

# PRAVASI INDIANS

The India Connection

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## COVER STORY INDIA'S HUMAN ADVANTAGE

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THE NEW GEOMETRY OF POWER

IDEAS & SOCIETY

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हास्य व्यंग्य

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## LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



## India at the Crossroads of Changes

Dear Readers,

Every era poses a defining question to a nation. For India today, that question is not whether change is coming—it is whether we are prepared to shape it.

As we bring you this edition of *PRAVASI INDIANS*, we find ourselves reflecting on a country in transition: a nation that is simultaneously young and ancient, ambitious and reflective, globally connected yet deeply rooted in its civilisational heritage. The stories in this issue explore different dimensions of that transformation.

Our Cover Story examines one of India's greatest strategic advantages in the twenty-first century—its people. As ageing societies across the world grapple with labour shortages and the search for skilled professionals intensifies, India's vast reservoir of talent is emerging as a source of global influence. Yet demographic strength alone is not enough. The challenge lies in converting potential into enduring leadership.

That theme of strategic positioning continues in our Lead Story on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent five-nation tour. In a world increasingly shaped by geopolitical uncertainty, energy security, technological competition and supply-chain realignments, diplomacy has become inseparable from economic strategy. The article offers valuable insight into how India is navigating this complex global landscape.

Closer to home, another transformation is unfolding. India's Generation Z is emerging as a powerful political force, equipped with digital tools, global awareness and unprecedented access to information. As the country moves towards the next electoral cycle, their aspirations, frustrations and expectations are likely to shape the future of democratic discourse.

Equally significant is the battle of ideas. In our Ideas & Society section, we explore whether India is witnessing the beginnings of a new intellectual awakening through debates around decolonisation, Swaraj in Ideas and Creative Theory. The question is profound: can India contribute original frameworks to global thought while remaining open to diverse traditions and perspectives?

Yet progress is not measured only in economics, politics or philosophy. It is also found in memory, culture and human connection. Our evocative essay on achar reminds us that identity often survives through the smallest and most intimate traditions. For millions of Indians living abroad, a simple jar of homemade pickle becomes a bridge between continents, generations and emotions.

This issue also examines the invisible financial systems powering the clean-energy revolution, the economic pressures confronting India in an uncertain world, and the role of humour and satire in questioning contemporary realities. Our literary offerings—a moving short story and a selection of poems—invite readers to pause and reflect on duty, sacrifice and the enduring complexity of human experience.

Across these diverse themes runs a common thread: adaptation without loss of identity. Whether discussing talent, technology, politics, economics, culture or personal values, the central challenge remains the same—how to embrace the future without forgetting who we are.

As always, we hope this issue informs, inspires and stimulates meaningful conversation among our readers across India and the global Indian diaspora.

Happy reading *PRAVASI INDIANS*!

*Rashmi*  
CEO and Publisher

We would love to hear from you. We also invite diaspora members to write for us and share their experiences

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# PRAVASI INDIANS

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In a deeply evocative essay, **DR. VENKATESH GANAPATHY** traces the remarkable journey of India's most beloved condiment. Long before refrigeration, supermarkets and packaged foods became common place, Indian kitchens had perfected the art of preserving seasons in jars. From sun-drenched terraces lined with clay marta-bans to the unmistakable aroma of mustard oil, spices and raw mangoes, achar has remained a repository of memory, migration and identity. For millions of Indians living abroad, a single spoonful of homemade pickle can evoke home more powerfully than words ever can.

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हिंदी साहित्य की दुनिया में निरंतर सक्रिय **ललितप्रसाद मथुरादत्त जोशी** अपनी संवेदनशील कहानी के माध्यम से जीवन के शाश्वत द्वंद्व—शोक और कर्तव्य—को सामने लाते हैं। यह कहानी एक ऐसी मुलाकात की है जो पाठक को यह सोचने पर मजबूर करती है कि त्याग हमेशा हार नहीं होता; कई बार वही मनुष्य की सबसे बड़ी उपलब्धि और सबसे बड़ी जीत बन जाता है।

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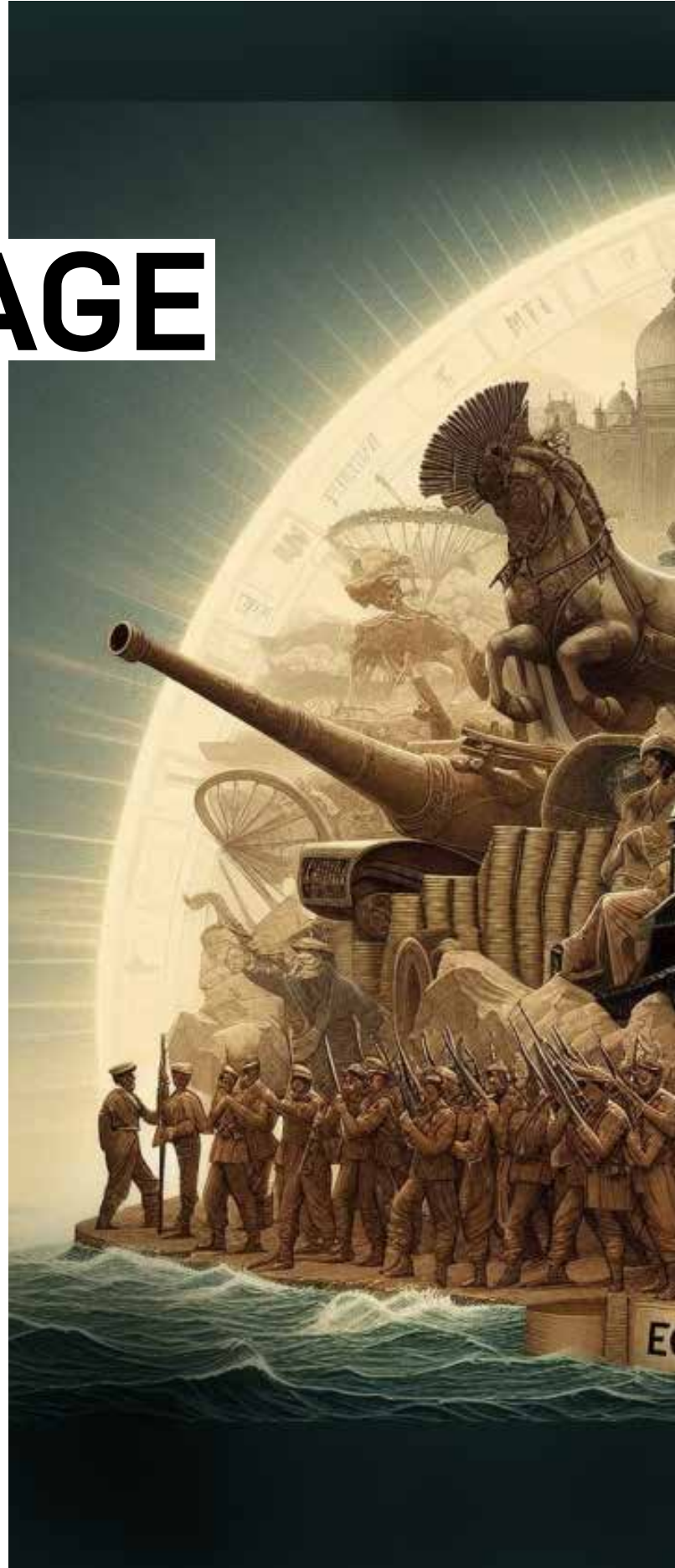
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**डॉ. निलय रंजन सिंह**, जो वर्तमान में स्टेट बैंक ऑफ इंडिया, डीआईएफसी, दुबई के मुख्य कार्यकारी अधिकारी हैं, अपने तीखे व्यंग्य के माध्यम से भारतीय समाज की दो समानांतर गिरावटों पर कटाक्ष करते हैं। एक ओर डॉलर के मुकाबले लगातार कमजोर होता रुपया है, तो दूसरी ओर टीआरपी की अंधी दौड़ में अपनी विश्वसनीयता खोता मीडिया। उनके अनुसार सबसे दिलचस्प प्रश्न यह नहीं कि कौन अधिक गिर रहा है, बल्कि यह है कि दोनों में गिरने की क्षमता किसकी अधिक है।

# INDIA'S HUMAN ADVANTAGE

For much of the twentieth century, nations measured power through military strength, industrial capacity and natural resources. In the twenty-first century, a new strategic asset is emerging at the centre of global competition: talent. As ageing societies confront labour shortages and innovation-driven economies search for skilled professionals, India finds itself in a uniquely advantageous position. With one of the world's youngest populations, a vast global diaspora and a growing reputation for competence and adaptability, the country is increasingly being viewed not merely as a market or manufacturing hub, but as one of the world's most trusted reservoirs of human capital. The challenge now is whether India can transform this demographic opportunity into lasting global influence.







BY SANJAY KUMAR VERMA

With a diplomatic career spanning 37 years, the author served as India's Ambassador to Sudan, Japan, and Canada. Until recently, he was Chairperson of the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), a leading think tank, focused on the Global South and international economic issues. His interests lie in foreign policy, security, technology, and the global economy.

**O**n any given day, an Indian doctor begins her shift in a hospital in London, an Indian engineer joins a design review in California, an Indian project manager heads to a construction site in Dubai, and an Indian researcher enters a laboratory in Germany. Separated by continents but connected by capability, they represent one of India's most valuable global assets: talent.

From healthcare systems and technology companies to universities, financial institutions and innovation hubs, Indian professionals have become deeply embedded in the functioning of the global economy. In many countries, their presence is no longer exceptional—it is structural.

This transformation reflects a profound shift in the nature of global power. During much of the twentieth century, nations competed for territory, industrial capacity, energy resources and military strength. In the twenty-first century, they are increasingly competing for something less visible but equally strategic: trusted human capital.

Across much of the developed world, demographic pressures are mounting. Europe is ageing rapidly. Japan continues

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**From London's hospitals to  
Silicon Valley's boardrooms,  
Indian professionals are no longer  
exceptions in the global economy—  
they have become part of its  
essential infrastructure.**

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to grapple with labour shortages. Healthcare systems in several advanced economies are under strain. Even technologically sophisticated societies are confronting an uncomfortable reality: innovation still depends on people.

Artificial intelligence may transform productivity, automate processes and reshape industries, but it cannot fully replace human judgement, creativity, adaptability, ethical reasoning and trust. In many advanced economies today, the most pressing shortage is no longer capital. It is dependable,





skilled people capable of solving complex problems.

It is within this changing global landscape that India's opportunity acquires extraordinary significance.

For decades, Indian professionals have steadily built reputations across continents—in hospitals, universities, technology firms, financial institutions, research centres and entrepreneurial ecosystems. Indian doctors form an indispensable part of healthcare systems in countries such as the United Kingdom. Indian-origin CEOs now lead some of the world's most influential corporations. Indian engineers, researchers and academics are deeply integrated into global innovation



**As Europe ages, Japan faces labour shortages and advanced economies compete for skilled workers, India's demographic dividend is emerging as a strategic geopolitical asset.**



networks.

In boardrooms, laboratories and government offices across the world, conversations about India increasingly revolve not merely around markets, but around people.

Yet the larger significance of this phenomenon may only now be becoming fully visible.

India is no longer merely exporting manpower. It has the potential to become one of the world's most trusted reservoirs of talent.

That distinction is important.

A talent reservoir is not defined simply by numbers. It is defined by competence, credibility, adaptability and consistency over time. Trust is not created overnight. It is earned gradually—often silently—through decades of performance.

In many parts of the world, Indian professionals are viewed as technically capable, educationally driven and institutionally adaptable. These qualities may appear intangible, but in an increasingly uncertain world they are becoming strategic assets.

Several structural factors place India in a uniquely favourable position.

The most fundamental is demography. While many advanced economies are ageing rapidly, India remains one of the few major nations with a relatively young population. Millions of Indians continue to enter the workforce every year. At a time when many countries fear labour contraction and shrinking workforces, India possesses a potentially transformative demographic advantage.

But demography alone guarantees nothing. History offers numerous examples of countries that confused population with power. A young workforce becomes an asset only when



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**The old narrative of 'brain drain' is giving way to 'brain circulation', with overseas Indians increasingly driving investment, innovation and knowledge transfer back home.**

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supported by quality education, market-relevant skills and meaningful opportunity. Otherwise, a demographic dividend can quickly become a demographic burden.

India's scale strengthens this advantage further. Few countries possess the capacity to supply talent across such a wide spectrum—from highly specialised doctors, engineers and technology professionals to teachers, caregivers, technicians, entrepreneurs and skilled workers. As global demand for qualified professionals rises, this scale becomes increasingly significant.

Closely linked to scale is India's enduring advantage in English-language proficiency. While unevenly distributed, this



capability has enabled generations of Indians to integrate successfully into international professional environments. In science, diplomacy, technology and global commerce, language often functions as invisible infrastructure. India possesses that advantage at scale.

Adaptability forms another pillar of India's talent story. Indian professionals have repeatedly demonstrated an ability to work across cultures, institutional systems and economic environments. Whether in Silicon Valley, Singapore, London, Nairobi or Dubai, they have often displayed remarkable resilience and flexibility.

Part of this adaptability may stem from India itself. A soci-

ety accustomed to extraordinary linguistic, cultural and social diversity naturally produces individuals capable of navigating multiple worlds.

The Indian diaspora has consequently emerged as one of India's most important strategic assets.

Today, it is among the largest and most influential diasporas in the world. Yet its significance extends far beyond remittances. Overseas Indians increasingly function as bridges connecting India with global markets, technologies, investment networks, research ecosystems and entrepreneurial opportunities.

The traditional language of "brain drain" no longer adequately captures this reality.

For decades, emigration was viewed primarily through the lens of loss—talented individuals leaving India in search of opportunity abroad. That concern was understandable in an era when domestic opportunities were limited and the economy remained relatively closed.

