

MAGIC OF 12 YEARS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has become the longest serving elected head of the government. He has served 12 years as Prime Minister in a row and that is remarkable in the country with elections being held with regularity and democratic traditions flourishing. PM Modi has become a brand indeed but the magic behind his longevity as Prime Minister is in his distinct style of working and grand vision for his people and the country. The list of transformation that Modi brought in is long but let's focus on J&K and Pakistan, two related policy issues. PM Modi's vision for J&K, especially Kashmir which had become the fertile ground for terrorism and Pakistan's game plan for three decades, proved that great leaders can make a difference in changing lives. The government under his leadership stopped all avenues where terrorism can be glorified and youth lured into joining the Pakistan based organizations. Moves like ending grandiose funerals for terrorists, pushing a policy for amnesty to local youth who had gone astray helped change the situation. The government led by PM Modi removed article 370 from the constitution, equalizing the rights of people of J&K with those enjoyed by Indians in rest of the country and thereby removing an ideological basis for terrorism and separatist movement. To dispense justice to victims of terrorism, the government reopened all the criminal cases related to militancy and terrorism as a result some of the top separatist leaders are in jail. PM Modi's vision of carrying out massive developmental works in Kashmir to divert peoples' minds and usher in positivity has paid off. Kashmir today is connected through a railway with the rest of the country. On Pakistan, PM Modi has pursued a realistic policy. After his initial attempts at making peace with the country, Modi understood the futility of pursuing the policy with a neighbor that was pushing in terrorists in J&K. And the rest is history.

From waste to wealth: Why India must get serious about biogas

Kushan Mitra

India has a habit of discovering useful ideas and then burying them under slogans. Biogas is one such idea. It is routinely described as a clean fuel, a rural livelihood generator, a waste-management solution and a climate instrument. All of that is true. But unless the government builds a sensible policy architecture and a financially viable market structure, biogas will remain a useful concept trapped in pilot projects, small installations and optimistic speeches. That would be a mistake. In a country that produces huge volumes of cattle manure, agricultural residue and municipal organic waste, biogas is one of the few energy options that can simultaneously address emissions, waste disposal and fuel import dependence. It is a rare case where environmental logic and energy security logic point in the same direction. The climate case is straightforward. Organic waste releases methane, a greenhouse gas far more potent than carbon dioxide over the short term. Capturing that methane reduces the emissions problem at source. In other words, biogas is not merely about producing a green fuel; it is about preventing a worse one from entering the atmosphere in the first place. That distinction matters because India's biogas debate is often framed too casually. Not all biofuels are equally defensible. Crop-based fuels can raise questions about land use, food security and water stress. Waste-based biogas does not carry the same moral and economic ambiguity.

When the feedstock is cattle dung, municipal organic waste or agricultural residue, the equation is cleaner: the country is turning a liability into an asset. I recently travelled to the Banaskantha district in Gujarat, where I saw first-hand how this can work. A tripartite venture between Banas Dairy, the local district dairy union, the National Dairy Development Board and Suzuki Research and Development India has created facilities where about 100 tonnes of cow dung are con-



verted into biogas every day. The operation is industrial in scale, even if still modest in the larger national context, and the gas is sold directly to local transport users outside the plant.

This example from Gujarat points to the promise of the model, but it also reveals its limits. Such projects are viable only when multiple revenue streams are available. Gas sales alone rarely support the full economics. Plants also depend on slurry sales, fertiliser value, carbon credits and, in some cases, waste-processing fees. That is not a weakness of the model; it is the model. The problem is that policy in India still tends to treat biogas as a single-product energy business rather than a multi-product circular-economy system. That is where the government must become more serious. If it wants biogas to scale, it must stop thinking in terms of announcements and start thinking in terms of market design. A biogas plant needs assured feedstock, predictable offtake, stable regulation and a financing structure that reflects its real cash flows. None of those things happens automatically. At present, the sector suffers from a familiar Indian policy problem: enthusiasm at the top, fragmentation on the ground. Municipal waste systems remain uneven, even though good work on waste-to-gas has been showcased in places like Indore. Agricultural residue

