social standing and access to opportunities. Despite legal prohibitions against caste-based discrimination, practices persist both at institutional and societal levels. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 was enacted to prevent atrocities against members of marginalized communities and ensure their rightful access to education, government jobs, and public services. Activists and organizations continue to challenge prevalent norms. For example, the Dalit Panthers and other movements work towards societal reform, advocating for equality and justice.

**Women's Rights**

Women in India face multiple layers of discrimination, influenced by both traditional norms and contemporary societal structures. Issues such as gender-based violence, disparities in education, and employment illustrate the plight of women in many parts of the country. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) indicates that around 30% of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical or sexual violence. This highlights the need for systemic change to ensure women's safety and equal participation in all spheres. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme focuses on ensuring the survival, protection, and education of the girl child, aiming to transform societal attitudes and improve gender ratios.

**Impact on Society**

Social justice initiatives significantly impact various segments of Indian society by promoting dignity, rights, and equal opportunities. These efforts lead to:

Empowered communities, where marginalized groups gain a voice and agency. Economic development, fostering a more inclusive economy where all citizens can contribute to and benefit from national progress. Social cohesion, as efforts to address injustices contribute to reducing societal tensions and fostering understanding among diverse groups.

**Celebrations and Observances**

The World Day of Social Justice is globally recognized and celebrated through various activities, campaigns, and observances that emphasize the importance of addressing social inequalities. This day catalyzes initiatives aimed at promoting social justice and enhancing awareness across diverse communities.

**Global Celebrations**

Across the world, different organizations and institutions engage in activities that highlight key issues relevant to social justice: Many NGOs and educational institutions organize workshops, seminars, and webinars aimed at raising awareness about social justice issues such as poverty, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. These gatherings often include discussions led by experts who share insights and strategies for fostering social equity. Activists leverage platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to spread awareness about social justice issues. Hashtags related to World Day of Social Justice trend, encouraging individuals to share their stories and advocate for change. Volunteer work and community outreach programs are organized, focusing on providing aid to marginalized communities. Activities include food distribution, healthcare services, and clothing drives, aimed at uplifting those facing social injustices.

**Observances in India**

In India, the celebration of the World Day of Social Justice is particularly significant given the country's diverse social landscape and ongoing struggles for equality.

Local Initiatives: Various educational and academic institutions across India host workshops and discussions to address issues such as caste discrimination, gender equality, and economic disparities. Initiatives are led by student organizations and civil society groups, promoting dialogue among participants about possible solutions to social inequalities. Some NGOs organize cultural events such as street plays and art exhibitions that focus on themes of social justice. These programs not only entertain but also educate the public about critical social issues, fostering a sense of community engagement and responsibility. Government bodies and NGOs participate actively in the observance of this day: Governments at various levels may hold discussions about existing

policies aimed at addressing social justice issues. These forums provide a platform for stakeholders to evaluate programs, propose adjustments, and promote new initiatives. Various NGOs launch targeted campaigns on this day to highlight how social justice impacts particular demographics, such as women, Scheduled Castes, and Tribals. These campaigns may include initiatives designed to encourage policy reforms or public commitments towards creating a more equitable society.

**Social Media Presence**

Indian activists and organizations utilize social media to extend the reach of the World Day of Social Justice. Campaigns often include: Engaging video content is shared online, raising awareness about pressing social issues and inviting public engagement. Activists may host live sessions to discuss social justice topics, allowing participants to ask questions and share experiences.

**Challenges in Achieving Social Justice**

Achieving social justice remains a significant challenge both globally and within India, with several systemic and socio-economic obstacles impeding progress. Here, we explore some of the key challenges that hinder the realization of social equity.

**Economic Disparity**

One of the primary challenges is economic disparity, which is prevalent in many societies worldwide. The widening wealth gap contributes to social injustice by limiting access to essential resources such as education, healthcare, and employment opportunities for marginalized communities. Nearly 10% of the global population continues to live on less than \$1.90 a day, exacerbating cycles of poverty and preventing upward mobility.

**Political Corruption**

Political corruption poses another major hurdle in the pursuit of social justice. Corruption results in the misallocation of resources intended for social programs, which undermines efforts to alleviate poverty and promote social welfare. It erodes public trust in government institutions, leading to apathy and disengagement from civic responsibilities. Corruption may stifle the implementation of policies aimed at enhancing social equity.

**Social Stigma and Prejudice**

Social stigma, often stemming from deeply embedded cultural and societal norms, presents a considerable barrier to achieving social justice. In India, caste-based discrimination continues to persist, affecting access to education and employment for those belonging to lower castes or marginalized communities. The societal stigma associated with caste further entrenches inequality. Women face widespread discrimination and violence, rooted in patriarchal norms that dictate gen-

der roles. Resistance to progressive women's rights reforms is prevalent.

**The Role of Government and NGOs**

Governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play significant roles in promoting social justice both globally and in India. Their efforts are crucial in enhancing awareness, implementing initiatives, and mobilizing communities to address social inequalities.

**Governmental Involvement in Promoting Social Justice**

Governments have the primary responsibility for upholding and enforcing social justice through legislation, policy frameworks, and developmental programs: Governments implement programs like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which provides a legal guarantee for wage employment, thus improving livelihoods in rural areas. Legislation such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act aims to protect marginalized communities from discrimination and violence, reaffirming their rights. Policy Implementation : Initiatives aimed at empowering disadvantaged groups—like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, which provides housing for the homeless—demonstrate the government's commitment to social justice. Governments often run awareness campaigns to educate the public about their rights and available resources. These campaigns may utilize media channels to reach wider audiences effectively.

**Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

NGOs play a complementary role by filling the gaps that governmental efforts may not fully address. They often engage in grassroots advocacy and capacity-building initiatives. Advocacy and Awareness: NGOs conduct workshops, seminars, and outreach programs to raise awareness about social justice issues, addressing topics like gender equality and caste discrimination. NGOs leverage digital platforms to expand their reach. Through hashtags and viral content, they effectively mobilize communities and advocate for social change.

Community Engagement: Many NGOs focus on empowering communities by providing resources such as skills training and financial assistance. Programs like self-help groups (SHGs) foster economic independence among women. NGOs encourage community involvement by organizing volunteer opportunities, allowing individuals to actively participate in social justice efforts, thereby fostering a culture of civic engagement.

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