



# Daily Current Affairs



## To The Point

by Dhananjay Gautam

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GS Paper 2 – Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice

## 1 Presidential Reference and the Supreme Court: Can Past Verdicts Be Clarified Without Being Overturned?

**Context:** In a significant constitutional development, the **Supreme Court of India** has issued notices to the **Union Government and all States** following a **Presidential Reference** under **Article 143 of the Constitution**. The move seeks the apex court's advisory opinion on whether **courts can compel constitutional authorities like the President and Governors to act within specific timelines on Bills passed by State legislatures**.



A **Constitution Bench** led by Chief Justice B.R. Gavai is slated to commence detailed hearings by **mid-August 2025**.

### Background: April 2025 Judgment Under Review

This Reference stems from a landmark **April 2025 ruling** delivered in response to a petition by the **Tamil Nadu government**. In that case, the **Supreme Court ruled that the inordinate delay by Governor R.N. Ravi** in assenting to **ten State Bills**—which had been re-enacted by the legislature—was **"constitutionally impermissible."** For the first time, the Court introduced **judicially enforceable timelines** for both **Presidential and Gubernatorial assent** to Bills.

Following this, **President Droupadi Murmu**, exercising powers under **Article 143(1)**, referred **14 constitutional questions** to the Court, seeking clarity on the limits of **judicial supervision over constitutional authorities**.

### Understanding Article 143: The Supreme Court's Advisory Jurisdiction

**Article 143(1)** empowers the **President** to seek the **Supreme Court's advisory opinion** on matters of **law or fact of public importance**, even if **no case is currently before the Court**.

- This provision has roots in the **Government of India Act, 1935**.
- It has been invoked **at least 14 times since Independence**, dealing with matters such as the **Berubari Union, Ram Janmabhoomi**, and the **Collegium system**.
- The **Court's opinion is advisory, not binding**, but carries **tremendous persuasive authority**.

However, **Article 145(3)** mandates that such References must be heard by a **Constitution Bench of at least five judges**, ensuring constitutional depth and balance.

### Can the Supreme Court Decline a Presidential Reference?

Yes. Though Article 143 uses the word **"may"**, implying discretion, this was **judicially confirmed in the Special Courts Bill case (1978)**. The **Supreme Court may refuse to answer**, especially if the questions are:

- **Hypothetical**
- **Purely political**
- **Require expert, non-legal evidence**

In **Ismail Faruqui v. Union of India (1994)**, the Court declined a Reference linked to the **Ayodhya-Babri Masjid dispute**, citing **ongoing civil proceedings and political sensitivities**. Similarly, in **1982**, it refused to answer a question on a law regarding **migrant resettlement in J&K** after it was already enacted.

### Are Supreme Court's Advisory Opinions Binding?

The **legal status** of advisory opinions has remained **ambiguous**:

- In **St. Xavier's College v. State of Gujarat (1974)**, the Court ruled that advisory opinions are **not binding** under **Article 141**, which covers **"law declared"** by the Court.

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- Yet in **R.K. Garg v. Union of India (1981)**, the Court treated reasoning in an advisory opinion as **binding**.
- In the **Cauvery Water Disputes case (1991)**, the Court observed that such opinions “**deserve due respect and weight**” but stopped short of making them binding.

Thus, while **not enforceable**, advisory opinions **strongly guide legal and constitutional developments**.

**Can the April 2025 Verdict Be Reversed Through a Presidential Reference?**

**Absolutely not.** The **Supreme Court has consistently held** that a **Presidential Reference cannot override or reverse a binding judgment** rendered under its **adjudicatory jurisdiction**.

- In the **Cauvery Water Disputes case**, the Court clarified that **Article 143 is not a backdoor for review**.
- The only legal route to challenge a final verdict is through a **review petition or curative petition**, as per **Articles 137 and 142**.

However, the Court may use the **Reference to clarify or expand on its legal reasoning**, as seen in:

- **1998 Collegium case**, where clarification led to modifications in the appointment process of judges.
- **Natural Resources Allocation case (2012)**, where the Court clarified the meaning of “**auction**” in the allocation of national resources without altering its earlier rulings.

**What This Means for the Future:**

While the **April 2025 decision remains final and enforceable**, the present Reference provides an opportunity for the **Supreme Court to elaborate its constitutional reasoning**, especially regarding the **doctrine of separation of powers**, the **scope of judicial review**, and the **autonomy of constitutional functionaries**.

