Electrification Efforts in India - Ambedkar

What is the issue?

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- Recently, Indian PM announced the completion of electrification of all census villages.
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- In this context, a look at the efforts of electrification process in India becomes imperative.
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How did electrification process evolve in India?

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- The vision and blueprint for electrifying the country was formulated by BR Ambedkar in early 1940s.
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- He was then the chairman of the Policy Committee on Public Works and Electric Power, established in 1943.
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- By 1945, Dr Ambedkar and his team had studied the problems and opportunities for electricity development in India.
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- They pursued provinces and states to impart a national perspective to electricity development.
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- Ambedkar's belief was that **cheap and abundant electricity can only be provided through a centralised system.**
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- He felt this was essential to ensure the success of industrialisation and bring about socio-economic development.
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- Electricity was dominated by the private sector and followed a decentralised model during pre-Independence era.
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- But the committee favoured the state enterprise in development of electricity

supply using the best technology of the time.
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- Accordingly, the Electricity Supply Act got enacted in 1948.
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- India started carrying out electrification according to the plan formulated by the Ambedkar committee.
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How did village electrification go?

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- During plan periods in the 1950s, there was focus on village electrification, primarily to support rural industries.
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- From mid-1960s to late-1980s, the focus shifted to pump-set energisation.
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- But not much progress could be achieved in electrifying villages and households.
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- Rural electrification increased to only 6% in 1973, 30% in 1991 and 43% in 2001.
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- Also, electric utilities were suffering from huge losses.
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- With over half the population without electricity access in 2001, the government launched the Rural Electricity Supply Technology Mission.
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- This aimed at enhancing electricity access in a targeted manner, using both grid and off-grid technologies.
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- It was followed by major policy reforms with the passage of Electricity Act, 2003.
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What is the present scenario?

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- Rural electrification got the impetus since the enactment of Electricity Act, 2003, which obligated both Centre and states to enable electricity access.
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- It led to the launch of large-scale electrification effort in 2005 by the central government.
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- Efforts to create access to electricity for all households and provide free connections to all below poverty line households were taken up.
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- In its latest report, World Energy Outlook 2018, the International Energy Agency called India a “star performer”.
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- This was in terms of achieving the milestone of providing power to each village.
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- Around half a billion people have gained access to electricity in India since early 2000s.
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What is the case with household electrification?

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- While villages were getting electrified during the last decade and a half, household electrification was lagging.
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- The government launched the Saubhagya Scheme, or the Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana, in September 2017.
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- It aimed at connecting all non-electrified households by March 2019.
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- It’s a first-of-its-kind scheme focusing on household electrification, regardless of economic status.
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- It aims to cover 30 million households in rural areas, of which 20 million have been connected.
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Source: Financial Express

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