

Whose Job Is It?

You, Your City, and Your Governments

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Neev Academy | Grade 8 | Government and Me

How Many Governments Does India Have?

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THE FABLE: *India has three governments: Union, state, and local.*

► Hands up: **1?** **3?** About **30?** More?

1

Union government

36

States and UTs

~5,000

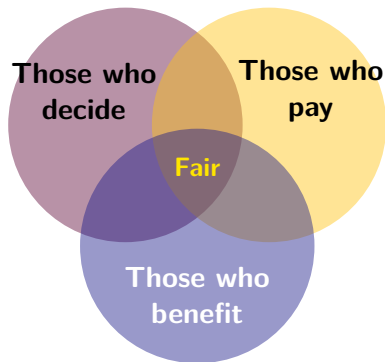
City governments

5 lakh+

Village gov-
ernments

The government closest to you is the one most people forget exists.

When is Public Service Delivery Effective?



- ▶ A system works when the people who **decide**, **pay**, and **benefit** are the same people
- ▶ Think of the class sports kit: who makes the rules, who pays, who plays?
- ▶ When these are different people, someone always feels cheated

Today, Bengaluru fails this test. You can help fix it before you turn 18.

I Have Three Points

1

It's not too many people.
**It's too little
government.**

2

Not every problem is
the government's job.

3

"Someone should do
something" never works.
Small groups do.

1. It's Not Too Many People

THE FABLE: *Our roads are broken because India has too many people.*

- ▶ The **Netherlands** and **South Korea** are more crowded than India, and they work well
- ▶ India's fertility rate is already about **2 children per woman**; Karnataka's is lower still
- ▶ The "population explosion" is mostly over.
- ▶ Top 10 cities occupy 0.2% of national land mass (Das, 2019)
- ▶ "Even if all of India's population had a dwelling of 1000 square feet per family of 4, this requires only 0.76% of India's land area, assuming a low FSI of 1." (Sane and Shah, 2008)

Overpopulation is every government's favourite problem statement

The State Isn't Absent. It's Omniabsent.

THE FABLE: *The government is everywhere.*

THIS ABSENCE OF STATE CAPACITY AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL IS ALL TOO APPARENT TO US.



Too Big? No, Too Small

THE FABLE: *India's government has too many employees.*

THE POPULAR PERCEPTION IS THAT THE INDIAN STATE IS OVERSTAFFED WITH INEFFICIENT GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.



THE REALITY IS THAT KEY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS ARE GROSSLY UNDERSTAFFED.



* Source: As per MHA in Rajyasabha, March 2021.
<https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA/Pw2017/pdf/par2021-pdf/sr-24032021/3266.pdf>

Rich Cities, Poor Governments

THE FABLE: *If only the Chief Minister got involved, our cities would work.*

- ▶ Cities make about **60%** of India's GDP; all municipal corporations together raise **0.4%** of GDP
- ▶ Your city **can't set its own tax rates**; the state government does
- ▶ About **one-third** of Bengaluru's civic budget came as grants from above (2023–24)
- ▶ Raja Chelliah: *"Everyone wants decentralisation, but only up to his level."*

For Half Your Life, Your City Had No Councillors



- ▶ Those who **decide** aren't those who **pay** or **benefit**.
- ▶ Do you know your ward's name? Who's contesting?

