



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 19-05-2025

GS-1

1. Jnanpith Award
2. Rajon Ki Baoli Stepwell
3. Bihar's high replacement rate a consequence of poverty

GS-2

4. Is caste census is not a silver bullet for social justice

GS-3

5. World Food Prize

Jnanpith Award

Syllabus: GS-1: Art and Culture - Literature

Context:

- The **58th Jnanpith Award** was conferred by the **President of India** to:
 - **Jagadguru Rambhadracharya** (for contributions in **Sanskrit literature**).
 - **Gulzar**, the eminent **Urdu poet**, was also selected but could not attend the ceremony due to health reasons.

About the Jnanpith Award:

Overview:

- **Established:** 1961 by the **Bharatiya Jnanpith Trust**, founded by industrialist **Sahu Shanti Prasad Jain**.
- **First Conferred:** 1965.
- **Objective:** To recognize and honour **outstanding contributions to Indian literature**, and promote **India's cultural and intellectual heritage**.

Historical Background:

- Conceived on **Sahu Shanti Prasad Jain's 50th birthday** on **22 May 1961**.
- Initially awarded for a **specific work**, but since the **18th award**, it honours the **entire literary contribution** of an author.

Eligibility Criteria:

- Open to **Indian citizens** only.
- Recognizes contributions in **languages listed in the Eighth Schedule** of the Indian Constitution and **English** (included since the **49th award**).
- Once a language receives the award, it becomes **ineligible for the next three years**.

Selection Process:

Proposal Stage:

- Proposals are invited from:
 - **Universities**
 - **Literary organizations**

- Critics
- Readers

Language Advisory Committees (LACs):

- Each recognized language has a **3-member expert committee**.
- LACs are **reconstituted every 3 years**.
- They may consider **names beyond those submitted**.

Evaluation Criteria:

- **Comprehensive review** of an author's entire body of work.
- Emphasis on **cultural impact** and **contemporary relevance**.

Selection Board:

- Composed of **7 to 11 eminent scholars** with integrity and distinction.
- Reviews LAC recommendations and makes the **final selection**.

Award Details:

- **Components:**
 - **Cash Prize:** ₹11 lakh
 - **Citation**
 - **Plaque**
- Formerly (first 17 awards): Given for a **specific literary work**.
- Now: Recognizes **overall literary excellence**.

Rajon Ki Baoli Stepwell

Syllabus: GS-1: Indian Culture and Heritage – Traditional Knowledge.

Context:

Conservation project was completed for Rajon ki Baoli, a 16th-century stepwell in Mehrauli Archaeological Park, New Delhi.

Rajon Ki Baoli Conservation Project – Overview

Location: Mehrauli Archaeological Park, New Delhi

Era: Constructed around 1506 CE during the Lodi dynasty

Led by: Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

Partners: World Monuments Fund India (WMFI) & TCS Foundation

Global Alignment: Climate Heritage Initiative – promoting sustainable water management in the context of climate change

Historical Significance

- **Function:** Stepwell used for water storage and as a rest stop offering shade to travellers.
- **Architecture:**
 - Arched colonnades
 - Ornate stucco medallions
 - Depth: 13.4 metres | Area: 1,610 sq. metres
- **Symbolism:** Reflects the engineering and artistic excellence of the Lodi period.

Conservation Efforts

- **Initial Steps:** Cleaning and desilting
- **Structural Repairs:** Strengthening the foundations and restoring damaged sections
- **Materials Used:** Traditional lime plaster and mortar to maintain authenticity
- **Water Quality:** Improved through eco-sensitive techniques
- **Historical Accuracy:** Guided by archival records

Community Engagement & Education

- **Awareness Drives:** Focused on cultural and ecological importance
- **Educational Initiatives:** Heritage walks, lectures, and site visits for students and locals
- **Participatory Conservation:** Involving communities in maintenance and care

Significance of Traditional Water Systems

- **Climate Relevance:** Stepwells like Rajon ki Baoli represent time-tested, sustainable water harvesting techniques

- **Model for Future Projects:** Showcases how ancient structures can meet modern needs for sustainability

Current Status

- **Open to Public:** The site is accessible for cultural and educational purposes
- **Revitalised Landmark:** Serves as a heritage tourism site and a case study for successful conservation

Key Takeaway

The Rajon ki Baoli project exemplifies how **heritage conservation**, **climate resilience**, and **community participation** can go hand-in-hand to restore India's traditional water wisdom.

