

PRAVASI INDIANS

The India Connection

₹ 200/-

VASUDHAIV KUTUMBAKAM
**INDIA'S HUMANITARIAN
DIPLOMACY**

BEHIND THE CURTAIN
**SANDEEP DUTTA'S
INTERVIEW**

MOHAMMED RAFI
THE DAWN OF A LEGEND

HERITAGE
KAPILVASTU ON WPRLD BUDDHIST MAP

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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



Resilience and Responsibility

Dear Readers,

Every edition of *PRAVASI INDIANS* is a journey across ideas, voices, and experiences that shape our times. This August issue brings together eleven powerful narratives — each distinct, yet all bound by a common thread: resilience, responsibility, and the search for meaning in a changing world.

Our Cover Story, penned by Ambassador **SANJAY KUMAR VERMA**, reminds us that humanitarian assistance is more than compassion — it is credibility. From the Indian Ocean tsunami to Vaccine Maitri, India's evolution from recipient to dependable responder reflects a new grammar of diplomacy, where solidarity itself becomes strategy.

In National Awakening, **SUDHANSHU RANJAN** revisits Bal Gangadhar Tilak, whose *Gītā Rahasya* transformed philosophy into politics. Tilak's insistence on *Karmayoga* gave India's freedom struggle a moral foundation, reminding us that ideas can ignite revolutions as surely as actions.

The Economy section captures India at a turning point. **DR. NILAY RANJAN SINGH** explains how the RBI's concessional swap facilities defend the rupee amid global storms. **SATISH SINGH** explores the debate over polymer banknotes, asking whether trust can be printed on tougher, cleaner currency. And **B. SHEKHAR** situates India in the global supply chain, not as a mere consumer market but as a trusted producer — exporting resilience as much as goods.

Our Book Review by **DR. VED MITRA SHUKLA** introduces Neera Kashyap's *Cracks in the Wall*, a debut in adult fiction that etches lives fractured by violence and loneliness, yet illuminated by resilience and hope. Literature, here, becomes both mirror and balm.

In Behind the Curtain, **MADHU SEN**'s interview with **SANDEEP DUTTA** reveals the artistry of light design. His work reminds us that illumination is not technical support but storytelling itself — a philosophy that earned him the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award.

The Mohammed Rafi essay by **DR. VENKATESH GANAPATHY** traces how a boy imitating a fakir's chant became the voice of generations. Rafi's journey from Punjab to Bombay's studios is a testament to discipline, devotion, and the power of song to define an era.

Heritage finds its place in **SUNITA DWIVEDI**'s piece on the Piprahawa relics. The return of the Peppe Collection jewels to India is not just preservation — it is reclamation, recentering Kapilvastu in the global Buddhist imagination.

Our Hindi features deepen the edition's range. **DR. PRASHANT SINHA**'s अपशिष्ट प्रबंधन confronts the mounting crisis of urban waste, reminding us that garbage is not merely filth but a reflection of lifestyle and responsibility. And in राशिफल, **ACHARYA DINAİK** explains astrology as a guide to selfunderstanding, where the Janam Kundli becomes a map of opportunities and challenges rather than fixed destiny.

Together, these eleven stories form a mosaic of India — a nation negotiating crises, rediscovering heritage, reimagining philosophy, and exporting trust. They remind us that resilience is not only about surviving adversity but about transforming it into strength, whether through diplomacy, economics, literature, or art.

As Publisher, I invite you to read this edition not as a collection of articles but as a conversation — between past and present, between India and the world, between struggle and hope. May these stories inspire reflection, responsibility, and renewal.

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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SUNITA DWIVEDI, who has travelled and covered the Buddhist heritage along the Asian Silk Road and authored five travel-ogues, says the sacred Piprahwa relics' return to India marks a watershed moment in the preservation of Buddhist heritage, adding "For the first time in more than a century, the jewels from the Peppe Collection — once threatened by auction abroad — now stand reunited with relics preserved in India, displayed in a stupa like pavilion at Delhi's Qila Rai Pithora." This grand exposition, *The Light and the Lotus: Relics of the Awakened One*, not only showcases treasures spanning over two millennia but also recenters Kapilvastu, the ancient homeland of the Buddha, in the global Buddhist imagination.

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Dubaibased CEO of State Bank of India, DIFC, **DR. NILAY RANJAN SINGH**, argues that India's external finances have rarely faced such a perfect storm: wardriven oil spikes, collapsing FDI, and relentless portfolio outflows. In mid2026, with reserves sliding and the rupee under siege, the RBI revived a familiar but potent weapon — concessional swap facilities. By mobilizing diaspora deposits and leveraging foreign borrowings, the central bank sought to defend the currency without choking growth, reviving a playbook that has steadied India before.

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Our Bengaluru Bureau Chief **B. SHEKHAR** observes: "History is once again at a turning point. After America's post-war dominance, Japan's industrial miracle, South Korea's rise, and China's transformation into the factory of the world, the spotlight is now shifting to India. No longer just a vast consumer market, India is emerging as a trusted producer — from premium smartphones and aerospace components to pharmaceuticals and specialty chemicals. Redefining global supply chains with scale, skill, and reliability in an era where resilience matters more than cost, trust has become India's greatest export."



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DR. VED MITRA SHUKLA, Associate Professor of English at Rajdhani College, University of Delhi, reviews Neera Kashyap's debut in adult fiction. *Cracks in the Wall* is both lyrical and unsettling. Drawing on her journalistic eye and literary craft, Kashyap etches lives fractured by violence, loneliness, and spiritual longing — yet illuminated by resilience and hope. "Her collection confronts uncomfortable truths while reminding us that even through the deepest cracks, light can stream in."