2. Whose Job Is It?

Sarkaar
Government

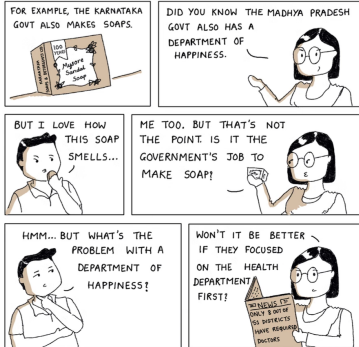
Bazaar
Market

Samaaj
Society

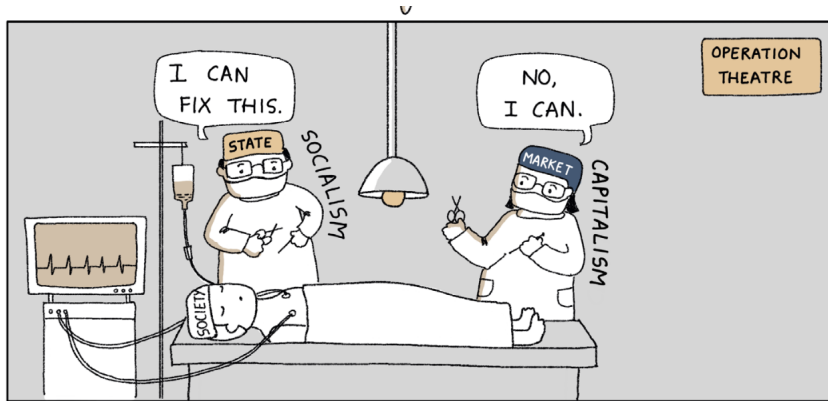
1. Kannada and other Indian languages are losing speakers to English
2. India should win 50 medals at the next Olympics
3. Our social media feeds trap us in echo chambers
4. A lake in our neighbourhood is dying

Is It the Government's Job to Make Soap?

ON THE OTHER HAND, THE INDIAN STATE, WHICH HAS LESSER INCOME AND HENCE LESSER MONEY TO SPEND, IS ALSO THINLY SPREAD OUT ACROSS SUNDRY DEPARTMENTS AND A LONG LIST OF PUBLIC-SECTOR UNITS (PSUs).



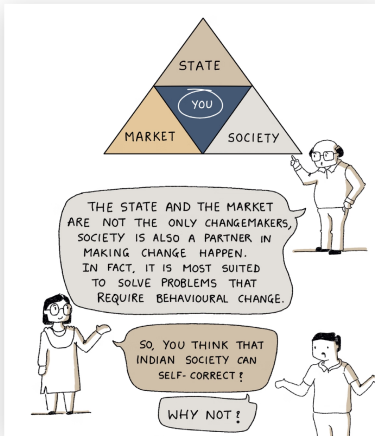
We Think Only Two Doctors Can Operate



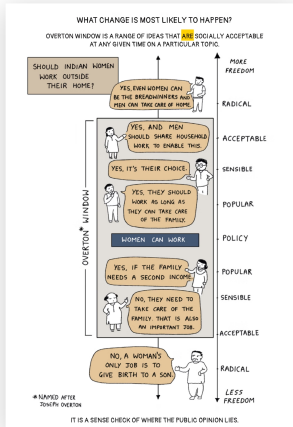
THIS DICHOTOMY ASSUMES THAT THE SOLUTIONS TO OUR PROBLEMS
LIE EITHER WITH THE STATE OR THE MARKET.

Society Is a Partner, Not a Patient

- ▶ The state can make laws
- ▶ The market can make things
- ▶ **Society is best at changing behaviour**



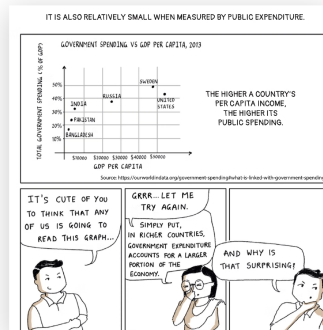
Norms Move



What Does “Fair” Mean?

THE FABLE: *A fair society is one where everyone gets an equal slice.*

- ▶ Most of the world's inequality is **between countries**, not within them (Max Roser)
- ▶ Countries that grow richer do better on **58** non-money measures too: health, schooling, safety (Lant Pritchett)
- ▶ Richer countries can afford bigger, better governments



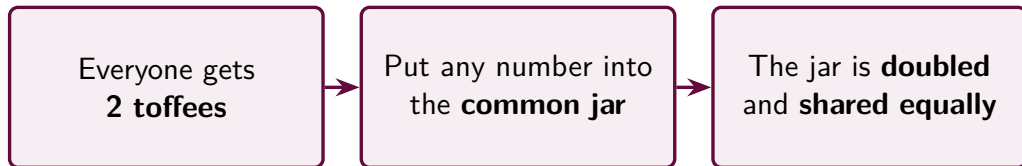
Society Can Run a Commons

THE FABLE: *Shared things can only be managed by the government or by a company.*

- ▶ Several Bengaluru lakes were revived by **neighbourhood groups** working with the city
- ▶ What makes it work: clear boundaries, local rules, people who keep watch, fair penalties

A commons fails when it's everyone's. It works when it's ours.