Crucially, the **14 questions** raised in the current Reference **go beyond the Tamil Nadu case**, potentially impacting **ongoing cases in Kerala, Punjab**, and other States where Governors have allegedly delayed assent to Bills.

**Additional Insight: Why This Matters Now**

In recent years, there has been growing friction between **State governments and Governors**, particularly in **non-BJP-ruled States**. Governors have increasingly been accused of **withholding or delaying assent** for **political or ideological reasons**, raising serious concerns about **federal balance** and **legislative sovereignty**.

This Presidential Reference could, therefore, play a **pivotal role in shaping the contours of Indian federalism**, reaffirming or redefining the **powers and duties of Governors and the President** in a parliamentary democracy.

**Conclusion:** The upcoming hearings on this **Presidential Reference** are more than a legal formality—they are a **constitutional moment**. While the **Supreme Court cannot and will not undo its April 2025 verdict**, it holds the power to **clarify critical constitutional doctrines** that will shape the functioning of **State legislatures, the Union executive, and India’s democratic ethos** for years to come.



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GS Paper 3 – Defence & Science & Technology

## 2 MiG-21 Bison: India's Iconic Fighter Jet Nears Final Flight

**Context:** The **Indian Air Force (IAF)** is preparing to bid farewell to one of its most iconic aircraft — the **MiG-21 Bison**. By **September 2025**, the last of these Russian-origin fighter jets will be retired from service, bringing an end to over **six decades of operational legacy**. The retirement marks the closure of a historic chapter in India's military aviation.



### A Supersonic Trailblazer: First of Its Kind in India

The **MiG-21** was the **first supersonic jet** to be inducted into the Indian Air Force, entering service in **1963**. Designed by the **Mikoyan-Gurevich Design Bureau** of the **former Soviet Union**, it became a symbol of India's aspirations for aerial dominance during the Cold War era.

- India acquired license production rights from the USSR and went on to **build 657 MiG-21s** domestically through **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)**.
- It remains the **second most produced fighter aircraft in the world**, after the American **F-4 Phantom**.

### Known by Many Names, Feared by Many Adversaries

The aircraft earned several nicknames across the globe:

- **NATO reporting name: Fishbed**
- **'Balalaika'** – due to its triangular wing design resembling the Russian string instrument
- **'Ołówek'** (Polish for "**pencil**") – for its slender fuselage
- **'Ăn Bạc'** (Vietnamese for "**silver swallow**") – for its agility and shine

Its unique delta-wing configuration and compact build made it ideal for high-speed interception and dogfights.

### A Veteran of Every Indian Conflict Since 1963:

The **MiG-21** has participated in **almost every conflict India has faced** post-independence:

- **1965 India-Pakistan War**
- **1971 Indo-Pak War**, including the **creation of Bangladesh**
- **Kargil War of 1999**, where it was used for ground-attack roles
- **Balakot Airstrikes in 2019**, where a MiG-21 Bison famously engaged in aerial combat with Pakistani F-16s
- **Operation Sindoor** — a recent mission that further added to its combat résumé

With these engagements, the MiG-21 has arguably seen **more combat than any other fighter in Indian service**.

### A Machine of Mixed Legacy: Power and Controversy

While the MiG-21 holds a **glorious record in air defense**, it has also drawn criticism for its **high accident rate** in later years. Often referred to in headlines as the **"Flying Coffin"**, the aging aircraft has suffered from **maintenance challenges, outdated avionics, and pilot safety issues**.

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Over **400 accidents involving MiG-21s** have been reported since their induction, raising questions about **continued reliance** on an aging fleet. However, in its early decades, it was considered cutting-edge and unmatched in speed and maneuverability.

## Why the Retirement Matters:

The retirement of the MiG-21 reflects a **generational shift in India's airpower** strategy:

- The IAF is now modernizing its fleet with **Rafale, LCA Tejas**, and plans for **fifth-generation stealth aircraft** under the **AMCA (Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft)** project.
- The phase-out of the MiG-21 opens the way for newer technologies, enhanced safety, and improved battlefield effectiveness.

## Did You Know?

- The MiG-21 holds the record for being the **longest-serving combat aircraft** in the history of the IAF.
- Globally, over **11,000 MiG-21s** were built — making it **one of the most mass-produced jet fighters** ever.
- Apart from India, it served in over **60 countries**, including **Vietnam, Egypt, Libya, Poland, and North Korea**.
- The MiG-21 was **one of the first aircraft capable of achieving Mach 2 speed**, which is **twice the speed of sound**.

