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1. Still no recognition of the third tier

- 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were passed by Parliament in December, 1992. Through these amendments local self-governance was introduced in rural and urban India.

How are local bodies funded?

- States are required to set up a State Finance Commission once every five years to review the financial position of local government institutions and to make recommendations to the state governments, in order to ensure that local bodies have adequate financial resources to function.
- Broadly, local bodies have two main sources of revenue: internal and external. Internal (or own-source revenue) is that which they raise themselves, either through taxes such as land or property tax, or through non-tax sources which include rents and user-fees. External revenue sources include:
 - Assigned revenue, which covers taxes, duties, tolls, and fees due to local bodies, that are collected by the state and central governments. The exact percentage allocation of these revenues is done through recommendations of State Finance Commissions.
 - Grants-in-aid and loans from the central and state governments, domestic institutions, financial intermediaries, capital markets, and/or donor agencies.

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Finance Commission (FC)

- is a constitutional body, that determines the method and formula for distributing the tax proceeds between the Centre and states, and among the states as per the constitutional arrangement and present requirements.
- Article 280 of the Constitution, the President of India is required to constitute a Finance Commission at an interval of five years or earlier.
- The 15th Finance Commission was constituted by the President of India in November 2017, under the chairmanship of NK Singh.
- Its recommendations will cover a period of five years from the year 2021-22 to 2025-26.

15th Finance commission

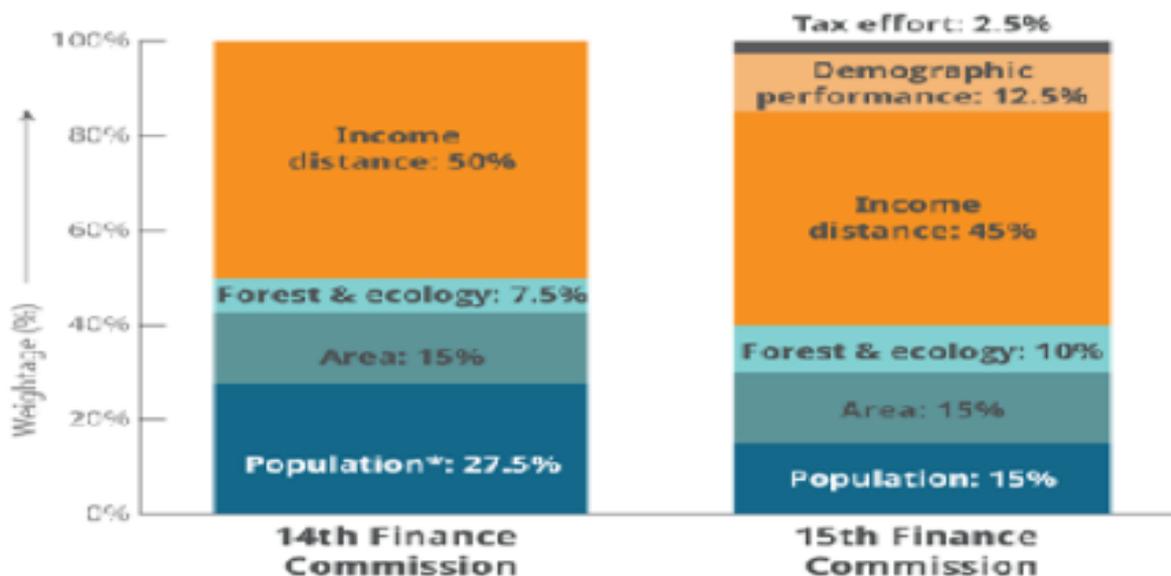
Vertical Devolution (Devolution of Taxes of the Union to States)

- It has recommended maintaining the vertical devolution at 41%
- It is at the same level of 42% of the divisible pool as recommended by the 14th Finance Commission.
- It has made the required adjustment of about 1% due to the changed status of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir into the new Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir

Horizontal Devolution (Allocation Between the States):

- Suggested 12.5% weightage to demographic performance, 45% to income, 15% each to population and area, 10% to forest and ecology and 2.5% to tax and fiscal efforts.