3. The Toffee Game



- ▶ **Round 1:** the whole room
- ▶ **Round 2:** groups of five

What Just Happened?

THE FABLE: *The bigger the group, the more likely something gets done.*

- ▶ In a big group, my effort feels invisible, so I wait for **someone else**
- ▶ In a small group, my share is visible and it matters
- ▶ Every change starts with a **few people** who go first; others watch, then join

A WhatsApp group of 500 complains. A group of 5 acts.

The Trap: Don't Do the Government's Job for It

FIRSTLY, WE MUST DEMAND THAT THE STATE DELIVERS IN AREAS WHERE IT IS UNSUBSTITUTABLE SUCH AS PROVIDING SECURITY, PROTECTING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND UPHOLDING THE RULE OF LAW.



- ▶ A clean-up drive outside school feels good
- ▶ But if the city never fixes it, **we've let them off the hook**
- ▶ So: clean it up, **report it**, and **track** whether it gets fixed

Don't do the government's job for it. Do the job of making it do its job.

What You Can Do at 13

Find your ward

Who's contesting in
December? Invite
them to school

Audit one street

Report prob-
lems to the city.
Track the replies

**Form a
group of five**
Not five hundred

Go first

Start one good
habit oth-
ers can copy

An Eightfold Path for the Rest of Your Life

Right Balance

Your interest and
the public interest

Right Faith

In the Republic:
not perfect, but
ours to improve

Right Ideas

Science, economics,
an open mind

Right Politics

Politics isn't
a bad word

Right Organisation

No lone wolves.
Build a team

Right Contribution

Time, skills or money:
give what you can

Right Voting

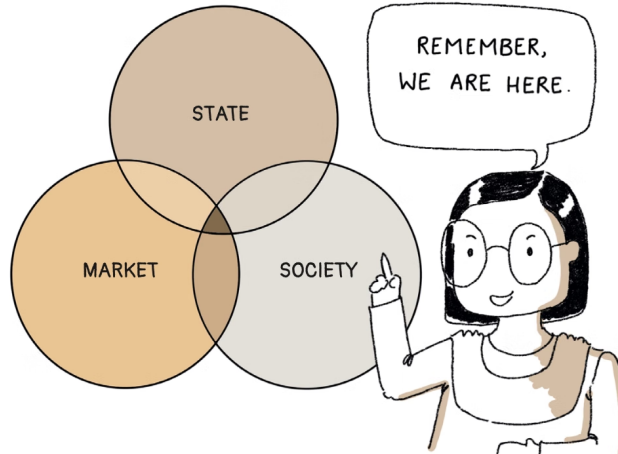
Every election,
every time
(from 18)

Right Engagement

Stay in touch
with your coun-
cillor, MLA, MP

Adapted from Nitin Pai.

We Live Where All Three Meet

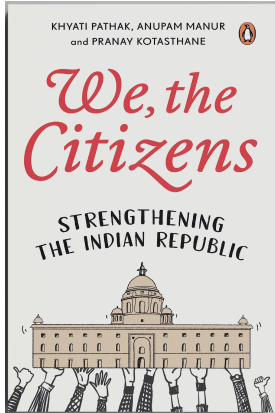


Citizenship Happens Every Day

THIRDLY, WE MUST STEP OUT OF OUR IMMEDIATE SILOS AND BUILD COMMUNITIES THAT BRING TOGETHER PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE.



Thank You



Questions?

Objections and
counter-examples welcome