## The End of an Era, but a Legacy That Will Fly Forever

As the Indian Air Force prepares to send off the **MiG-21 Bison**, it is more than just the retirement of an aircraft — it is the **farewell of a legend** that shaped India's skies for decades. It trained generations of pilots, defended the nation in its darkest hours, and became an indelible part of India's **military and strategic history**.

The **MiG-21 may soon stop flying**, but its **legacy will remain etched in the annals of Indian aviation** for generations to come.

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## Sea Slugs: Nature's Colorful Marvels Revealing New Secrets

**Context:** In an exciting discovery for marine biology, scientists have recently identified **two previously unknown species** of **wart sea slugs** off the coast of **North Sulawesi, Indonesia**. These new species—**Phyllidia ovata** and **Phyllidia fontjei**—have now been **formally described**, adding to the rich biodiversity of the Indo-Pacific region. The find highlights the **undiscovered potential of coral reef ecosystems**, which continue to surprise researchers with their hidden wonders.



### What Are Sea Slugs?

Commonly referred to as **sea slugs**, these fascinating creatures are part of a group called **nudibranchs**—a type of **soft-bodied marine mollusc** belonging to **Phylum Mollusca** and **Class Gastropoda**. Found in **oceans worldwide**, from **shallow tropical reefs** to the **deepest trenches**, sea slugs have evolved into some of the most **visually striking animals on Earth**.

### Nature's Living Rainbows:

Sea slugs are famous for their **vibrant colours**, **bold patterns**, and **fluid movements**—traits that are not just beautiful but also **defensive**. Their dazzling appearances often act as **warning signals** to predators, as many species are **highly toxic**.

- Their **toxicity** is often **acquired from their diet**, especially from **sponges, jellyfish, and anemones**.
- Some can even **retain the stinging cells (nematocysts)** of jellyfish and use them as defense mechanisms.

### Naked but Not Defenseless:

Unlike other molluscs, sea slugs **lack external shells**, which is why they're sometimes described as "**naked snails**." Despite this, they have adapted **incredible survival mechanisms**:

- **Photosynthetic Abilities:** Some species, like *Elysia chlorotica*, can **photosynthesise** by incorporating **chloroplasts** from the algae they consume—a phenomenon known as **kleptoplasty**.
- **Gene Theft:** Certain sea slugs can **steal genes from their prey** and **incorporate them into their own DNA**.
- **Limb Regeneration:** In some species, **lost body parts can regenerate**, adding another layer to their survival toolkit.

### Ecological Importance of Sea Slugs:

Sea slugs are more than just eye-catching marine creatures. They play a **vital ecological role** in **coral reef ecosystems**:

- Their presence is often a **positive indicator of coral health**.
- They help **control populations of algae and sponges**, contributing to **reef balance**.
- Some even act as **bioindicators**—their **sensitivity to pollution and climate change** helps scientists monitor reef health.

### Behaviours and Lifestyle:

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- **Feeding Habits:** These slow grazers feed on **algae, hydroids, small invertebrates**, and even **other nudibranchs**.
- **Diurnal and Nocturnal:** While many species are **active during the day**, some are **nocturnal** and venture out under the cover of darkness.
- **Reproduction:** Sea slugs are **simultaneous hermaphrodites**, meaning they carry both male and female reproductive organs, often exchanging roles during mating.

## A Field of Endless Discovery:

With over **3,000 known species** and more being discovered regularly, sea slugs continue to captivate scientists and divers alike. The discovery of **Phyllidia ovata** and **Phyllidia fontjei** is a **reminder of how much remains unexplored** beneath the waves.

## Conclusion: Small Creatures, Big Impact

Sea slugs, despite their delicate and miniature appearance, represent some of the **most complex and adaptive life forms** in the ocean. Their **brilliant adaptations, striking appearance**, and **ecological importance** make them a symbol of the **hidden intelligence and beauty of marine life**.



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GS Paper 1 – Geography

## 4 Kanniyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary: A Biodiversity Hotspot at India's Southern Tip

**Context:** In a remarkable revelation highlighting the sanctuary's rich biodiversity, a **research scholar recently documented around 450 species of moths** at the **Kanniyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary**. This discovery emphasizes the ecological significance of the region and showcases its potential for **scientific research and conservation**.