Revenue-sharing formulas in the 14th and 15th Finance Commissions



*17.5% weightage according to 1971 population and 10% by 2011 population
Source: Finance Commission reports

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Local Bodies Grants

Rural Local Bodies

- 50% for specific objectives i.e sanitation and water
- 50% is Untied i.e can be used for any objective depending on location Urban Local Bodies
- 9k cr for million plus population cities
- 21k for cities with < 1 mill population with 50% untied (basic) grants + 50% tied for drinking water and solid waste management.
- Part IX and Part IX-A mandate the Union Finance Commission to supplement the resources of panchayats and municipalities on the basis of the recommendations of the State Finance Commission.

Increase in vertical devolution

- Since the Eleventh Commission have tied specific items of expenditure to local grants and the Fifteenth Finance Commission has raised this share to 60% and linked them to drinking water, rainwater harvesting, sanitation and other national priorities in the spirit of cooperative federalism.
- Compared with the Fourteenth Finance Commission there is a 52% increase in the vertical share.
- Fifteenth Finance Commission has raised the vertical devolution recommended to local governments to 4.23%

Criteria to avail union local grant (Except health grant)

Panchayats

- Online submission of annual accounts for the previous year and audited accounts for the year before.

Urban local governments

- Like fixation of the minimum floor for property tax and improvement in its collection.

Issue

- It is not clear why gram panchayats are left out from this.
- Although Eleventh to the Fourteenth, have recommended measures to standardise the accounting system and update the auditing of accounts, the progress made has been halting.

Minimum basic services

- The Fifteenth Finance Commission failed to carry policy choices forward systematically.
- Articles 243G, 243W and 243ZD read along with the functional decentralisation of basic services like drinking water, public health care, etc., mandated in the Eleventh and Twelfth schedules demand better public services and delivery of 'economic development and social justice' at the local level.
- A good opportunity to ensure comparable minimum public services to every citizen irrespective of her choice of residential location has not been taken forward in an integrated manner.

Issue with equalisation principle for the local government

- The Fifteenth Finance Commission claims that it seeks to achieve the desirable objective of evenly balancing the union and the states but there is no recognition of the third tier in this balancing act.

- The Alma-Ata declaration of the World Health Organization (1978) which outlined an integrated, local government-centric approach with a simultaneous focus on access to water, sanitation, shelter and the like.
- There is no integrated approach in the recommendations of the Fifteenth Finance Commission about the local governments in contrast to the recommendations of the Thirteenth Finance Commission.

Challenges of Local bodies

Functional challenges

- The power to devolve functions to local governments rests with the state government.
- For a variety of reasons, states do not devolve adequate functions to local government bodies, severely affecting the system's efficiency and effectiveness.
- For instance, state governments have been known to create parallel structures for the implementation of projects around agriculture, health, and education—undermining areas for which local bodies are constitutionally responsible.
- The 74th amendment requires a District Planning Committee to be set up in each district, so that the development plans prepared by the panchayats and urban local bodies can be consolidated and integrated. However, it was seen that District Planning Committees are non-functional in many states, and failed to prepare integrated plans .

Financial challenges

Expenditure

- Devolving functions is meaningless without providing adequate funds to carry out said functions.
- Local government expenditure as a percentage of GDP is only two percent— a number that is extremely low when compared to other major emerging economies such as China (11 percent) and Brazil (seven percent).

Funds

- Most local bodies, both rural and urban are unable to generate adequate funds from their internal sources, and are therefore extremely dependent on external sources for funding.
- Studies show that around 80 percent to 95 percent of revenue is obtained from external sources, particularly state and central government loans and grants.

Financial challenges

- There are two main reasons for low internal revenue collection:
 - ✓ Local bodies may lack the capacity to properly impose taxes, due to ambiguous taxation norms, lack of reliable records, and so on.
 - ✓ State governments have not devolved enough taxation powers. Most states only permit local bodies to collect property taxes and water tariffs, but not land tax or tolls, which can provide more substantial revenues.

Functionary challenges

- The capacity of local bodies to carry out their mandate is often circumscribed by the state

government officials.