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DR. VENKATESH GANAPATHY, Faculty Member at ICFAI Business School, traces how Mohammed Rafi — a boy from a small Punjabi village imitating a wandering fakir's chant — became the voice that defined generations. "From a humble beginning to the bustling studios of Bombay, Rafi's journey was marked by discipline, devotion, and a rare gift that would soon captivate millions." This essay explores the formative years that shaped Rafi into the soul of Indian cinema.

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Senior journalist and columnist **SUDHANSHU RANJAN** remembers Bal Gangadhar Tilak on his death anniversary, describing him as more than a fiery nationalist — a thinker who reimagined scripture as a call to action. "In his *Gītā Rahasya*, written during his Mandalay jail term, Tilak rejected centuries of renunciatory interpretations and proclaimed the Gītā's true essence as *Karmayoga*. By turning philosophy into politics, he gave India's freedom struggle a moral foundation, transforming the sacred text into a manifesto for Swaraj."

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Delhi-based senior journalist, **MADHU SEN**, interviews the master of spot light design, **SANDEEP DUTTA** on behalf of *PRAVASI INDIANS* magazine. Known for blending technology with artistic nuance, Dutta has transformed performances across dance and theatre. His artistry earned him the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 2023 for stage light design.

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HOROSCOPE / राशिफल

आचार्य दिनायक कहते हैं कि ज्योतिष विज्ञान खगोलीय गतिविधियों और इंसानी अनुभवों के बीच के बारीक रिश्ते को समझने की कोशिश करता है। इसका आधार जन्म कुंडली है, जिसमें जन्म के ठीक समय ग्रहों की स्थिति दर्ज होती है। ज्योतिष किस्मत को पहले से तय मानने के बजाय जीवन के मौकों और चुनौतियों को पहचानने की कोशिश करता है। यह खुद को बेहतर ढंग से समझने के लिए प्रेरित करता है और साथ ही संतुलन और सकारात्मक जीवन जीने के लिए ध्यान, मंत्र, दान, व्रत और रत्न धारण करने जैसे उपाय भी बताता है।

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अपशिष्ट प्रबंधन

जाने माने पर्यावरणविद् **डॉ. प्रशान्त सिन्हा** कहते हैं कि भारत के शहरों से हर साल करोड़ों टन ठोस अपशिष्ट पैदा हो रहे हैं, लेकिन उसका निस्तारण अधूरा और अव्यवस्थित है। महानगरों की चमक दमक के पीछे खड़े कचरे के पहाड़ हवा को विषाक्त बना रहे हैं। वे आगे कहते हैं: "कचरा केवल गंदगी नहीं, बल्कि हमारी जीवनशैली और लापरवाही का प्रतिबिम्ब है। यह समस्या केवल पर्यावरणीय संकट नहीं, बल्कि सामाजिक जिम्मेदारी की परीक्षा भी है। जब तक नागरिक और सरकार दोनों मिलकर समाधान नहीं खोजेंगे, तब तक शहरीकरण की रफ्तार हमें स्वच्छ भविष्य की बजाय कचरे के अंधकार की ओर ले जाएगी।"

VASUDHAIV KUTUMBAKAM

INDIA'S HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY

When disaster strikes, the world notices the aircraft, ships, and rescue teams that rush in. Yet behind those dramatic images lies something deeper: humanitarian assistance as a measure of credibility, compassion, and international responsibility. For India, this journey has been shaped by recurring crises at home and a civilisational ethos of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. From the Indian Ocean tsunami to Vaccine Maitri, India's evolution from recipient to dependable responder reflects not just resilience, but a new grammar of diplomacy — one where solidarity becomes strategy, and relief becomes a bridge to global leadership.



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.

When disaster strikes, diplomacy is usually not the first thing people notice. What they see instead are military aircraft, naval ships, rescue teams and field hospitals. Those images matter. They tell affected societies something important about the countries that arrive quickly, stay engaged and help rebuild after the headlines fade.

Humanitarian assistance deserves to be seen a little

differently today. It remains an act of compassion, but it is also a practical part of international engagement.

World Humanitarian Day, observed every year on 19 August, is a useful reminder of that reality. It honours humanitarian workers who serve, often at great personal risk, in conflict zones, disaster areas and public health emergencies.

For much of the twentieth century, diplomacy was understood largely through familiar instruments: political engagement, economic cooperation and military power. Development assistance occupied a separate space, particularly in relations between developed and developing countries. That distinction has gradually faded.

Today's crises do not fit neatly into diplomatic categories. Climate change, pandemics, armed conflict and supply-chain disruptions move across borders quickly, and they often hit countries far from where the original problem began. In that sense, humanitarian emergencies are no longer local events. Their effects travel, and they often travel far.

This changing landscape has altered expectations of international leadership. Increasingly, countries are judged



not only by the size of their economies or the sophistication of their diplomacy, but also by their ability to respond when others face adversity. The ability to provide assistance beyond national borders has become an important measure of international responsibility.

Unlike many other instruments of foreign policy, humanitarian cooperation is not directed against another country. A field hospital established after an earthquake, relief supplies delivered after a cyclone or technical assistance to improve disaster preparedness do not seek to alter the balance of power. They seek to reduce human suffering. Yet they often produce lasting political consequences. Countries seldom forget those who stand beside them in moments of national adversity. During nearly four decades in diplomacy, I came to appreciate that governments negotiate agreements, but societies remember solidarity. In international relations, that distinction matters.

There is another, less discussed, dimension to this evolution. The idea of providing *global public goods*, whether through public health, disaster preparedness, climate resilience, maritime security or capacity building is no longer confined to economic theory. It has become an increasingly relevant measure of international engagement. The common thread is not charity. It is responsibility.