The contemporary global economy operates differently.



**In the coming decades, nations may compete less for territory and more for trusted talent—and India is uniquely positioned to shape that contest.**



Talent now moves through networks rather than one-way routes. Indian-origin professionals abroad frequently invest in India, mentor start-ups, facilitate technological partnerships and support educational initiatives. Many move between countries multiple times during their careers. Knowledge, capital and innovation increasingly circulate across borders.

The more accurate description today may therefore be "brain circulation" rather than "brain drain."

The geopolitical significance of talent is likely to deepen further in the decades ahead.

Military power, industrial output and natural resources will remain important. Yet technological leadership, economic resilience and national competitiveness will increasingly depend upon access to skilled human capital. The competition for talent is becoming one of the defining strategic contests of the twenty-first century.

The United States continues to attract a disproportionate share of global scientific and technological talent through its universities, innovation ecosystems and venture capital networks. Europe faces mounting shortages in healthcare, engineering and advanced manufacturing. The Gulf economies are diversifying beyond hydrocarbons and require vast pools of skilled expatriate professionals. Meanwhile, countries such as Canada, Australia, Singapore, Vietnam and several Eastern European nations are actively positioning themselves as talent destinations.



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**Population alone is not power.  
India's real challenge is converting  
demographic scale into  
globally trusted skills, institutions  
and innovation.**

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The point is not merely that countries need workers. They need trusted workers. They need trusted professionals. They need trusted talent. That is where India possesses a potentially unique advantage. Yet reputational capital should never be taken for granted.

India's higher education system continues to struggle with uneven quality. Research ecosystems remain underdeveloped relative to the country's scale. Employability concerns persist across large segments of graduates. Vocational training requires strengthening, while infrastructure gaps and regulatory complexity continue to impede innovation.

Global competition is also intensifying.

India cannot assume an automatic advantage simply because of population size. In the long run, quality will matter far more than quantity.

A country seeking to become the world's most trusted reservoir of talent must invest not only in technical skills, but also in educational excellence, research capability, institution-

al reliability and innovation ecosystems.

In this context, educational reform, research investment, healthcare expansion and urban modernisation are not merely development priorities. They are strategic imperatives.

The future may also witness a growing role for what can be called "talent diplomacy."

Mobility agreements, mutual recognition of qualifications, educational partnerships and skill corridors are likely to become increasingly important components of international relations. Countries capable of reliably training, certifying and supplying skilled professionals will enjoy a new form of geopolitical influence.

India has already begun moving in this direction.

Ultimately, the question is no longer whether India possesses talent. That debate was settled long ago.

The deeper question is whether India can build the institutions, educational systems and governance frameworks necessary to transform demographic advantage into enduring global trust.

For centuries, India was known across continents as a source of commerce, knowledge and civilisation. In the decades ahead, it may increasingly be recognised for something equally valuable: trusted human capability.

For generations, Indians crossed oceans in search of opportunity.

The coming decades may witness a subtle reversal—a world increasingly seeking Indian competence, Indian adaptability and Indian trustworthiness.

In an uncertain century, that may become one of India's most consequential contributions to the world. ■

# GROWTH UNDER PRESSURE

India continues to remain one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, yet mounting global and domestic pressures are exposing deeper structural vulnerabilities. Rising inflation, record crude oil and gold imports, a weakening rupee, and growing geopolitical uncertainty are steadily increasing pressure on economic stability. As household budgets tighten and external dependencies widen, the challenge before policymakers is no longer just sustaining growth, but ensuring resilience in an increasingly volatile global environment.



**BY SATISH SINGH**

The author is a Mumbai-based Banking and Economic Columnist. The opinions expressed in this article reflect his personal views. Currently, he serves as an Assistant General Manager with SBI and is available on [satish5249@gmail.com](mailto:satish5249@gmail.com).

**T**he Indian economy is presently navigating a phase in which sustaining growth while preserving macroeconomic stability is becoming increasingly complex. A combination of global geopolitical tensions, rising crude oil prices, persistent inflationary pressures, a weakening domestic currency, and excessive dependence on imports has created a

challenging economic environment. Although India continues to remain one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, several warning indicators suggest that underlying economic vulnerabilities are steadily intensifying.

Recent inflation data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation underscores these concerns. Retail inflation in April

2026 rose to 3.48 per cent from 3.40 per cent in March. While inflation remains within the Reserve Bank of India's prescribed tolerance band, the continued rise in food and essential commodity prices is significantly affecting household budgets. Rural inflation stood at 3.74 per cent, compared to 3.16 per cent in urban areas, indicating that the burden of rising prices is falling disproportionately on rural India.

Food inflation has climbed to 4.20 per cent, a particularly worrying development because food expenditure constitutes a major share of spending among middle- and lower-income households. Inflation is not merely an abstract economic statistic; it directly erodes citizens' purchasing power. When the prices of food, fuel, transportation, and daily necessities continue to rise, savings decline, consumer confidence weakens, and discretionary spending contracts. Over time, this reduces industrial demand, slows investment activity, and weakens overall economic momentum.

One of the most pressing concerns confronting the Indian economy today is its growing dependence on imported gold. In India, gold is not only viewed as an investment asset but also as a symbol of social prestige, cultural tradition, and financial security. Demand for gold rises sharply during weddings, festivals, and family celebrations. However, the economic consequences of excessive gold imports are becoming increasingly serious.

India imports nearly 90 per cent of its gold requirements from abroad. Annual domestic consumption ranges between 700 and 800 tonnes, while domestic production remains negligible at barely one or two tonnes annually. Consequently, gold imports have emerged as a major source of dollar outflow from the country.

During the financial year 2025–26, India's gold imports rose by more than 24 per cent to reach a record level of nearly 72 billion dollars. Such massive imports place enormous pressure on the country's foreign exchange reserves and widen the Current Account Deficit (CAD). According to Reserve Bank of In-

dia data, India's CAD increased to 13.2 billion dollars, or 1.3 per cent of GDP, during the December quarter. Estimates further suggest that the CAD could widen substantially during the current financial year if import dependence continues to increase.

This is precisely why policymakers and economic experts are increasingly



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**India's dependence on imported oil and gold is steadily increasing pressure on the country's external sector and foreign exchange reserves.**

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**A weakening rupee, rising inflation, and global geopolitical instability are creating new challenges for economic growth and consumer confidence.**

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 urging citizens to reduce investments in physical gold such as jewellery and coins, and instead shift towards financial alternatives like Gold ETFs, Sovereign Gold Bonds, and paper gold instruments. Even a 30 to 40 per cent

reduction in physical gold demand could potentially save India between 20 and 25 billion dollars in foreign exchange annually. If demand falls by 50 per cent, the savings could exceed 35 billion dollars, significantly easing pressure on the external sector.

Another major challenge confronting the Indian economy is its heavy dependence on crude oil imports. India imports nearly 88 per cent of its crude oil requirements, making the country highly vulnerable to fluctuations in global energy prices. International crude oil prices have already crossed 100 dollars per barrel, sharply increasing India's import bill. At present, the country spends more than 134 billion dollars annually on crude oil imports.

The impact of rising oil prices extends far beyond fuel stations. Higher transportation costs increase the prices of food products, construction materials, industrial goods, and essential commodities. Manufacturing and logistics expenses rise steadily, eventually fuelling broader inflationary pressures across the economy. In a developing country like India, where millions are already struggling with rising living costs, persistent fuel inflation can significantly undermine economic stability and social welfare.

Global geopolitical developments are further intensifying economic uncertainty. Rising tensions in West Asia, instability in energy-producing regions, and weakening ceasefire conditions among major powers have increased volatility in global financial markets. Supply chain disruptions and elevated shipping costs continue to affect international trade flows.

These developments are particularly damaging for developing economies like India, which remain heavily dependent on imported energy, fertilisers, electronics, and precious metals. The strengthening of the US dollar against global currencies has added another layer of pressure. A stronger dollar raises import costs for countries like India and simultaneously weakens domestic currencies.

The Indian rupee has recently fallen to record lows against the US dollar.

Currency depreciation raises the cost of imports and further contributes to domestic inflationary pressures. Essential imported products such as crude oil, electronic goods, medical equipment, and industrial machinery become more expensive. Moreover, a weaker currency often undermines investor confidence and can trigger volatility in equity and bond markets.

Reflecting these concerns, global rating agency Moody's has revised its growth projections for the Indian economy downward. The agency expects India's GDP growth to remain around 6 per cent in both 2026 and 2027, citing slowing private consumption, weaker investment activity, and external uncertainties. According to the report, supply-side disruptions in energy and fertiliser markets, coupled with continuing geopolitical instability, may continue to affect economic growth in the coming years.

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**Reducing import dependence and strengthening domestic manufacturing may hold the key to India's long-term economic resilience.**

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**Rising inflation, widening trade deficits, excessive import dependence and a weakening currency are placing sustained pressure on economic growth.**

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At the same time, rising interest rates across the world are tightening global liquidity conditions. Higher borrowing costs discourage private investment and delay business expansion plans. In India, elevated lending rates are already affecting sectors such as real estate, automobiles, and small enterprises. When investment activity slows, employment generation also weakens, placing additional pressure on economic growth.

Despite these challenges, India still possesses significant opportunities to strengthen its economic position. Reducing import dependence, promoting domestic manufacturing, accelerating renewable energy adoption, and encouraging productive financial investments can substantially improve long-term economic resilience. Government initiatives such as "Make in India," "Atmanirbhar Bharat," and Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes are important steps in this direction.

Equally important is the role of citizens themselves. Responsible financial behaviour, reduced dependence on imported luxury goods, and greater financial literacy can collectively contribute to economic stability. Encouraging investments in productive financial assets instead of excessive physical gold consumption can help reduce unnecessary dollar outflows and strengthen the country's external sector.

In conclusion, the Indian economy is currently confronting multiple interconnected challenges. Rising inflation, widening trade deficits, excessive import dependence, a weakening currency, and continuing global geopolitical uncertainties are placing sustained pressure on economic growth. While India continues to possess strong long-term economic potential, maintaining stability in the present environment will require prudent policymaking, fiscal discipline, strategic reforms, and responsible consumer behaviour. If addressed effectively, these challenges can become an opportunity for India to build a more resilient, self-reliant, and sustainable economy for the future. ■



## AGING WITH DIGNITY

# THE TASTE OF HOME INDIANS NEVER LEAVE BEHIND

Long before refrigeration, supermarkets and packaged foods became part of everyday life, Indian kitchens had already perfected the art of preserving seasons in jars. From sun-drenched terraces lined with clay martabans to the unmistakable aroma of mustard oil, spices and raw mangoes, achar has remained one of India's oldest and most cherished culinary traditions. Yet pickle in India has never been merely a side dish. It is memory, migration and emotion preserved together. For millions of Indians living far from home, a single spoonful of homemade achar can evoke childhood summers, family kitchens and forgotten courtyards more powerfully than words ever can. This is the remarkable story of how India's humble pickle travelled across oceans to become a global symbol of nostalgia, identity and belonging.





**BY DR VENKATESH  
GANAPATHY**

Author is a Faculty Member, ICFAI Business School, Bangalore.

**A Taste of Home in a Jar**

Close your eyes and imagine it—the sharp bite of raw mango, the earthy warmth of mustard seeds, the fire of red chillies hitting the back of your throat. That single sensory rush can transport an Indian thousands of miles back home in an instant.

That is the power of achar.

It is not merely a condiment. It is memory, identity and belonging—bottled in oil and spice, sealed with the warmth of every grandmother who ever made it.

Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, a man who touched the stars, never forgot the taste of his mother Ashiamma's kitchen in Rameswaram, where a humble banana leaf carried rice, sambar and a spoonful of tangy homemade pickle. The greatest minds, it turns out, are of-

ten nourished by the simplest jars.

And perhaps that is the enduring magic of achar. It occupies a place far beyond the dining table. It connects generations, preserves family histories and carries the emotional geography of home. Long after people leave their villages, cities or even their country behind, the taste of pickle remains a faithful companion—a small but potent reminder of where they come from.

Yet the story of Indian pickles is not merely personal. It is also civilisational.

Over 4,000 years ago, long before refrigerators, supermarkets, or industrial food processing existed, Indian communities had already mastered the sophisticated art of preservation. Cucumbers, native to the Indian subcontinent, were being pickled as early as 2030 BCE. Earthen pots were packed with mangoes marinating in mustard oil and rock salt, buried beneath cool soil, and left to slow-cure in the earth's natural temperature. Fruits and vegetables were sun-dried until they shrivelled and concentrated in flavour, then layered carefully into clay martabans with generous handfuls of aromatic

spices. It was practical ingenuity at its finest — a way of capturing the abundance of one season and carrying it safely through months of scarcity.

Even the words we use today carry echoes of that long culinary history. "Pickle" is believed to derive from the Dutch word *pekel*, meaning saline or brine, while "achar" traces its roots to Persian, where it referred to the preservation of meats, roots, leaves, vegetables, or fruits using salt, vinegar, honey, or syrup. Two different words, two separate etymologies — and yet both point to the same ancient and universal human instinct: the desire to preserve the finest flavours of a season and carry them forward in time.

So deeply is pickling woven into Indian civilisation that the tradition carries a different name in nearly every language spoken across the subcontinent — *Uppinakaayi* in Kannada, *Urragaya* or *Avakkai* in Telugu, *Urukai* in Tamil, *Uppillittuthu* in Malayalam, *Loncha* in Marathi, *Athanu* in Gujarati, and *Achar* in Hindi. This remarkable diversity of names is itself proof of how inseparable the practice is from Indian



life and memory. One could reasonably argue that the art of pickling did not merely flourish in India — it may well have originated here.

