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Structural Safety Certification in India: Evaluating Regulatory Fragmentation, Institutional Accountability and Enforcement Gaps

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ABSTRACT

India's recurring building collapses expose a regulatory paradox: an elaborate body of technical standards coexists with a certification system that cannot reliably demonstrate whether a building was safely designed, constructed, altered and maintained. This article evaluates structural safety certification as a problem of public law and regulatory governance rather than a narrow engineering formality. Using doctrinal analysis of constitutional allocations, municipal legislation, the National Building Code, model bye-laws, disaster-management law, real-estate regulation and leading judicial decisions, it identifies three structural defects. First, regulatory fragmentation disperses authority among the Union, States, urban local bodies, development authorities, fire services, disaster-management institutions and professional actors without establishing an accountable lead regulator or a continuous building-safety record. Secondly, institutional responsibility is diluted by self-certification, conflicted professional appointments, opaque empanelment and weak allocation of duties among owners, promoters, architects, structural engineers and public officials. Thirdly, enforcement remains episodic and approval-centred: scrutiny is strongest at plan sanction and completion, while material substitutions, unauthorised additions, change of use, deterioration and post-occupancy risks frequently escape systematic inspection. The article argues that legal validity should not be confused with structural assurance. A certificate based on fragmented inputs and unverifiable records transfers risk to occupants, purchasers, lenders and municipalities instead of governing it. It proposes a risk-based lifecycle framework built on statutory duty-holders, independent third-party review for higher-risk buildings, stage-linked digital certification, a durable "golden thread" of structural information, periodic assessment triggered by age and risk, public disclosure, protected reporting, calibrated sanctions and clear municipal oversight. It further contends that certification reform should be integrated with RERA disclosures, conveyancing, insurance and property valuation so that safety

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information affects market decisions before failure occurs. A cooperative federal model can preserve local legislative competence while establishing nationally consistent minimum outcomes, data standards and professional accountability. Such reform would convert certification from a one-time permission ritual into an auditable chain of responsibility, improve the legitimacy of enforcement and give practical content to the constitutional protection of life, shelter and safe urban governance. The article concludes that credible certification must function simultaneously as a technical assurance, a public-law record and an information mechanism for safer urban property markets.

Keywords: *structural safety certification, building regulation, regulatory fragmentation, institutional accountability, municipal governance, enforcement, real estate regulation*

I. INTRODUCTION

A structural safety certificate appears to offer a simple assurance: a qualified professional states that a building's structural system is safe. In law and practice, however, the certificate is only the visible end of a dispersed process. Land-use permission may come from a development authority; building sanction and completion from a municipality; fire clearance from a specialised service; registration and disclosures from a Real Estate Regulatory Authority; technical design from private professionals; and disaster-risk directions from separate institutions. The quality of the assurance therefore depends less on the existence of a prescribed form than on who verifies the underlying design, construction and later alterations, what information remains available, and who bears the consequences when the assurance proves false.

The stakes are constitutional as well as technical. Regulation of buildings ordinarily operates through State and municipal law, reinforced by the constitutional position of urban local bodies in planning and building regulation.¹ Yet unsafe construction directly threatens life under Article 21, property interests under Article 300A, consumer welfare and the credibility of urban administration. Courts repeatedly describe unauthorised construction as a serious public wrong and reject administrative tolerance that converts planning controls into negotiable obstacles.² Structural failure is thus rarely an isolated engineering event. It is often the terminal manifestation of defective approvals, divided information, compromised inspection, unlawful alteration or neglected maintenance.

¹ INDIA CONST. art. 243W, sched. 12, entries 1–2.

² *Friends Colony Development Committee v. State of Orissa*, (2004) 8 SCC 733, ¶¶ 24–25 (India); *Dipak Kumar Mukherjee v. Kolkata Municipal Corporation*, (2013) 5 SCC 336, ¶¶ 2, 8 (India).

This article asks whether the Indian certification framework creates a verifiable and continuous chain of responsibility. It adopts a doctrinal and institutional method. It reads the constitutional distribution of functions together with the National Building Code of India 2016 (NBC), the Model Building Bye-Laws 2016 (MBBL), the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 (RERA), selected local rules and Supreme Court authority. The comparison is functional rather than exhaustive, because building control differs across States and cities.

