INDIAN SOCIETY GS PAPER I

Why *Arya Samaj* Marriages Are Coming Under Judicial Scan

The *Arya Marriage Validation Act, 1937* grants legal validity to marriages between two persons who declare themselves as Arya Samajists—even if they belong to different castes or faiths. For decades, Arya Samaj temples have facilitated *shuddhikaran*-based marriages, particularly among inter-caste or interfaith couples, without state-level oversight. However, recent High Court directions and Supreme Court observations have triggered rigorous judicial scrutiny. Courts have flagged issues: certificates issued by unauthorised bodies, underage or coerced marriages, procedural lapses in conversion laws, and even human-trafficking concerns in UP. This note explains the evolving legal contours

1. Misuse of "Certificate Power" : In *Arya Samaj* weddings, temples often issue what are called marriage certificates. In 2022, the Supreme Court clearly held that *Arya Samaj "has no business" issuing marriage certificates*—as marriage registration is the function of civil authorities under the *Special Marriage Act* or *Hindu Marriage Act*. The Allahabad High Court echoed this view when it struck down a marriage based solely on such a certificate without evidence of Vedic rites and witnesses.

2. "Fake Arya Samaj Societies" & Underage Rackets ; In July 2025, the Allahabad High Court ordered the UP government to deploy a **DCP-level probe** into unregistered "Arya Samaj" bodies conducting illegal marriages—including those involving minors or conversions not compliant with UP anti-conversion law, 2021. Many certificates were issued without verifying the age or identity of parties involved, indicating organised fraud targeting vulnerable.

3. Compliance Gaps Under Anti-Conversion Law : Per UP's *Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021*, any conversion-by-marriage must meet stringent criteria—60-day pre-declaration, post-conversion filing, police inquiry, and the **burden of proof** lies on the person who facilitated the conversion (§§ 6–12). If Arya Samaj weddings bypass these steps, they are deemed void under the law—even if both sides claim to be Arya Samajists

4. Lack of Independent Verification : A landmark 2024 Delhi HC case exposed a marriage between a woman and her maternal uncle, where the uncle falsely self-declared as single and only two persons attended the ceremony (priest and couple). The Court directed temples to ensure at least *one genuine, verifiable witness from each side*. Such guidelines aim to deter proxy or coerced marriages with fabricated affidavits

Conclusion

With mounting judicial concerns, *Arya Samaj* marriages—once seen as an egalitarian solution for inter-caste/religion couples—are now under legal scrutiny due to procedural lapses, underage marriages, non-compliance with anti-conversion statutes, and fraudulent institutions. Ensuring legitimacy requires:

- Mandatory **civil registration** under HMA or SMA;
- Clear **authorisation process** for temples performing conversions/marriages;
- **Uniform registration standards** and **identity verification protocols**;
- Legal awareness campaigns for vulnerable groups.

Balancing right to marry (especially for interfaith or inter-caste couples) with the state's duty to prevent exploitation and uphold statutory compliance demands policy reform—not dismantling tradition. A harmonised legal framework that integrates the 1937 validation into a * Marriage & Family Relations Act*, with safeguards for consent, age verification, and civil oversight, can preserve individual freedom while protecting rights.

BILATERAL RELATION GS PAPER II

India-U.K. FTA: A Quiet Concession of *Digital Sovereignty*

In August 2025, *The Hindu* editorial warned that India's Comprehensive Economic & Trade Agreement (CETA) with the UK quietly surrenders its regulatory right over the digital domain—striking a stark contrast with the "gold-standard" label touted by political leaders. Though the FTA claims to protect agriculture and labour sectors, it remains silent about sweeping concessions impacting India's future digital autonomy.

Key Concessions Under the FTA

1. **Source Code Disclosure** : The agreement prohibits India from demanding *ex ante* access to source code for imported software in sensitive sectors such as telecom, AI, and healthcare. Unlike earlier U.S. FTAs or CPTPP, *there are no carve-outs*. This limits India's ability to inspect, audit or compel urgent remediation within software used in strategic infrastructure.

