



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 17-03-2026

Prelims Perspective

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Gajapati Empire

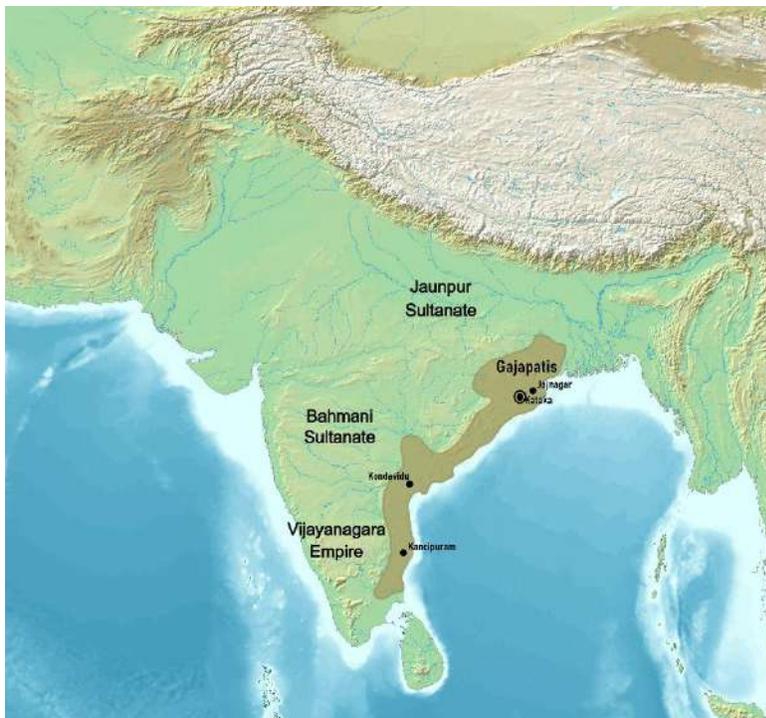
Syllabus: GS-1: Indian History

Context:

- A **Telugu medieval inscription** linked to the **Gajapati rulers of Odisha** has been discovered at the **Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple (Guntur, Andhra Pradesh)**.
- Indicates:
 - **Extent of Gajapati influence into Andhra region**
 - Cultural-administrative linkages beyond Odisha
- Useful for **mapping territorial reach & epigraphy-based history**

About Gajapati Empire

Origin & Foundation



- **Time Period:** c. 1434 – 1541 CE
- **Region:** Primarily Odisha (Kalinga region)
- **Founder:** Kapilendra Deva (Suryavamsa lineage)
- Emerged after decline of **Eastern Ganga dynasty (Bhanu Deva IV)**

Political & Territorial Expansion

- Capital initially at **Cuttack (Kataka)**
- Under **Prataparudra Deva (1497–1540)**:
 - Empire reached zenith
- **Extent of Empire**:
 - North: Ganga River (near Hooghly)
 - South: Kaveri basin
- Included parts of:
 - Odisha
 - Andhra Pradesh
 - Tamil Nadu
 - West Bengal

Cultural Contributions

- Major patrons of:
 - Art & architecture
 - Literature (Odia language development)
 - Performing arts (Odissi roots)
- **Iconic Monument**:
 - **Sun Temple, Konark (UNESCO World Heritage Site)**
- Played a key role in **Odia cultural renaissance**

Administration & Military

- Strong centralized monarchy
- Title "**Gajapati**" = *Lord of Elephants* (symbol of military strength)
- Maintained a **powerful army with war elephants**
- Controlled key **trade routes along eastern coast**

Decline of Gajapati Empire

- Continuous conflicts with:
 - Vijayanagara Empire
 - Golconda Sultanate
- Loss of southern territories in early 16th century

- Internal instability weakened control
- Eventually:
 - Region absorbed into **Mughal Empire (late 16th century)**

Kurumba Painting

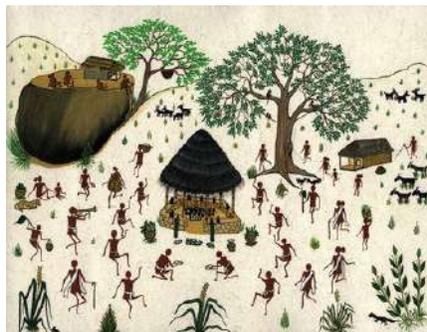
Syllabus: GS-1: Indian Art and Culture – Folk Painting.

Context:

- Recently, it has been reported that **Kurumba painting**, an indigenous tribal art form of the **Nilgiri region**, is **facing the threat of extinction** due to declining practitioners and limited transmission to younger generations.

About Kurumba Painting

- **Kurumba Painting** is an ancient **tribal art tradition** practiced by the **Kurumba tribe**.
- It is believed to be **over 3000 years old**, making it one of the **oldest surviving tribal art forms in South India**.
- The art is primarily associated with the **Nilgiri Hills**, spanning parts of:
 - Tamil Nadu
 - Kerala
 - Karnataka
- Traditionally, paintings were created on:
 - Rocks
 - Cave walls
 - House walls



Raw Materials and Tools Used

- Kurumba paintings rely entirely on **natural forest-based materials**.