### The Summer Ritual That Binds Us

In India, the arrival of summer has never signified only heat and school holidays. In kitchens across the country, it has traditionally meant one thing above all else: pickle season.

It is a time marked by the clinking of glass jars, the rhythmic thud of chopping

fect stage of ripeness. Every region confidently claims to produce the finest version, and every such claim carries the quiet authority of generations.

The process itself, wherever it is practised, is deliberate and unhurried. Fresh produce is selected carefully at the peak of the season. Spices are ground patiently on stone slabs. Ceramic jars are left beneath the open sky until the oil glistens like liquid gold. It is a labour of love in the truest sense, and every stir of the spoon carries within it

through the richness of rice, the spice awakening the palate, and the oil binding everything together in perfect balance.

Beyond taste, traditionally prepared achar is genuinely beneficial for health. Fermented naturally with salt, cold-pressed oils, and preservatives such as lemon juice or vinegar, Indian pickles are rich in probiotics that support digestion and improve gut health. They are prepared without synthetic chemicals or artificial additives. Even



boards, and the intoxicating fragrance of mustard oil warming beneath the harsh afternoon sun. Across the country, this ritual unfolds differently but with equal devotion. In Tamil Nadu, tiny *maavadu* mangoes are pickled whole with mustard seeds and chilli. In Andhra Pradesh, *avakkai* — thick-cut raw mango packed generously with fenugreek and fiery red chilli powder — is treated almost like a religion. In Rajasthan, families gather together to stuff plump red chillies with bold masala blends. In Gujarat, lemons are bathed in jaggery and turmeric until they turn golden, soft and syrupy. In the misty highlands of Nagaland, bamboo shoots are fermented with the searing *bhut jolokia* and earthy mustard oil into something smoky, pungent and unforgettable.

The undisputed monarch of them all, however, remains mango pickle — crafted from raw mangoes harvested at their tartest, firmest and most per-

fect stage of ripeness.

For many Indians, pickle-making is inseparable from the most vivid recollections of childhood — helping grandmothers choose the perfect raw mangoes, grinding spices in open courtyards, and waiting impatiently as large ceramic jars sat basking in the summer sun on terraces and balconies. Those warm jars, brimming with freshly prepared achar, contain within them an entire era of Indian domestic life.

### More Than a Side Dish

Indian pickles do far more than merely flavour a meal — they transform it completely. A single spoonful of mango pickle served beside hot rice and ghee is not simply a garnish; it is often the soul of the plate itself. Traditionally, Indians consume just a small portion with every bite, allowing the sharp intensity of the pickle to elevate every other flavour — the sourness cutting

From ancient clay jars buried in the earth to modern kitchens across the world, India's centuries-old pickle tradition continues to preserve not just food, but memory, identity and belonging.

the organic waste generated during pickle-making is returned to the soil as natural fertiliser. The ingredients are local, seasonal and sustainable. Choosing a jar of traditionally made achar is, quietly, one of the wisest food choices a person can make — both for personal health and for the environment.

In Indian cuisine, no meal feels entirely complete without it. Whether paired with curd rice in Chennai, Hyderabadi biryani in the Deccan, dal-chawal in Bihar, or a simple paratha in Punjab, achar remains the constant — the thread that ties India's diverse regional cuisines to a shared emotional and cultural identity.

### The Pickle That Travels With Us

What is perhaps most remarkable about achar is that it never stays behind when Indians leave home.

It is often among the very first things packed into a suitcase. Indians living abroad describe it as a non-ne-





gotiable comfort food, tucked carefully into checked baggage beside theplas, namkeen, and packets of homemade masala. The attachment runs so deep that there are stories of grown adults — including senior corporate executives — nearly breaking into tears after having jars of homemade achar confiscated at airport customs. The loss, in those moments, is not merely of a condiment. It feels like the loss of home itself.

Wherever the Indian diaspora has settled, achar has travelled, adapted and evolved. The Telugu diaspora in the United States and Gulf countries stockpiles *gongura* to recreate authentic Andhra meals. British-Indian households cherish Gujarati *chhundo*. Indian families in Canada reach for Kashmiri potato pickle during long winters, drawn to its warming spices and comforting familiarity. In Auckland, Indian migrants prepare spicy achar from feijoas — a fruit they may never have encountered growing up, yet instinctively know how to pickle. In California, backyard Meyer lemons become the season's prized batch of homemade achar, shared generously with neighbours and friends during festive gatherings.

Today, Indian pickle brands export to more than fifty countries worldwide. Innovative chefs in London drizzle mango pickle oil over avant-garde dishes in

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**Whether it is  
 Andhra's fiery  
 avakkai, Gujarat's  
 sweet lemon pickle or  
 Nagaland's fermented  
 bamboo shoots, achar  
 remains the emotional  
 thread connecting  
 Indians to home —  
 wherever they  
 may live.**  
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fine-dining restaurants. Indian pickle exports, including gherkins, have grown significantly — from nearly \$200 million in FY21 to a record \$256.58 million in FY 2023–24 — driven largely by rising demand from European markets. The next phase of growth is expected to emerge from organic varieties, innovative regional flavours, and younger global consumers discovering achar for the very first time.

#### **A Jar Is Never Just a Jar**

Yet what no export figure or market re-

port can truly capture is the emotional weight a jar of achar carries when it crosses an ocean.

Pickle invokes memory in its purest form. There is something almost magical about it — one taste, and suddenly you are no longer seated at a dining table in a foreign land, but back home once again, sitting cross-legged on the kitchen floor, watching someone who loved you stir a clay pot beneath the warm afternoon sun. It recalls summer vacations scented with mustard oil and sunshine. It recalls recipes whose precise taste exists nowhere else in the world — not in restaurants, not in supermarkets, not on any online marketplace — because they belong uniquely to one family, one courtyard, one grandmother, one clay jar buried in the earth decades ago.

For Indians living abroad, achar is perhaps the most honest answer to the question of where they come from. It requires no translation and no explanation. Open the jar, and the story reveals itself — in the heat of chilli, the sharpness of sour mango, and the slow, layered complexity of something prepared patiently with time, care, memory and love.

That is why every Indian abroad misses it. And that is why, no matter how far Indians travel from home, the pickle always finds a way to travel with them. ■

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# INDIA'S NEXT INTELLECTUAL AWAKENING?



At a time when public discourse is increasingly shaped by algorithms, political polarisation and fleeting social media trends, an unexpected question is resurfacing in India's universities and intellectual circles: Can the country produce a new generation of ideas rooted in its own experiences while remaining open to the world? The renewed debate around decolonisation, *Swaraj in Ideas* and *Creative Theory* suggests that India may be witnessing the early signs of an intellectual awakening—one that seeks not merely to interpret society, but to rethink the very foundations of knowledge, democracy and human freedom.



**BY MANINDRA NATH THAKUR**

The author is a faculty at the Centre for Political Studies, JNU, and a trustee at the Foundation for Creative Social Research.

## **Creative Theory, Swaraj in Ideas and the Search for New Horizons.**

A remarkable scene recently unfolded in New Delhi. A colloquium on "Indian Political Theory," organised by the Association for Creative Theory in collaboration with few leading intellectual and cultural institutions such as the Foundation for Creative Social Research, the India International Centre, the Raza Foundation, the Marcuse Society, and Shanti

Sahyog, drew an unexpectedly large gathering of students, research scholars, academics and public thinkers. At a time when conventional wisdom suggests that philosophy, political theory and the social sciences are losing relevance in an age dominated by technology, markets and instant communication, the enthusiasm witnessed at the event offered a striking counterpoint.

The response raised an important

question. Why are young people once again turning towards ideas? Why is there renewed curiosity about theory, philosophy and intellectual traditions?

Perhaps the answer lies in a deeper restlessness. Across the world, societies are experiencing profound transformations. Economic uncertainty, technological disruption, ecological crises, rising inequalities and political polarisation have generated a growing sense that inherited frameworks are no longer sufficient. Young people increasingly find themselves searching for intellectual tools capable of making sense of a rapidly changing world.

The enthusiasm witnessed at the colloquium therefore may signify something larger than academic curiosity. It may reflect the early signs of an intellectual awakening—a desire to rethink inherited assumptions and explore alternative ways of understanding society, politics and human existence.

### **The Unfinished Project of Decolonisation**

Few debates have gained as much prominence in contemporary India as the call to decolonise knowledge.

The concern itself is not new. During the freedom movement, many Indian thinkers argued that colonial rule had not merely subjugated territory; it had also reshaped consciousness. Political independence, they believed, would remain incomplete without intellectual independence.

Different thinkers approached this challenge through different pathways. Ramakrishna and Vivekananda sought renewal through Vedantic philosophy. Dayananda Saraswati called for a return to Vedic foundations. Raja Ram-mohan Roy pursued reform through critical engagement with tradition and modernity. Rabindranath Tagore envisioned a cosmopolitan humanism rooted in Indian cultural experience. Sri Aurobindo explored spiritual evolution and consciousness, while Mahatma Gandhi developed a civilisational critique of modernity centred on swaraj, ethics and nonviolence.

Scientists such as Jagadish Chandra

Bose and Prafulla Chandra Ray similarly imagined forms of scientific advancement grounded in Indian realities.

Among these voices, philosopher K. C. Bhattacharya offered one of the most enduring formulations through his call for “Swaraj in Ideas.” He argued that genuine freedom required the ability to think independently rather than merely imitate intellectual frameworks imported from elsewhere.

Yet after Independence, this project gradually receded from the centre of academic life.

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**The challenge is  
no longer simply  
to critique colonial  
legacies, but to create  
new intellectual  
frameworks rooted in  
India’s plural traditions  
and contemporary  
realities.**

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Universities often engaged these thinkers selectively, treating them as historical figures rather than as sources of living theoretical insight. Intellectual legitimacy increasingly came from frameworks developed in Europe and North America. Indian traditions were studied more frequently as objects of analysis than as active contributors to contemporary theory.

The publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* revitalised debates on colonial knowledge and power. Post-colonial scholarship exposed the ways in which colonialism shaped representations, institutions and identities. However, while it proved effective in critiquing domination, it often offered limited guidance regarding how alternative intellectual futures might be constructed.

Moreover, many forms of internal domination—caste hierarchies, gender inequalities and class-based

exclusions—remained insufficiently addressed.

This is precisely where the idea of Swaraj in Ideas regains contemporary significance. It invites a movement beyond critique towards intellectual reconstruction. It asks not only how knowledge was colonised, but how new horizons of thinking can be created.

### **Competing Visions of Decolonisation**

Today, debates around decolonisation have acquired new political dimensions.

One influential approach seeks to position India as a civilisational power and a Vishwaguru. While this narrative appeals to cultural confidence and historical pride, critics argue that it often risks reducing India’s immense plurality to a singular cultural identity. Questions of caste, gender, minority experiences and social inequality can become marginal within such frameworks.

At the same time, sections of the academic establishment often respond by defending inherited intellectual paradigms without sufficiently addressing widespread dissatisfaction with the distance between universities and society.

The result is an intellectual impasse.

One side invokes cultural nationalism; the other frequently remains confined within institutional frameworks that many citizens perceive as disconnected from lived realities.

The challenge, therefore, is not simply to choose between competing camps. It is to imagine a more creative and inclusive intellectual project capable of engaging India’s plural traditions while remaining attentive to contemporary social realities.

### **What Would Indian Political Theory Look Like?**

One of the most stimulating aspects of the Delhi colloquium was the debate over a deceptively simple question: What exactly is Indian political theory?

For decades, much of political theory taught in India has remained largely derivative of Western intellec-

tual traditions. Concepts developed by thinkers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Rawls continue to provide the dominant vocabulary through which politics is analysed.

These traditions remain important and deserve careful engagement. Yet many participants questioned whether Indian political theory should merely adapt Western concepts to Indian circumstances or whether it could generate its own conceptual vocabulary.

Could ideas emerging from Gandhi, Ambedkar, Tagore, Lohia, Periyar, Phule and numerous other thinkers provide foundations for fresh theoretical frameworks?

Could concepts such as swaraj, samata, dignity, fraternity, selfhood, community, nonviolence and social justice become sources of theoretical innovation rather than simply historical references?

The distinction may appear subtle, but it is profound. It marks the difference between producing political theory in India and developing a political theory of India.

Many young scholars appeared eager to explore this possibility.

### Language and the Democratisation of Knowledge

Another recurring theme was language.

Knowledge production in India remains heavily dependent on English. While English provides access to global scholarship, it also creates barriers that exclude vast sections of society



**Nearly a century after K.C. Bhattacharya's call for intellectual self-rule, a new generation of scholars is asking whether India can think in its own voice rather than through borrowed paradigms.**



from intellectual participation.

The issue is not a simplistic rejection of English. Rather, it is a recognition that ideas become richer when they emerge through multiple linguistic worlds.

Indian languages contain conceptual resources, historical experiences and cultural nuances that often resist easy translation. A truly democratic intellectual culture requires creating spaces where knowledge can be generated, debated and disseminated across linguistic boundaries.