### Location: Where Land Meets Three Seas

The **Kanniyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary** is located in **Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu**, near the **southernmost tip of mainland India**. It lies at the **unique confluence of the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and Indian Ocean**, making it not only **geographically important** but also **ecologically diverse**.



- **To the north**, the sanctuary shares its boundary with the **Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve**.
- **To the south**, it is flanked by the **Kodayar left bank channel** and the **Thovalai channel**.
- **To the west**, it borders the **state of Kerala**.

### Lifeline Rivers and Lush Landscapes:

The sanctuary is the **origin point for seven rivers**, including the well-known **Pahrli** and **Thamirabarani** rivers. These rivers play a vital role in supporting **agriculture, biodiversity, and the livelihoods of local communities**.

### Diverse Vegetation Covering Multiple Ecozones:

The natural vegetation of Kanniyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary spans across several ecological zones:

- **Southern thorn forests**
- **Dry and moist deciduous forests**
- **Semi-evergreen and evergreen hill sholas**
- **Grassy hilltops and downs**

This variety in vegetation supports an equally wide array of **flora and fauna**, making it one of the **most ecologically rich sanctuaries in southern India**.

### Rich and Rare Fauna: A Sanctuary for the Wild

The sanctuary provides safe haven to several **threatened and endemic species**, including:

- **Indian Bison (Gaur)**
- **Asiatic Elephant**
- **Nilgiri Tahr** – an endangered mountain goat species found only in the Western Ghats
- **Sambar Deer**
- **Lion-tailed Macaque** – one of the most endangered primates in the world

In addition to these, the forest is also home to **reptiles like the Indian Rock Python**, and now, as revealed, **hundreds of moth species**, many of which are indicators of **healthy ecosystems**.

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## Home to Indigenous Communities:

Several **tribal communities** reside in the **reserve forests adjacent to the sanctuary**, living in close harmony with nature. Their **traditional knowledge** of the forests and sustainable practices are an **integral part of the sanctuary's cultural heritage**.

## Conservation Significance:

- The sanctuary lies within the **Western Ghats**, which is one of the **eight "hottest hotspots" of biodiversity in the world**, as declared by Conservation International.
- It forms a crucial part of the **Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve**, contributing to the conservation of **rare and endemic species**.
- The discovery of **450+ moth species** serves as an indicator of the **sanctuary's excellent environmental health**, as moths play key roles in **pollination, food webs, and ecosystem stability**.

## Did You Know?

- **Kanniyakumari district** is the only place in India where you can **watch the sunrise and sunset over the ocean from the same spot**.
- The region is home to **Agasthiyar Malai**, a sacred peak named after the sage Agastya and considered one of the oldest geological formations in the country.

## Conclusion: A Sanctuary Worth Protecting

The **Kanniyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary** is much more than just a green expanse—it's a living mosaic of **natural wonders, ancient forests, cultural richness, and ecological balance**. As new species continue to be discovered, its importance as a **biodiversity reserve and conservation model** becomes ever clearer.

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GS Paper 3 – Digital Economy

## 5 Unified Payments Interface (UPI): India's Digital Payment Revolution Gains Global Recognition

**Context:** The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, in its recent report titled *"Growing Retail Digital Payments: The Value of Interoperability,"* has **praised the Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** for revolutionizing India's digital payments ecosystem. The IMF emphasized UPI's **interoperable design**, calling it a model for developing countries aiming for **inclusive and scalable payment systems**.



### What is UPI? A Game-Changer in Digital Transactions

The **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** is a **real-time payment system** developed by the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)**. It allows users to **link multiple bank accounts** in a single app to **send and receive money instantly**, without needing to input card or bank details repeatedly.

- **Dual Functionality:** UPI supports both **push (sending)** and **pull (receiving)** transactions using a **Virtual Payment Address (VPA)**, offering high convenience and security through **two-factor authentication**.
- **Built on Robust Tech:** It leverages the **Immediate Payment Service (IMPS)** and integrates with the **Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AePS)**.
  - **IMPS** enables fast fund transfers using mobile numbers and account details.
  - **AePS** allows Aadhaar-based services like cash withdrawal, deposits, and balance checks through biometric verification.

### BHIM App: India's UPI at Your Fingertips

The **BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money)** app, launched by NPCI, is a flagship **UPI-based mobile application** designed to promote easy, secure, and fast transactions—especially in rural and semi-urban India.