Natural Pigments

- **Yellow-brown and black:** extracted from **Vengai tree resin**.
- **Green:** obtained from **crushed leaves**.
- **Red and white:** derived from **natural soil and clay**.
- **Black:** also obtained from **tree bark or charcoal**.

Tools

- Fine twigs
- Bamboo sticks
- Natural fibre brushes
- Cloth pieces

Surface

- Traditionally painted on **cow dung-coated walls**, which act as a natural binding base.

Design and Artistic Style

- The art follows a **minimalistic and symbolic style**.

Key Features

- Simple **linear motifs**
- Use of **dots, lines, and geometric shapes**
- Limited but **earthy natural colour palette**

Common Depictions

- Huts and settlements
- Wild animals
- Forest landscapes
- Scenes from community life

Themes

Kurumba paintings primarily portray:

- Spiritual beliefs and tribal cosmology
- Rituals and festivals

- Daily livelihood activities
- Human–nature relationship

The paintings reflect the **deep ecological knowledge and spiritual connection with forests** maintained by the Kurumba community.

Product Range (Modern Adaptations)

Today, Kurumba art is also adapted into:

- Wall murals
- Decorative panels
- Ritual paintings
- Cloth-based artworks
- Handmade paper paintings

These adaptations help **generate livelihood opportunities** for tribal artists.

Reasons for Decline

- Modernization and migration of tribal youth
- Decline of traditional patronage
- Limited documentation and institutional support
- Competition from commercially popular tribal arts

Cultural Significance

- Preserves **indigenous ecological knowledge**.
- Represents the **intangible cultural heritage of the Nilgiri tribes**.
- Reflects **early rock art traditions of South India**.

Acrylonitrile

Syllabus: GS-3: General Science

Context:

- Recent computer simulations suggest **acrylonitrile** may **self-assemble into cell-like membrane structures**.
- These structures are termed **“azotosomes”**, hypothesized to exist on **Saturn’s moon Titan**.

- Significance:
 - Suggests possibility of **non-water-based life (methane-based life)**.
 - Expands scope of **astrobiology** and extraterrestrial habitability studies.

About Acrylonitrile

- **Chemical Nature:** Organic compound (C₃H₃N).
- **Production:**
 - Produced via **catalytic ammoxidation** of propylene.
 - Reaction involves:
 - Propylene + Ammonia + Oxygen → Acrylonitrile

Properties

- **Physical Properties:**
 - Colorless liquid
 - Sharp **onion/garlic-like odor**
 - Highly **volatile**
- **Chemical Behavior:**
 - Soluble in water
 - Evaporates quickly
 - Vapor is **heavier than air**
- **Hazardous Nature:**
 - Highly **flammable**
 - Can form **explosive mixtures** at room temperature
 - Combustion releases **toxic nitrogen oxides (NO_x)**
 - Requires **closed-system storage and handling**

Applications

- **Industrial Uses:**
 - Production of:
 - Plastics (ABS - Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene)
 - Synthetic rubber (Nitrile rubber)
 - Acrylic fibers (e.g., clothing, carpets)

➤ **Past Use:**

- Mixed with **carbon tetrachloride** as a pesticide (now discontinued due to toxicity concerns)

Impact on Human Health

➤ **Mode of Exposure:** Inhalation, skin contact, ingestion

➤ **Immediate Effects:**

- Irritation of: Skin; Eyes & Respiratory tract

➤ **Toxic Effects:**

- Mild: Headache, fatigue, nausea, vomiting
- Severe: Dyspnea (breathing difficulty); Asphyxiation; Lactic acidosis & Cardiovascular collapse

Scientific Significance

➤ Key molecule in **prebiotic chemistry studies**.

➤ Relevant for:

- Astrobiology
- Origin of life theories

➤ Titan's environment (methane lakes) makes acrylonitrile-based membranes plausible alternatives to **phospholipid bilayers** on Earth.

Washington Consensus

Syllabus: GS-3: Economy – Key Concepts.

Context:

Once upon a late-20th-century lecture circuit, the phrase “Washington Consensus” (WC) did the work of a talisman: 10 tidy policy prescriptions that promised macro stability, market-led growth, and a path out of crisis for beleaguered states.

Understanding the Washington Consensus

Coined in 1989 by economist John Williamson, the **Washington Consensus** represents a set of 10 economic policy prescriptions considered the “standard” reform package promoted for crisis-wracked developing countries.

- **The Proponents:** International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and the US Department of the Treasury.

- **The Core Philosophy:** Neoliberalism, market fundamentalism, and "stabilize, privatize, and liberalize."
- **Key Pillars:**
 - **Fiscal Discipline:** Avoiding large fiscal deficits.
 - **Tax Reform:** Broadening the tax base with moderate marginal rates.
 - **Interest Rates:** Market-determined and positive in real terms.
 - **Trade Liberalization:** Replacing quantitative restrictions with low, uniform tariffs.
 - **Privatization:** Converting state-owned enterprises into private ones.
 - **Deregulation:** Abolishing barriers to entry/exit to promote competition.