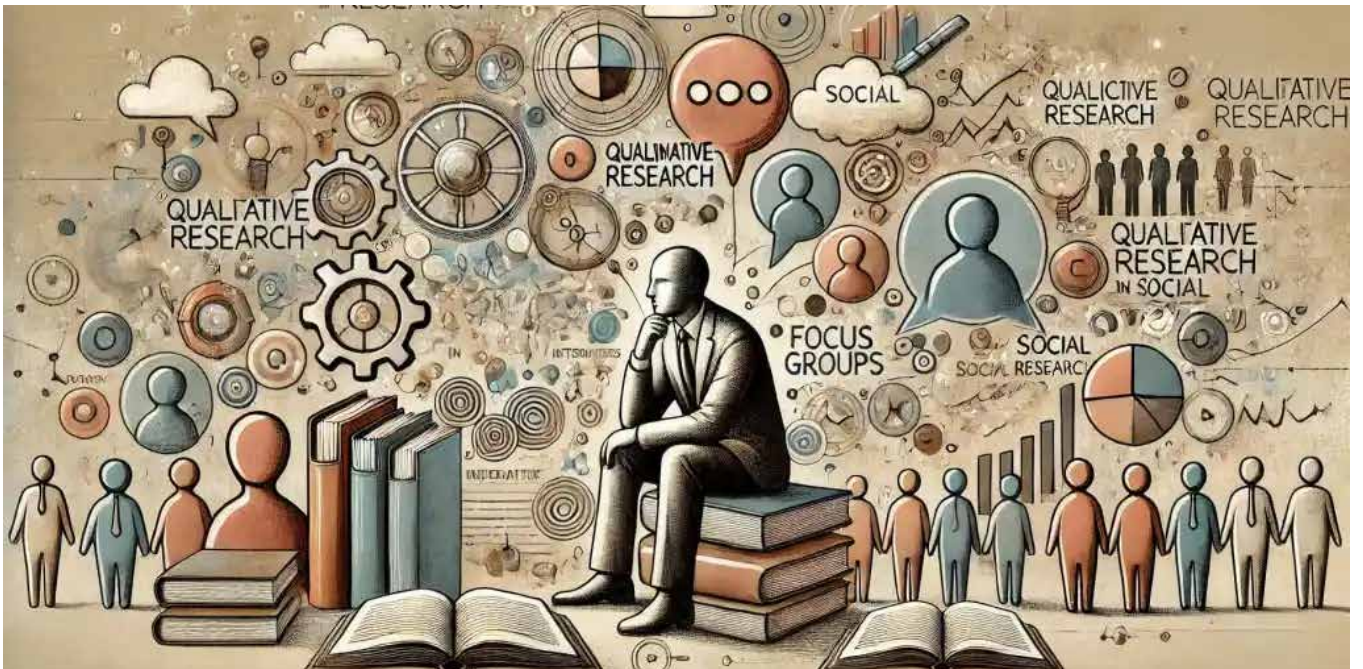
The future of Indian thought may depend significantly upon whether theory remains confined to elite institutions or becomes accessible to broader social communities.

### The Promise of Creative Theory

It is within this wider search that the project of Creative Theory acquires significance.

Creative Theory begins from a simple but powerful proposition: human beings are not merely products of structures, systems and histories. They are also creative, reflexive agents capable of transforming themselves





and their societies.

Rather than treating concepts as fixed inheritances, Creative Theory regards them as living tools that must continuously evolve in response to changing realities.

Its central commitment is to democratic dialogue among intellectual traditions. Indian, Western, Marxist, feminist, Buddhist, indigenous and other traditions are invited into conversation without granting any single perspective a monopoly over truth.

This approach challenges both colonial hierarchies of knowledge and internal structures of domination rooted in caste, class, gender and religious exclusion.

Equally important, it seeks to reconnect knowledge with lived experience.

Too often, theory becomes detached from ordinary life. Creative Theory insists that ideas must remain accountable to human struggles, aspirations and possibilities. It views dignity, justice, care, freedom and emancipation not as abstract ideals but as realities that shape everyday existence.

In this sense, theory becomes more than academic analysis. It becomes a creative and transformative practice.

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**Young researchers  
are increasingly  
questioning the  
disconnect between  
universities and  
ordinary citizens,  
seeking ideas that  
emerge from lived  
experience rather than  
academic isolation.**

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#### **Towards a New Intellectual Movement**

The larger significance of the colloquium may therefore lie not in any definitive conclusions it reached but in the questions it revived.

Can India move beyond intellectual dependency without retreating into cultural chauvinism?

Can universities reconnect with society while preserving critical inquiry?

Can diverse intellectual traditions engage one another without collapsing into ideological camps?

Can theory once again become a public activity rather than a special-

ised academic exercise?

These questions do not have easy answers. Yet the enthusiasm of the young scholars who participated in the discussions suggests that the search itself is gaining momentum.

India today stands at a historical moment marked by technological transformation, democratic contestation, ecological uncertainty and shifting global power structures. Such periods often generate demands for intellectual renewal.

The call for Swaraj in Ideas remains unfinished. The aspiration to create knowledge rooted in freedom, plurality and human dignity remains alive.

Whether this aspiration matures into a genuine intellectual movement will depend upon imagination, courage and institutional commitment. But the signs of possibility are unmistakable.

If the energy witnessed in Delhi is any indication, the future of ideas in India may be entering an important new chapter—one in which intellectual creativity, rather than intellectual imitation, becomes the defining aspiration.

The question is no longer whether India needs an intellectual movement.

The question is whether India is finally ready for one. ■



# THE NEW GEOMETRY OF POWER

As geopolitical tensions redraw trade routes, energy flows and technology alliances, economic security has become inseparable from national security. In this rapidly changing environment, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's five-nation tour of the UAE, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Italy was far more than a diplomatic exercise. It reflected a broader strategy to secure reliable energy supplies, access critical technologies, deepen industrial partnerships and reduce India's exposure to global disruptions. Taken together, the visits offered a glimpse into how New Delhi is positioning itself for a world where resilience, diversification and strategic partnerships may matter as much as economic growth itself.



**BY B SHEKHAR**

The author, based in Bengaluru, is our South India Bureau Chief.

In an era when geopolitics increasingly shapes economics, diplomacy is no longer confined to managing bilateral relations or projecting soft power. It has become a critical instrument for securing energy supplies, accessing advanced technologies, strengthening supply chains and protecting national growth from external shocks.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's six-day, five-nation tour in May 2026 reflected precisely this new reality.

Travelling across the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Italy, Modi was not undertaking a ceremonial goodwill mission. Rather, the tour represented a carefully calibrated effort to strengthen India's long-term economic foundations at a time when the global order is undergoing profound change.

The backdrop could hardly have been more challenging. Rising tensions in West Asia, disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz, volatile energy markets and intensifying competition over critical technologies have exposed new vulnerabilities in the global economy. For India—the world's third-largest importer of crude oil and one of its fastest-growing major economies—such developments carry immediate implications for inflation, trade, industrial growth and

macroeconomic stability.

At the same time, India is pursuing ambitious goals. It seeks to emerge as a global manufacturing hub, build a domestic semiconductor ecosystem, accelerate its clean-energy transition and position itself as a major player in the technologies that will define the coming decades.

Against this backdrop, Modi's five-nation engagement was less about diplomacy in the traditional sense and more about economic statecraft. Each destination represented a distinct pillar of India's broader strategic vision: energy security in the Gulf, semiconductor cooperation in Europe, green technology partnerships in the Nordic region, advanced manufacturing linkages with Italy and deeper integration into emerging global supply chains.

Taken together, the tour offered a glimpse into how New Delhi is attempting to build an economic architecture capable of insulating India from geopolitical turbulence while expanding its influence in an increasingly multipolar world.

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**From energy security in the Gulf to semiconductor partnerships in Europe, India is using diplomacy as a tool of economic resilience in an increasingly uncertain world.**

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#### **The UAE: Securing India's Energy Lifeline**

The first stop—Abu Dhabi—set the tone for the entire journey.

Modi's discussions with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan focused heavily on energy security, investment flows and long-term economic cooperation. In an environment of persistent uncertainty in global energy markets, these discussions carried significance far beyond bilateral relations.

India imports more than 80 per cent of its crude oil requirements, with a substantial portion originating in the Gulf. Any dis-



ruption in shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz has the potential to affect India's inflation outlook, fiscal calculations and industrial activity.

Against this backdrop, negotiations on long-term energy arrangements, including expanded cooperation in hydrocarbons and strategic reserves, assumed particular importance. The objective was clear: reduce vulnerability to sudden supply disruptions while ensuring greater predictability in energy procurement.

The UAE already occupies a pivotal position in India's external economic strategy. It is among India's largest trading partners, a major source of investment and an increasingly important collaborator in logistics, digital commerce and infrastructure development. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), implemented in 2022, has further accelerated bilateral trade and opened new avenues for economic integration.

Equally important is the human dimension of the relationship. More than 4.5 million Indians live and work in the UAE, making it home to one of the largest overseas Indian communities in the world. Their contributions extend beyond remittances; they form a living bridge between the two economies.

As the UAE seeks to diversify beyond hydrocarbons and position itself as a global hub for finance, logistics and

emerging technologies, India offers a vast market, skilled workforce and long-term growth opportunities. For India, the Emirates remain an indispensable partner in ensuring energy security and expanding economic connectivity with the wider Gulf region.

**The Netherlands: Pursuing Technological Sovereignty**

If Abu Dhabi was about energy resilience, the Netherlands leg of the tour was about technological capability.

During his meetings in The Hague with Dutch leaders, including King Willem-Alexander, Queen Máxima and Prime Minister Rob Jetten, Modi focused on semiconductors, clean energy, water management, agricultural innovation and logistics infrastructure.

Among these areas, semiconductor cooperation stood out as the most strategically consequential.

The Netherlands occupies a unique position within the global semiconductor ecosystem through ASML, the company that dominates the production of extreme ultraviolet lithography machines—technology essential for manufacturing advanced computer chips.

For India, which is investing billions of dollars to establish a domestic semiconductor industry, access to expertise, equipment, research partnerships and talent development is critical. The country increasingly recognises that technological leadership in the

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**The UAE, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Italy each represent a different pillar of India's emerging strategy for growth, technology access and strategic autonomy.**

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twenty-first century will depend not only on software capabilities but also on mastery of advanced hardware manufacturing.

The discussions therefore extended beyond immediate commercial opportunities. They reflected India's broader determination to become a meaningful participant in global technology supply chains rather than remain merely a consumer of imported technologies.

The Netherlands also brings globally recognised expertise in water management and precision agriculture. As climate pressures intensify and resource management becomes more complex, collaboration in irrigation efficiency, food logistics and sustainable agricultural systems could prove equally valuable.

For Dutch policymakers and businesses, India represents one of the world's largest growth markets. For India, the Netherlands offers access to technologies and capabilities that are increasingly central to economic competitiveness.

#### **Sweden: Green Industry and the Future Economy**

The Sweden visit highlighted another dimension of India's

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**As global supply chains fragment and geopolitical rivalries intensify, New Delhi is building diversified partnerships designed to reduce vulnerability and strengthen long-term competitiveness.**

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strategic transformation—the transition towards a greener, more technologically sophisticated economy.

In Gothenburg, Modi held discussions with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson on artificial intelligence, clean technologies, innovation ecosystems, defence cooperation and resilient supply chains.

A significant moment came when Modi joined Kristersson and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at the European Round Table for Industry, a gathering of some of Europe's most influential industrial leaders.

The symbolism was important.

Europe is actively searching for ways to diversify supply chains and reduce excessive dependence on China. India, meanwhile, is seeking deeper integration into global manufacturing and technology networks.

The convergence of these interests is creating new opportunities for collaboration.

Sweden's strengths align closely with India's long-term priorities. Swedish companies already maintain significant operations across sectors such as telecommunications, en-

gineering, pharmaceuticals and automotive manufacturing.

Emerging areas of cooperation include green hydrogen, battery technologies, carbon capture, sustainable industrial systems and artificial intelligence.

For India, access to such expertise is crucial. Achieving rapid economic growth while pursuing climate goals will require technological innovation on a massive scale. Swedish experience in combining industrial competitiveness with sustainability offers valuable lessons.

For Europe, engagement with India provides access to scale, talent and one of the most dynamic growth markets in the world. Increasingly, both sides view each other as essential partners in shaping the future industrial landscape.

### Norway and the Nordic Vision

Modi's participation in the Third India-Nordic Summit in Norway underscored a broader shift in India's diplomatic thinking.

Rather than relying solely on relationships with major powers, New Delhi is increasingly cultivating partnerships with technologically advanced middle powers capable of delivering specialised expertise and long-term strategic value.

The India-Nordic framework, which includes Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland, has evolved into a platform for cooperation in maritime technology, renewable energy, digital innovation, Arctic research and sustainable development.

Norway occupies a particularly important place within this framework.

Its expertise in offshore energy, maritime systems, ocean governance and renewable technologies aligns closely with India's ambitions to develop its blue economy and modernise its maritime infrastructure.

Discussions focused on offshore exploration, floating wind energy, carbon capture technologies and maritime surveillance systems.

For a country with more than 7,500 kilometres of coastline and growing maritime ambitions, these capabilities carry considerable strategic value.

Norway also offers lessons in sovereign wealth management, sustainable development and long-term investment planning. As India expands its infrastructure and energy networks, such experience becomes increasingly relevant.

More broadly, India's Nordic engagement reflects a recognition that innovation is often concentrated not only in large powers but also in smaller, highly specialised economies. Building relationships with such countries expands

India's access to cutting-edge expertise while diversifying its international partnerships.

### Italy: Manufacturing, Defence and Europe's Industrial Gateway

The final leg of the tour took Modi to Italy, where discussions focused on advanced manufacturing, defence production, aerospace cooperation and industrial innovation.

Italy remains one of Europe's leading manufacturing powers, renowned for precision engineering, industrial design, automotive technologies and specialised machinery.

These strengths complement India's ambitions under initiatives such as Make in India and its broader objective of expanding domestic manufacturing capacity.

The visit also carried wider significance within the context of India-European Union relations.

Negotiations on the India-EU Free Trade Agreement have gathered momentum in recent years, reflecting a growing recognition on both sides that deeper economic integration is mutually beneficial.

For Europe, India offers market scale, talent and strategic diversification. For India, Europe remains an important source of technology, investment and industrial expertise.

Defence cooperation featured prominently in discussions. As India seeks to modernise its military capabilities while simultaneously expanding indigenous defence production, partnerships with technologically advanced European countries assume increasing importance.