collection is inconsistent. The case for biogas becomes even stronger when viewed through energy security. India still relies heavily on imported natural gas, much of it arriving as LNG from external suppliers and exposed to international price volatility. That dependence is not merely an economic issue; it is a strategic vulnerability. Every unit of domestically produced biomethane reduces that exposure, however incrementally. Biogas will not replace LNG imports, but it can narrow the gap and improve resilience. In fact, when the gas shortage induced by the West Asia crisis occurred, industrial users across India were informed of a cut in supplies. This included the Maruti-Suzuki plant at Hansalpur, Gujarat. Production of gas from the Banaskantha Biogas facilities was diverted to Hansalpur and made up over half the shortfall, according to Maruti-Suzuki officials. This is why the biogas conversation should not be reduced to environmental idealism or rural romanticism. It should be treated as industrial policy. A serious biogas ecosystem can create local jobs, improve sanitation, generate organic fertiliser that can help restore soil health, reduce methane emissions and lower foreign exchange outgo on imported gas. Few policy areas offer so many dividends from the same tonne of waste. But these require a sustainable financial model. That means

the government must create conditions under which private capital can actually underwrite projects. Feedstock aggregation must be systematised. Municipal bodies, dairies, farmer collectives and cooperatives must be integrated into collection networks. Offtake contracts must be bankable. By-product markets must be formalised. Digestate standards must be clear. And if carbon credits are to be part of the revenue stack, the rules around verification and monetisation must be credible. This is the unglamorous part of clean energy policy. It is much easier to announce a target than to build the supply chain, legal framework and revenue certainty that make the target real. There is also a larger governance lesson here. India's waste streams are not going away. Its livestock numbers are not going away. Its municipal waste burden is not going away. These will only increase as the country gets richer and more urban. Nor is its appetite for gas likely to disappear soon. A policy that treats these realities separately is less useful than one that connects them. Biogas links agriculture to energy, sanitation to industry and climate policy to import substitution. That is why the government should be more pragmatic. It should encourage decentralised plant construction where feedstock is available, but not imagine that every district will support the same business model. It should recognise that some feedstocks and locations are better than others and that commercial discipline is not a betrayal of public purpose but a precondition for it. The ideal outcome is not a sector dependent on permanent subsidy. It is a sector where the economics make sense because the policy has been designed sensibly. If that happens, biogas can become what it ought to be: a boutique environmental project, but a mainstream part of India's energy and waste infrastructure. Biogas is one of the few solutions that can deliver measurable gains on emissions, waste and fuel imports at the same time. But only if the government stops treating it as a niche idea and starts treating it as a national necessity.

THE PREJUDICES WE STILL CARRY

Sanjay Chandra

The ongoing society elections have generated the usual debates, disagreements, and campaign promises. Yet a few conversations I encountered recently stayed with me long after the election discussions themselves had faded.

One of the candidates is a woman who is widely known within the community for her commitment and hard work. She is often among the first to respond when residents face difficulties and among the last to leave when a task remains unfinished. Unlike many who appear only during elections, her engagement with the community has been visible throughout the year. A resident from her own tower recently advised her not to contest. His reasoning was straightforward. She would lose. Not because she lacked commitment or capability, but because she was a woman. He further suggested that she should recognise her limitations as a woman, particularly since an elected representative would be expected to deal with all kinds of people, including unsavoury elements. The advice was given as practical wisdom. A few days later, I overheard a group of morning walkers discussing another resident. Their conversation was punctuated by loud laughter and knowing glances. The object of



their amusement had stated that the apartment was in his wife's name and that she would cast her vote as she chose. What followed was not a discussion about voting rights or personal choice. The laughter was at the suggestion that a man who did not control his wife's decisions had somehow failed in his role. These were accomplished professionals occupying senior positions in their respective fields.

The conversations reminded me of an evening nearly twenty-five years ago during an official visit to another city. I was taken to a prestigious club frequented by prominent politicians from rival parties.

The atmosphere was relaxed and cordial, with political differences seemingly suspended over drinks and conversation. What I remember most clearly, however, was the laughter that followed an extremely sexist remark about a female politician.

The incidents occurred in different places and at different times. But they seemed connected by a common thread.

We often measure social progress through visible indicators. More women occupy leadership positions today than ever before. By almost every measurable standard, society has moved forward. Yet

many old prejudices still survive in subtle forms - in assumptions disguised as concern, in jokes disguised as humour, and in opinions disguised as common sense. They appear when competence is acknowledged in principle but doubted in practice, when independence is celebrated publicly but mocked privately, and when equality is accepted as an idea but resisted as a lived reality. This is what makes such attitudes difficult to confront. Overt discrimination is easier to identify. Hidden prejudice often arrives wrapped in the language of realism, tradition, practicality, or experience. Those expressing it rarely see themselves as prejudiced at all.