Traditional Water Harvesting & Conservation Systems in India – State-wise Table

State/UT	Traditional Water System	Description / Purpose
Rajasthan	<i>Johad, Khadin, Baori, Tanka</i>	Johads are earthen check dams; Khadin is runoff farming; Baoris are stepwells; Tankas are underground water tanks.
Gujarat	<i>Virdas, Stepwells (Vavs)</i>	Virdas are shallow wells for water collection in saline areas; Vavs are ornately built stepwells.
Maharashtra	<i>Bandhara, Phad System</i>	Bandharas are small check dams; Phad is community-managed canal irrigation system.
Tamil Nadu	<i>Eri, Ooranis</i>	Eris are tanks used for irrigation and flood control; Ooranis are small village water tanks.
Karnataka	<i>Kalyani, Katte</i>	Kalyanis are sacred temple tanks; Kattes are bunds around trees used to store rainwater.
Kerala	<i>Surangam, Kulam</i>	Surangams are horizontal wells; Kulams are small tanks used for domestic and irrigation use.
Andhra Pradesh / Telangana	<i>Kunta, Cheruvu, Tankas</i>	Kunthas and Cheruvus are village tanks; Tankas are rainwater harvesting structures.
Odisha	<i>Munda, Kata</i>	Mundas are small reservoirs; Katas are

State/UT	Traditional Water System	Description / Purpose
		embankments for runoff harvesting.
West Bengal	<i>Dighi, Pukur</i>	Large ponds used for storage and domestic use.
Assam	<i>Dong, Pukhuri</i>	Dongs are community channels for irrigation; Pukhuris are village ponds.
Himachal Pradesh	<i>Kul, Kuhl</i>	Small gravity flow irrigation channels.
Uttarakhand	<i>Naula, Chal</i>	Naulas are stone-lined wells; Chals are seasonal water collection ponds.
Jammu & Kashmir	<i>Zing, Kuhl</i>	Zings are water storage tanks in Ladakh; Kuhls are surface water channels in the hills.
Punjab	<i>Khadin-type field bunding</i>	Used to collect and store monsoon runoff for crop use.
Haryana	<i>Talab, Johad</i>	Talabs are village ponds; Johads are earthen bunds for rainwater harvesting.
Chhattisgarh	<i>Bhatli, Bhandara</i>	Small tanks and bunds used traditionally by tribal communities.
Jharkhand	<i>Aahar, Pyne</i>	Aahars are storage structures; Pynes are traditional irrigation channels.
Bihar	<i>Aahar-Pyne System</i>	A sophisticated rainwater harvesting and irrigation system.
Madhya Pradesh	<i>Talab, Bavdi</i>	Talabs are lakes or reservoirs; Bavdis are stepwells.
Uttar Pradesh	<i>Baoli, Pond irrigation</i>	Baolis are stepwells; ponds are used for irrigation and domestic needs.
Nagaland	<i>Zabo System</i>	Unique system integrating forest, agriculture, and water conservation.
Manipur	<i>Zings</i>	Small reservoirs mainly for paddy irrigation.

Bihar's high replacement rate a consequence of poverty

Syllabus: GS-1: Population Geography – Demographic Changes.

Context:

- This is an analysis of TFR in Bihar, based on an article published in The Hindu.

Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in India – 2021 Overview

- As per **Sample Registration System (SRS) 2021** by the Registrar General of India:
 - **India's TFR:** 2.0 (replacement level is 2.1)
 - **Delhi & West Bengal:** Lowest TFR at 1.4
 - **Bihar:** Highest TFR at 3.0

TFR in Bihar – An Outlier

Key Facts:

- **TFR stagnation:** Around 3.0 for the past 6–7 years.
- **Projected achievement of replacement level (2.1):** By 2039.
- Despite improvements in:
 - **Infant Mortality Rate (IMR):** Reduced from 42 to 27 per 1,000 live births.
 - **Women's education levels**
 - **Poverty rates (as per NITI Aayog's Multidimensional Poverty Index)**

Factors Influencing High TFR in Bihar

1. Cultural Preferences

- **High fertility as a norm:** Only **49.6% of women in Bihar** consider two children as ideal vs. **67% nationally**.
- Fertility is influenced by **conscious choices** rooted in **social norms**.

