

GIST OF KURUKSHETRA

STARTUP INDIA



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CHAPTER 1- START-UPS TRANSFORMING EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

India has emerged as the **third-largest startup ecosystem globally**, with **over 1.4 lakh registered startups and 118 unicorns by mid-2025**. Driven by the **Start-up India Initiative** and the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, startups are reshaping **education and skill development** through **digital platforms, artificial intelligence (AI), personalized learning, and industry-linked skilling**.

- This transformation is crucial for converting India's **demographic dividend into productive human capital**, aligning education with employability, and realizing the vision of **Viksit Bharat@2047**.

Evolution of Start-up Culture in India

India's startup journey began with the rise of **IT giants such as Infosys, Wipro and TCS** in the late 1990s, which laid the technological and entrepreneurial foundation. The spread of the **internet, mobile technology, and a young tech-savvy population** further accelerated innovation.

- The success of startups such as **Flipkart, MakeMyTrip and Zomato** normalized risk-taking and entrepreneurship, paving the way for India's vibrant startup culture.
- As highlighted by the Prime Minister, **startups are job creators, not job seekers**, redefining India's growth narrative.

Start-up India Initiative: Building an Innovation Ecosystem—Launched in **2016**, the **Start-up India Initiative** aims to foster a **robust, inclusive and scalable innovation ecosystem** through:

- **Tax incentives and simplified compliance**
- **Funding support and incubation**
- **Ease of entry and exit for startups**

It is supported by a strong **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**—including **Aadhaar, UPI, Bharat Net and Digital India**—which has lowered entry barriers, reduced transaction costs, and enabled startups to scale rapidly.

Key Outcomes

- Unicorns increased from **4 (2014) to 118 (2025)**
- **Over 12 lakh direct jobs** created, with millions of indirect opportunities
- Strengthened exports, reduced import dependence, and enhanced India's global economic footprint
- A new unicorn emerging roughly **every 20 days**

Start-ups and Education

- **Role of NEP 2020**—The **National Education Policy 2020** marks a paradigm shift:
- From **rote learning to competency-based, multidisciplinary education**
- Emphasis on **innovation, entrepreneurship and skill orientation**
- **Flexible entry–exit options** to remove stigma around dropouts
- Integration of **technology, vocational education and experiential learning**

NEP 2020 seeks to correct the long-standing **disconnect between education and employability**, creating fertile ground for education-focused startups.

EdTech Startups: Transforming Learning Delivery—The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated innovation in education delivery, and startups played a **transformative role** across school, higher education and research.

Key Contributions

- **Digital platforms** with multimedia content, gamification and interactive tools
- **AI-driven personalized learning**, catering to diverse learning paces

- **Affordable online courses**, democratizing access for disadvantaged groups
- **Hands-on learning** through robotics, coding camps and maker labs
- **Industry mentoring and curriculum integration**

Major Domains

- **School & Test Preparation:** BYJU'S, Physics Wallah, Vedantu
- **STEM & Math Learning:** Cuemath, robotics and coding platforms
- **Early Childhood Education:** Play-based, experiential models
- **Inclusive Education:** Assistive technologies for **Children with Special Needs (CwSN)**
- **Immersive Learning:** Gamification and simulation-based platforms

These innovations promote **scientific temper, critical thinking and creativity**, aligning with constitutional values.

Personalized and Inclusive Learning- NEP 2020 recognizes that **every learner is unique**. EdTech startups use:

- **Adaptive algorithms and AI**
- **Real-time feedback mechanisms**
- **Self-paced and modular learning**

This enhances **student engagement, retention and learning outcomes**, while targeted programmes promote **gender inclusion, marginalized communities and rural learners**, contributing to social equity.

Start-ups in Skill Development

- Under the **Skill India Mission**, the government implements **large-scale skilling** through programmes such as **PMKVY, Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS)** and the **Craftsman Training Scheme (CTS)** via ITIs.
 - These initiatives focus on expanding access, standardization and certification, particularly for youth and informal-sector workers.
- **Skilling start-ups** complement public programmes by addressing gaps in **employability and industry relevance**. They offer **future-oriented courses** in AI-ML, data science, coding, digital marketing and communication skills, using **micro-credentials, live classes and project-based learning**.
- Through **internships, apprenticeships and job-linked programmes**, often in collaboration with corporates, start-ups enable **early workforce integration** and readiness for an economy shaped by **automation and rapid technological change**.
- Further, education and skilling start-ups promote **lifelong learning** by enabling **continuous upskilling and reskilling** through **online courses, micro-learning modules and professional development platforms**.
 - This supports the creation of a **learning society**, which is critical for **sustained economic growth, demographic dividend realization and long-term competitiveness**.