### How UPI Reshaped India's Digital Economy:

#### Unprecedented Growth and Reach

- In **June 2025 alone**, UPI processed **24.03 lakh crore** across **18.39 billion transactions**.
- UPI now caters to **491 million users** and **65 million merchants**, connecting **over 675 banks**.
- It has become the **world's largest real-time payments platform**, handling **over 640 million daily transactions**, surpassing global giants like **Visa**.

### Seamless Interoperability Across Apps and Banks:

UPI broke the limitations of **closed-loop systems** (like individual digital wallets), enabling users to **transact across different apps and banks** with ease.

- This **platform-agnostic model** fosters innovation, improves competition, and enhances **user experience**.
- **QR codes** powered by UPI are now commonplace, making **cashless payments effortless even at local shops and street vendors**.

### Empowering Financial Inclusion:

One of UPI's most transformative roles has been in **bridging the financial divide**:

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- With **zero-cost** and **real-time transfers**, UPI has made digital payments **accessible to small vendors, self-employed individuals, and first-time users**.
- It has empowered **kirana stores, gig workers, and rural communities**, while also **boosting digital literacy and trust** in financial systems.

## UPI's Global Footprint Expands:

India's digital diplomacy has taken UPI across borders. It is now **live in 7 countries**:

- **UAE, Singapore, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, France, and Mauritius.**
- Its **launch in France** marked UPI's **European debut**.
- India is actively promoting UPI integration within **BRICS nations**, aiming to ease **cross-border remittances and payments** for Indian migrants and travelers.

## Digital Backbone Behind UPI's Success:

The rise of UPI wasn't an overnight miracle—it stands on a **strong digital foundation** known as the **JAM Trinity**:

### 1. Jan Dhan Yojana (Financial Inclusion):

- Over **55.9 crore bank accounts** opened under Jan Dhan as of July 2025.
- Enabled **direct benefit transfers (DBTs)** and brought millions into the **formal banking system**.

### 2. Aadhaar (Digital Identity):

- Over **142 crore Aadhaar IDs** issued by June 2025.
- Enabled **secure, biometric-based authentication**, facilitating **digital governance** and payments.

### 3. Mobile Connectivity:

- India now boasts one of the **world's fastest-growing 5G networks**, with **4.74 lakh base stations** covering nearly all districts.
- **Mobile data costs** dropped from 308/GB in 2014 to just 9.34 in 2022, making internet access highly affordable.
- Over **116 crore mobile subscribers** now use mobile-based financial services, many for the first time.

## Did You Know?

- UPI handles more than **85% of India's digital retail payments** and accounts for **almost half of global real-time transactions**.
- Several African and Southeast Asian nations are studying the **UPI model** to replicate it for their financial inclusion goals.
- India's RuPay card and UPI system have begun integrating to create a seamless **card-to-app transaction ecosystem**.

## Conclusion: UPI – A Blueprint for Digital Transformation

The **Unified Payments Interface** has transformed how India **pays, banks, and transacts**, becoming a symbol of **self-reliant innovation** and **inclusive digital progress**. As it expands globally, UPI stands not just as a **technological success**, but as a **model for empowering people through digital infrastructure**.

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## 6 Lantana Camara: A Beautiful Menace Threatening India's Forest Ecosystems

**Context:** The invasive plant **Lantana camara**, once introduced in India as an **ornamental shrub**, has now become a serious ecological threat. Recent reports reveal that it has **infested nearly 3.25 lakh hectares** of forest land in **Himachal Pradesh alone**, severely **endangering native biodiversity** and disrupting the natural balance of ecosystems.



### What is Lantana Camara?

**Lantana camara** is an **invasive alien species** that has spread rapidly across the **tropical and subtropical regions** of India.

- Originally **native to Central and South America**, it belongs to the **Verbenaceae family**.
- It was **first introduced in India during the early 1800s** by the British for use in **gardens and hedges** due to its vibrant, colorful flowers.
- However, over time, it has **escaped cultivation** and now grows **wild**, covering vast stretches of forest and grassland.

### Rapid Spread and Invasion Pattern:

Lantana grows **aggressively**, forming **dense thickets** that block sunlight and suppress the growth of other plant species.

- Its invasion pattern shows an **alarming trend**—it spreads from **low-lying regions to higher altitudes**, gradually conquering **hills and forested slopes**.
- In India, Lantana has now become **one of the most widespread invasive weeds**, especially across the **Western Ghats, central India, and the Himalayan foothills**.

### Ecological Consequences:

The presence of **Lantana camara** in forested areas leads to a **significant decline in native flora and fauna**.

