



“We must be willing to get rid of the life we’ve planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us.”

—Joseph Campbell



Edit

End of a long shadow

For nearly six decades, Left Wing Extremism cast a long and painful shadow over large parts of India, with violence becoming a tragic part of everyday life for crores of people. Villages lived under fear. Development remained stalled. Young lives were drawn into an ideology that offered conflict instead of opportunity. Today, as the Union government declares that the country has become free from Naxalism, it marks a moment of deep national significance. The central leadership of the Maoist movement has been almost completely dismantled. Many leaders have surrendered while others have been eliminated in sustained security operations. The so-called Red Corridor that once stretched across multiple states has steadily shrunk over the past decade. This moment did not arrive overnight. Left Wing Extremism has troubled India for 59 years. During this period, more than 12 crore people lived under the constant shadow of violence and insecurity. Thousands of innocent civilians lost their lives while thousands of brave security personnel made the ultimate sacrifice while protecting the nation. Entire regions remained trapped in underdevelopment as roads, schools and hospitals struggled to reach areas controlled by armed insurgents. For decades the problem was acknowledged but rarely resolved. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office in 2014, the government made it clear that the era of hesitation would end. The approach adopted was both firm and comprehensive even as security forces were strengthened, intelligence networks expanded and infrastructure development pushed aggressively into previously inaccessible regions. The government opened doors for those willing to surrender and return to normal life even as the message was equally clear for those who continued to pursue violence that armed insurgency against the Indian state would not be tolerated. Over the years this strategy produced visible results. Areas that once witnessed frequent attacks began experiencing calm. Security forces regained control of territories that had long been considered insurgent strongholds. Development projects accelerated and tribal communities began to see opportunities that had been denied to them for generations. The announcement that India is now free from Naxalism therefore represents more than just a security achievement. It is the closing of a painful chapter that affected crores of citizens. It also reaffirms the strength of India's democratic system. The Constitution provides pathways to address injustice and inequality. Violence and parallel systems of power have no place in a society governed by law. Credit for this achievement belongs first and foremost to the brave soldiers of the Central Armed Police Forces, the CRPF, the specialised CoBRA units and the state police forces who fought tirelessly in difficult terrain. The cooperation of tribal communities also played a vital role in isolating extremist networks. But the political leadership that set the goal and stayed committed to it also deserves recognition. The Modi government had promised to end the scourge of LWE by March 2026. Delivering on that promise is no small achievement. For crores who lived for decades under fear, this moment brings hope. It signals that peace, development and opportunity can finally reach regions that were once trapped in conflict.

‘Nari Shakti’ Soon HERE’S TO WOMEN POWER

POONAM I KAUSHISH

The countdown for an amended Women Reservation Bill Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam Bill 2023 mandating 33% reservation for women in legislatures in time for the 2029 general election has begun. The Government intends bringing it in the ongoing Parliament session before it is adjourned sine die. Yippee!

The Bill proposes to delink it from the ongoing Census and delimitation exercise which would have followed. As under terms of the existing law, which lists Census and delimitation as pre-requisites, implementing the quota ahead of the 2029 Lok Sabha election would have been difficult, if not impossible.

The Government plans to increase Assemblies and Lok Sabha size by 50% whereby the expanded House would have 816 seats from 543 now, of which 273 would be reserved for women. If passed five States: UP, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur which go to polls early 2027 could include women reservation in enlarged Assemblies.

Alongside, it would keep proportional representation of States untouched in an enlarged House and use lottery to identify seats reserved for the fair sex. However, this would require changing the terms of the Delimitation Commission which would use the 2011 Census figures as its base — not 2027 Census as the final figures would be released too late to enable delimitation before 2029.

As, keeping the current proportion of State seats in Lok Sabha unchanged would mean a vote in Kerala or Tamil Nadu would carry more weightage than a vote in UP or Bihar. As it stands, southern States worry that a delimitation based on current population would penalize them in terms of proportional representation in Lok Sabha for meeting the national imperative of population control better than some northern and eastern States.

To allay concerns of southern States which account for 24% Lok Sabha seats, each State's seat share would be retained at the current level. In order to implement this the Government would bring two Bills — one to freeze each State's seat share at its current level for the next 25-30 years and perhaps another Constitutional amendment of Article 82 which mandates adjusting Lok Sabha seats after every Census.

Towards that end Home Minister Amit Shah had consultations with NDA allies and select Opposition Parties TMC and Left, minus Congress last week proposing 50% expansion of legislative seats which would allow sitting MPs and MLAs, 85% of whom are male, to potentially retain their seats even while making room for women.

Asserted a BJP Minister, “There is dire necessity of affirmative action to improve women's conditions, as recent studies on Panchayats where there is reservations, have shown the positive effect of female political participation, leadership, women empowerment and allocation of resources. No matter, instances of them being used as proxies by men to win elections in States from Maharashtra to Bihar.