This shift has particular significance for the developing world.

A growing number of countries in the Global South now possess the institutions, operational experience and technological capabilities to assist others while continuing to address significant developmental challenges at home.

India's evolution over the past two decades offers an illuminating example of this broader change.

For much of its post-Independence history, India figured prominently in international humanitarian discussions because of the scale of disasters it confronted within its own borders. Earthquakes, cyclones, floods, droughts and, more recently, public health emergencies repeatedly tested national institutions. Those experiences were often painful, but they also became powerful teachers. Disaster management gradually evolved from an administrative responsibility into a national capability. Institutions became stronger. Scientific forecasting improved. Civil-military coordination deepened. The establishment of the National Disaster Management Authority and the National Disaster Response Force reflected a growing recognition that effective disaster response required permanent capabilities rather than ad hoc arrangements.

India's humanitarian outlook, however, is based on the age old civilisational adage – Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam. Its contemporary disaster-response capabilities rest on this older foundation. What has changed over the last decade

is not this underlying philosophy, but the scale, speed and institutional capability with which India can now translate that philosophy into action.

The turning point came in December 2004.

The Indian Ocean tsunami caused immense devastation across the region. India itself suffered heavily along its eastern coastline and in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Yet even while responding to the disaster at home, it dispatched naval ships, aircraft, medical teams and relief supplies to Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Indonesia.

Looking back, the significance of that moment lay less in the volume of assistance than in what it revealed. India had reached a stage where it could manage a major humanitarian emergency at home while simultaneously assisting others. That marked more than the success of a relief operation. It reflected the emergence of a new confidence in India's regional role.

Over the following two decades, humanitarian assistance ceased to be an occasional response to exceptional circumstances. It became an increasingly visible expression of India's engagement with its neighbourhood, the Indian Ocean Region and, progressively, the wider developing world.

India's emergence as a dependable humanitarian responder was not accidental. It was the outcome of decades of learning from its own vulnerabilities.

For many countries, disasters are exceptional events. For India, they have been recurring realities. Cyclones along the eastern coast, earthquakes in the Himalayas, floods across the Indo-Gangetic plains, droughts, tsunamis and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic have repeatedly tested national institutions. Every crisis exposed weaknesses. Equally, every crisis compelled improvements in preparedness, coordination and institutional capacity.

Over time, those repeated experiences changed India's disaster-management system in a very real way. What began as a response to emergencies at home gradually became a broader national strength. The National Disaster Response Force acquired specialised expertise. The Indian Air Force refined its strategic airlift capability. The Indian Navy expanded its role as a first responder across the Indian Ocean. Scientific forecasting, communications and civil-military coordination improved steadily. None of these developments was undertaken with humanitarian diplomacy in mind. Their original purpose was domestic resilience. Yet capabilities developed for national emergencies inevitably expanded India's ability to respond beyond its borders.

There is another dimension that is likely to shape the future of humanitarian cooperation. Technology is steadily transforming the way disasters are anticipated, managed and recovered from. Satellite imagery now enables rapid

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damage assessment. Artificial intelligence is improving risk modelling and resource allocation. Drones are reaching communities cut off by floods and earthquakes. Digital public infrastructure is helping governments identify beneficiaries and deliver assistance more efficiently. India's strengths in space technology, digital public infrastructure, affordable innovation and public health place it in a favourable position to share practical solutions that many developing countries can adapt to their own circumstances. The future of humanitarian cooperation will depend not only on the speed with which relief reaches affected communities, but also on the intelligence, connectivity and resilience that technology can provide before disaster strikes.

The operations that followed reflected this evolution.

Operation Maitri, launched after the devastating Nepal earthquake in 2015, demonstrated the value of preparedness, proximity and trust. Geography undoubtedly helped. So did decades of close political, cultural and people-to-people ties. The speed of India's response was important. Equally significant was the confidence with which the operation was received.

Operation Rahat, undertaken later that year during the conflict in Yemen, illustrated a different aspect of India's approach. The evacuation of 6,688 Indian nationals was itself a major logistical achievement. Less noticed, but equally significant, was the evacuation of 1,947 citizens from more than forty other countries. Every government has an obligation to protect its own citizens. The willingness to extend that protection to others, wherever circumstances

permit, carries a different diplomatic resonance.

For the Indian diaspora, humanitarian missions carry an additional significance. They reinforce confidence that India possesses both the capability and the political will to protect its citizens overseas while also extending assistance to others. That reassurance strengthens emotional bonds with India and enhances the country's reputation among communities that often serve as informal ambassadors of India's values and capabilities.

Operation Dost, following the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria in 2023, reaffirmed that India had moved well beyond ad hoc humanitarian responses. Specialised search-and-rescue teams, field hospitals and relief supplies were mobilised over considerable distances within remarkably short timelines. Such operations are possible only when institutional capabilities have matured over many years.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a different test altogether. The challenge was not evacuation or disaster relief but global public health. As one of the world's largest producers of vaccines and generic medicines, India assumed responsibilities that extended well beyond its own borders. Through Vaccine Maitri, vaccines, medicines and medical equipment reached partner countries at a time when access to essential supplies remained deeply unequal.

Humanitarian operations often capture public attention because they are dramatic. Aircraft land amid damaged infrastructure. Naval ships arrive carrying relief supplies. Medical teams begin work within hours of a disaster. Such images communicate compassion. They also reveal



something less obvious: institutional competence.

During my diplomatic career, I came to appreciate that countries judge one another not only by their declarations but by their ability to deliver when circumstances become difficult. A humanitarian mission is therefore much more than an operational exercise. It is an expression of national credibility.

That helps explain why humanitarian cooperation has become a valuable diplomatic asset.