Way Forward: Strengthening the EdTech and Skilling Ecosystem

- **Teacher training and capacity building** to effectively integrate technology
- **Public-private collaboration** for scaling and sustainability
- Addressing challenges of **infrastructure, finance and regulation**
- **Co-creation of solutions** with educators and institutions
- Integrating **Indian Knowledge Systems** with modern pedagogy
- Ensuring **equitable access** to digital infrastructure and funding

Conclusion

Startups in education and skill development are central to India's **economic and social transformation**. By leveraging **AI, digital platforms and industry collaboration**, they bridge skill gaps, enhance employability and improve productivity.

CHAPTER 2- INDIA'S STARTUP REVOLUTION

India has firmly emerged as the **third-largest startup ecosystem in the world**, reflecting the country's growing entrepreneurial dynamism. As of **31 December 2024**, over **1.57 lakh startups** have been recognized by the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)**.



- With **more than 100 unicorns**, India's startup ecosystem is redefining innovation, generating employment, and expanding economic opportunities across sectors.
- While **Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Delhi-NCR** remain leading hubs, the ecosystem is becoming increasingly **geographically inclusive**, with **over 51% of startups originating from Tier-I and Tier-II cities**, signaling the democratization of entrepreneurship.

Role of Government: Startup India as the Flagship Driver

- Launched on **16 January 2016**, **Startup India** is the government's flagship initiative to promote **innovation, entrepreneurship and employment generation**.
 - The programme focuses on improving the **ease of doing business** through **simplified compliance and self-certification**, providing **tax incentives** including **income tax exemption for three years**, and strengthening **access to funding, incubation and mentoring support**.

Impact of Startup India

- **Impact of Startup India** has been significant. As of **31 December 2024**, recognized startups have generated **over 17.28 lakh direct jobs**.
 - Sector-wise, **IT services** account for **2.10 lakh jobs**, followed by **healthcare and life sciences (1.51 lakh)** and **professional and commercial services (96,474)**, reflecting diversification of employment beyond traditional sectors.
- The initiative has also advanced **women entrepreneurship**, with **75,935 recognized startups** having **at least one-woman director**, indicating improved **gender inclusion** and a more **inclusive startup ecosystem** aligned with India's development goals.



- **Access to Early-Stage Capital: Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS)**
- The **Startup India Seed Fund Scheme**, launched in **2021** with a **corpus of ₹945 crore**, aims to improve access to early-stage capital for startups at critical phases such as **proof of concept, prototype development, product trials, and market entry/commercialization**.

- Operational since **1 April 2021**, the scheme is overseen by an **Experts Advisory Committee (EAC)** to ensure transparent and need-based allocation.
- As of **December 2024**, **213 incubators** have been approved, **2,622 startups** supported, and **₹467.75 crore** disbursed, highlighting its role in strengthening India's **innovation-driven startup ecosystem**.

Scaling Startups through Domestic Capital: Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS)

Launched in **June 2016** with a corpus of **₹10,000 crore**, the **Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS)** aims to enhance access to domestic risk capital. Managed by **SIDBI**, the fund invests in **SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs)**, which in turn invest in startups.

Progress

- **₹6,886 crore** committed by DPIIT to SIDBI
- **₹11,687 crore** committed by SIDBI to AIFs (as of December 2024)
- Catalyzed **₹21,276 crore** of investment in **1,173 startups**

Improving Credit Access: Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS)

- The **Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS)** improves **credit access** for **DPIIT-recognised startups** by providing guarantees on loans extended by **scheduled commercial banks, NBFCs and venture debt funds**.
- Implemented by the **National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited**, the scheme reduces **lenders' risk perception** and facilitates greater **institutional credit flow** to startups.
- As of **3 January 2025**, **260 loans** amounting to **₹604.16 crore** have been guaranteed, including **₹27.04 crore** for **17 women-led startups**, supporting **inclusive and innovation-driven entrepreneurship**.