Undeniably, politics of presence is crucial for effective functioning of our democratic system, as women constitute 50% of the population and have played a key role in deciding many State elections. Bihar a case in point. And BJP has won more of those than Opposition.

Presently, even as we talk about more power to woman, a reality check bares some

unpleasant home-truths. Women account for less than 10% of both Houses of Parliament. Women legislators in Lok Sabha account for roughly 13.6% 74 MPs, lower than 78 in 2019 and much below the global average of 24%.

not just leaders, women continue to remain the ‘unwanted’ and neglected sex. Yet, there is no dearth of women workers in Parties who are regularly sidelined and denied Party tickets to contest elections. Despite, 65.8 %

the population needs. Eventually, women-centric policies would heighten political efficacy among female voters.

At the same time one needs to watch out for the danger that gender politics can lead to

Further, there are only a handful of women leaders today: Congress's Sonia, TMC's Mamata, BSP's Mayawati and President Murmu. So unlike the strong female contingent who fought alongside other freedom fighters, Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kripalani, Aruna Asaf Ali, Durgabai Deshmukh and Savitri Phule, who not only defied the notorious patriarchal norms but also blazed a trail of women's empowerment. Unfortunately, post-Independence India, women slipped to a secondary status where not just leaders, women continue to remain the ‘unwanted’ and neglected sex. Yet, there is no dearth of women workers in Parties who are regularly sidelined and denied Party tickets to contest elections. Despite, 65.8 %, women turnout compared to 65% men during 2024 Parliamentary elections and more women voting than men in 16 of 29 States. Undisputedly, there is a paucity of strong women in politics with Party bosses often reluctant to trust them with handling the rowdy business of winning elections. Add to this a neglect of women issues in most elected bodies. Questionably: Will this Bill correct centuries-old imbalances and stigma against women? Will increased participation of women in the political process lead to less female infanticide, fewer dowry deaths, bride burning and trampling of female aspirations. Undoubtedly, Parties recognize that in a changing India, women marginalization, exclusion from power corridors and decision-making echelons is becoming unsustainable, hence, having more women in politics will improve the system and society. Their absence alienates women thereby undermining the system's legitimacy. Besides, Parties realize value of women power by the rising turnout of female voters who are slowly closing the gap with male turnouts. Their greater visibility and imprint in public spaces which are rising inexorably.



Think. If in 1950 women formed 5% of Parliament, today a mere 9% increase in the last 76 years is a sobering reminder of how slow progress has been. Consequently their under-representation not only reveals gender disparity but also constitutes gender deficit.

Shockingly, States like Tripura, Arunachal, Nagaland and J&K don't have a single women MP in Lok Sabha. Women representation in State Assemblies is even more glaring. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Karnataka have fewer than 5%. Mizoram has none and Nagaland one. Surprisingly, Bihar and Haryana boast of 10% fair sex representation. Hence this lack of representation is problematic as legislation reflects the values of those who make it.

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Besides, Parties realize value of women power by the rising turnout of female voters who are slowly closing the gap with male turnouts. Their greater visibility and imprint in public spaces which are rising inexorably. Hence, women power acts as a potent force to ensure policies and legislation that affect their lives, is inclusive and representative of

a ferocious brand of political Puritanism. So far jobs, posts and seats in legislatures have always served as “apples of discord.”

Either way, the legislation has set the stage for a future where nari shakti will play a more substantial role in politics and integral to India's democratic ethos. Clearly, if the Bill is implemented it will set a unique precedent as the only major democracy globally to implement such affirmative action.

True, the Bill is not a magical fix but a crucial leap forward for women empowerment and gender parity. One hopes it will not end up as an exercise in competitive, reckless populism at its worst. The Constitution has given women equal rights. Reservations will go a long way in facilitating them to build a legacy. A revolutionary change is needed. Merely mouthing platitudes will no longer work.

The crucial need is to undergo catharsis -- a course in emotive cleansing and giving a push to women empowerment in cementing a cohesive society. It is a good idea to have more women than less. As Nari Shakti is at the cusp of a bright future as our leaders' help them break the glass ceiling and give them their place in the sun. Time now everyone takes the lead in increasing “Her Voice.” ---- INFA

Speed at the cost of Safety: Inside the Lives of Delivery Workers

SHAHID AHMED HAKLA POONCHI

In today's fast-moving world, convenience has quietly become our biggest priority. We want everything quickly—food, groceries, medicines—delivered right to our doorstep without any delay. Many apps have perfectly fitted into this lifestyle, promising deliveries in just minutes. For many urban consumers, this feels like progress, a sign of modern efficiency and smart living.

But behind this comfort lies a reality that we often choose to ignore. Every quick delivery is not just a service—it is the result of someone's constant struggle. While we sit comfortably at home, a delivery worker is rushing through traffic, dealing with pressure, and trying to survive in a system that demands speed over safety. This contrast between our comfort and their hardship is too large to be ignored.