Its significance lies not simply in the assistance delivered but in the confidence it generates. Credibility, after all, cannot be improvised during a crisis. It is accumulated through consistency, professionalism and the quiet assurance that commitments made in ordinary times will be honoured when circumstances become extraordinary.

India's humanitarian engagement reflects this philosophy. Assistance has generally been extended without political conditionalities or ideological expectations. That does not suggest humanitarian action is detached from national interest. No country's foreign policy operates in that manner. Rather, it reflects an understanding that durable influence grows more readily from reliability than from dependency.

There is another aspect that deserves greater attention.

Most discussions of humanitarian assistance focus on emergency response. However, the more enduring contribution lies elsewhere. Training disaster-management professionals,

strengthening early warning systems, sharing technological solutions and helping partner countries develop their own institutional capacities may not generate dramatic headlines, but they often produce far greater long-term impact.

Relief saves lives.

Capacity building changes futures.

That simple distinction may ultimately define the next phase of India's humanitarian engagement. It also provides the bridge to a broader question: how does humanitarian cooperation fit within India's larger engagement with the Global South and the evolving architecture of international relations?

If India's humanitarian engagement has acquired greater visibility over the past decade, it is also because the international environment has changed in profound ways.

The world is witnessing a return of geopolitical competition. Rivalries among major powers increasingly shape debates on trade, technology, critical minerals, maritime security and supply chains. Yet these contests unfold against a backdrop of shared vulnerabilities. Climate change respects no political boundaries. Pandemics spread irrespective of ideology. Earthquakes and cyclones spare neither allies nor adversaries. Governments, more and more, find themselves navigating a world in which strategic competition and humanitarian cooperation coexist.

This has altered the grammar of diplomacy.

For much of the twentieth century, diplomacy was primarily about negotiating differences. Today, it must also manage common challenges. The ability to cooperate during crises has become almost as important as the ability to compete during periods of strategic rivalry. Humanitarian cooperation is one of the few areas where national interests and collective interests often reinforce rather than contradict one another.

That is precisely why it deserves to be viewed as an investment in long-term stability rather than simply as emergency assistance.

India has generally sought to respond to requests rather than prescribe solutions. Assistance has tended to complement national priorities identified by partner countries rather than impose externally determined conditions. Equally important, emergency relief has been accompanied by training, technology sharing, institutional cooperation and capacity building.

A relief aircraft eventually returns home. A field hospital is dismantled once the emergency has passed. Training imparted to disaster managers, technologies adapted to local conditions and institutions strengthened through cooperation continue to serve societies long after international headlines have faded.

Perhaps that is where India's comparative advantage lies.

For more than six decades, the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme has quietly trained professionals from all over the world. The subjects have ranged from public administration and information technology to renewable energy, public health, disaster management and governance. These programmes rarely attract the attention that accompanies high-profile relief missions. Yet their cumulative impact on institutional capacity has been considerable.

The same philosophy is visible in India's wider development partnerships.

Whether through the Development Partnership Administration, the *Neighbourhood First* policy, SAGAR and its more recent articulation through MAHASAGAR, or initiatives undertaken during India's G20 Presidency and the Voice of Global South Summit, a common thread becomes evident. Each seeks, in different ways, to expand the capacities of partner countries rather than merely respond to immediate needs.

Seen individually, these initiatives belong to different policy domains. Taken together, they reveal something more significant. They point towards an expanding Indian contribution to what are increasingly described as global public goods.

The expression is often associated with economics.

Increasingly, it belongs equally to diplomacy.

Vaccines that arrest the spread of disease beyond national borders, digital public infrastructure that improves financial inclusion, satellite-based early warning systems, maritime safety, resilient infrastructure, affordable medicines and technical training all generate benefits extending well beyond the country that provides them. Their value lies not only in what they deliver today, but also in the vulnerabilities they reduce tomorrow.

This is where humanitarian engagement acquires a larger strategic meaning.

For many countries across the Global South, the challenge is no longer simply recovering from disasters. It is preventing recurring disasters from reversing decades of development gains. Climate resilience, disaster preparedness, public health security and institutional capability have become integral to economic development itself.

India's own experience gives it a measure of credibility in addressing these concerns. It speaks not from the perspective of a country that has escaped such challenges, but from that of a society that has repeatedly confronted them and gradually built stronger institutions in response.

That is a perspective many developing countries instinctively understand.

It also suggests a broader evolution in India's foreign policy.

For decades, India argued that the voices of developing countries deserved greater representation in international decision-making. That remains an important objective. Increasingly, however, India is contributing something equally significant: practical solutions shaped by its own developmental experience.

Representation remains important.

Contribution is becoming indispensable.

The distinction is subtle, but it reflects a deeper transformation. Leadership in the twenty-first century is likely to depend less on the ability to speak for others and more on the ability to work with them in addressing common challenges.

For many countries across the Global South, the challenge is not only recovering from disasters. It is making sure that one crisis does not erase years of development progress. Climate resilience, disaster preparedness, public health security and institutional capability are now part of development itself.

That is where India's experience carries weight. It speaks not as a country untouched by these problems, but as one that has repeatedly faced them and built stronger institutions in response. In that sense, India's growing role in humanitarian diplomacy reflects something larger than a widening diplomatic footprint. It reflects a different way of thinking about international responsibility. ■

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India's humanitarian engagement shows that while emergency aid is vital, the greater legacy lies in training, technology sharing, and building institutions that endure beyond crises

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KAPILVASTU ON WORLD BUDDHIST MAP

The return of the sacred Piprahawa relics to India marks a watershed moment in the preservation of Buddhist heritage. For the first time in more than a century, the jewels from the Peppe Collection — once threatened by auction abroad — now stand reunited with relics preserved in India, displayed in a stupa like pavilion at Delhi's Qila Rai Pithora. This grand exposition, *The Light and the Lotus: Relics of the Awakened One*, not only showcases treasures spanning over two millennia but also re-centers Kapilvastu, the ancient homeland of the Buddha, in the global Buddhist imagination.