Promoting Grassroots Innovation: Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)

- The **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)**, launched in **2016** by **NITI Aayog**, promotes **grassroots innovation and entrepreneurship** through a multi-tier ecosystem comprising **Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs)** in schools, **Atal Incubation Centres (AICs)**, **Atal Community Innovation Centres (ACICs)**, and **Atal New India Challenges** focused on nationally relevant problem-solving.
- The mission is supported by **real-time MIS monitoring** and **third-party evaluations** to ensure accountability and outcomes.
- As of **18 December 2024**, **10,000 ATLs** have been established nationwide, **3,556 startups** incubated across **72 AICs**, and **41,965 jobs** created, underscoring AIM's role in building an **innovation-driven, employment-generating ecosystem**.

Technology-Led Entrepreneurship: MeitY Startup Hub (MSH)

- The **MeitY Startup Hub (MSH)** promotes **technology-led entrepreneurship** by integrating **incubation centres, Centres of Excellence and emerging technology labs**, and enabling **collaboration and innovation** in **electronics, IT and frontier technologies**.
- Under its ecosystem, **5,310+ startups**, **495+ incubators** and **328+ labs** are supported, reinforcing India's role as a **global technology innovation hub**.

Broader Significance of India's Startup Revolution

- **Employment generation** and absorption of skilled youth
- **Innovation-led economic growth**
- Reduced import dependence and improved export competitiveness
- Rise of **women-led and regionally diverse startups**
- Strengthening India's position in **global value chains**

Conclusion

India's startup ecosystem has undergone a **structural transformation** over the last decade, emerging as the **third-largest globally**. Government initiatives such as **Startup India, Startup India Seed Fund Scheme, Fund of Funds for Startups, Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups, Atal Innovation Mission** and the **MeitY Startup Hub** have played a **catalytic role** in fostering **innovation, finance access and job creation**.

Going forward, **continued policy support, deeper capital markets and inclusive innovation** will further strengthen the ecosystem, positioning startups as a key driver of **economic growth** and **Viksit Bharat@2047**.

CHAPTER 3- NEW LABOR LAWS 2025

India's labor ecosystem is undergoing a **major structural reform** through the **New Labor Codes, 2025**, which **consolidate 29 labor laws into four codes**. The reforms aim to create a **simplified, inclusive and future-ready framework**, balancing **worker welfare with enterprise flexibility**, expanding **social security coverage**, and improving **ease of compliance**.

- By aligning with **global labor standards**, the codes support **employment formalization, productivity enhancement**, and the vision of **Aatmanirbhar Bharat and sustainable economic growth**

Four Labor Codes

- **Code on Wages, 2019**
- **Industrial Relations Code, 2020**
- **Code on Social Security, 2020**
- **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHC) Code, 2020**

Together, these codes provide a **cohesive and uniform labor framework**, replacing a regime characterized by **overlapping compliances, inspector raj, legal ambiguity, and poor adaptability to new forms of work**.

Why Were New Labor Codes Necessary?

- **Structural and Regulatory Deficiencies:** India's earlier labor regime, largely inherited from the **colonial period and 1950s–80s**, was marked by **fragmentation across Central and State laws, inconsistent definitions, and complex compliance requirements**, resulting in **high transaction costs and prolonged litigation**.
- **Changing Nature of Work:** Traditional labor laws were ill-suited to address **emerging employment forms** such as **gig, platform and fixed-term work**, leading to **regulatory gaps, limited social security coverage**, and worker vulnerability in the new economy.
- **Worker Safety and Equity Concerns:** Global evidence highlights systemic labor challenges—**International Labor Organization estimates 2.78 million annual worker deaths** due to occupational accidents and diseases, alongside **persistent gender wage gaps**, underscoring the need for stronger, harmonized labor protections.
- **Alignment with Global Labor Standards:** With the **ILO's June 2025 move towards binding standards for platform workers**, India's labor reforms are **progressive and anticipatory**, aligning domestic regulations with **evolving global norms** and recognizing **new forms of work** in a future-ready manner.

Twelve Game-Changing Reforms under New Labor Codes

- **Minimum wages for all workers** through a **National Floor Wage**
- **Uniform definition of wages** for transparency
- **Social security coverage for gig and platform workers**
- **Gratuity eligibility after one year** for fixed-term employees
- **Mandatory appointment letters** for all employees
- **Double wages for overtime work**

- **Reduced eligibility period for leave**
- **Permission for women to work night shifts** with safety and consent
- **Formal recognition of work-from-home and flexible work**
- **Free annual health check-ups for employees above 40**
- **Mandatory timely wage payments**
- **Compensation for certain commuting accidents**