The central claim is that India's problem is not the absence of technical knowledge. It is the legal architecture by which knowledge becomes binding, verified and enforceable over a building's life. The present system is approval-centred, document-heavy and institutionally diffuse. Reform must move toward lifecycle regulation: explicit statutory duty-holders, independent review proportionate to risk, traceable digital records, periodic assessment, public disclosure and coordinated enforcement. Certification should evidence compliance; it should never substitute for accountable regulation.

II. THE LEGAL ARCHITECTURE OF STRUCTURAL SAFETY

The Constitution does not assign "structural safety certification" as a self-contained subject. Legislative competence is assembled from the State List entries on local government and land, while the Twelfth Schedule associates municipalities with urban planning, regulation of land use and construction of buildings. This design permits responsiveness to local geology, density and administrative arrangements. It also produces wide variation in the legal force of technical standards, professional eligibility, inspection stages, renewal requirements and sanctions.³

At the national level, the NBC is the principal technical reference. Its provisions cover administrative control, development rules, fire and life safety, structural design and construction management. The Code is prepared by the Bureau of Indian Standards, but it does not generally operate as a directly enforceable parliamentary building statute. Its rules become binding when incorporated into State legislation, municipal bye-laws, contractual documents or approval conditions. Adoption may be selective, delayed or modified. Consequently, a nationally recognised engineering benchmark does not necessarily yield a uniform legal duty or enforcement practice.⁴

³ INDIA CONST. sched. 7, list II, entries 5, 18; sched. 12, entries 1–2.

⁴ BUREAU OF INDIAN STANDARDS, NATIONAL BUILDING CODE OF INDIA 2016 vol. 1, foreword, pts. 0, 2 (SP 7: 2016) (stating that the Code's provisions "are intended to serve as a model for adoption by local bodies, Public Works Departments and other government construction departments, and other construction agencies"); *see also id.* vol. 1, pts. 3, 4, 6; vol. 2, pt. 7.

The MBBL seek to translate technical norms into an administrative sequence. They contemplate professional competence, structural design requirements, notices at construction stages, completion documentation and provisions for structural safety in specified circumstances.⁵ Local instruments show both convergence and divergence. Delhi's Unified Building Bye-Laws prescribe forms and responsibilities for structural design and supervision, while Mumbai's development-control regulations operate within a distinct statutory, professional and approval structure.⁶ A certificate carrying the same description may therefore rest on different evidence and different levels of public scrutiny.

The Disaster Management Act adds a preventive dimension. National, State and district authorities may issue plans and guidelines, and local authorities must train personnel, maintain resources and ensure that construction under their jurisdiction conforms to prescribed standards.⁷ The earthquake-management guidelines of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) expressly favour techno-legal regimes, code compliance, professional capacity and the safety assessment of existing buildings.⁸ Yet disaster governance typically influences building control indirectly; it does not routinely own the sanction-to-occupation certification chain.

RERA creates another layer. Promoters must make disclosures, follow sanctioned plans and structural designs, refrain from material alterations except as permitted, obtain completion or occupancy certification, and rectify structural defects reported within the statutory period. These are significant buyer-protection duties. But RERA does not replace municipal technical control, license structural engineers or establish periodic safety review after the defect-liability window. It relies on certificates produced elsewhere and is oriented principally to registered real-estate projects.⁹

⁵ MINISTRY OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, MODEL BUILDING BYE-LAWS 2016 chs. 2, 6 & apps. (Town and Country Planning Organisation 2016), <http://tcpo.gov.in/sites/default/files/TCPO/schemes/MODEL-BUILDING-BYE-LAWS-2016.pdf>.

⁶ DELHI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, UNIFIED BUILDING BYE-LAWS FOR DELHI 2016 chs. 2, 9 & declaration proformas (notified by S.O. 1191(E), Mar. 22, 2016); MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF GREATER MUMBAI, DEVELOPMENT CONTROL AND PROMOTION REGULATIONS FOR GREATER MUMBAI 2034 (sanctioned by Government of Maharashtra, Urban Development Department Notification No. TPB-4317/629/CR-118/2017/DP/UD-11, May 8, 2018).

⁷ The Disaster Management Act, 2005, No. 53, Acts of Parliament, 2005, §§ 6, 18, 30, 34, 41(1)(a)–(c) (India).

⁸ NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY, NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES: MANAGEMENT OF EARTHQUAKES 17–28, 35 (Government of India 2007), <https://ndma.gov.in/sites/default/files/PDF/Guidelines/earthquakes.pdf>.