- It **releases allelochemicals**—toxic compounds that **inhibit the germination and growth** of nearby native plants.
- This results in **monoculture-like conditions**, reducing **plant diversity**, and in turn, affecting **insects, birds, and other wildlife** that depend on indigenous vegetation.
- **Forest regeneration slows down**, and in extreme cases, native species may **disappear entirely**.

### Socio-Economic and Agricultural Impact:

Lantana not only impacts biodiversity but also poses **threats to agriculture and rural livelihoods**:

- It **invades grazing lands**, reducing fodder availability for livestock.
- **Farmlands adjacent to forested areas** are vulnerable to its spread, forcing farmers to spend on manual or chemical removal.
- It increases **forest fire risks**, as the plant's **woody biomass** is highly **flammable during dry seasons**.

Can Lantana Be Managed? Turning a Threat into a Resource

Despite its destructive nature, Lantana's biomass holds **potential for productive use**, if managed wisely:



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- Its **wood** can be used to make **low-cost furniture, handicrafts, and fuelwood**.
- When processed properly, its **leaves and stems** can be converted into **organic compost and vermicompost**—a sustainable alternative to **chemical fertilizers**.
- **Livelihood programs** in parts of India, including **Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand**, have begun engaging local communities in **Lantana removal and biomass utilization**, offering **employment and environmental restoration**.

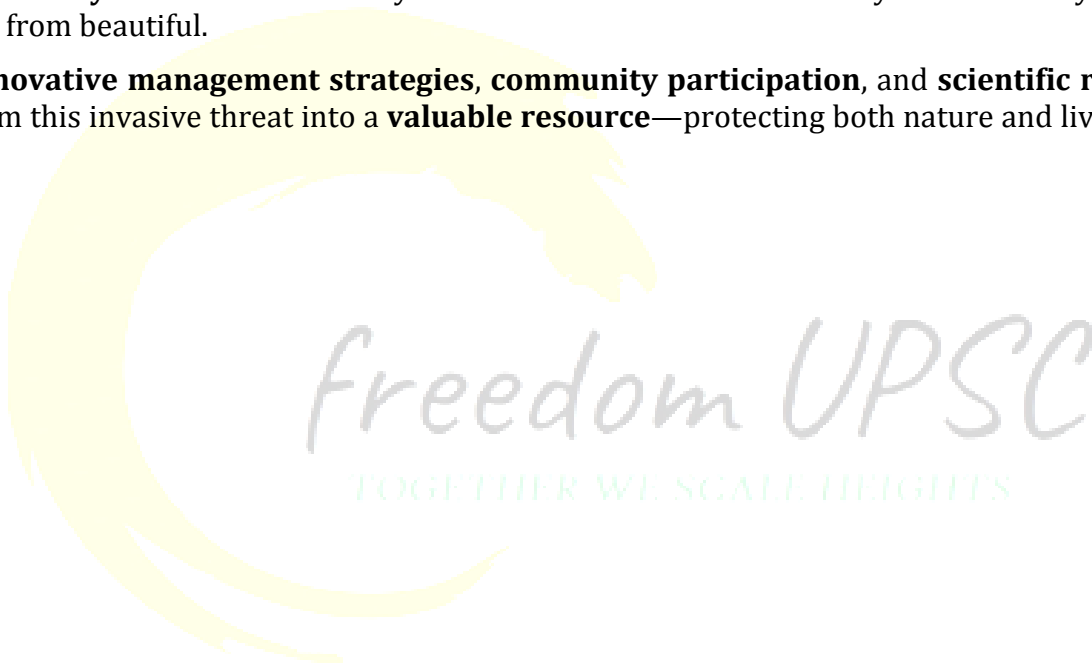
## Interesting Fact: From Poisonous Shrub to Useful Product

While **toxic to many animals**, certain parts of the Lantana plant are being **experimented with in biopesticide research**. In some regions, Lantana extract has been shown to **repel insects** and may serve as an **eco-friendly pest control solution**.

## Conclusion: The Dual Nature of Lantana

**Lantana camara** is a classic example of how a **non-native species**, when unchecked, can **outcompete native biodiversity** and alter entire ecosystems. While its **vivid flowers** may deceive the eye, its ecological impact is far from beautiful.

Yet, with **innovative management strategies, community participation, and scientific research**, India can transform this invasive threat into a **valuable resource**—protecting both nature and livelihoods in the process.



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