Why it was once a "Talisman"

For decades, it was the "gold standard" for economic development.

- **Post-Cold War Dominance:** Following the collapse of the USSR, the Western liberal model appeared invincible (Fukuyama's "End of History").
- **Crisis Management:** It provided a ready-made template for countries in Latin America and Southeast Asia to exit debt crises.
- **India's 1991 Reforms:** India's LPG (Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization) era was significantly influenced by these principles to escape the Balance of Payments crisis.

The Factors Behind its Decline

The "talisman" began to lose its luster due to several structural and geopolitical shifts:

- **Rising Inequality:** While it boosted GDP in many regions, the "trickle-down" effect failed. Wealth became concentrated, leading to social unrest and the rise of populism.
- **The China Model (The Beijing Consensus):** China's meteoric rise—achieved through state-led capitalism rather than pure market liberalization—challenged the "one-size-fits-all" Western approach.
- **The 2008 Global Financial Crisis:** Originated in the heart of the "liberalized" West, proving that unregulated markets could lead to global catastrophe.
- **Geopolitics & Protectionism:** The shift from "**Efficiency First**" to "**Resilience First**." Major powers are now embracing industrial policy, subsidies (e.g., US Inflation Reduction Act), and "friend-shoring."

The "New" Consensus: From Washington to Cornwall?

We are moving toward a post-Washington Consensus world, often discussed in frameworks like the **Cornwall Consensus (G7, 2021)**.

Feature	Washington Consensus	New Emerging Consensus
Primary Goal	Market Efficiency & Growth	Resilience, Sustainability, & Equity
State Role	Minimalist ("Laissez-faire")	Active Investor & Regulator
Supply Chains	Global integration (Offshoring)	Strategic Autonomy (De-risking/Friend-shoring)
Climate	Secondary to growth	Central to economic policy (Green transition)

Significance for India

- **Strategic Autonomy:** India is balancing market reforms with robust welfare schemes (DBT) and industrial policy (*Atmanirbhar Bharat* / PLI Schemes).
- **Global South Leadership:** India often advocates for a developmental model that respects national sovereignty rather than strict Western conditionality.
- **Multi-alignment:** Engaging with Western capital while maintaining state-led infrastructure development.

Critical Takeaway: The Washington Consensus isn't entirely dead, but it has lost its status as a universal dogma. The world has moved from a "market-knows-best" attitude to a "state-must-steer" approach to handle climate change, pandemics, and geopolitical rivalry.

SC Judgement on Menstrual Leave

Syllabus: GS-2: Social Justice – Gender Equality.

Context:

- The Supreme Court of India was hearing a petition seeking **mandatory paid menstrual leave for women (students and working professionals)**.
- The petition was filed by **Shailendra Mani Tripathi**.
- The bench included **Surya Kant** and **Joymalya Bagchi**.

Court's Observations

Concerns about Mandatory Law

- The Chief Justice stated that **making menstrual leave mandatory may adversely affect women's employment opportunities**.

- Employers may:
 - Prefer hiring men over women.
 - View women employees as **less competitive or less available** in the workforce.
- The court warned that such legislation could **create a psychological perception that women are “less capable” than men.**

Market Reality Argument

- Justice Joymalya Bagchi noted:
 - Labour markets operate on **business considerations and productivity.**
 - Employers might avoid hiring women if they perceive **additional legal obligations.**

Voluntary vs Mandatory Measures

- The court differentiated between:
 - Voluntary institutional policies (acceptable).
 - Compulsory statutory mandates (may create hiring bias).

Examples Mentioned

- The petitioner highlighted that **Kerala** introduced menstrual leave for women students in state universities in **2013.**
- The policy was announced by **Pinarayi Vijayan** as part of efforts to build a **gender-just society.**
- Some **private companies** have also introduced menstrual leave policies voluntarily.

Related Supreme Court Judgement (Menstrual Health)

- In **January 2026**, the Supreme Court ruled that:
 - **Menstrual hygiene is part of the Right to Life under Article 21.**
- The bench of **JB Pardiwala** and **R Mahadevan** directed governments to:
 - Provide **free sanitary napkins.**
 - Ensure **functional gender-segregated toilets in schools.**
 - Conduct **menstrual health awareness programmes.**

Constitutional Dimensions

Relevant Articles

- **Article 14** – Equality before law

- **Article 15(3)** – Special provisions for women and children
- **Article 21** – Right to life, dignity, and health

Key Debate

- **Supporters of menstrual leave argue:**
 - Biological realities must be accommodated.
 - It promotes **gender equality and workplace inclusion**.
- **Opponents argue:**
 - Mandatory leave may reinforce **gender stereotypes**.
 - It could **reduce women's hiring prospects**.

Global Context (Examples)

Countries or organisations offering menstrual leave include:

- Japan
- South Korea
- Indonesia
- Spain (recently introduced paid menstrual leave)

Way Forward

- Encourage **voluntary workplace policies**.
- Promote **menstrual health awareness**.
- Improve **workplace infrastructure and flexibility**.
- Balance **gender equity with labour market realities**.