New laws usher in key changes HT

- ▶ **Gratuity after a year**
Gratuity payments for all fixed-term employees after one year of continuous service, instead of five years earlier.
- ▶ **Mandated minimum wage**
A national minimum wage will cover all workers, instead of a few scheduled industries.
- ▶ **Health focus**
Free annual medical checkups for workers aged above 40.
- ▶ **New lay-off threshold**
Companies with up to 300 workers allowed to fire workers or shut plants without prior govt approval. The previous threshold was 100 workers.
- ▶ **Relief for fixed-term staff**
Fixed-term employees will get the same benefits as permanent staff, including leave, regulated working hours and medical benefits.
- ▶ **Enhancing female labour force participation**
Women allowed to work night shifts and enter industries, sectors under the "hazardous" category, such as mining
- ▶ **Laws define gig, platform work**
"A person who participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship"

Key Structural Shifts in the Labor Market

- **Formal recognition of gig, platform and fixed-term employment**
- **Single registration and licensing** with an *inspector-cum-facilitator* regime
- Predictable wage structures reducing inter-state uncertainty
- Digitized compliance systems lowering administrative burden
- Complementarity with digital initiatives such as **EPFO 3.0**

These reforms strengthen **investor confidence**, reduce litigation risks, and promote **employment formalization**.

Sector-wise Impact of Labor Reforms

- **Fixed-Term Employees:** Fixed-term workers are accorded **parity with permanent employees** in terms of **leave, medical and social security benefits**, with **gratuity eligibility reduced to one year**, encouraging **direct hiring** and discouraging excessive contractualization.
- **Gig and Platform Workers:** For the first time, **gig work, platform work and aggregators** are legally defined. Aggregators must contribute **1–2% of annual turnover (capped at 5%)** towards social security, while **Aadhaar-linked Universal Account Numbers** ensure **portability of benefits across states**.
- **Contract Workers:** Contract workers are brought under **health and social security coverage**, with the **principal employer made accountable** for welfare provisions, strengthening responsibility and enforcement.

- **Women Workers:** The reforms enforce **legal prohibition of gender discrimination** and **equal pay for equal work**, allow **night shifts and all occupations with safeguards**, mandate **women’s representation in grievance redressal committees**, and expand the definition of **dependents to include parents-in-law**.
- **MSME Workers:** Workers in MSMEs are covered under **universal minimum wages**, with safeguards relating to **standard working hours, overtime payments and paid leave**, improving basic labor standards.
- **Plantation Workers:** Plantation labor is covered under the **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHC) Code and Social Security Code**, mandating **safety training, protective equipment, ESI medical facilities, and educational support for workers’ children**.
- **Mine Workers:** The reforms recognize **certain commuting accidents as employment-related** and cap **working hours at 48 hours per week**, improving occupational safety and work-life balance.
- **Hazardous Industry Workers:** Enhanced protections include **free annual health check-ups, mandatory safety committees at worksites, and national safety standards for hazardous chemicals**, strengthening preventive regulation.
- **Textile Workers:** Textile workers, including migrants, receive **equal wages and welfare benefits, PDS portability, extended claims period of up to three years, and double wages for overtime**, addressing sector-specific vulnerabilities.
- **Dock Workers:** Employers are mandated to provide **medical, sanitation and welfare facilities**, ensuring safer and humane working conditions.
- **Media and Creative Workers:** Journalists, OTT workers and digital creators are entitled to **formal appointment letters** clearly specifying **wages, terms of employment and entitlements**, enhancing job security and transparency.

Challenges & Way Forward

Challenges and Transitional Issues	Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambiguities in the new definition of wages, especially regarding variable pay and stock benefits • Potential increase in gratuity liabilities • Retrospective financial provisioning concerns • Need for workforce reclassification and documentation • Adjustment challenges for industries relying heavily on contract labor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate updating of HR policies, contracts, and payroll systems • Issuance of appointment letters to existing employees • Registration on Shram Suvidha and labour portals • Capacity building under the inspector-cum-facilitator regime • Stakeholder collaboration among government, employers and workers

Conclusion

By consolidating **29 labor laws into four codes**, the **New Labor Laws, 2025** address regulatory fragmentation and establish a **transparent, inclusive and investment-friendly labor regime**. By recognizing **modern work arrangements**, ensuring **minimum national standards**, and **simplifying compliance**, the reforms aim to balance **worker protection with productivity**. Their success will depend on **effective enforcement and adaptive implementation**, and if executed well, the codes can underpin **sustainable growth, social justice, and Aatmanirbhar Bharat**.