2. Economic Structure

- Primarily **agricultural economy**, leading to demand for more labor (children).
- **Low urbanisation and industrialisation** → Limited alternative employment.
- Poor **primary education system** and **high illiteracy** persist.

3. Gender-related Dynamics

- Strong **son preference**, especially in landed, affluent rural households.
 - Families ideally want **two sons**.
 - Probability of having two sons consecutively: **only 26.4%** → Leads to larger families.

4. Low Female Literacy & Empowerment

- **Female literacy in 2011: ~53%**
- Despite schemes (e.g., **bicycle distribution for girl students**), challenges persist:
 - Low **employability**
 - Restricted **mobility and autonomy**
 - **Mothers-in-law** often mediate contact with health workers (e.g., ASHA workers)

Urban vs Rural TFR Dynamics

National Comparison:

- **Urban India TFR: 1.6**
- **Rural India TFR: 2.2**
- **Gap: 0.6**

Bihar Comparison:

- **Urban TFR in Bihar: 2.3**
- **Rural TFR in Bihar: 3.1**
- **Gap: 0.8**
- **Concern:** Even urban areas in Bihar show **above-replacement TFR**, which is unusual compared to national urban trends.

Multidimensional Poverty and TFR

- **Poverty is a factor**, but **not the sole determinant**.
- Cultural and structural issues **intertwine with economic deprivation**.
- MDP indices **do not fully capture** urbanisation, employment, and livelihood realities.

Implications of High TFR – Political and Democratic Concerns

1. Regional Demographic Divergence

- Southern States: Already reached or nearing **below-replacement fertility**.
- Northern States (e.g., Bihar, UP, MP, Rajasthan): **High population growth continues**.

2. Delimitation Debate

- **Post-2026 delimitation** may increase representation for high TFR States.
 - Leads to **disproportionate constituencies** (25–30 lakh voters per MP in North vs. smaller in South).
 - Raises question: Will **low TFR States be penalized** for demographic success?

3. Federal Tensions

- **Allocation of resources** (via Finance Commission) is based on **population size**.
- If trends persist, could create **political imbalance** and **strain on cooperative federalism**.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- TFR is not merely a demographic figure but a reflection of **cultural, economic, and policy realities**.
- Tackling high TFR in Bihar requires:
 - Greater focus on **female education, employment, and awareness**
 - **Cultural transformation** through grassroots campaigns
 - Enhancing **public health outreach, literacy, and women's empowerment**
- **Delimitation and resource allocation** must consider **development achievements**, not just raw population data, to ensure equity and democratic fairness.

Is Caste Census Is Not a Silver Bullet for Social Justice?

Syllabus: GS-2: Governance – Policy Making & GS-1: Demographic Data - Census.

Context:

- This is the summary of an editorial published in The Hindu newspaper.

Introduction: Importance of Census in India

- Census data serves as a critical tool for **public policymaking**, informing sectors like **health, education, employment, and housing**.
- The recent decision by the **Government of India to include caste enumeration** in the national Census has sparked both support and criticism.
- It is seen by some as a long-overdue move to gather **accurate data on Other Backward Classes (OBCs)**, but concerns exist about the **intent behind the move**.

The Merit of Caste Census

- **Empirical Basis for Affirmative Action:**
 - Offers a factual foundation to evaluate the **socio-economic status** of different caste groups, especially OBCs.
- **Judicial Legitimacy:**
 - Reliable data can help justify welfare schemes in court, addressing concerns over the **credibility of existing surveys** and commissions.
- **Intra-OBC Inequality:**
 - Helps identify **Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs)** within OBCs and enables **targeted policy interventions**.

Limitations and Cautions

- **Overreliance on Census Data:**
 - Risk of elevating Census data as the **sole foundation** for social justice, which can be **misleading and dangerous**.
- **Mandate of the Census:**
 - The Registrar General of India is meant to **collect neutral data**, not shape or recommend policy.

- Overburdening the Census with political expectations risks **politicisation** of a neutral institution.
- **Role of Political Leadership:**
 - Welfare policy must be driven by **empirical evidence already available, not delayed** in anticipation of perfect data.