⁹ The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016, No. 16, Acts of Parliament, 2016, §§ 4, 11, 14, 17, 18 (India); *see id.* § 2(zq) (defining “sanctioned plan” to include “structural designs, if applicable”), § 11(4)(b) (completion or occupancy certificate), § 14(2)–(3) (alterations; rectification of structural defects brought to the promoter's notice within five years of handing over possession).

The result is a legal mosaic. Each instrument addresses a real part of the risk, but no general statute defines structural safety certification as a continuing public assurance with common evidentiary content. The fragmentation is vertical, across Union models, State laws and local bye-laws; horizontal, across multiple agencies; temporal, between design, construction and occupation; and professional, among architects, engineers, contractors and owners.

III. REGULATORY FRAGMENTATION AND THE CERTIFICATION DEFICIT

Fragmentation is not inherently defective. Federal variation can accommodate seismic zones, coastal conditions, heritage areas and different urban capacities. The defect arises when interdependence is not matched by coordination. A sanctioning authority may accept structural drawings signed by an empanelled engineer, conduct only limited site inspection, and later issue an occupancy certificate based on multiple departmental clearances. RERA may publish project information but lack the municipal inspection record. A disaster-management authority may identify vulnerable building classes but lack the power or data to compel timely remediation. Each institution performs a bounded function while the overall assurance remains nobody's sole responsibility.

This structure creates a "certification deficit" in four ways. First, incorporation is uncertain. References to the NBC may be general, partial or outdated, making it difficult for an owner or a court to identify the exact enforceable technical obligation. Secondly, terminology is unstable. Structural stability, structural safety, design sufficiency, supervision and completion certificates may be treated as interchangeable although they answer different questions. A design certificate assesses calculations and assumptions; a construction certificate should address execution; an occupancy decision addresses broader compliance; and an ageing-building assessment concerns present condition.

Thirdly, institutional boundaries interrupt information. Design revisions, soil reports, material-test results, non-conformity notices and as-built drawings may remain with different actors. Paper files and disconnected portals prevent regulators from reconstructing what was approved and what was built. A later assessor may see the original drawing but not a removed wall, an added floor, a changed use, water ingress or fire-induced damage. Certification then rests on an incomplete history.

Fourthly, coverage is unequal. Formal projects within active approval systems receive more documentary scrutiny than informal, unauthorised or incrementally expanded buildings, even though vulnerability may be greater in the latter. Older buildings can remain occupied without periodic structural assessment unless a local rule, a complaint, visible distress or a special

municipal drive triggers action. The law therefore concentrates assurance at administrative gateways rather than at points of changing risk.

Judicial intervention exposes the consequences but cannot supply routine administration. In *Dipak Kumar Mukherjee v. Kolkata Municipal Corporation*, the Supreme Court observed that the menace of illegal and unauthorised construction had acquired “monstrous proportion”, criticised official tolerance of it, endorsed the principle that no relief is due to a violator on the ground of money spent on construction, and directed demolition with exemplary costs against the builder.¹⁰ In *Supertech Ltd. v. Emerald Court Owner Resident Welfare Association*, the Court upheld the demolition of two towers where collusion between the planning authority and the developer, and departures from the governing building norms, had undermined planning legality and residents’ interests.¹¹ These cases affirm strict public duties. They also reveal the limitations of *ex post* adjudication: demolition or compensation after prolonged litigation cannot recreate the preventive value of timely, competent inspection.

A uniform national building authority is neither constitutionally necessary nor administratively sufficient. What is required is interoperability: nationally consistent minimum outcomes and data fields, State-level legal adoption, local implementation, and a clear allocation of decisional responsibility. Diversity can remain, but uncertainty about who certified what, on which evidence and at which date cannot.

IV. INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Certification depends heavily on private expertise. That dependence is legitimate because structural design and assessment require specialised judgment. It becomes problematic when self-certification is used as a substitute for regulatory capacity. A professional engaged and paid by the promoter or owner may certify a design that the public authority lacks the staff or systems to scrutinise. The authority may treat the signature as conclusive while later attributing failure entirely to the signatory. This distributes tasks without establishing accountability.

The first weakness is role ambiguity. Architects coordinate design and statutory submissions; structural engineers determine the load-resisting system; geotechnical specialists characterise ground conditions; contractors execute; laboratories test; developers finance and direct; owners maintain; and public officials approve and inspect. Unless the law identifies the duty attached to each role, failures become contests over causation. Collective involvement must not mean collective anonymity.