While public attention often focuses on the optics of

high-level diplomacy, the substantive significance of the Italy visit lay in its emphasis on industrial collaboration, technology transfer and long-term investment partnerships.

### Building India's Economic Architecture

Viewed collectively, the five-nation tour demonstrated the continuing evolution of India's foreign policy from traditional diplomacy towards strategic economic statecraft.

Each stop addressed a different vulnerability or opportunity.

The UAE strengthened energy security.

The Netherlands supported technological ambitions.

Sweden contributed to the green and digital transition.

Norway expanded maritime and renewable energy cooperation.

Italy reinforced manufacturing and defence partnerships.

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**India's engagement with technologically advanced middle powers signals a shift from traditional diplomacy towards a more focused model of economic statecraft.**

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Together, they formed a multidimensional framework designed to enhance India's resilience in an era characterised by geopolitical fragmentation, technological competition and economic uncertainty.

What makes this approach noteworthy is its emphasis on diversification. Rather than depending excessively on any single country or region, India is building a broad network of relationships across multiple sectors and geographies.

This reflects a deeper understanding of how power is changing in the twenty-first century.

Economic strength increasingly depends on secure supply chains, technological capability, energy access, industrial competitiveness and trusted international partnerships. Diplomacy, therefore, is no longer separate from economics; it has become one of its principal instruments.

#### **Diplomacy as Economic Strategy**

The significance of Modi's five-nation tour lies not merely in the agreements signed or the diplomatic optics generated. Its deeper importance rests in what it reveals about India's evolving worldview.

For much of the post-Cold War era, economic growth was

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**The real significance of the five-nation tour lies not in diplomatic optics, but in its attempt to create an economic architecture capable of withstanding future global shocks.**

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driven by globalisation, open markets and relatively stable supply chains. That era is giving way to a more uncertain environment marked by geopolitical rivalry, technological competition and economic fragmentation.

In such a world, resilience is becoming as important as growth.

India's response is increasingly visible. Rather than relying excessively on any single partner, New Delhi is building diversified networks across energy, technology, manufacturing and trade. The objective is not simply to participate in the global economy, but to help shape its next phase.

The UAE offers energy security. The Netherlands opens doors to critical technologies. Sweden and the Nordic countries provide access to the green industrial future. Italy

strengthens India's manufacturing and defence ambitions.

Together, these partnerships form the foundations of a broader strategy aimed at enhancing India's economic resilience and strategic flexibility.

Viewed through this lens, the tour was far more than a diplomatic itinerary. It was a statement of intent.

In an increasingly fragmented world, India is positioning itself not merely as a participant in the global economy, but as one of the countries seeking to shape the architecture of the emerging international order.. ■

# THE HIDDEN FORCE POWERING CLEAN ENERGY

Solar panels may capture sunlight, batteries may store power, and electric vehicles may redefine transportation, but none of them can transform the energy landscape unless investors are willing to finance them. Behind every renewable-energy project lies an invisible layer of financial modelling that determines risk, return, and ultimately viability.

As clean-energy technologies advance at unprecedented speed, the financial systems used to evaluate them are undergoing a revolution of their own. The future of the energy transition may be shaped as much by innovation in spreadsheets and pricing engines as by breakthroughs in hardware itself.



BY KSHITIZ RAJ

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The most important transformation in clean energy today may not be happening in solar panels, batteries, or electric vehicles. It is taking place quietly inside financial models.

At first glance, that might seem surprising. Yet every clean-energy project—whether a solar power purchase agreement (PPA), a battery storage facility, or an EV charging network—must first survive a financial model before it can be built. If the model fails, the project stalls. If the model works, capital flows.

In that sense, financial models are far more than analytical tools. They are the gatekeepers of investment. Increasingly, the way these models are designed determines how rapidly the global energy transition can scale.

## The Hidden Challenge: Model Fragmentation

Across project-finance teams, a familiar pattern tends to emerge over time. A model is developed to price a specific asset—perhaps a solar PPA. It performs well and becomes trusted. Then a slightly different opportunity arrives. Rather than designing a new framework, the existing spreadsheet is copied, modified, and reused.

The cycle repeats itself

Over the years—and often through multiple rounds of staff turnover—organisations accumulate dozens of models that appear similar but operate differently. Each functions in isolation. None are fully aligned. Yet every version claims to represent the “correct” methodology.

The result is not a coherent system but a patchwork of spreadsheets that are difficult to maintain, slow to update, and vulnerable to hidden errors. More importantly, such fragmentation impedes decision-making. When assumptions change or markets evolve, updating every version becomes an increasingly cumbersome exercise.

In an industry where speed and precision are critical, this becomes a structural bottleneck.



### The Five-Macro Problem

At Redaptive, an Energy-as-a-Service company, this challenge became evident in one of its core pricing tools. The model relied on five separate macros, each responsible for solving a different variable—development fees, PPA rates, escalators, EPC costs, and operating expenses.

Although the macros were built around similar logic, they operated independently. Introducing a new variable often required copying an existing macro and manually rewriting sections of code. Debugging meant comparing multiple nearly identical scripts in search of subtle inconsistencies.

The system functioned, but inefficiently. It was fragile, difficult to audit, and increasingly hard to scale.

The answer was not another incremental fix. It required rethinking the architecture of the model itself.

### Building a Unified Solver

Rather than maintaining several specialised macros, the pricing framework was rebuilt around a single parameterised solver.

Instead of selecting a specific macro, users simply define the variable they wish to solve for. The same computational engine handles every scenario.

The shift—from multiple fixed rou-



**The biggest breakthrough in clean energy may not be technological—it may be financial.**



ties to a single adaptable engine—may appear modest in theory. In practice, however, it transforms the way the model operates.

New deal structures no longer require new code. They require only different inputs. The framework becomes flexible rather than reactive.

Several additional enhancements strengthened the model:

- Circular dependencies were addressed through cleaner iterative logic.
- Convergence criteria were explicitly defined, replacing unreliable heuristics.
- Robust error-handling mechanisms ensured incorrect outputs were identified immediately.

Together, these improvements significantly enhanced reliability. In a high-volume transaction environment, that translates directly into lower operational risk and greater confidence in decision-making.



### Why Flexibility Matters

The redesigned engine proved capable of supporting transactions across a broad range of asset classes, including solar generation, battery storage, EV charging infrastructure, and multi-site energy portfolios operating across multiple geographies.

This flexibility is increasingly important.

Traditional financial models often struggle with cross-asset projects because each asset category relies on distinct assumptions, revenue streams, and performance metrics. By separating the solver from the variable being solved, the new framework allows different technologies to be evaluated within a unified structure.

In practical terms, the model can evolve alongside the business itself. It no longer needs to be rebuilt every time markets shift or new technologies emerge.

### Hardware Is Advancing Faster Than Finance

The need for adaptable financial tools is being driven by the extraordinary pace of technological innovation.

Electric-vehicle charging infrastructure provides a striking example. Megawatt-scale charging systems, once considered experimental, are now entering commercial deployment. Platforms such as ABB's OMNI X-Series are capable of delivering up to 10 megawatts at a single site, while other manufacturers continue pushing performance boundaries.

Solar technology is advancing just as rapidly. High-efficiency tandem solar cells are surpassing previous performance limits, improving energy yields while reducing long-term costs.

These technological developments have significant implications for financial modelling:

- Lower equipment costs alter project-return calculations.
- Longer asset lifespans reshape maintenance assumptions.
- Higher power density affects infrastructure design and grid-connection costs.

Yet many financial models continue



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**Outdated financial models are increasingly becoming a bottleneck to renewable-energy deployment.**  
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to rely on outdated benchmarks and legacy assumptions.

When models fail to reflect technological reality, pricing becomes distorted. Projects may be delayed, mispriced, or rejected—not because they lack economic merit, but because the

modelling framework cannot accurately capture their value.

Updating assumptions alone is no longer sufficient. The underlying architecture of financial models must evolve as well.

### A Cross-Border Test Case

The value of a flexible pricing engine became particularly evident during a cross-border deployment in Mexico.

Working with Invisible Urban Charging, Redaptive applied its platform to charging-as-a-service projects that combined EV charging infrastructure, solar generation, and battery storage within a single financial structure.

Unlike traditional solar PPAs, these projects generate revenue through



multiple channels, including fleet utilization, service agreements, and infrastructure deployment contracts. Such complexity can overwhelm conventional modelling frameworks.

Because the pricing engine had already been decoupled from specific asset classes, there was no need to redesign the model from scratch. New project structures simply required new inputs.

This capability enabled the evaluation and pricing of integrated infrastructure projects at scale. The partnership ultimately supported a major deployment initiative involving charging networks and electric buses across central Mexico.

The lesson was clear: modern ener-

gy infrastructure increasingly requires models capable of managing complexity rather than avoiding it.

### India's Next Opportunity

India presents a particularly compelling case for this evolution.

The country has expanded its EV ecosystem at remarkable speed, growing from a relatively small charging network to tens of thousands of public charging stations within a few years. Even so, infrastructure density remains

## ● ● Smarter pricing engines can unlock investment across solar, battery storage and EV infrastructure. ● ●

well below global benchmarks.

Meeting India's electrification ambitions will require a dramatic increase in charging capacity, potentially exceeding one million public chargers within this decade.

At present, many projects are financed individually. Charging stations, solar systems, and energy-storage assets are frequently treated as separate investments. While workable, this approach often limits efficiency and financing flexibility.

A more integrated framework—one that combines energy supply, charging infrastructure, storage assets, and service agreements within a unified cash-flow structure—could unlock entirely new financing opportunities.

Such an approach would strengthen project bankability while improving capital efficiency.

This is precisely where a unified pricing engine becomes valuable. It provides the analytical foundation needed to evaluate increasingly complex, multi-component infrastructure investments.

### What Travels Across Markets

Infrastructure rarely transfers seamlessly from one country to another.

Regulatory frameworks differ. Equipment standards vary. Financing structures are often unique to local conditions.

Yet one critical element travels remarkably well: a robust pricing engine.

A well-designed financial model is largely geography-agnostic. It requires only reliable inputs and a consistent methodology for solving key variables. Whether applied in North America, Latin America, Europe, or Asia, the same framework can evaluate fundamentally different projects.

In that sense, pricing engines have become strategic assets in their own right.

### The Invisible Layer Driving the Transition

The energy transition is often measured through visible milestones—solar farms rising from deserts, charging stations appearing along highways, or new transmission lines connecting renewable resources to the grid.

But beneath these tangible achievements lies an invisible layer of software, financial logic, and analytical infrastructure.

That layer ultimately determines what gets built, where capital flows, and how quickly deployment occurs.

A few hundred lines of well-designed code can influence the allocation of millions of dollars in investment. When those systems are fragmented, outdated, or inflexible, progress slows. When they are unified, transparent, and adaptable, scale becomes achievable.

In an era defined by accelerating technological change and growing project complexity, this invisible layer matters as much as the hardware itself.

The future of clean energy will undoubtedly depend on better batteries, more efficient solar panels, and smarter grids. But it will also depend on something less visible: better tools for pricing, financing, and evaluating those technologies.

The spreadsheet, quietly evolving behind the scenes, may prove to be one of the most powerful engines of the energy transition. ■



GEN Z

# WHO COULD REDEFINE INDIA'S 2029 POLITICS?

India's Generation Z is emerging as one of the most influential demographic forces in the world's largest democracy. Digitally connected, politically aware and driven by both aspiration and anxiety, this generation is redefining how young citizens engage with governance, employment and public life. As the country moves towards the 2029 general elections, a key question looms large: will Gen Z merely influence electoral outcomes, or fundamentally reshape India's political conversation?



en by concerns over employment, inequality, governance and opportunity, these movements have transformed political conversations across several countries. Their rise has prompted an important question closer to home: could India's Generation Z emerge as a decisive political force by the time the country approaches the 2029 general elections?

The answer is neither simple nor predictable. Yet the question itself has gained increasing relevance as India's younger citizens become more connected, more informed and more conscious of their collective influence.

### India's Largest Democratic Generation

Generation Z—generally defined as those born between the late 1990s and early 2010s—represents one of the most significant demographic forces in modern India. More than 370 million Indians are under the age of 25, making the country one of the youngest societies in the world.

This demographic reality presents both immense opportunity and considerable pressure.

Young Indians today are more digitally connected than any previous generation. Affordable smartphones, inexpensive data and widespread internet access have ensured that debates surrounding governance, economic policy, corruption, climate change, entrepreneurship and social justice reach them instantly. Unlike earlier generations, they are exposed not only to domestic political developments but also to global examples of youth participation in public life.

At the same time, they are entering adulthood at a moment of significant economic and social transition.

Many young Indians have benefited from expanding educational opportunities, technological innovation and the growth of India's digital economy. Government initiatives focused on entrepreneurship, startups, skill development and digital inclusion have sought to harness youthful energy for economic growth and nation-building.

Yet alongside these opportunities



BY ANJANI KUMAR

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A restless generation is asking difficult questions across much of Asia. From the streets of South Asia to protest sites elsewhere in the developing world, youth-led movements have increasingly emerged as powerful forces capable of influencing political discourse and, in some cases, altering political outcomes.

Coordinated through smartphones, amplified by social media, and driv-

lies a growing sense of unease.

Persistent unemployment, intense competition for government jobs, concerns about income inequality and anxieties regarding social mobility continue to shape the outlook of many young citizens. For millions of graduates entering the labour market each year, the gap between aspiration and opportunity remains a pressing concern.

It is this tension—between ambition and uncertainty—that increasingly shapes discussions about the political future of India's youth.

**Lessons from Beyond India**

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**The real challenge before India's youth lies in the widening gap between aspiration and opportunity—particularly in employment, education and economic mobility.**  
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patterns could emerge elsewhere.