Historical Precedents: Data vs. Political Will

- **Policy reforms like:**
 - **Reservations, land reforms, and the Mandal Commission** were implemented based on **political vision and public pressure**, not detailed data.
- **Example: EWS Reservation by Modi Government**
 - Implemented **without major statistical evidence or commission backing**.
 - Illustrates that **government action can proceed independent of data** when there is political will.

Existing Data on Caste Inequality

- **SC/ST Data:**
 - SCs and STs have been included in the Census since Independence.
 - **National Sample Surveys, NFHS, and NCRB data** reveal persistent **social and economic disadvantage** and **rising crimes**.
- **OBC Data from Other Surveys:**
 - **Bihar Caste Survey, SECC, and academic research** show:
 - **Economic vulnerability, informal employment, and lack of social mobility** within OBCs.
- **Marginal Representation:**
 - OBCs, SCs, and STs are **underrepresented in private sectors** (corporates, IT, media) and **elite public institutions** (higher education, judiciary, top bureaucracy).

Policy Vacuum and Inaction

- Despite **abundant data**, transformative welfare policies have not been enacted for OBCs.

- **Inaction at the national level** indicates a **lack of political commitment** rather than lack of information.
- Highlights the **gap between knowledge and execution**.

Way Forward: The Role of Political Will

- **Data ≠ Policy:**
 - Data can diagnose problems but cannot **implement solutions**.
- **Political Vision is Key:**
 - Effective policy for marginalised communities requires **moral imagination and democratic accountability**, not just data.
- **Real Test for Government:**
 - Lies in the **execution of welfare measures**, not merely in collecting caste data.

Conclusion

- A caste census can be a useful tool but must not be seen as a **precondition for justice**.
- Without **robust political will**, even the best data will remain unused.
- Social justice demands **action-oriented governance**, not just enumeration.

World Food Prize

Syllabus: GS-3: Agriculture and Food Security

Context:

- **Brazilian microbiologist Mariangela Hungria** received the **2025 World Food Prize**.
- Recognized for pioneering work in **Biological Nitrogen Fixation (BNF)** and promoting **microbial solutions** in agriculture.
- Her contributions led to Brazil's '**Micro Green Revolution**', transforming sustainable farming practices.

About the Micro Green Revolution

What is it?

- A transformative **agricultural movement** in Brazil led by Mariangela Hungria.
- Focuses on **biological alternatives** to synthetic fertilizers, especially **microbial seed and soil inoculants**.

Key Features:

- **Biological Nitrogen Fixation (BNF):**
 - Utilizes **rhizobia** and **Azospirillum brasilense**.
 - Converts **atmospheric nitrogen (N₂)** into forms usable by plants.
- **Reduced Dependence on Chemical Fertilizers:**
 - Saves farmers up to **\$40 billion annually** in fertilizer costs.
 - Promotes **environmental sustainability** and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Enhanced Crop Productivity:**
 - **Soybean yield** grew from **15 million tonnes (1979)** to **173 million tonnes (2025)**.
 - Yield improvements also noted in **common beans** and **pasturelands**.
- **Restoration of Degraded Lands:**
 - Developed **first microbial inoculants** for **pasture grasses**.
 - Enhanced **biomass production** and **livestock forage quality**.

About the World Food Prize

Overview:

- The **World Food Prize** is the **highest international honor** recognizing efforts to improve:
 - Food quality
 - Food quantity
 - Food accessibility

Key Facts:

- **Established:** 1986 by **Norman Borlaug** (Nobel Peace Prize winner and father of the Green Revolution).
- **Administered by:** World Food Prize Foundation.
- **Headquarters:** Hall of Laureates, Des Moines, Iowa, USA.

First Laureate:

- **M. S. Swaminathan (1987)** – Key architect of India's **Green Revolution**.

Award Features:

- **Prize:** \$500,000 cash award.
- **Includes:** Diploma and a commemorative sculpture designed by **Saul Bass**.
- **Awarded During:** Annual **Borlaug Dialogue Symposium** in Des Moines, Iowa.
- **Recognizes Contributions in:**
 - Agriculture
 - Soil Science
 - Food Technology
 - Nutrition
 - Public Policy
 - Hunger Alleviation