BY SUNITA DWIVEDI

Author has travelled and covered the Buddhist heritage along the Asian Silk Road and authored five travelogues — *Buddha in Gandhara* [2020]; *Buddha in Central Asia- A Travelogue* [2014]; *Buddhist Heritage Sites of India* [2017, 2005]; *In Quest of the Buddha: A Journey on the Silk Road* [2009], and *On the Buddha's Trail in Bangladesh* (April, 2026).

The ongoing International Exposition of the Piprahawa Relics from Kapilvastu, organized by the Ministry of Culture in Delhi, marks a landmark moment in India's cultural history. For the first time in over a century, the sacred Piprahawa Jewels from the Peppe Collection have returned to their homeland, reunited with relics preserved in India. Displayed in a stupalike structure within the gardens of Qila Rai Pithora, the exhibition brings together masterpieces of Buddhist art from the National Museum, the Indian Museum, and the Archaeological Survey of India, in collaboration with the International Buddhist Confederation and the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.

A Landmark Exposition

Titled *The Light and the Lotus: Relics of the Awakened One*, the exhibition was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2026 and runs through July. Featuring over 80 objects spanning the 6th century BCE to the present, it includes relics from the Piprahawa excavations of 1898 and 1972, sculptures, manuscripts, thangkas, and ritual objects — all narrating stories from the life of the Buddha.

The Government of India's decisive intervention in 2025 halted the proposed auction of the Piprahawa Jewels in Hong Kong by descendants of W.C. Peppe through Southby's. Legal action was threatened in Indian and Hong Kong courts, as well as through international bodies, on

grounds that the relics constituted inalienable religious and cultural heritage. The auction was dropped, and the jewels returned to India, exemplifying the nation's resolve to protect and restore its treasures.

Piprahawa and Kapilvastu

The exposition highlights the importance of Piprahawa village in Siddharthnagar district, Uttar Pradesh, believed to be the burial site of a portion of the Buddha's ashes. Though part of the Buddha Marg pilgrimage route, Piprahawa has not yet achieved the prominence of Kushinagar, the site of the Buddha's Mahaparinirvana, and still lacks infrastructure for pilgrims and tourists.

The relics preserved at the Indian Museum in Kolkata are believed to be 2,300 years old. They were uncovered



in 1898 by W.C. Peppe, who found a sandstone chamber containing caskets — one of crystal holding ashes and bone fragments believed to be of the Buddha. Most of the 1,800 gems went to Kolkata, while Peppe retained about a fifth, including amethysts, corals, garnets, pearls, rock crystals, shells, and gold.

Buddhists believe these gems, buried in the stupa around 240–200 BCE with the Buddha's cremated remains, are imbued with his presence and must be treated as corporeal relics.

Kapilvastu: The Great Departure

Kapilvastu rose to fame as the site of the Buddha's *Great Renunciation* — his departure from palace life to seek Enlightenment. Nestled in the Himalayan foothills, Kapilvastu was the

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**The return of the
Piprahawa Jewels is
more than a cultural
triumph — it is a
reclamation of India's
Buddhist heritage
and a reaffirmation of
Kapilvastu's place in
the global imagination.**

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capital of the Sakyan kingdom in the 6th century BCE, named after sage Kapila. Here Prince Siddharth spent 29 years before leaving for ascetic life.

Excavations at Piprahawa by Peppe in 1898 revealed a relic casket inscribed with references to the Buddha's relics and the stupa built by the Sakyas. Later excavations by the ASI (1971–77) led by Dr. K.M. Srivastava uncovered more reliquaries and inscriptions, including "Om Devaputra Vihare Kapilvastu Bhikkhu Sanghasa."

Surrounding the stupa are ruins of viharas, with cells arranged around courtyards, storerooms, kitchens, and bathing places. Excavations at nearby Ganwaria uncovered palace ruins and viharas, believed to represent the ancient township of Kapilvastu.

The Kapilvastu Controversy

The location of Kapilvastu remains contested. Indian archaeologists identify Piprahawa as the site, while Nepali scholars, notably Prof. Basant Bidari, argue for Tilaurakot, 27 km from Lumbini. Nepal has conducted extensive excavations at Tilaurakot, uncovering citadel walls, palace structures, monastic complexes, coins, terracotta figurines, and a Mauryan-period brick tank. UNESCO, with support from Japan, initiated a multidisciplinary project in 2014 to conserve and investigate Tilaurakot, now on its Tentative World Heritage List.

Visitors to Tilaurakot today see fortified walls, gateways, palace ruins, viharas, and ancient water bodies. The site's grid iron layout and Kushanera coins attest to its antiquity.

Two Sites, One Legacy

Piprahawa in India and Tilaurakot in Nepal lie less than 70 km apart, easily traversed across the Indo-Nepal border. Their contiguity suggests they may represent parts of the same Kapilvastu. As historian Debala Mitra noted, however, the remains of Kapilvastu may be sought in the mounds around Piprahawa rather than at Tilaurakot.

Conclusion

The Piprahawa relics, now reunited in India, embody both the sanctity of the Buddha's corporeal remains and the en-



during debates over Kapilvastu's location. Whether Piprahawa or Tilaurakot, both sites illuminate the Buddha's early life and the Sakyan republic's history. The Delhi exposition not only restores national treasures but also reaffirms India's role in safeguarding Buddhist heritage for the global community.