¹⁰ *Dipak Kumar Mukherjee*, *supra* note 2, ¶¶ 2, 6, 8, 28–30.

¹¹ *Supertech Ltd. v. Emerald Court Owner Resident Welfare Association*, (2021) 10 SCC 1, ¶¶ 159–160, 170 (India).

The second weakness is conflict in professional assurance. Project designers possess indispensable knowledge but cannot always provide independent verification of their own work. For higher-risk buildings, peer review should be performed by a competent person institutionally and financially independent of the original design team. Independence does not remove the designer's responsibility; it adds a separate layer of assurance. Review intensity should depend on height, occupancy, structural complexity, seismicity, soil conditions, alteration history and the consequences of failure.

The third weakness is uneven professional regulation. The Architects Act, 1972 regulates the registration of architects and the use of the title "architect", but India lacks a comparably comprehensive central licensing statute for the engineering profession. Municipal empanelment often becomes the practical gatekeeping device for structural engineers. Empanelment can verify qualifications, yet it rarely supplies uniform continuing competence, disciplinary transparency, mandatory professional indemnity or cross-jurisdictional accountability. Blacklisting by one authority may not be visible to another.¹²

Public accountability is equally important. Municipal bodies cannot absolve themselves merely by collecting signed forms. In *Municipal Corporation of Delhi v. Association of Victims of Uphaar Tragedy*, which arose from a catastrophic cinema fire, the Supreme Court relieved the Municipal Corporation and the licensing authority of the monetary liability imposed by the High Court, holding that their omissions in discharging statutory functions, absent *mala fides*, were not the proximate cause of the deaths; yet it did not disagree with the High Court's observation that their performance of those duties had been "mechanical, casual and lackadaisical".¹³ The decision shows that regulatory omissions attract judicial censure even where liability is carefully confined. A sound regime must therefore record which official reviewed each submission, what level of scrutiny was applied, which deviations were noticed, and why occupation was permitted.

Accountability should therefore operate through a statutory duty-holder model. The client or promoter should ensure adequate appointments and resources; the principal designer should coordinate safety-critical design; the structural engineer should certify analysis and drawings; the contractor should control conformity of execution; an independent reviewer should assess prescribed higher-risk work; the owner or association should manage occupied-building information and maintenance; and the authority should supervise the system through risk-based

¹² The Architects Act, 1972, No. 20, Acts of Parliament, 1972, §§ 17, 22, 29, 37 (India).

¹³ *Municipal Corporation of Delhi v. Association of Victims of Uphaar Tragedy*, (2011) 14 SCC 481, ¶¶ 54–57 (India).

review and enforcement. Certificates must contain defined statements, limitations, supporting records and declarations of interest. False certification, reckless omission and administrative collusion require distinct, proportionate consequences rather than a single undifferentiated penalty.

V. ENFORCEMENT GAPS ACROSS THE BUILDING LIFECYCLE

Indian building control commonly treats permission as the organising event. The applicant submits plans, receives sanction, provides stage notices and seeks completion or occupancy certification. This sequence is necessary, but it can mistake documentary closure for continuing safety. Structural risk changes after sanction through redesign, workmanship, material substitution, unauthorised extension, corrosion, settlement, change of use, overloading, impact, fire, flooding and seismic events.

Pre-construction enforcement suffers when authorities cannot assess complex calculations or geotechnical assumptions. Standard checklists may confirm that documents exist without testing their coherence. During construction, infrequent or predictable inspections allow concealed work to pass before verification. Completion review may rely on professional declarations without systematic comparison between approved and as-built conditions. Occupancy certificates may be delayed, politically contested or bypassed while utilities and possession proceed.

Post-occupancy enforcement is the largest gap. Some local laws empower authorities to require repairs, evacuate dangerous structures or demolish unauthorised work. These powers are usually reactive. Complaint-led inspection favours visible defects, while latent structural deterioration remains undiscovered. Periodic structural audits, where required by local rules or municipal policies, vary by building age, category, assessor eligibility and follow-up. A certificate that merely labels a building “safe” without documenting inspection scope, tests, observed distress, assumptions and a remediation timetable can create false confidence.