The Promise of Freedom That Isn't Real
At first glance, delivery jobs appear attractive, especially for young people who are looking for flexible work. Companies promote these jobs as an opportunity to “be your own boss” and “earn as much as you want.” This idea creates hope, particularly among those who have limited employment options.

However, the ground reality is very different. Workers are completely dependent on the app for their earnings. The app decides when they get orders, how frequently they get them, and how much they will be paid. If they log out early or reject orders, their future chances of getting work can reduce. In simple words, they are not

controlling the system—the system is controlling them. This creates a hidden pressure where workers feel forced to stay online for long hours, even when they are tired or unwell. The so-called “freedom” becomes a trap, where they are constantly working just to maintain a stable income.

The Race Against Time
The idea of delivering groceries within minutes may sound impressive, but for workers, it creates a daily race against time. Every order comes with a strict deadline, and even a small delay can affect their ratings and earnings. In cities where traffic is unpredictable and roads are often crowded, meeting such tight deadlines is extremely difficult. Workers often have to take shortcuts, drive faster than safe limits, and ignore basic safety precautions. The pressure is not just external—it becomes mental stress that builds up throughout the day.

Imagine the constant anxiety of watching the clock, knowing that every second matters. For the customer, a delay of a few minutes is a minor inconvenience. But for the worker, it can mean reduced income or even fewer future opportunities. This imbalance shows how the burden of speed is placed entirely on the worker.

Working in Extreme Conditions
Delivery workers do not have fixed offices or controlled environments. Their workplace is the road, and their working conditions depend entirely on the weather and surroundings. During summers, when temperatures rise above 45°C in many parts of India, these workers are still out there, riding bikes under the burning sun. Their bodies face dehydration, fatigue, and sometimes even heat-related illnesses. In the rainy

season, they continue working on slippery roads, increasing the risk of accidents. Winters bring their own challenges, especially in colder regions where early mornings and late nights become extremely difficult.

Despite all this, there are very few facilities available for them. There are no proper rest areas, no guaranteed breaks, and often no access to clean drinking water. Many workers continue working without stopping because every break means losing potential income. Over time, this affects not just their physical health but also their mental well-being.

No Security, No Safety Net
One of the most serious issues faced by workers is the complete lack of job security. Unlike traditional employees, they are not protected by strong labour laws or company policies. Everything depends on the app. A worker can suddenly stop receiving orders or even get blocked without clear explanation. This means their source of income can disappear overnight, leaving them helpless. There is no proper grievance system where they can raise concerns or seek justice.

In case of accidents, which are quite common due to the nature of their work, support is often limited or delayed. Medical expenses, loss of income, and family responsibilities become their personal burden. This creates a constant fear in their minds—they are working today, but there is no guarantee for tomorrow.

Low Earnings, High Effort
From the outside, it may look like delivery workers earn a decent amount because they are always busy and visible on the streets. But the reality is far from this perception. Their earnings are based on the

number of deliveries they complete, and the payment per delivery is often quite low. To earn enough for basic living expenses, they have to work long hours—sometimes stretching to 10–12 hours a day. Even then, a significant portion of their income goes into fuel, vehicle maintenance, and mobile expenses.

After deducting all these costs, what remains is often not enough to provide a comfortable life. Many workers struggle to support their families, pay rent, or manage emergencies. This creates a cycle where they are forced to work more and more, without any real improvement in their financial condition.

The Role We All Play
While companies design these systems, we as consumers also play an important role in sustaining them. Our demand for faster deliveries directly increases the pressure on workers. When we expect everything instantly and show dissatisfaction over small delays, we unknowingly contribute to the stress faced by delivery workers. The culture of instant gratification has made us less patient and, at times, less understanding.

We rarely think about the human effort behind the service. The person delivering our order is not just a part of an app—they are an individual with challenges, responsibilities, and limits. Recognising this reality is the first step towards change.

What Needs to Change
The growth of the gig economy is not a bad thing. It has created employment opportunities and made services more accessible. However, growth without fairness leads to exploitation. There is an urgent need

to improve the working conditions of delivery workers. They should be provided with a minimum guaranteed income so that they do not have to depend entirely on unpredictable orders. Proper insurance and health support should be ensured, especially considering the risks involved in their work.

Companies must also rethink unrealistic delivery promises and focus on sustainable models that prioritise worker safety. At the same time, the government needs to strengthen labour policies to include gig workers and protect their rights. As consumers, we must also become more responsible. Choosing slightly slower delivery options or simply being patient can make a difference in reducing pressure on workers.

Time to Think Beyond Convenience
The next time your order arrives within minutes, pause for a moment and think about the journey behind it. It is possible that the worker skipped a meal to complete more deliveries. It is possible that he drove through dangerous traffic or extreme weather just to meet a deadline. It is possible that he has been working since morning without proper rest.

Behind every quick delivery is a story of effort, struggle, and sacrifice that often goes unnoticed. Convenience is a part of modern life, but it should not come at the cost of human dignity. True progress is not just about speed—it is about creating systems that respect and protect the people who keep them running.

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