In India, such comparisons frequently surface in online discussions and political commentary. Social media platforms such as Reddit, X and Instagram host regular debates on the role that young citizens should play in shaping the country's future.

Some voices argue that Indian youth must become more politically assertive and demand greater accountability from institutions. Others caution against romanticising protest movements, emphasising the importance of democratic processes, con-



Recent developments in parts of Asia and Africa have demonstrated the growing political influence of younger generations. In several countries, youth-led campaigns have mobilised around issues such as corruption, unemployment, governance failures and economic inequality.

These movements have often been decentralised, digitally coordinated and driven less by ideology than by accumulated frustration. Their speed and scale have attracted global attention and encouraged debate about whether similar

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**More than 370 million Indians are under the age of 25, making Generation Z a demographic force that no political party can afford to ignore.**  
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stitutional mechanisms and electoral participation.

What these discussions reveal is not necessarily a desire for confrontation, but a growing awareness among young Indians that they possess considerable political influence.

**A Politically Aware but Diverse Generation**

India's younger generation is far from apolitical. Student movements, issue-based campaigns and civic activism continue to play a visible role

in public life. Recent protests concerning employment opportunities, regional autonomy, environmental issues and educational reforms demonstrate that young people remain willing to engage when matters directly affect their lives.

Yet India differs significantly from many countries often cited in discussions about youth mobilisation.

The country's federal structure disperses political power across states, regions and multiple levels of governance. Political identities are shaped not only by age but also by language, caste, religion, geography and local economic realities.

As a result, a young voter in Bihar may prioritise employment and migration issues. An urban professional in Bengaluru may focus on entrepreneurship and innovation. A student in Tamil Nadu may be more concerned with regional identity and educational policy, while young citizens in the Northeast may focus on entirely different priorities.

This diversity makes the emergence of a single nationwide youth movement less likely.

Political analysts often observe that Indian youth are politically engaged but not politically uniform. Their concerns are real, but they are rarely identical.

### The Real Influence of Gen Z

The political influence of Generation Z may ultimately emerge in a form very different from the mass protest movements seen elsewhere.

Its impact is more likely to be felt through voting behaviour, digital campaigning, issue-based mobilisation, civic participation and public opinion formation.

For political parties, this reality is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

The ruling establishment continues to emphasise youth empowerment through infrastructure development, digital initiatives, entrepreneurship programmes and welfare schemes. Opposition parties, meanwhile, increasingly focus on employment generation, educational opportunities, constitutional values and democrat-

ic accountability when appealing to younger voters.

Both sides recognise that Gen Z will represent a crucial electoral constituency in the years ahead.

Unlike previous generations, young voters consume information differently. They are less dependent on traditional media, more influenced by digital networks and often more willing to challenge conventional political narratives. Their political choices are shaped not only by ideology but also by issues that directly affect everyday life, including jobs, educa-



**Unlike many countries that have witnessed unified youth movements, India's Gen Z remains shaped by diverse regional, linguistic, caste and economic realities.**



**The political impact of Generation Z may not emerge through street protests, but through ballots, digital activism, civic engagement and issue-based voting.**



tion, affordability, technology and quality of governance.

### The Employment Challenge

Among all issues affecting young Indians, employment remains the most significant.

India's economy continues to grow faster than many major economies, yet concerns regarding job creation persist. The demand for secure employment opportunities—particularly among educated youth—remains strong across

both urban and rural India.

For many young citizens, questions surrounding employment, skills, entrepreneurship and economic mobility are likely to play a decisive role in shaping political preferences.

This does not necessarily translate into political unrest. Rather, it suggests that future elections may increasingly be fought on issues that directly affect the aspirations of younger voters.

Any government, regardless of political affiliation, will ultimately be judged by its ability to create opportunities for the country's largest demographic group.

### Looking Towards 2029

As India moves towards the next general election cycle, the debate surrounding Generation Z is unlikely to disappear.

The more relevant question is not whether India's youth will replicate political movements seen elsewhere, but how they will choose to exercise their influence within the framework of the world's largest democracy.

Will economic aspirations dominate political choices? Will digital platforms create new forms of civic engagement? Will young voters reward performance over rhetoric? Or will a stronger sense of generational identity emerge around issues such as employment, education and opportunity?

Definitive answers remain elusive.

What is clear, however, is that India's political future cannot be understood without understanding its youth.

Generation Z is educated, connected, ambitious and increasingly aware of its collective voice. Its influence may not arrive through dramatic upheaval or street mobilisation. It may instead reshape Indian politics through ballots rather than barricades, participation rather than protest, and sustained democratic engagement rather than sudden disruption.

As 2029 approaches, one reality stands out: India's youngest generation is no longer merely observing politics. It is steadily becoming one of the most important forces shaping it. ■

# शौक

हर मनुष्य के भीतर एक संसार बसता है—सपनों, शौकों और अधूरी इच्छाओं का संसार। लेकिन जीवन हमेशा उन सपनों के अनुरूप नहीं चलता। कभी परिवार, कभी परिस्थितियाँ, तो कभी किसी अपने के प्रति निभाई जाने वाली जिम्मेदारियाँ हमें ऐसे मोड़ पर ला खड़ा करती हैं, जहाँ अपने और पराए, शौक और कर्तव्य, सुख और त्याग के बीच चुनाव करना पड़ता है। यह कहानी उसी चुनाव की कथा है—एक ऐसी मुलाकात की, जो यह समझा देती है कि त्याग हमेशा हार नहीं होता; कई बार वही मनुष्य की सबसे बड़ी उपलब्धि बन जाता है।



ललितप्रसाद मथुरादत्त जोशी

लेखक हिंदी में निरंतर अपना लेख व कविताएँ प्रकाशित करते रहे हैं। इनकी कविताएँ 'साहित्यनामा' एवं 'अमर उजाला' में प्रकाशित हो चुकी हैं। इसके अतिरिक्त, इनके दो काव्य-संग्रह *बढ़ता भारत* और *मानव किस ओर बढ़ रहा है* भी प्रकाशित हो चुके हैं।

**बा**त अगर शौक की हो, तो कुछ भी जायज़ लगता है, और यदि शौक ही जीवन से निरस्त हो जाए, तो फिर जीवन का अर्थ ही क्या रह जाता है। अपनी लड़खड़ाती उम्र के संघर्षों के बीच भी, एक दार्शनिक की भाँति अपनी पराकाष्ठाओं को हृदय के किसी बंद तहखाने से मुक्त कर, वह आज समाज के सामने अपनी एक अलग छवि प्रस्तुत करने में लगा हुआ था। समय और पैसों में से थोड़ा-थोड़ा काटकर कुछ क्षण स्वयं के लिए भी जी लेने वाले सिद्धांत को आज सोपाल पूरी तरह निभा रहा था। घर की जिम्मेदारियों से मिले कुछ क्षणों के अवकाश ने उसे मानो एक नए पायदान पर ला खड़ा किया था।

अपने समस्त दर्द और थकान की अनुभूतियों को कुछ देर के लिए दूर कर, इस थके हुए जीवन को तरोताज़ा करने हेतु आज इस घुमक्कड़ प्रवृत्ति की लालसा उसे उन दृश्यों तक ले आई थी, जिन्हें वह कभी 10 बाय 10 के कमरों में, उलझते धागों के बीच बैठकर कल्पना में देखा करता था। पेशे से दर्जी होने के कारण उसकी आँखों की गहराइयों में हमेशा एक ऐसा चित्र बसता रहता, जो सीमित वस्तुओं के बीच भी असीमित संभावनाओं को देखने का निरंतर प्रयास करता था। जो व्यक्ति अत्यंत सूक्ष्म वस्तुओं को देखते हुए भी अपने भीतर नए दृश्यों का सृजन करने की क्षमता रखता हो, वह निश्चय ही अपने वर्तमान जीवन की एकरसता से ऊब चुका होता है।

कर्तव्य और दायित्वों के अतिरिक्त, मनुष्य को अपने लिए भी कुछ क्षण जी लेने चाहिए—

इस विचार को वह अपने दैनिक जीवन में हमेशा संजोए रखता था। आज उन्हीं अमूर्त इच्छाओं को मूर्त रूप देने के लिए वह प्रकृति और सृष्टि के इस सौंदर्य को पूरी तरह आत्मसात कर रहा था। भविष्य की स्मृतियों को धरोहर के रूप में कुछ तस्वीरों में कैद कर, उसे ऐसा प्रतीत हो रहा

अपंग व्यक्ति की ओर गया, जो घायल अवस्था में भी जी-तोड़ मेहनत कर रहा था। बार-बार लोहे पर प्रहार करते हुए कई बार उसके हाथ से हथौड़ा छूटकर एक ओर जा गिरता, और उसके चेहरे पर दर्द की स्पष्ट रेखाएँ उभर आतीं। तभी सोपाल को स्मरण हो आया कि वह स्वयं भी इसी



था मानो उसने अपने जीवन का कोई बहुत बड़ा मुकाम हासिल कर लिया हो। क्षणिक सुख के इस संसार में उसने स्वयं को कहीं-न-कहीं इसी रूप में देखने का प्रयास किया था, इसलिए इन क्षणों को जीवंत बनाए रखने में उसे कभी कोई कठिनाई महसूस नहीं हुई।

इन सुखद क्षणों से लौटते समय, सड़क के दूसरी ओर क्षणभर के लिए उसका ध्यान एक

प्रकार जिम्मेदारियों से बंधा हुआ व्यक्ति है और अब परिश्रम की यह निरंतरता उसे भीतर तक थका चुकी है।

सहानुभूति-वश सोपाल उसके निकट जा पहुँचा और उसके हाथों में उठते-गिरते हथौड़े के प्रहारों को ध्यान से देखते हुए आश्चर्यचकित स्वर में पूछ बैठा—

“क्या इतनी भीषण गर्मी में लगातार इस



तरह काम करते हुए तुम थक नहीं जाते? कई बार तुम्हारे प्रचंड प्रहारों के बीच तुम्हारा टूटता हुआ मनोबल तुम्हारे चेहरे पर साफ दिखाई देता है, फिर भी तुम अपने हठ पर क्यों अड़े हुए हो? क्यों न कोई आसान-सा काम कर लेते? पेट की भूख मिटाने के लिए और भी तो कई काम हैं। इस तरह जोखिम भरा काम क्या तुम्हें और अधिक कष्टदायक नहीं लगता?

मनुष्य को अपना कर्म और कर्तव्य अवश्य निभाना चाहिए, इसमें कोई दो राय नहीं; किन्तु उसे अपनी सीमाओं, शक्ति और संभावनाओं का समुचित आकलन करते हुए ही निर्णय लेना चाहिए।”

वह व्यक्ति कुछ देर और ज़ोर-ज़ोर से प्रहार करता रहा। फिर रुककर उसने माथे से पसीना पोंछा और कुछ कहने को हुआ। उसकी बात सुनते ही सोपाल भावुक हो उठा।

उस अपंग पुरुष ने शांत स्वर में कहा, “जब से मेरे भाई का देहांत हुआ है, तब से यह काम मैं ही संभाल रहा हूँ। उसके बच्चे अभी छोटे हैं और उसकी पत्नी गर्भवती है। कोई मदद कर भी दे, तो दो-चार दिनों से अधिक क्या साथ निभा पाएगा? ऐसा कोई नहीं है, जो इस समय उनके हालात में स्थायी सहारा बन सके। और यह पुश्तैनी दुकान है, जिसे अब

● ●  
**कर्तव्य और शौक के इस द्वंद्व में भी बहुत कुछ गंवाकर शायद बहुत कुछ पाया भी जा सकता है।**

● ●  
**यह कहानी बताती है कि जीवन का वास्तविक सौंदर्य केवल सपनों को जीने में नहीं, बल्कि दूसरों के जीवन को संभालने के साहस में भी छिपा होता है।**

● ●  
छोड़ा भी नहीं जा सकता।”

अपना दुःख प्रकट करते हुए सोपाल कुछ क्षण दीवारों की ओर देखता हुआ स्तब्ध खड़ा रहा। तभी दीवार पर बनी एक सुंदर भित्ति-चित्रकारी ने उसका ध्यान पूरी तरह अपनी ओर खींच लिया। वह उस चित्र को देखकर मुग्ध हो उठा और जिज्ञासावश पूछ बैठा—

“यह भित्ति-चित्र किसने बनाया है? यह

अत्यंत सुंदर प्रतीत हो रहा है।”

उत्तर में वह अपंग व्यक्ति सहज स्वर में बोला कि यह चित्र उसी ने बनाया है। उसने बताया कि उसे चित्रकारी में विशेष रुचि है और अपने शौक को जीवित रखने से भी अधिक, यदि वह किसी चीज़ को प्राथमिकता देना चाहता है, तो वह है अपने स्वर्गीय भाई के प्रति अपने कर्तव्य को निभाना।

वह आगे कहने लगा, “मैं अपने भाई को सच्ची श्रद्धांजलि तभी दे पाऊँगा, जब उसके परिवार को इस गहरी खाई से बाहर निकाल सकूँ। यदि मेरे जीवन का यह अंतिम उद्देश्य मेरे शौक को पूरी तरह नष्ट भी कर दे, तो भी मैं यही समझूँगा कि मैंने किसी उचित निर्णय के लिए अपने शौक का त्याग किया है। कर्तव्य और शौक के इस द्वंद्व में मैं बहुत कुछ गंवाकर भी शायद बहुत कुछ पा चुका हूँ।”

एक पल के लिए सिर खुजलाते हुए सोपाल मन-ही-मन सोच में पड़ गया। वह स्वयं सबल होते हुए भी अपने पेट-गुज़ारे से अधिक अपने शौक के पीछे उम्रभर भटकता रहा, और आज उसके सामने एक ऐसा व्यक्ति खड़ा था, जो स्वयं असमर्थ होते हुए भी बिना किसी मानसिक क्लेश के, सबकुछ त्यागकर अपने कर्तव्य-पथ पर निस्वार्थ भाव से अडिग खड़ा है। ■

## WHERE PLANETS SHAPE POSSIBILITIES

Astrology has long been regarded not merely as a tool for predicting future events, but as a traditional system for understanding the deeper patterns and rhythms that shape human life. Central to this practice is the Janam Kundli, or birth chart, which maps the positions of celestial bodies at the exact moment of an individual's birth. Astrologers interpret these planetary alignments to identify potential tendencies, challenges, opportunities, and life directions that may influence a person's journey over time. In this sense, astrology is viewed less as a doctrine of fixed destiny and more as a framework for self-awareness, reflection, and informed choice. Within this enduring tradition, practices such as mantra chanting, charity, fasting, and the use of specific gemstones are often recommended to cultivate inner balance and harmonise life with the perceived rhythms of cosmic influence.