2. **Open Government Data Clause** : A non-binding "best-endeavour" clause grants UK entities equal access to Indian public datasets. While committed under earlier NDSAP norms, within the trade context it transforms open data—once seen as transparency—to an international resource that helps competitors test and train AI systems using Indian data.

3. **Consultation-MFN Trap** : A future India-U.K. FTA might require India to notify the UK whenever India grants free flow or localization concessions to another partner—and negotiate equivalent commitments. This early *most-favoured-nation* clause detaches India from its own stand on data localisation and digital control

Consequences for India's Digital Sovereignty

- These clauses mark a reversal in India's global stance — from resisting "code/ex-filing protections" at the WTO to accepting restrictions domestically, much like the U.S. retreat in previous years.

- India's AI industry and regulatory agencies may lose the authority to audit algorithms or impose local hosting requirements. Such capabilities are foundational to sovereign oversight and security in data-sensitive domains.
- The lack of political constituency in India vis-à-vis manufacturing or agriculture meant digital rules passed without debate, even as consequences play out over decades.

Way Forward: Strategising for Sovereignty
- India urgently requires a **Digital Sovereignty Policy** that:
  o Defines *data, software and AI* as critical national resources.
  o Prescribes mandatory civil hosting, source code escrow and audit protocols in sensitive sectors.
  o Guides trade negotiators with foresight on future technology rules.
- Negotiation teams must include digital technology experts with direct access to highest political levels, to align economic objectives with regulatory autonomy in a rising digital economy.
- Simultaneously, India must build **indigenous digital infrastructure**—cloud platforms, large-language models, analytics labs—so that digital industrialisation is not hostage to foreign trade rules or proprietary dependencies.

Conclusion

The India-UK FTA offers market access and new digital corridors for trade—but at a stealthy cost: India unwittingly traded short-term gains for long-term concessions on data, code and algorithmic control. As global digital norms are increasingly written by Western FTAs and data regimes, India must swiftly reclaim regulatory space, infrastructure ownership and algorithmic sovereignty—or risk becoming a digital colony of the 21st century.

ECONOMY GS PAPER III

Is India's Economy "Dead"?

Introduction

U.S. President Donald Trump labelled India a "dead economy" — amid stalling India-U.S. trade talks and proposed 25 % tariffs on Indian exports. Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal swiftly rebutted: India is the **world's fastest-growing major economy**, contributing ≈ **16 % of global GDP growth**, and projected to become the **third-largest economy** within years. Thus, Trump's claim demands empirical scrutiny.

India's Growth Trajectory (≈ 120 words)
- **IMF World Economic Outlook (April 2025)** ranks India as the fastest-growing major economy, with growth forecast at **6.4 %-6.7 % for FY 2025-26 and FY 2026-27**.
- Since 1995, **India's real GDP has grown nearly 12-fold**, far outpacing Germany, the UK, and even Japan (whose economy is now similar in size to 1995 levels), thus debunking the "dead" tag.
- **India's exports share**: goods exports at ~1.8 % and services at ~4.3 % of global trade as of FY 2024-25, signalling trade integration but scope for scale **Emerging Risks & Structural Challenges (≈ 140 words)**
- **Slower growth momentum**: India's trend GDP growth slid from 8-9 % during 2005–11 to **around 6 % since 2014**, exacerbated by global headwinds. S&P estimates that sustained U.S. tariff pressure could pull FY 26 growth **below 6.2 %**.
- **Factory vs farm growth**: Despite the "Make in India" agenda, **manufacturing has contracted as a share of GDP**—down from ~16 % in 2014-15 to ≈14.1 % in 2023-24, now growing slower than agriculture (manufacturing CAGR ~4.0% vs agriculture ~4.7%).
- **Poverty and inequality**: Though extreme poverty has declined, a **significant 24–25 % of the population still remains below the World Bank's poverty threshold** (≤ US $2.15/day) → roughly 83 % of Indians live on less than ₹171/day (PPP $8.40 benchmark). Economic disparities and poor HDI indicators remain persistent.
- **Demand and investment malaise**: Sluggish urban demand, weak wage growth, under-utilised capacity (~75%) and cautious private capex point to inward-looking slowdowns and rising unemployment risks.