- Additionally, the secretariats of local governments are grossly under-staffed and under-skilled, and therefore unable to provide the required support to the elected body.
- Their capacities need to be further strengthened through training of existing personnel and the recruitment of new staff.
- Though local bodies are authorised to recruit staff, this is prevented by limited funding.
- India's local governance system needs to be empowered in all three areas to ensure that power truly rests with the people, not just on paper, but also in practice.

2. Remoteness is no hindrance to academic excellence

- Excellence in education depends on the quality of mentorship; not on the size or location of campuses. To improve, faculties should be made bigger, and recruitment yardsticks should focus on quality and not quantity.

Core functions

- The core functions of an engineering school are to: guide students along as they inquire and discover their interests in science and engineering; engage students with the interactions between technology, society, economics and the environment; prepare students for working careers as designers and gadget-makers, but also as entrepreneurs; invent new gadgets and discover new science, and enmesh all of these activities with local developmental needs.
- Overall, education at the higher secondary and college levels is really a nourishment that society produces to meet and bless the intense energies of young adults.

Issues

A lack of language and study skills

- About a quarter of the incoming undergraduates need extra training and confidence- building measures in using the English language.
- A key problem in most engineering colleges is that the students should not only become skilled engineers but should also train to speak and write clearly.

Case of IIT Mandi in Himachal Pradesh

- Five-week induction programme gently welcomes them into the academic setting and helps them feel at home. This phase also breaks the ice between students and faculty, making it easy for the students to get in touch with their teachers. This useful programme requires time and mentorship effort from faculty members.
- A substantial final year project can be nourishing and fulfilling for anyone completing an academic degree, because it presents an opportunity for focused work bringing together different strands of knowledge and skills on a concrete problem.
- Sadly, at many IITs, including the “crown jewels”, this final project is no longer mandatory.

Faculty issues

- Faculty salaries are lower than the international norms, it makes sense to hire many more faculty members than we do now
- Only around a dozen IITs can be comfortably staffed with world-class faculty.
- Those hired are burdened with additional tasks such as running the canteen, etc.

Issues in hiring

- Inconsistency and group think in the hiring committees
- Typically, recruitment has two stages: shortlisting by the hiring institute, and an interview in front on a panel that consists of mostly professors from outside the hiring institute.
- The shortlisting is done mechanically, then good and sometimes even excellent candidates can be weeded out. In specific, if shortlisting is done on the basis of the number of papers, size of grants won and the like, then those hired may be mediocre, paper-manufacturing mills.
- A better alternative is possible by reversing the existing two stages in recruitment, and explicitly flagging quality as a merit.

Solution

- First, the external experts should prepare a short shortlist, and then the local hiring committees should attempt hiring from within this shortlist.
- The applicants should be required to submit information demonstrating the best aspects of their work.
- Each applicant should be asked to provide, in addition to their full curriculum vitae, their two best research publications, and their two best pedagogic materials such as a homework assignment or examination.
- According to the Times Higher Education ranking for the last year, the IITs at Ropar (Punjab) and Indore (Madhya Pradesh) are within the top 100 young universities of the world.
- But even ignoring such superficial rankings, the details are promising – the growth of IIT Mandi for example. This IIT has as international a resident faculty body as any other IIT. In the last year, this IIT was seventh in the Atal innovativeness ranking ; an IIT Mandi project that developed a landslide warning system won the SKOCH award

Examples abroad

- Remoteness is not a hindrance to excellence. Cornell University is located in the heart of rural New England, and has been excellent from even before the Internet age.
- Japan's newest world class University, the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University, is in the most remote corner within its territory, Okinawa island.