(Article is based on author's visit to the villages of Piprahawa and Ganwaria in Uttar Pradesh, India and Tilaurakot in Nepal.)

References:

Southby's Hong Kong postpones the auction of *Piprahwa Gems of the Historical Buddha* scheduled on May 7, 2025 'In light of the matters raised by the Government of India and with

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Whether Piprahawa in India or Tilaurakot in Nepal, Kapilvastu endures as the sacred landscape of the Buddha's Great Renunciation — a site where history, faith, and archaeology converge.

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the agreement of the consignors, allowing fresh discussion between the parties (<https://www.pib.gov.in>).

Also, see Batty Davi's article on *The Guardian* on *Auction of Piprahwa Gems of the Buddha postponed after India's legal threat* (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/07/>)

The Union Ministry of Culture issued a legal notice dated May 5, 2025 to Sotheby's Hong Kong and Mr. Chris Peppé, the heirs of William Claxton Peppé, demanding immediate halt of the 'The Piprahwa Gems of the Historical Buddha' auction. (available on Instagram). ■

FOREX DEFENSE

RBI'S DIASPORA LIFELINE: CONCESSIONAL SWAPS TO SHIELD THE RUPEE

India's external finances have rarely faced such a perfect storm: wardriven oil spikes, collapsing FDI, and relentless portfolio outflows.

In mid2026, with reserves sliding and the rupee under siege, the RBI reached for a familiar but potent weapon — concessional swap facilities. By mobilizing diaspora deposits and leveraging foreign borrowings, the central bank sought to defend the currency without choking growth, reviving a playbook that has steadied India before.



**BY DR NILAY
RANJAN SINGH**

With 22 years of experience in banking, the author currently serves as the Chief Executive Officer of State Bank of India, DIFC, Dubai. He has authored a collection of Hindi poems titled *Kaner Ke Phool* and contributed to a management book and *World Encyclopaedia on UN SDGs*. He has also received several international accolades, including the recent 'CEO of the Year' award in the Middle East.

The Iran–America war of 2026 dealt a severe blow to global economies. Oil prices surged past \$100 per barrel, supply chains were disrupted, and most currencies came under pressure while the dollar strengthened. By June, India's foreign reserves had slipped from a February peak of \$728 billion to around \$682 billion. The rupee crossed 96 against the dollar and hov-

ered near 95, briefly stabilizing before sliding again. With Brent crude elevated due to the Hormuz crisis, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) turned to a familiar but rarely used strategy: tapping the diaspora through concessional swap facilities to shore up reserves and stabilize the rupee.

A Familiar Tool Revived

The RBI unveiled a concessional foreign exchange swap facility for FCNR(B) deposits and External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs). Running until September 30, 2026, the scheme aimed to attract foreign currency inflows, stabilize the rupee, and strengthen external finances without resorting to interest rate hikes that could dampen growth and sentiment. This was not the first time the central bank had relied on such a measure; similar schemes had been deployed in 1998, 2000, and 2013 during earlier crises.

The FCNR(B) Swap Facility

Under the 2026 scheme, banks can raise fresh foreign currency deposits

from NRIs, OCIs, and Persons of Indian Origin with maturities of three to five years. Mobilization runs from June 8 to September 30. Banks sell the dollars to the RBI at the prevailing reference rate and agree to buy them back at maturity at the same rate. The RBI bears the hedging cost—roughly 3–3.5% annually—eliminating swap costs for banks.

Key features include:

- Oneyear lockin period for deposits.
- Swaps cannot be cancelled before maturity.
- Deposits exempt from CRR and SLR requirements.
- Window open until October 16, 2026, for deposits mobilized by September 30.

This structure makes FCNR(B) deposits highly attractive, both for banks and for depositors, by removing the usual hedging burden.

The ECB Swap Facility

In parallel, the RBI offered a concessional swap for eligible ECBs raised by public sector undertakings with maturities of three years or more. Drawn be-



tween June 8 and December 31, 2026, the swap is available at a fixed 1.5% per annum—well below the market hedging cost of 3.5–4%. This window remains open until January 15, 2027. Together, the FCNR(B) and ECB facilities represent a coordinated attempt to attract foreign capital without destabilizing domestic interest rates.

Why Now?

The timing reflected extraordinary pressures: tariff shocks, collapsing net FDI, and the Iran–America war. The most immediate trigger was the dramatic fall

in FCNR(B) inflows—from \$7.08 billion in FY25 to just \$946 million in FY26, an 86% decline. Portfolio outflows of \$45 billion since CY24, elevated crude prices, and geopolitical tensions compounded the rupee's weakness.

Declining FDI

Gross FDI inflows rose to \$94.53 billion in FY26, but net FDI fell to just \$7.65 billion after accounting for capital outflows and repatriation. Monthly net FDI even dipped into negative territory in May. With 70% of gross inflows being retained earnings of existing firms, only

30% represented fresh capital. This erosion of net inflows heightened the urgency for RBI intervention.

Avoiding Rate Hikes

The RBI chose swap subsidies over interest rate hikes. Inflation was supplyside driven by oil, not excess demand. Raising rates would have worsened inflation and slowed growth. By incentivizing banks to attract NRI deposits, the RBI sought to strengthen reserves without undermining investment and consumption. This approach allowed the central bank to address balance-of-



have raised FCNR(B) rates by 200–300 basis points to 6–7% for three-to-five-year maturities. This combination of higher rates and subsidized hedging costs makes the scheme particularly attractive.

Historical Precedents

- 1998 Resurgent India Bonds (RIBs): Raised \$4.23 billion amid sanctions and crisis.
- 2000 India Millennium Bonds: Raised \$5 billion.
- 2013 FCNR(B) Swap Window: Announced by Raghuram Rajan, attracted \$34 billion, stabilized the rupee, and proved remarkably successful.