Conclusion

Trump's "dead economy" jibe is ideologically and economically misplaced. India, at 6-7 % growth and holding ~12 % share of global growth, is far from dying. However, structural bottlenecks—especially in manufacturing, human development, and distributive outcomes—pose medium-term threats. The key lies in deepening productive investments, fostering inclusive welfare (health, education, digital access), and accelerating reforms in labour, land, and skill sectors. India's challenge is not merely growth, but growth with **equity and quality**.

PRELIM FACTS

1. India's Next Space Mission: *BlueBird Block-2* Satellite

Following the **successful NISAR launch** (July 30, 2025) aboard **GSLV-F16**, ISRO is gearing up for a new **US-India collaboration**: the **BlueBird Block-2 communications satellite**, developed by **AST SpaceMobile (USA)**.

Launch Overview
- Scheduled to launch within **3–4 months** (i.e. by November 2025) using India's **LVM3** (*formerly GSLV-Mk-III*), from **Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota**, on ISRO control.
- BlueBird Block-2 is a **user-funded** mission, part of a set of **nine ISRO launches** planned before March 2026, including **Earth-observation, navigation, technology demonstration and commercial satellites**.

Satellite Specifications

- Mass: ~**6,000 kg** (≈ 6.5 tonnes), deployed into **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)**.
- Equipped with **64 m² phased-array antenna**, designed to provide **direct satellite-to-smartphone** broadband connectivity.
- Features up to **40 MHz throughput**, delivering **peak data speeds ~120 Mbps** — enabling voice/data access without terrestrial towers.

Strategic Significance

- Strengthens **Indo-US civil space cooperation** following NISAR and Axiom-4 astronaut mission.
- Demonstrates ISRO's increasing role in **commercial satellite deployment** — essential to meet its target of a **8–10% share in global launch market** within a decade.

Key Facts Summary

Aspect	Details
Satellite	BlueBird Block-2 (AST SpaceMobile, USA)
Launch vehicle	LVM3 (GSLV-Mk-III, India's heavy-lift)
Launch window	Sept–Nov 2025 (within 3–4 months post-NISAR)
Payload weight	~6 tonnes (6,000–6,500 kg)
Orbit	Low Earth Orbit (LEO)
Mission capability	Direct mobile broadband (~120 Mbps)
Antenna	64 m² phased-array for direct-to-phone
Strategic objective	Expand 5G-like services, enhance global broadband penetration, strengthen bilateral ties

2. OECD Report on Plastic Pollution

The OECD has released a warning that plastic use and waste in Southeast and East Asia may nearly double by 2050 without urgent, stringent policies.

About OECD Report on Plastic Pollution:

What It Is?

A comprehensive environmental forecast by the *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)* assessing the trajectory of plastic production, waste, leakage, and policy options in the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) region.

Key Trends and Findings:

- **Plastic Use Surge:** Projected to rise from 152 million tonnes (2022) to **280 million tonnes by 2050** in APT countries.
- **Waste Generation:** Plastic waste will increase from **113 million tonnes to 242 million tonnes** by 2050.
- **Packaging Waste:** To grow from 49 million tonnes to 91 million tonnes.
- **Mismanaged Waste:** Despite percentage reduction (29% in 2022 → 23% in 2050), absolute volume rises **from 33 to 56 million tonnes**.
- **Plastic Leakage:** 8.4 million tonnes leaked into the environment in 2022; **expected to hit 14.1 million tonnes by 2050**, threatening oceans, rivers, and human health.
- **Climate Implications:** Lifecycle emissions from plastics to **nearly double** from **0.6 to 1 $GtCO_2e$ by 2050**.