CHAPTER 4- WASTE MANAGEMENT INNOVATIONS IN HIMALAYAN STATES

Waste management in the Himalayan region is shaped by **fragile ecosystems, high-altitude settlements, limited land, difficult terrain and seasonal tourism pressures**. These constraints make **centralized models unviable**, necessitating **locally adapted and decentralized solutions**.

- Accordingly, Himalayan states have strengthened waste governance under **Swachh Bharat Mission–Urban 2.0**, focusing on **source segregation, scientific processing, legacy waste remediation and citizen participation**.

Why Waste Management Is Critical in Himalayan States

Waste management is critical in Himalayan states due to **ecological fragility, disaster vulnerability, limited landfill space, high tourism-induced waste, and transport constraints.**

- The region also faces a **high risk of plastic pollution in rivers and glaciers**, threatening downstream ecosystems. Hence, **centralized waste models are unsuitable**, making **technology-enabled, community-driven and circular economy-based approaches** essential.

Innovative Practices Across Himalayan States

Kedarnath (Uttarakhand): Digital Deposit Refund System (DRS)- To manage pilgrimage-related plastic waste, Uttarakhand introduced the **Digital Deposit Refund System (DRS) in Kedarnath in May 2022.**

- Plastic bottles and **MLPs tagged with QR-coded USI** carry a **₹10 refundable deposit**, returned digitally via **UPI** through collection centers and **Reverse Vending Machines.**
- Expanded across all **Char Dham sites**, the initiative has **recycled over 20 lakh bottles, avoided 66 MT of CO₂ emissions, and created 110+ green jobs**, exemplifying **digital governance, behavioral nudges and circular economy practices.**

Jammu & Kashmir: Green Campus Framework- The **Green Campus Framework**, led by the Housing & Urban Development Department, institutionalized waste management across educational and public institutions.

- Using a **three-stage process—identification, preparation and declaration**, it focused on **source segregation, on-site composting, reduction of single-use plastics and behavioral change.**
- **Anantnag** became the first ULB to declare all campuses Green, demonstrating **institutional accountability and behavior-led environmental governance.**

Dharamshala (Himachal Pradesh): Collaborative Urban Waste Model- Since 2021, **Dharamshala Municipal Corporation** has implemented a **collaborative, multi-stakeholder waste management model.**

- Initiatives such as the **Clean Business Programme, Model Ward Programme, decentralized MRFs, and the “Waste Under Arrest” initiative** have led to a **25% rise in segregation, 30% reduction in road littering, and 40% cut in landfill waste.**
- The model uniquely integrates **urban governance, social rehabilitation and circular economy principles.**

Leh (Ladakh): Solar-Powered Circular Waste Management- In **Leh (Ladakh)**, the **LAHDC** launched a **solar-powered waste management facility (2020)** suited to high-altitude conditions, with a capacity of **30 tonnes/day.**

- It targets **100% source segregation and 90% material recovery**, converting waste into **compost and pavement tiles** while generating revenue.
- The model is distinct for its use of **renewable energy, circular economy principles, and integration of recycling, composting and reuse** in an extreme climatic setting.

Key Governance Lessons from Himalayan States

- **Decentralized waste management** is essential in fragile regions
- **Technology + behavior change** delivers sustainable outcomes
- **Community participation**, especially women-led models, strengthens service delivery
- **Renewable energy integration** enhances resilience
- **Circular economy practices** reduce landfill dependence

Conclusion- Waste management innovations in Himalayan states demonstrate the importance of **context-sensitive governance** in ecologically fragile regions. By combining **community participation, institutional accountability, digital tools, renewable energy and circular economy principles**, these initiatives advance **sustainable urbanization and environmental stewardship.**

- Anchored under **Swachh Bharat Mission–Urban 2.0**, they show that **citizen-led, decentralized and technology-enabled approaches** can protect fragile ecosystems while supporting a **developed and sustainable India**.

UPSC Mains Practice Questions-(Around 250 words)

- Q.1 Discuss how technology-enabled and community-driven waste management models can address the challenges of plastic pollution in mountain ecosystems. Illustrate with suitable examples.
- Q2. Examine the contribution of digital governance and behavioral nudges in improving environmental governance in India's hill states.

Essay-Type Questions (1000-1200 words)

- Sustainable waste management in fragile ecosystems is as much a governance challenge as it is an environmental one.” Discuss in the context of innovative waste management practices in Himalayan states.