Each scheme leveraged diaspora capital to defend the rupee and strengthen reserves. The 2026 initia-

1 lakh crore.

- Credit growth: FCNR(B)-backed lending improves profitability and supports economic activity.

The RBI projects FY27 GDP growth at 6.2–6.5%, driven by resilient consumption and improved external financing. Stabilized reserves and stronger banking liquidity are expected to underpin this growth trajectory.

Banking Sector Relief

Banks benefit from spreads of 60–65 basis points on FCNR-backed lending versus wholesale deposits. Liquidity pressures ease, borrowing costs soften, and profitability improves. Challenges remain in arranging liquidity for leveraged deposits, but the scheme strengthens the sector's resilience. By narrowing the credit deposit gap, banks can support broader economic activity without resorting to expensive wholesale borrowing.

Many Chapters, One Playbook

The 1998 RIBs, 2013 FCNR(B) swap, and 2026 scheme are chapters in the same playbook: India's distinctive strategy of mobilizing diaspora capital during crises. Each adapted to its era—high coupons in 1998, concessional swaps in 2013, and zero hedging costs with leverage in 2026.

The common thread is leverage: banks multiplying customer equity to generate inflows. The impact has consistently been positive—stabilizing the rupee, strengthening reserves, financing deficits, and restoring confidence.

● ●
**By reviving
 concessional swap
 facilities, the RBI turned
 to India's diaspora as
 a financial lifeline —
 stabilizing the rupee,
 strengthening reserves,
 and proving once again
 that resilience can
 be mobilized across
 borders.**
 ● ●

payments pressures while preserving growth momentum.

The Leverage Proposition

The scheme's twist lies in leverage. NRIs can borrow multiple times their own capital and deposit the combined sum in FCNR(B) accounts. For example, \$1 million of equity plus \$9 million borrowed funds yields a \$10 million deposit. At 6–7% returns, leveraged gains can reach 9–18% annually.

Expected inflows: \$50–80 billion, largely through leveraged loans. Banks

tive builds on this legacy, offering even more generous terms.

Impact on GDP and Growth

The scheme influences GDP through multiple channels:

- Currency stabilization: Prevents sharp depreciation, inflation, and import cost escalation.
- Reserves: Expected to rise to \$720–750 billion, bolstering monetary stability.
- Banking liquidity: Deposit growth projected to rise 14–16% in FY27, narrowing the credit deposit gap by nearly

Conclusion

As India faces volatile global conditions, the FCNR leverage loan template remains a powerful instrument in the RBI's arsenal. It underscores the enduring financial bond between India and its diaspora and highlights the country's ability to craft creative solutions to external sector challenges. By reviving a tested strategy, the RBI has once again demonstrated its capacity to defend the rupee, stabilize reserves, and support growth without compromising domestic stability. ■

POLYMER NOTES

PROMISE AND PRACTICALITY FOR INDIA

India's currency is more than a medium of exchange — it is a symbol of trust. As the Reserve Bank of India re-examines the case for polymer banknotes, the debate goes beyond paper versus plastic. The real question is whether tougher, cleaner notes can withstand India's climate and cash-intensive economy, while balancing cost, convenience, and security. Polymer notes promise durability and advanced anti-counterfeit features, but their practicality lies in careful calibration, phased adoption, and realistic expectations.



BY SATISH SINGH

A Mumbai-based columnist, the author currently serves as an Assistant General Manager with SBI.

The debate on polymer, or plastic, banknotes is not new to India. Yet with the Reserve Bank of India once again examining the possibility, the question has acquired fresh relevance in the larger discourse on currency management. The issue is not simply whether notes should be made of paper or plastic, but whether polymer notes are feasible in a country as vast, diverse, cash-intensive, and climatically challenging as India. Who would benefit, who might face inconvenience, and can they meaningfully address problems such as black money, corruption, hawala transactions, or terror financing?

What Polymer Notes Are

India's existing notes are printed on specialised cotton-based paper, not

ordinary paper. Polymer notes, by contrast, use a plastic substrate. Countries such as Australia, Canada, the UK, and New Zealand have adopted them, citing durability, resistance to moisture and dirt, and stronger security features against counterfeiting.

Climate and Durability

India's climate and cash-intensive economy provide the strongest argument in favour. Humidity, rain, sweat, dust, heat, and high turnover shorten the life of notes. In mandis, bus stands, railway stations, and rural markets, notes pass from hand to hand at extraordinary speed. Polymer notes do not tear easily, resist water damage, and remain cleaner for longer. This could reduce the cost of withdrawing, sorting, and replacing soiled notes.

Systemic Adjustments

Feasibility, however, goes beyond printing. India's vast currency ecosystem — ATMs, cash vans, notesorting machines, vending machines, and cashprocessing centres — would all need recalibration. Thickness, friction, flexibility, and machine-readable fea-

tures differ from cotton notes. Banks, shopkeepers, and the public would need education on identifying and handling the new notes.

Costs and Denominations

Polymer notes are costlier to print initially, but last two to three times



Polymer notes should neither be hailed as a miracle nor dismissed as a fad. They can improve cash management if introduced with prudence, preparation, and public trust.



longer. Over their life cycle, they may prove cheaper. India would need to assess which denominations offer the highest benefit. Low-value, high-circulation notes may be the best start-



ing point to test durability, machine compatibility, and public convenience.

Impact on Currency Management

Polymer notes would not directly affect GDP or inflation. Their impact would be administrative: cleaner notes, fewer replacements, reduced costs for banks, and improved quality of cash in circulation. Small traders and rural consumers would benefit from fewer disputes over torn or dirty notes.