3. Apna Ghar Initiative

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has launched 'Apna Ghar', a national initiative providing resting facilities for truck drivers along highways.

About Apna Ghar Initiative:

- **What It Is?**
  - A **resting infrastructure scheme** for truck drivers, launched to address fatigue, hygiene, and well-being during long-haul journeys.
  - Operated at **fuel retail outlets** along **national and state highways** by Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas
- **Launched in:** 2025
- **Aim:**
  - To **enhance road safety**, reduce driver fatigue, and improve **living conditions** for truckers, who are crucial to India's logistics sector.
  - Supports **inclusive infrastructure development** and social welfare in the transport ecosystem.
- **Key Features:**
  - **Widespread Coverage:** 368 rest houses with 4,611 beds operational across major highways.
  - **Facilities Offered:**

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- Dormitories (10–30 beds each)
- Clean toilets and bathing areas (Houdas)
- Self-cooking and dining zones
- Restaurants/Dhabas
- Purified drinking water access
  o **Tech Integration:** 'Apna Ghar' mobile app launched for booking, feedback, and driver engagement.
  o **Public-Private Implementation:** Built and managed by **OMCs** at retail fuel stations.
  o **User-Centric Design:** Customised to **truckers' needs**, informed by feedback and mobile app data analytics.
- **Significance:**
- Promotes driver health, hygiene, and road safety.
- A step towards dignified working conditions for the informal transport sector.
- Aligns with supply chain resilience, labour rights, and SDG 8 (Decent Work).

4. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has urged the Central Government to regulate AI platforms disseminating misinformation about Sikh teachings, history, and Gurbani.

About Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC):

What it is?

SGPC is the **apex elected body of Sikhs** that manages historical gurdwaras and religious affairs in India and abroad, acting under the spiritual guidance of **Sri Akal Takht Sahib**.

Year of Establishment:

- Founded in **1920** as part of the **Gurdwara Reform Movement**, and legally recognised under the **Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925** after British-era religious mismanagement.

Historical Context:

- Emerged during the Sikh struggle against Udasi mahants and British control of Sikh shrines.
- Played a pivotal role in movements like **Nankana Sahib Massacre (1921)**, **Guru Ka Bagh Morcha**, and **Jaito Morcha**.
- Became a symbol of religious autonomy and community self-governance for Sikhs.

Key Functions:

- Administers over 200 gurdwaras under Sections 85 & 87 of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act.
- Conducts elections for 191-member house, ensuring representation from across India.
- Manages educational institutions, medical centres, publications, and religious awareness campaigns.
- Acts on sacrilege, misinformation, and challenges to Sikh spiritual and cultural heritage.

About Gurbani:

- **What is Gurbani?**
  o Gurbani refers to the sacred hymns and verses composed by the Gurus of Sikhism, primarily found in the Guru Granth Sahib, the central scripture of the Sikh faith. It is considered the divine word revealed by the Gurus, and is the spiritual and moral guide for Sikhs.
- **Key Features of Gurbani:**
  o **Divinely Inspired Revelation:** Sikhs believe Gurbani is the **eternal voice of the divine**, revealed through the Gurus, not man-made literature.
  o **Compiled in Guru Granth Sahib:** All authenticated Gurbani is preserved in the **Guru Granth Sahib**, which contains hymns by **six Sikh Gurus** and **15+ saints** (Bhagats) from diverse social and religious backgrounds.
  o **Written in Gurmukhi Script:** The language is primarily **Sant Bhasha** and **Punjabi dialects**, written in **Gurmukhi**, and uses poetic meters called **Raags** (musical modes).
  o **Musical and Poetic Structure**: Most Gurbani verses are composed in **31 Raags**, and are intended to be sung. This enhances **devotional engagement** and memory.
  o **Universal Ethical Message:** Gurbani emphasizes truth, humility, service (seva), compassion, and remembrance of God (Naam Simran) — transcending caste, religion, and gender.
  o **Authority in Sikhism:** It is considered the **living Guru** after Guru Gobind Singh Ji's declaration, and no one is allowed to alter or reinterpret Gurbani arbitrarily.
  o **Daily Recitation and Practice:** Sikhs recite Gurbani (Nitnem) daily, including verses like **Japji Sahib, Rehras Sahib, and Kirtan Sohila**, as part of spiritual discipline.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. Critically examine how digital trade provisions in the India–UK FTA (CETA) challenge India's established positions on digital sovereignty. What are the implications for India's regulatory autonomy and future trade negotiations?