Perhaps this is why legal and institutional measures, important though they may be, can only take society so far. Societies do not become truly equal when women are simply allowed to participate. They become equal when competence is judged independently of gender, when respect is extended without qualification, and when dignity is not contingent upon conformity to old expectations.

Progress, after all, is not measured only by what we claim to believe. It is measured by what we reveal about ourselves when we speak freely, laugh casually, and assume nobody is paying attention. The prejudices we fail to confront are often the ones we quietly pass on.

Protecting children in the digital age

Vipul Gaur

Children today are entering the digital world at an early age. Smartphones, online gaming platforms, social media applications and virtual classrooms have become an inseparable part of childhood. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this transition, pushing millions of students towards online learning and digital interaction. While technology has undoubtedly expanded access to education and communication, it has also exposed children to unprecedented risks in the digital sphere.

A growing number of children are unknowingly sharing personal information across gaming platforms, social media applications and educational websites. In many cases, neither children nor parents fully understand how such data is collected, stored and used. The rise of targeted advertising, behavioural tracking and online fraud has made children one of the most vulnerable groups

in the data-driven economy. In this context, the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, assumes critical importance.

The DPDP Act, 2023, is India's primary law governing how personal data is collected, stored and used in the digital space. Under this framework, a Data Principal refers to the individual whose data is being processed, while a Data Fiduciary is the entity (such as an app, platform, or organisation) that collects and uses that data.

Under Section 9 of the said Act, special safeguards are provided for children's online data. It mandates that digital platforms and data handlers must obtain verifiable consent from a parent or lawful guardian before processing any personal data of a child. It also restricts practices such as behavioural tracking, targeted advertising, and any processing that may adversely impact a child's well-being. In principle, these provisions aim to ensure that children are not reduced to data



sources for commercial exploitation and are protected from manipulative digital practices.

While the intent of the DPDP Act, 2023, is clearly protective, its implementation in the context of children raises practical concerns. The idea of "verifiable parental consent" assumes a level of digital awareness and supervision that may not exist uniformly across households. In reality, many parents themselves are not fully aware of how digital platforms collect and use personal

data, and consent is often given mechanically through quick approvals rather than informed understanding.

At the same time, children today are active users of online games, social media platforms, and EdTech applications, many of which are designed to encourage constant engagement. In such an environment, distinguishing between meaningful consent and routine digital acceptance becomes increasingly difficult. This creates a gap between

the law's intention and its real-world effectiveness. A significant part of this challenge emerges from the rapid digitisation of education itself. Schools and EdTech platforms today rely heavily on digital tools for attendance tracking, assignments, assessments, and communication with parents. While these systems have improved access and efficiency, they have also led to the large-scale collection of children's personal data, often without a clear understanding among students or even parents of how this information is stored or used.

Many educational applications collect behavioural data such as login patterns, time spent on tasks, performance analytics, and interaction history. In some cases, this data is used not just for academic tracking but also for product improvement and user engagement strategies. This raises an important concern: data generated in the classroom is increasingly becoming part of a broader digital ecosystem, where

the boundaries between education and data profiling are becoming blurred. Beyond education platforms, children's digital exposure is also shaped heavily by social media applications and online gaming environments. These platforms are designed around engagement-driven algorithms that encourage prolonged usage, often by analysing user behaviour and preferences. For children, this translates into continuous exposure to content tailored to keep them engaged, sometimes without a clear understanding of how these systems operate.

In such ecosystems, behavioural tracking becomes routine. Every click, interaction, and viewing pattern contributes to a digital profile that can be used to predict and influence future behaviour. The DPDP Act, 2023, seeks to restrict targeted advertising and tracking for children; however, enforcing these boundaries in fast-moving digital environments remains a significant challenge. The result is a space where chil-

children are active participants, yet largely unaware subjects of extensive data collection. The challenge, therefore, is not merely about the existence of a robust legal framework such as the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, but about ensuring its meaningful implementation in a rapidly evolving digital ecosystem. Protecting children online cannot depend only on formal consent mechanisms; it must also be supported by greater digital literacy among parents, educators, and children themselves. Schools and educational institutions must be encouraged to adopt transparent data practices, while platforms must be held accountable for designing child-centric and privacy-respecting systems by default. At the same time, awareness around digital footprints and data sharing must become an essential part of early education. Without these complementary measures, the idea of "verifiable consent" risks becoming a procedural formality rather than a genuine safeguard.