3. India does not shine when only some gleam

- In the country's march to a \$5 trillion economy, the Indian government and its advisers are keen to recover the many lost quarters of GDP growth. Have they lost sight of how poorly India's economic growth has been serving its citizens?
- Global Hunger Index which places India 94 amongst 107 countries
- The WHR20 Happiness Report released in March 2021 Indian citizens are amongst the least happy in the world: India ranks a very low 144th
- According to a report released by the World Bank, while India's stock markets rose during the pandemic and the very rich became even richer, the number of people who are poor in India (with incomes of \$2 or less a day) is estimated to have increased by 75 million. This accounts for nearly 60% of the global increase in poverty, the report says.
- Until the incomes of all rise, India will be a poor country from the perspective of the majority of its citizens, no matter how large its GDP

Need

- One is broader progress measures. GDP does not account for vital environmental and social conditions that contribute to human well-being and the sustainability of the planet
- Happiness Report explains, this 'objective' approach misses the point that happiness and well-being are always 'subjective'.
- What matters to people depends also on the conditions of others around them.
- Wealthy people can be unhappy when they have less wealth than other wealthy people. Moreover, everywhere, fairness, and trust in others and in institutions, contribute greatly to well-being.
- Therefore, countries in which the spirit of community is high, such as the 'socialist' countries of Northern Europe, come on top of well-being rankings even when their per capita incomes are not the highest
- The universal solution for improving well-being is for local communities to work together to find their own solutions within their countries, and in their villages and towns.
- Leo Tolstoy begins Anna Karenina with the observation that all unhappy families are unhappy in their own ways.
- Locals know which factors in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals matter the most to them. Therefore, standard global solutions will neither make their conditions better nor make them happier
- New ways must be adopted to create a new post-pandemic normal. Sadly, the old ways are returning. The government is back to chasing its \$5 trillion GDP target.
- The best medical treatments are those that help the system to heal itself. Therefore, communities must be allowed to, and assisted to, find their own solutions to complex problems.
- The philosopher Michael J. Sandel says in The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good? that the ideology of 'individualism' – which believes that a person's successes and failures are entirely that person's own responsibility – is a disease that has infected societies in the West.

- It justifies indifference to the conditions of those less well off. It denies that societal conditions are responsible for the difficulties poor people have. It also conveniently hides that societal conditions have contributed substantially to the wealth of those well-off.

4. Polarisation in times of dispossession

- Recently the UNHRC conducted its 46th session. During this, the UNHRC adopted a resolution titled “Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka
- The resolution on ‘Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka’ was however adopted after 22 member states of the 47-member Council voted in its favour
- India abstained from a crucial vote on Sri Lanka’s rights record at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.

History of Srilanka civil war

Settlement

- The majority of Sri Lankans are ethnic Sinhalese, a group of Indo-European peoples that had migrated to the island from northern India in the BC 500s.
- Tamils were settled in the southern part of the Indian subcontinent. A major migration of the Tamils occurred between the 7th and the 11th centuries CE.
- The Sinhalese were predominantly Buddhist and the Tamils were mostly Hindu British rule (started in 1815).
- Britishers brought nearly a million Tamils to work in the coffee, tea and rubber plantations to the island-nation.
- They also favoured the Tamils in the civil service.

After independence

- New government initiated many laws that discriminated against the Tamils.
- Sinhalese was declared the sole official language which effectively eliminated the Tamils from government service
- A law was passed which simply barred Indian Tamils from getting citizenship.
- The Tamils started demanding equal rights in their homeland.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

- Formed in 1976 with the intention of acquiring a homeland for the Tamils in Sri Lanka in the north and east parts of the island.
- There were many skirmishes between the government and the insurgents in which civilians were also affected.

Indian Intervention

- In 1987, Rajiv Gandhi decided to intervene in the situation mainly because of separatism issues in Tamil Nadu and also to avoid the potential swarm of refugees from Sri Lanka to Indian shores.

Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF)

- Was sent to the island in the hope of bringing about peace. This move proved to be a terrible disaster.
- Instead of negotiating a settlement between both parties, the Indian troops ended up fighting the Eelam group. Many Indian men died in the war.
- Rajiv Gandhi was also a victim of the LTTE when in 1991, he was assassinated by a human bomb at an election rally in Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu.

Withdrawal of IPKF

- After the IPKF had withdrawn in 1990, the fighting continued more intensely.
- Sri Lankan President Premadasa was also killed by the LTTE in 1993 in a human bomb.
- A ceasefire was declared a few times by the LTTE, only to resume fighting later. Peace talks were also held with the intervention of international actors, particularly Norway. Nothing came to any avail.