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With over fifteen years of dedicated practice in astrology, the author brings a deep engagement with classical astrological principles, offering interpretations that are thoughtful, grounded, and insightful.

### जून 2026 मासिक राशिफल

जून 2026 का महीना कई राशियों के लिए नए अवसर, धन लाभ और रिश्तों में बदलाव लेकर आ रहा है। गुरु ग्रह का प्रभाव कई राशियों को सकारात्मक ऊर्जा देगा। यह महीना करियर, स्वास्थ्य और पारिवारिक मामलों में संतुलन बनाए रखने का संकेत देता है।

#### मेष (Aries)

इस महीने आत्मविश्वास बढ़ेगा। नौकरी में नई जिम्मेदारियाँ मिल सकती हैं। धन लाभ के योग हैं लेकिन खर्च भी बढ़ सकते हैं। परिवार का सहयोग मिलेगा। प्रेम संबंध मजबूत होंगे। यात्रा के योग बन सकते हैं। स्वास्थ्य में सिरदर्द या थकान से बचें।

#### वृषभ (Taurus)

धन और करियर के मामले में जून शुभ रहेगा। रुका हुआ पैसा वापस मिल सकता है। व्यापार में नए अवसर आएंगे।

परिवार में खुशियों का माहौल रहेगा। वैवाहिक जीवन मधुर रहेगा। खान-पान पर ध्यान दें।

#### मिथुन (Gemini)

यह महीना आपके लिए विशेष रहेगा। नए काम की शुरुआत हो सकती है। करियर में सफलता मिलेगी और सामाजिक दायरा बढ़ेगा। प्रेम जीवन में थोड़ी सावधानी रखें। मानसिक तनाव से बचने के लिए योग और ध्यान लाभकारी रहेगा।

#### कर्क (Cancer)

गुरु ग्रह का शुभ प्रभाव मिलेगा। परिवार और घर से जुड़ी खुशखबरी मिल सकती है। नौकरी में सम्मान बढ़ेगा। आर्थिक स्थिति मजबूत होगी। रिश्तों में भावुकता अधिक रहेगी। स्वास्थ्य सामान्य रहेगा।

#### सिंह (Leo)

जून में आत्मविश्वास और ऊर्जा भरपूर रहेगी। नई योजनाओं में सफलता मिलेगी। प्रेम जीवन रोमांटिक रहेगा। परिवार में

किसी शुभ कार्य के योग हैं।  
वाहन चलाते समय सावधानी रखें।

### कन्या (Virgo)



कार्यस्थल पर मेहनत का फल मिलेगा।  
नई नौकरी के अवसर बन सकते हैं।  
आर्थिक मामलों में सोच-समझकर निर्णय लें।  
रिश्तों में धैर्य बनाए रखें।  
स्वास्थ्य अच्छा रहेगा लेकिन नींद पूरी लें।

### तुला (Libra)



यह महीना संतुलन और सफलता का रहेगा।  
प्रेम संबंधों में मधुरता बढ़ेगी। बिजनेस में लाभ  
मिलेगा। समाज में मान-सम्मान बढ़ेगा।  
छात्रों के लिए समय अनुकूल है।

### वृश्चिक (Scorpio)



जून में अचानक धन लाभ के योग बन रहे हैं।  
नौकरी में प्रमोशन मिल सकता है।  
परिवार में किसी बात को लेकर तनाव हो सकता है।  
स्वास्थ्य में पेट संबंधी समस्या से बचें।

### धनु (Sagittarius)



विदेश यात्रा या नए अवसर मिल सकते हैं।  
करियर में उन्नति होगी। प्रेम जीवन अच्छा रहेगा।  
धार्मिक कार्यों में रुचि बढ़ेगी।  
आर्थिक स्थिति मजबूत रहेगी।

### मकर (Capricorn)



काम का दबाव बढ़ सकता है लेकिन सफलता भी  
मिलेगी। परिवार का साथ मिलेगा।  
निवेश सोच-समझकर करें।  
स्वास्थ्य को लेकर लापरवाही न करें।

### कुंभ (Aquarius)



नए लोगों से मुलाकात लाभदायक रहेगी।  
नौकरी और व्यापार में प्रगति होगी।  
रिश्तों में ईमानदारी बनाए रखें।  
यात्रा के योग बन सकते हैं। स्वास्थ्य अच्छा रहेगा।

### मीन (Pisces)



जून 2026 आपके लिए भावनात्मक और  
आध्यात्मिक रूप से मजबूत महीना रहेगा।  
आर्थिक लाभ के अवसर मिलेंगे। परिवार में  
सुख-शांति रहेगी। प्रेम जीवन में खुशियां आएंगी।  
ध्यान और पूजा से मानसिक शांति मिलेगी।  
बढ़ेगी।  
परिवार में सुख-शांति रहेगी।  
सेहत सामान्य रहेगी।

## उपाय

हर गुरुवार पीले वस्त्र पहनें और जरूरतमंदों को भोजन दान करें।  
इससे गुरु ग्रह की कृपा बनी रहेगी।

# कौन ज्यादा गिर रहा है – रुपया या मीडिया?

पिछले कुछ वर्षों में भारतीय समाज ने दो ऐसी गिरावटों को बेहद करीब से देखा है, जिनका असर केवल अर्थव्यवस्था या मीडिया जगत तक सीमित नहीं रहा, बल्कि आम आदमी के रोज़मर्रा के जीवन, सोच और संवेदनाओं तक पहुँच गया है। एक तरफ डॉलर के मुकाबले लगातार कमजोर होता रुपया है, जो महँगाई, असुरक्षा और आर्थिक दबाव का प्रतीक बनता जा रहा है; दूसरी तरफ टीआरपी और सनसनी की अंधी दौड़ में अपनी विश्वसनीयता खोती मीडिया, जो खबरों से अधिक तमाशे का माध्यम बनती दिखाई देती है। तीखे व्यंग्य, हास्य और सामाजिक टिप्पणी के माध्यम से यह लेख इसी विडंबना की पड़ताल करता है कि आखिर ज्यादा खतरनाक गिरावट किसकी है—रुपये की या मीडिया की?



डॉ. निलय रंजन सिंह

हाल ही में मिले 'सीईओ ऑफ द ईयर' पुरस्कार सहित कई अंतरराष्ट्रीय गौरव से सम्मानित, लेखक वर्तमान में स्टेट बैंक ऑफ इंडिया, डीआईएफसी, दुबई के मुख्य कार्यकारी अधिकारी हैं।

पिछले कुछ वर्षों से दो चीज़ें लगातार 'गिरावट' के रिकॉर्ड बना रही हैं—एक है हमारा प्यारा रुपया, जो डॉलर के सामने हर दिन नया 'लो' बना रहा है। दूसरी है हमारी 'आज़ाद' मीडिया, जो टीआरपी और ब्रेकिंग न्यूज़ के चक्कर में हर दिन पाताल के नए आयाम खोज रही है। ऊँचाई तो वह कब की छोड़ चुकी थी... अब गहराई (माफ कीजिएगा... गढ़ू) में जा रही है। सवाल है—कौन ज्यादा गिर रहा है? और सबसे मजेदार सवाल—किसकी गिरने की क्षमता ज्यादा है? चलिए, तोलते हैं दोनों का 'पतन'...

मैंने अपने कई मित्रों से—और जो मित्र नहीं थे उनसे भी—यही सवाल पूछा। आश्चर्य यह था कि जवाब लगभग एक जैसे ही मिले।

रुपया और मीडिया दोनों में गिरने की होड़ लगी है, लेकिन मीडिया ज्यादा गिर चुका है। रुपया उसी निम्न स्तर को प्राप्त करने के लिए प्रयासरत है।

पहला पड़ाव: रुपया – गिरना इसकी फितरत है, पर इस बार तो...

आपने नोटिस किया? रुपया अब बाजार की सब्जी की तरह हो गया है—हर दिन नया रेट, हर दिन नया दर्द। कभी 86, कभी 87, कभी सुनने को मिलता था—90 भी आएगा। अब तो 90 ही नया 'लो' है। फिर कहा गया—91 से नीचे नहीं गिरेगा। 94 हो गया तो क्या हुआ, 95 नहीं पार करने देंगे... और अब तो 95 भी नया 'लो' हो गया। कितना गिरोगे 'रुपया', बता तो दो कृपया।

अर्थशास्त्री टीवी पर बैठे सिर झटकते हैं, सरकार कहती है—“चिंता मत करो, रुपया मजबूत है।” और हम देखते हैं कि हमारी जेब में जो दस रुपये के चावल आते थे, वे अब बीस के हो गए।

अमेरिका और ईरान में झगड़ा हो या न हो, रुपया गिरने का कोई-न-कोई बहाना ढूँढ ही लेता है। हाँ, मीडिया से गिरने की होड़ में इस लड़ाई ने दौड़ जरूर तेज कर दी। अमेरिकी डॉलर थोड़ा हँसा, तो रुपया रो पड़ा। अमेरिकी फेडरल रिज़र्व ने ब्याज दर बढ़ाई, तो रुपया

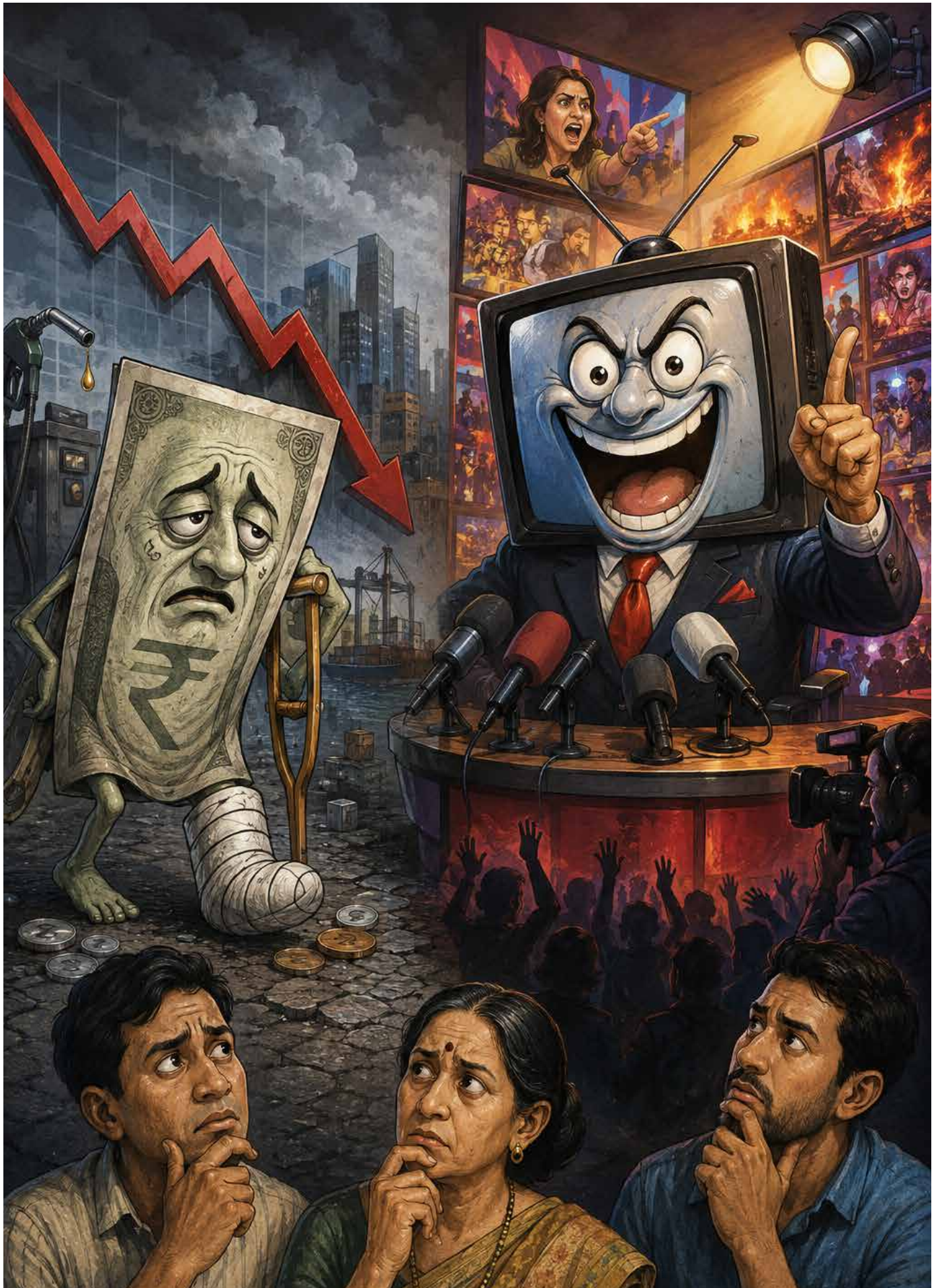
भी उतनी ही तेजी से नीचे उतरा—मानो वह एलिवेटर का बटन दबाकर 'ग्राउंड फ्लोर से भी नीचे' जा रहा हो।