Sanctions also distort behaviour when they are either trivial or catastrophically delayed. Small composition fees can convert deviations into a priced option. At the opposite extreme, demolition after occupation imposes severe costs on residents and purchasers, including those who did not cause the violation.¹⁴ The Supreme Court has repeatedly warned that regularisation

¹⁴ *Esha Ekta Apartments Cooperative Housing Society Ltd. v. Municipal Corporation of Mumbai*, (2013) 5 SCC 357, ¶ 44 (India) (purchasers in occupation of unauthorised floors left to sue the developer for refund or damages); *Dipak Kumar Mukherjee*, *supra* note 2, ¶¶ 28–30 (occupiers of the unauthorised floors directed to vacate, and the builder to refund purchasers with interest, before demolition).

cannot become a routine method of defeating planning law.¹⁵ Effective enforcement needs an escalation ladder: correction notices and stop-work powers at early stages; targeted restrictions and monitoring where risk is manageable; suspension of professional registration or empanelment for serious misconduct; financial penalties linked to project value and culpability; prosecution for knowing endangerment or fraud; and emergency evacuation where necessary.

Capacity is the practical constraint beneath these gaps. Many local bodies face shortages of structural expertise, high application volumes, weak laboratories and vulnerable record systems. Increasing formal requirements without financing implementation may only enlarge the paperwork. Risk-based regulation offers a better allocation. Routine low-risk work may use standardised declarations and random audit; medium-risk work requires defined stage inspections; and higher-risk buildings require independent design review, mandatory hold points and enhanced post-occupancy duties. Regulators should publish inspection coverage, non-compliance rates, enforcement time and outcomes. Without such metrics, neither legislatures nor residents can distinguish genuine assurance from administrative throughput.

VI. CERTIFICATION, PROPERTY MARKETS AND RIGHTS

Weak certification externalises structural risk. Purchasers usually cannot evaluate calculations, hidden reinforcement or foundation performance. They depend on promoters, professionals and public documents. When records are inaccessible or certificates have unclear evidentiary value, the market prices location and finishes more readily than structural quality. Unsafe practices can therefore remain commercially invisible until distress, litigation or collapse.

RERA partially corrects information asymmetry by requiring online project disclosures and adherence to sanctioned plans, and by creating remedies for structural defects. Yet a RERA registration number or a municipal occupancy certificate should not be understood as an unconditional warranty of present structural safety. The documents serve different statutory purposes and may rely on professional inputs rather than independent verification. Legal reform should make these distinctions intelligible while connecting the records.¹⁶

A verified structural-safety history should travel with the property. The digital building record should include sanctioned structural drawings, design criteria, the geotechnical report, the reviewer's statement where applicable, material and test records, recorded deviations, as-built drawings, completion and occupancy decisions, major repairs, changes of use and periodic

¹⁵ *Supertech*, *supra* note 11, ¶¶ 161–168 (reviewing the Court's decisions against regularisation of unauthorised construction); *Esha Ekta*, *supra* note 14, ¶ 56; *Friends Colony*, *supra* note 2, ¶ 25.

¹⁶ The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016, §§ 4(2), 11(1), 11(4), 14, 19 (India).

assessments. Sensitive security or proprietary details may require controlled access, but purchasers, residents, lenders, insurers and regulators need reliable summaries and authorised access to safety-critical information.

This information can improve valuation without pretending that a certificate fixes price mechanically. A valuer may consider residual life, deferred repairs, legal non-compliance, access restrictions, insurance availability and uncertainty in documentation. Lenders may condition disbursement on stage certification; insurers may reward verified maintenance; conveyancers may require current safety statements for prescribed building classes. These market mechanisms should supplement, not privatise, public enforcement.

The constitutional dimension strengthens the case for accessible assurance. Article 21 protects life and has supported an expansive understanding of safe and dignified living conditions, while public authorities exercise coercive control over construction in the public interest. Article 14 requires non-arbitrary administration: similarly situated applicants and occupants should not face radically different safety scrutiny because of opaque local practice. Property protection under Article 300A also demands lawful, proportionate action where unsafe structures require restriction or demolition. Procedural fairness, reasoned orders and hearing rights remain essential, subject to immediate emergency measures. A rights-consistent system prevents danger early, discloses reasons, protects good-faith occupants where possible and directs liability toward those who created or concealed the risk.¹⁷

VII. A FRAMEWORK FOR COHERENT REFORM

Reform should begin with a model structural-safety chapter capable of adoption through State building legislation and municipal bye-laws. It should define certification outcomes rather than merely prescribe forms. A design compliance statement, a construction-stage certificate, a completion statement and an occupied-building assessment should have separate statutory meanings. Each should identify the building, the applicable code edition, the scope of review, material assumptions, deviations, supporting documents, professional identity, conflicts and the period of relevance.