Results of the Sri Lankan Civil War

- Finally, the Rajapaksa government decided to come hard on the LTTE in an extreme offensive starting in 2007. There was intense fighting between the government forces and the LTTE in which thousands of civilians were caught in the line of fire.
- The government was also accused of targeting civilians and destroying entire villages.
- International and United Nations observers describe the events that led to the defeat of the LTTE in 2009 as a 'bloodbath'.

UNHRC Resolution against Sri Lanka

The 30/1 resolution and the aftermath

- To curb the HR violations in Sri Lanka UNHRC adopted the 30/1 resolution or the consensus resolution in 2015.
- The resolution aimed to establish reconciliation, accountability, and human rights in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan government accepted the resolution under the new President and took the following steps, like,

- Establishing a credible judicial process. Under this, the Sri Lankan government allowed participation of Commonwealth and other foreign judges, etc. This was to ensure proper adjudication of Human Rights Violations. (This is in line with the 30/1 resolution)
- Enactment of 19th Amendment to Nullify the powers provided to President under 18th Amendment.

UNHRC Resolution against Sri Lanka

- But the new government in 2020, withdrew its commitments under the resolution 30/1.
- Further, the new Sri Lankan government also stated that the resolution was not in conformity with the Constitution of Sri Lanka.
- A UN High Commissioner's report highlighted
 - ✓ Increasing militarization in Sri Lanka

- ✓ Intensified surveillance against rights defenders and NGOs,
- ✓ Interference with trials in certain symbolic cases from the past, etc.
- Recently the UNHRC conducted its 46th session. During this, the UNHRC adopted a resolution titled “Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka”

Resolution 46/L1, 2021

- Resolution 46/L1 has decided, among other things, to “strengthen” the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights “to collect, consolidate, analyse, and preserve information and evidence and develop possible strategies for future accountability processes for gross violations of human rights or serious violations of international humanitarian law in Sri Lanka, to advocate for victims and survivors, and to support relevant judicial and other proceedings, including in Member States, with competent jurisdiction

Impact of the UNHRC resolution

- The UNHRC resolution is not a legally binding one. But the resolution has a great moral significance. This includes,
 - ✓ The countries that voted in favour of the resolution may impose any sanctions or withdraw any benefits provided to Sri Lanka.
 - ✓ UNHCR can also make recommendations to the international community on preventing any future Human Rights violations
 - ✓ It sends a signals to other countries that the government of Sri Lanka is not a credible member in fulfilling its obligations.



India's Stand

- India never supported the Human Rights Violations in Sri Lanka.
- India wants the solution to the issue to be internal

- For example, India in 2012 supported a credible investigation into human rights violations. However India abstained in 2014
- Sri Lanka requested India's support in the recent UNHRC resolution. But, India abstains from the recent UNHRC resolution against Sri Lanka.
- Increasing Chinese presence in the Sri Lankan region
- India demanded the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka and meaningful decentralization to meet Tamil aspirations
- India always supported the implementation of the 13th Amendment of 1987. The 13th Amendment is the outcome of the Indo-Lanka Accord of July 1987.

13th Amendment

- It is an outcome of the Indo-Lanka Accord of July 1987, signed by the then PM Rajiv Gandhi and President J.R. Jayawardene, in an attempt to resolve the ethnic conflict and civil war.

Provisions

- Creation of Provincial Councils, assured a power-sharing arrangement to enable all nine provinces in the country, including Sinhala majority areas, to self-govern.
- Subjects such as education, health, agriculture, housing, land and police are devolved to the provincial administrations.
- But because of restrictions on financial powers and overriding powers given to the President, the provincial administrations have not made much headway.
- In particular, the provisions relating to police and land have never been implemented.

5. Weighing in on the saga of a vaccine

- The AstraZeneca SARS-CoV2 AZD1222 vaccine, which was developed at the University of Oxford, is a chimpanzee adenovirus strain which was engineered so that it could not replicate any more in humans. The team at Oxford had already begun to use this chimpanzee adenovirus vaccine technology to produce candidate vaccines against many pathogens including influenza, Zika and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus.