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On 24 July 2025, India and the UK signed the Comprehensive Economic & Trade Agreement (CETA), recently described as a "gold standard" bilateral deal by Indian political circles. While the accord expands market access and promise across 26 chapters—including digital trade, services, and procurement—trade experts have flagged its impact on India's **digital sovereignty**. Negotiations resulted in subtle yet foundational shifts from India's earlier positions at forums like WTO and CPTPP.

Key Digital Provisions & Sovereignty Concerns

1. **Source-code Access Ban**
   — CETA stipulates that India cannot require transfer or access to source code or related algorithms **ex ante**, except in narrow cases of **national security and law enforcement**.
   — This marks a departure from India's earlier assertions demanding regulatory access to inspect software underpinning critical infrastructure (telecom, health, AI). Even the U.S. has backtracked from such broad exemptions—limiting CPTPP obligations to "mass-market" software only.

2. **Open Government Data Clause**
   — India has agreed (even if on a "best-endeavour" basis) to treat its **government-held data as an international public resource**, permitting access to UK entities.
   — In an AI-driven era, such datasets are strategic assets essential for innovation and public policy. The concession raises risks to India's long-term **data-driven industrial advantage**.

3. **MFN Consult Clause in Digital Norms**
   — A future India–partner digital trade agreement obliges India to "consult the UK" about extending similar concessions—free flow of data or localisation—to the UK.
   — This breaks India's mega-passport position against binding rules on data flows at WTO, constraining regulatory flexibility.

Implications for India

- **Diminished Regulatory Agency:** Loss of ex ante source-code access weakens India's capacity to audit software, enforce privacy laws, and secure critical infrastructure. Similarly, open-data norms may force disclosure of sensitive information.
- **Precedent for Future FTAs:** These formulations are likely to become templates in bilateral / plurilateral digital trade chapters, restraining India's stand on data localisation, encryption standards, and procurement limits.
- **Weak Domestic Oversight Cushion:** Without widespread public or political contestation—unlike agriculture or manufacturing—digital commitments risk being insulated from debate despite their long-term national impact.

Way Forward

- **Formulate a National Digital Sovereignty Policy:** This must define data, software, and algorithmic assets as strategic resources, guiding future trade negotiations.
- **Negotiate Binding Flexibilities:** Ensure carve-outs for critical sectors (e-governance, healthcare, defence), probation of source-code access, and public procurement sovereignty.
- **Public Awareness and Legislative Oversight:** Strengthen parliamentary review of trade texts, with participation from domain experts who can assess implications beyond commerce.

Conclusion

While the India–UK FTA brings undeniable gains in trade and services access, its digital trade clauses represent a strategic retreat from India's earlier global posture on data sovereignty. Unless recalibrated through a robust legal-institutional framework, these concessions risk ceding regulatory autonomy and shaping future global norms to India's detriment.

MCQ

1. Consider the following statements regarding **BlueBird Block 2 satellite**:
   1. It is a communications satellite developed jointly by ISRO and NASA.
   2. It will be launched using India's LVM3 (GSLV Mk III) from Sriharikota.
   3. It is designed to provide direct satellite-to-smartphone broadband connectivity.
   Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
   a) 1 and 2 only   **b) 2 and 3 only**
   c) 1 and 3 only   d) 1, 2 and 3

2. The **OECD Report on Plastic Pollution (2025)** specifically focuses on which of the following regions?
   a) BRICS nations
   b) ASEAN Plus Three (APT) countries
   c) SAARC countries
   d) European Union (EU) and ASEAN