Secondly, the framework should classify buildings by risk. Height alone is inadequate. Occupancy vulnerability, number of occupants, structural system, irregularity, seismic zone, geotechnical conditions, neighbouring excavation, hazardous use and the consequences of failure should inform classification. Higher-risk buildings should require independent third-

¹⁷ *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*, (1985) 3 SCC 545 (India); *Chameli Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh*, (1996) 2 SCC 549 (India).

party design checking, named duty-holders, safety-critical hold points and regulator approval before occupation. Independence criteria should address ownership, payment arrangements, prior involvement and repeat commercial dependence.

Thirdly, every regulated building should have a durable digital record: a “golden thread” of accurate, current and accessible safety information. Entries should be time-stamped and attributable; superseded drawings should remain auditable; field changes should require recorded approval; and the occupancy decision should link to the as-built package. State systems should use national interoperability standards and connect, through controlled interfaces, municipal approvals, RERA disclosures, fire clearances and property identifiers. Technology cannot cure dishonest administration, but immutable audit trails raise the cost of concealment.

Fourthly, the law should extend responsibility into occupation. Owners and associations of prescribed buildings should maintain the safety file, control structural alterations and commission assessment at risk-based intervals. Reviews should also be triggered by major alteration, change of use, damaging events, visible distress or credible complaints. The assessor must state methodology and limitations, grade urgency and specify remedial deadlines. Authorities need powers to require intrusive testing, restrict use and recover emergency costs, together with safeguards against arbitrary declarations.

Fifthly, professional accountability must be portable. A State or national interoperable register should record competence categories, current insurance, disciplinary findings and restrictions for structural-safety work. Continuing professional development should be tied to complexity and hazard exposure. Whistle-blowers, site engineers and residents who report the suppression of adverse findings need protected channels. Public officials require technical training, workload norms and decisional protection for good-faith enforcement, alongside penalties for deliberate approval of non-compliance.

Sixthly, enforcement should be transparent and measurable. Regulators should publish anonymised risk data, audit selection methods, inspection completion, recurring violations and closure times. Serious certificates and enforcement orders should be available to affected occupants. RERA authorities should display linked completion and structural records for registered projects, while registration departments should flag prescribed unresolved safety orders during transfer. Central funding for urban reform and disaster resilience can be conditioned on State adoption of minimum outcomes, interoperable data and independent performance audit.

Finally, transition must be realistic. Retrospective demands for complete documentation may be impossible to meet for older buildings. The law should permit a structured evidence pathway using measured drawings, testing and conservative assessment. Priority should go to schools, hospitals, assembly buildings, high-occupancy housing and structures in high-hazard zones. Regularisation of planning deviations must never imply structural acceptance; the two decisions require separate reasons and evidence. This cooperative federal approach respects local competence while making the content of safety assurance intelligible across India.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Structural safety certification in India presently performs too many symbolic functions and too few evidentiary ones. A signature may facilitate sanction, completion, sale or occupation, yet the surrounding system often cannot prove that the relevant design was independently assessed, that construction matched it, that deviations were resolved, or that later deterioration is being managed. Fragmented laws and institutions do not merely create inconvenience. They create spaces in which responsibility can be transferred until no actor owns the overall risk.

The appropriate response is not mechanical centralisation. Building regulation must remain sensitive to State law, local conditions and municipal institutions. Coherence can instead be achieved through common minimum outcomes, precise certificates, interoperable records and an explicit chain of duty-holders. Public authorities must retain supervisory responsibility even when they rely on private expertise; professionals must remain answerable for defined judgments; promoters and contractors must preserve conformity evidence; and owners must manage post-occupancy risk.

A lifecycle model would also align public safety with property-market incentives. When reliable structural information follows a building, purchasers can conduct meaningful diligence, valuers can reflect physical and legal risk, lenders and insurers can reward compliance, and regulators can intervene before catastrophic failure. Conversely, opaque certification allows risk to remain socially dispersed and financially unpriced.

The decisive shift is conceptual. Certification should not be treated as a ceremonial endpoint or a defence against liability. It is one auditable statement within a continuing regulatory process. India already possesses substantial technical knowledge and multiple statutory tools. The urgent task is to connect them through accountable institutions, verified information and credible enforcement. Only then can a structural safety certificate represent what occupants reasonably understand it to mean: not an administrative form, but reliable evidence that identifiable actors have assessed, constructed and maintained the building according to law.