Efficacy

- The first report was by press release and indicated an efficacy of 70%, with some peculiar results showing that in some groups, efficacy could be as high as 90%.
- The vaccine trials compared a single dose and two doses, and decided to go with two doses, but with supply issues, wound up with some people with a single dose and others with two doses

Error in calculating dose

- Some individuals had received vaccine doses that had less of the viral vector. Initially, it was reported that highest efficacy was seen with a lower first dose, and scientists scrambled to try and find an explanation.

- It was hypothesised that it might be because antibodies made in response to the first dose inhibited response to the second dose, but given that the difference was one of 25 billion and 50 billion viral particles, it seemed a bit unlikely.
- Later, as more data became available, it was clear that the longer time there was between doses, the immune response and efficacy were better
- The data were reviewed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) which also approved the vaccine

The case in Europe

- Unfortunately, the controversies continued. A few European countries refused to use the vaccine in older individuals, citing the lack of data from this subset in clinical trials. And then, cases of haematological side-effects which combined blood clots and low platelets began to be reported

Phases of Clinical Trials

Phase I

- New drug is administered to a small number, a minimum of 2 healthy, informed volunteers for each dose under the close supervision of a doctor.
- It helps to determine whether the new compound is tolerated by the patient's body and behaves in the predicted way.

Phase II (exploratory trials)

- Drug is administered to a group of approximately 10-12 informed patients in 3 to 4 centers
- It helps to determine its effect and also to check for any unacceptable side effects.

Phases of Clinical Trials:

Phase III (confirmatory trials)

- In this phase, the group is between 1000-3000 subjects.
- To obtain sufficient evidence about the efficacy and safety of the drug in a larger number of patients, generally in comparison with a standard drug and/or a placebo as appropriate.

Phase IV trials (post-marketing phase):

- Phase of surveillance after the medicine is made available to doctors, who start prescribing it.
- The effects are monitored on thousands of patients to help identify any unforeseen side effects.

Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules 2019

Approval time

- Reduced the time for approving applications to 30 days for manufactured in India and 90 days for those developed outside the country.
- In case of no communication from Drugs Controller General of India, the application will be deemed to have been approved.

Trial

- The requirement of a local clinical trial may be waived for approval of a new drug if it is approved and marketed in any of the countries (EU, UK, Australia, Japan and US) to be specified by the Drugs Controller General with the approval of the government.

Patient safety

- New rules will ensure patient safety, as they would be enlisted for trials with informed consent

The ethics committee

- will monitor the trials and decide on the amount of compensation in cases of adverse events.
- The compensation in cases of death and permanent disability or other injuries to a trial subject will be decided by the Drug Controller General.
- Conditions for providing post-trial access of drugs to patients who require it have been defined for the first time.
- In a first, orphan drugs have been defined as a drug intended to treat conditions which affects not more than five lakh persons in India.
- New rules has removed regulations on tests conducted on animals in case of drugs approved and marketed for more than two years in well-regulated overseas drug markets.

Regulatory Mechanism

- Clinical trials in India are governed by the acts: Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, Medical Council of India Act, 1956 and Central Council for Indian Medicine Act, 1970.
- Prerequisites of conducting a clinical trial in India are:
 - ✓ Permission from the Drugs Controller General, India (DCGI)
 - ✓ Approval from respective Ethics Committee
 - ✓ Mandatory registration on the ICMR maintained website

Drugs Controller General of India

- Head of department of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization of the Government of India.
- Under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
- Responsible for approval of licences of specified categories of drugs such as blood and blood products, IV fluids, vaccines, and sera in India.
- Sets standards for manufacturing, sales, import, and distribution of drugs in India.
- Lays down the standard and quality of manufacturing, selling, import and distribution of drugs in India.

The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)

- CDSCO is under Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) of India .

Issues of drug trials in India

- Most of the times consent of the participants in the clinical trials is not taken
- Over-representation of low-income groups .
- Lack of training and independence of people in ethics committee.
- Lack of transparency in registration with Clinical Trials Registry of India.
- Collusion between drug companies and doctors
- Compensation for participating in research as well as research related injury is a major bone of contention.