पर सबसे दिलचस्प बात—रुपये के गिरने पर 'शोक' नहीं, बल्कि एक तरह की 'उदास हास्य' की परंपरा बन गई है। लोग फेसबुक पर मीम्स बनाते हैं—“रुपया

● ●  
रुपया गिरता है तो जेब हल्की होती है, मीडिया गिरती है तो समाज।

● ●  
कभी मीडिया रुपये को आईना दिखाती थी, आज रुपया मीडिया को शर्म दिखा रहा है।

● ●  
इतना गिरा कि अब वॉलेंटाइन डे पर डॉलर से प्यार करने का मन करता है” या “रुपये को देखो, पहले से पतला हो गया—आहार-विहार ठीक नहीं है।”



मीम्स तो बन रहे हैं, पर असली बात जो हमें खाए जा रही है, वह यह कि जब रुपया गिरता है, तो आम आदमी का पेट गिरता है, उसकी ईएमआई बढ़ती है, उसकी नींद घटती है। रुपये के गिरने पर कोई ढोल नहीं बजाता, कोई पटाखे नहीं फोड़ता—सिवाय उन विदेशी निवेशकों के, जो रुपये के गिरने पर मालामाल हो रहे हैं। उनके लिए तो यह 'उत्सव' है।

वैसे भी जिस देश में 80 करोड़ जनता 5 किलो राशन पर जी रही हो, वहाँ डॉलर करेंसी से ज्यादा डॉलर 'अंडरवियर' समझ में आता है।

तो रुपये की गिरावट से परेशान कुछ खास लोगों की पार्टी है—जिनके पास डॉलर है, जिन्होंने पहले से प्रॉपर्टी खरीद रखी है, या जो अमेरिका में पैसा कमाते हैं। बाकी सबके लिए तो यह 'अंतिम संस्कार' है, पर उस पर भी रोने की फुर्सत नहीं—क्योंकि सुबह दूध और ब्रेड के दाम देखने हैं, जो पेट्रोल की कीमत बढ़ने के साथ बढ़ जाते हैं, और पेट्रोल डॉलर के बढ़ने से बढ़ जाता है। इसलिए कसूरवार क्रूर डॉलर है, मासूम रुपया नहीं।

रुपया गिर रहा है—जोरदार रफ्तार से, रुकने का नाम नहीं ले रहा। पर हमने उपाय ढूँढ लिया है—विदेश नहीं जाएंगे, सोना नहीं खरीदेंगे और पब्लिक ट्रांसपोर्ट का उपयोग करेंगे। लेकिन सोना नहीं खरीदेंगे तो सोने के व्यवसाय में लगे लोग क्या करेंगे? क्या वे भी 5 किलो राशन लेने वाली 80 करोड़ की सूची में शामिल होंगे?

ऑटोमोबाइल सेक्टर पहले ही घिसट रहा था। जब पब्लिक ट्रांसपोर्ट ही रहेगा, तो कार कौन खरीदेगा? और अगर ये सब नहीं होगा, तो जीडीपी पर इनका असर शायद नहीं पड़ेगा—कोई नया अर्थशास्त्री बता दे। सोने-चाँदी पर एक्सआइज़ ड्यूटी बढ़ी, तो दुबई में सोना-चाँदी के व्यापारी खुश हैं, क्योंकि अब पर्यटक वहाँ से ज्यादा खरीदारी करेंगे—और शायद गोल्ड स्मगलर्स भी।

मीडिया – गिरने की सतत निरंतरता... यह भी 'ब्रेकिंग न्यूज़'

अब बात करते हैं हमारी 'लोकतंत्र की चौथी एस्टेट' की—जो असल में चौथी मंजिल से गिरकर बेसमेंट में जा पहुँची है। मीडिया का गिरना रुपये के गिरने से बिल्कुल अलग है। रुपया गिरता है चुपके से, दर्द देकर। मीडिया गिरती है ढोल-नगाड़ों के साथ, अपने ही शोर में।

आपने देखा है? टीवी चैनल खोलिए—हर पाँच मिनट में 'ब्रेकिंग न्यूज़' का झंडा लहराता है। "ब्रेकिंग: एक बिल्ली ने पेड़ पर चढ़ने से मना कर दिया!" और अगले पाँच मिनट में तीन विशेषज्ञ बहस कर रहे हैं—बिल्ली देशद्रोही है या पेड़।

मीडिया की विश्वसनीयता इतनी गिर गई है कि अब लोग 'न्यूज़ चैनल' को 'नौटंकी चैनल' कहने लगे हैं। लेकिन नौटंकी का भी एक स्तर

होता है, भारतीय मीडिया का नहीं।

कभी सोचा है—मीडिया कितनी ज्यादा गिरी है? पिछले कुछ सालों में तो इसने जमीन के नीचे भी सुरंग खोद ली है। एक चैनल कहता है—“रुपया गिरा, बेरोजगारी बढ़ी, सरकार की गारंटी फेल।” दूसरा चैनल तुरंत पलटवार करता है—“रुपया पिछली सरकारों के मुकाबले गिरने में मजबूत हो रहा है, विपक्ष झूठ बोल रहा है।”

आम आदमी घूम-घूमकर पागल हो रहा है। गिरने में मजबूत होना क्या होता है? एक समझदार ने समझाया—दूसरों के मुकाबले कम गति से गिरना।

असली सच्चाई क्या है? किसी को पता नहीं—क्योंकि मीडिया ने 'सच' शब्द को अपनी डिक्शनरी से निकाल फेंका है।

पर सबसे बड़ी विडंबना यह है—रुपये के गिरने पर लोग चुप रहते हैं, मगर

## रुपये की गिरावट आर्थिक संकट है, लेकिन मीडिया की गिरावट नैतिक संकट।

## टीआरपी की भूख ने खबरों को सूचना से ज्यादा तमाशा बना दिया है।

मीडिया के गिरने पर लोग हँसते हैं, मज़ाक उड़ाते हैं। क्योंकि मीडिया की गिरावट में एक 'मनोरंजन मूल्य' आ गया है। जब कोई एंकर चिल्लाता है—“देश का अंतिम सत्य यही है!”—तो हमें 'द श्री स्टूजेज' की याद आने लगती है।

जब पैनलिस्ट एक-दूसरे पर चिल्लाते हैं, तो हम सोचते हैं—ये वही लोग हैं जो सुबह एक चैनल पर कहते थे कि 'तेल सस्ता होगा' और शाम को दूसरे चैनल पर कहते हैं कि 'तेल सस्ता करना खतरनाक है।'

सोशल मीडिया पर लोग मीडिया का मज़ाक उड़ाने वाले पेज चलाते हैं। ट्विटर पर हर दिन कोई-न-कोई 'न्यूज़ चैनल ब्लूपर' वायरल होती है। यहाँ तक कि कॉमेडियनों ने अपने करियर का आधार ही 'मीडिया व्यंग्य' बना लिया है।

क्यों? क्योंकि मीडिया ने 'गिरना' सीख लिया है—आपदा में अवसर की तलाश करते हुए, बिना शर्म के, बिना संवेदना के। वह अपनी गिरावट को 'बिजनेस मॉडल' बना चुकी है। जितनी गिरती है, उतनी टीआरपी बढ़ती है। लोग चैनल बदलते नहीं, बल्कि उसी पर

टिके रहते हैं—इस उम्मीद में कि “अब क्या गलत बोलेंगे?”

मीडिया का गिरना अब एक राष्ट्रीय उत्सव बन चुका है।

एक जमाना था जब मीडिया रुपये को आईना दिखाती थी, आज रुपया मीडिया को शर्म दिखा रहा है।

बीस साल पहले अगर रुपया गिरता था, तो टीवी पर अर्थशास्त्री गंभीर चेहरा बनाकर 'आपातकाल' जैसी आवाज़ में बात करते थे। मीडिया उस दौर में 'गंभीर' थी—कभी-कभी ऊबाऊ, लेकिन कम-से-कम वह बेशर्म, बेगैरत, निर्लज्ज और निकृष्ट नहीं थी।

आज मीडिया खुद ही एक 'टीआरपी मुद्रा' बन गई है—जिसका मूल्य रुपये से भी तेजी से गिर रहा है। एक चैनल का एंकर सुबह कहता है—“हम सच लाएंगे”, और शाम को दूसरे चैनल पर वही एंकर जाकर कहता है—“वो सब मूर्ख थे जो सच ढूँढ रहे थे।”

एक राजनीतिक विश्लेषक दूसरे चैनल में पत्रकार हो जाता है, तीसरे चैनल में आम आदमी और चौथे में विषय-विशेषज्ञ। सारे रोल खुले हैं—विलेन से कॉमेडियन तक।

रुपये का गिरना एक आर्थिक मुद्दा है—उसका समाधान जटिल है। लेकिन मीडिया का गिरना एक नैतिक मुद्दा है—उसका समाधान केवल जनता के पास है। और जनता ने अपना अजीब फैसला दिया है—“तुम गिरो, हम हँसेंगे।”

और यही सबसे बड़ी दुखद कॉमेडी है—मीडिया इतनी गिर चुकी है कि लोग उसे गिरते देखकर तालियाँ बजाते हैं। रुपया गिरता है तो लोग चुप हो जाते हैं—क्योंकि उसे गिरते देखना सुखद नहीं, दर्दनाक है।

चाल, चरित्र और चेहरा

रुपये की गिरने की चाल पिछले एक साल में बहुत तेज रही है, लेकिन मीडिया की गिरावट की चाल तो पिछले एक दशक से ही बेलगाम हो चुकी है।

चरित्र पर बात न ही करें तो अच्छा है—मीडिया का चरित्र शायद सैकड़ों शोध का विषय हो सकता है।

चेहरा तो रुपये का बदलता रहता है—कहीं वह भारतीय रुपया है, कहीं पाकिस्तानी रुपया, नेपाली रुपया, श्रीलंकाई रुपया, मॉरीशस रुपया, सेशेल्स रुपया, इंडोनेशियाई रुपिया या मालदीवियन रुपिया। लेकिन मीडिया का चेहरा आजकल दो ही रह गया है—एक चाटुकारिता, निर्लज्जता और अप्रासंगिकता का; दूसरा निष्पक्ष पत्रकारिता का, जिसके पैरोकार अब बहुत कम बचे हैं।

गिरावट की 'तीव्रता' में रुपया आगे है—क्योंकि दो साल में 20 प्रतिशत गिरना बहुत है।

लेकिन गिरावट की 'निर्लज्जता' में मीडिया आगे है—क्योंकि रुपये को शर्म तो है, मीडिया को नहीं। ■

# When the Rains *Awaken* the Heart of India:

## MONSOON JOURNEYS THROUGH MADHYA PRADEH

*As the first monsoon clouds drift over central India, Madhya Pradesh undergoes a transformation that is nothing short of poetic. The plains turn emerald, Sal forests breathe again, rivers swell with purpose, and waterfalls—silent for months—return in full voice. The countryside reveals its most romantic self, inviting travelers not to rush, but to linger, listen, and feel the space, solitude and a sense of quiet discovery.*

### *Roads Washed in Romance*

Enjoy the serenity of the landscape with compelling road journeys. The Mandu–Maheshwar stretch is particularly evocative in the monsoon. Rain-softened medieval palaces, cloud-wrapped ramparts, and the fuller, calmer flow of the Narmada create moments of reflection and beauty. Heritage walks in light rain transform stone corridors into contemplative spaces.

### *Into the Satpuras: Where Mist Meets Memory*

From Bhopal, pass by the Narmada's gentle rhythm before climbing into the Satpura forests. In Narmadapuram, misty ghats and slow mornings by the river set the tone. Pachmarhi, revived by rain, reveals flowing waterfalls and cloud-kissed viewpoints at Dhoopgarh. While staying at MP Tourism's Amaltas, a resort run entirely by women, enjoy forest trails that celebrate silence as much as scenery.

### *Hidden Valleys and Quiet Escapes*

Further south, Tamia's winding roads, drifting clouds, and dramatic valley viewpoints reward those seeking stillness. Patalkot, a secluded horseshoe-shaped valley, comes alive with trickling waterfalls, lush medicinal flora, and guided cultural encounters.

### *Wildlife in the Rain: A Rare Perspective*

For those willing to travel just off the calendar's edge, the monsoon ushers in a rare opportunity for wildlife photography in the buffer zones of Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Pench, and Satpura – with forest paths unmarked by crowds, quieter viewpoints and diffused light. Immerse yourself in guided nature walks that reveal fresh pugmarks on soft earth, deer grazing in meadows washed clean by showers and butterfly populations that explore in colour.

### *Slow Travel, Deep Connection*

Cycling trails around forest fringes and villages allow travelers to move at nature's pace, accompanied by the scent of wet leaves and wildflowers. Importantly, these experiences are designed by Madhya Pradesh Tourism with safety and conservation in mind—expert naturalists, defined trails, and regulated access ensure that both visitor and habitat are respected.



Jahaz Mahal, Mandu



Ahilya Fort, Maheshwar



Sabarwani Homestay, Pachmari



Tamia Hill Station

### *Flavours of the Monsoon*

Monsoon journeys in Madhya Pradesh are more about intimacy than mere spectacle - about clouds drifting through forests, peacocks calling at dusk, and landscapes rediscovered in their most honest form. Soak it in with a dash of local cuisine - steaming chai, bhutte ka kees, poha, dal bafra and Bhopali gosht korma — best when savoured against a rain-cooled backdrop.

To travel through the heart of India when it rains is to witness renewal in real time. It is to drive through mist and emerge into sunlight, to hear forests hum with life, to watch ancient stones glisten under rain. And to bring back memories that last a lifetime.

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