3. With reference to the **'Apna Ghar' initiative**, consider the following statements:
   1. It is a scheme launched by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to provide rest facilities for truck drivers.
   2. It offers dormitories, bathing areas, and dining zones along national and state highways.
   3. It is implemented through Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).
   Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
   a) 1 and 2 only   **b) 2 and 3 only**
   c) 1 and 3 only   d) 1, 2 and 3

4. Which of the following statements is/are correct about the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)?

1. It was legally recognised under the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925.

2. It administers historical gurdwaras and is headquartered under the spiritual guidance of Sri Akal Takht Sahib.

3. It is an autonomous religious body with elected representation from across India.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

a) 1 only   b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1 and 2 only   **d) 1, 2 and 3**

5. In the context of **Gurbani** in Sikhism, which of the following is/are correct?

1. Gurbani refers to the sacred hymns compiled in the Guru Granth Sahib.

2. It is written in the Devanagari script and composed in Sanskrit.

3. It is considered the eternal Guru in Sikh tradition after Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

a) 1 only   **b) 1 and 3 only**
c) 2 and 3 only   d) 1, 2 and 3

6. With reference to the Digital Trade provisions of the India–UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), consider the following statements:

1. Article 12.7 prohibits India from requiring access to source code of imported software, except for national security or law enforcement purposes.

2. India has formally agreed to treat its government-held data as an "international public good," permitting access to UK entities.

3. Under the FTA, if India grants digital trade concessions (e.g., free flow of data) to any other country in the future, it must consult the UK and extend similar disciplines.

4. The FTA mandates that India cannot impose any future data localisation requirements for personal data.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2, 3 and 4 only

C. 1, 2 and 3 only

D. All four statements are correct

7. With reference to the claim that India's economy is "dead," consider the following statements:

1. Since 1995, India's GDP has shrunk relative to other major economies.

2. The IMF projects India's GDP growth at about 6.4% in both calendar years 2025 and 2026.

3. India contributes nearly 16% of global economic growth in 2025.

4. India's share **of** global goods exports is around 1.8% (with services exports ~4.5%).

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only   **B. 2, 3 and 4 only**
C. 1, 3 and 4 only   D. All four

8. With reference to recent judicial scrutiny of Arya Samaj weddings, consider the following statements:

1. In 2022, the Supreme Court held that Arya Samaj has no authority to issue marriage certificates—such certificates must be issued by civil authorities under the Special Marriage Act or Hindu Marriage Act.

2. The Delhi High Court has directed Arya Samaj temples to ensure the presence of at least two independent witnesses (at least one relative or acquainted person from each side) whose identities can be verified.

3. The Allahabad High Court has ordered the Uttar Pradesh government to investigate "fake Arya Samaj" **societies** that have solemnised marriages involving minors—without age verification or compliance with the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only   B. 2 and 3 only
C. 1 and 3 only   **D. All of the above**

9. 9.With reference to the Arya Marriage Validation Act, 1937 and recent judicial interpretations, which of the following statements are correct?

1. The 1937 Act validates marriages between two persons who *declare themselves as Arya Samajists*, even if they belong to different religions or sub-castes—a provision that overrides customary Hindu law or local usage that previously barred such unions.

2. Under the Act, solemnisation by an Arya Samaj priest and a self-declaration as Arya Samajists is sufficient for legal validity, without any need for marriage registration under civil law.

3. Recent Supreme Court and High Court rulings have clarified that marriage registration under the Special Marriage Act or Hindu Marriage Act remains essential; Arya Samaj certificates are not conclusive proof of a valid marriage in absence of ceremony and registration.

A. 1 only   B. 1 and 2 only
C. 1 and 3 only   D. All of the above

10. Consider the following:

1. Sending an Indian astronaut to the moon
2. Sample return missions from the moon
3. Building and operating an Indian space station
4. Reducing the cost of satellite launches

How many of the above are the significances of Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO's) Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission?

A. Only one   B. Only two
C. Only three   D. All four