Limits Against Black Money

Expectations must remain realistic. Polymer notes may be harder to counterfeit, but they cannot eliminate black money or corruption. These arise from opaque transactions, benami assets,

tax evasion, and weak enforcement — not from the material of a banknote. Polymer notes can raise the technological barrier against counterfeiters, but hawala and terror networks often shift to alternative routes such as gold, crypto, or trade-based laundering.

Banks and Public Use

Banks would benefit from fewer soiled notes, but face initial costs in recalibrating machines and training staff. Customers would need guidance on identifying genuine polymer notes. For everyday users, advantages include durability and cleanliness, but inconveniences may include slipperiness, sticking while counting, and difficulty folding. For visually impaired citizens,

tactile markers and note sizes would require careful design.

Environmental Concerns

Polymer notes are plastic, but their longer life and recyclability may reduce environmental costs. If recycling chains are weak, however, disposal could create new problems. A full lifecycle environmental assessment is essential before adoption.



Cleaner, more durable notes may ease disputes in mandis and rural markets, but the real cleansing of the economy comes not from plastic or paper — it comes from policy, transparency, and enforcement.



The Way Forward

The most practical path is a phased experiment. A pilot project should begin with limited denominations in selected regions — humid cities, hilly areas, hot zones, metropolitan markets, and rural cash centres. Independent evaluation should measure note life, counterfeit detection, ATM compatibility, public response, banking costs, recycling feasibility, and security impact.

Conclusion

Polymer notes should neither be hailed as a miracle nor dismissed as a fad. They can improve the quality of cash management if introduced with prudence, preparation, and public trust. In India, currency is not just a medium of payment; it is a symbol of confidence. Any new note must be convenient in the pocket, acceptable in machines, economical for banks, difficult for criminals, and trustworthy for citizens. ■

MANUFACTURING

THE WORLD KNOCKS AT INDIA'S DOOR

History is once again at a turning point. After America's post war dominance, Japan's industrial miracle, South Korea's rise, and China's transformation into the factory of the world, the spotlight is now shifting. India is no longer just a vast consumer market—it is emerging as the trusted producer the world needs. From premium smartphones and aerospace components to pharmaceuticals and specialty chemicals, India is redefining global supply chains with scale, skill, and reliability. In an era where resilience matters more than cost, trust has become India's greatest export



BY B SHEKHAR

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

History occasionally witnesses moments when economic gravity shifts. The postwar decades belonged to America. Later, Japan and South Korea emerged as industrial marvels. The first two decades of the twentyfirst century were dominated by China's rise as the factory of the world.

Today, another transformation is underway. India is steadily positioning itself as the world's most reliable sourcing destination for products, services, technology, engineering capabilities and innovation-led manufacturing. What began as a low-cost outsourcing model has evolved into a sophisticated ecosystem serving global supply chains across multiple strategic sectors.

India as the "Plus One"

Geopolitical tensions are reshaping trade routes and supply chains. Multinational corporations are unwilling to

depend excessively on a single geography. The concept of "China Plus One" has moved from boardrooms into global business strategy. Increasingly, India is emerging as the preferred "Plus One" destination.

This transformation is not accidental. It is the result of policy reforms, digital infrastructure, demographic advantages, entrepreneurial energy, improved ease of doing business and growing investor confidence.

Manufacturing Renaissance

India's manufacturing resurgence is visible across sectors once considered difficult to build domestically—electronics, aerospace, defence systems, pharmaceuticals, specialty chemicals, automotive components, solar equipment, engineering goods, toys, rail infrastructure and advanced IT products.

The world now views India not merely as a market of 1.4 billion consumers but as a trusted producer.

Trust is becoming India's greatest export.

Apple's expanding footprint in India is perhaps the strongest endorse-

Global Top 10 Manufacturing Countries 2026

1.		China	\$4.7 Trillion
2.		United States	\$2.5 Trillion
3.		Japan	\$1.0 Trillion
4.		Germany	\$850 Billion
		India	\$781 Billion
		↑ Entered Top 5	
		South Korea	\$420 Billion
7.		Mexico	\$360 Billion
8.		Italy	\$350 Billion
9.		France	\$340 Billion
10.		United Kingdom	\$320 Billion

ment. A decade ago, manufacturing premium iPhones in India for global markets seemed improbable. Today, India produces the entire iPhone lineup, including premium models, for export.

Global consumer brands—from Sensodyne to Unilever, Nestlé, GSK, Cummins, Caterpillar and Bosch—are sourcing from Indian facilities. The complexity of products being man-



Manufactured reflects rising confidence. India is no longer exporting only labour-intensive products; it is exporting intelligence-intensive products.

Defence, Railways and Chemicals

India's defence manufacturing has gained international buyers for indigenous missile systems, naval platforms, aerospace components and defence electronics. The railways ecosystem is supplying locomotives and engineering expertise abroad.

● ●
**Global corporations
 now see India not just
 as a vast consumer
 market but as a
 dependable producer
 anchoring resilient
 supply chains.**
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Notably, Jupiter Tatrasvaganka Rail-wheel Factory (JTRWF) signed a 10-year, ₹1,000–1,500 crore contract with Slovakian giant Tatrasvaganka to supply 50,000 wheelsets annually to Europe from 2027.

Specialty chemicals are another success story. Driven by "China+1" diversification and local demand, the Indian market is projected to reach \$100 billion, creating immense opportunities for exports and innovation.

Anchored by Policy and Talent

India's rise as a premier manufacturing alternative is anchored by Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes across 14 strategic sectors, establishing hubs in Noida, Hosur and Sriperumbudur. Global supply chains benefit from India's vast technical talent pool and compliance frameworks designed to foster resilience.

The pharmaceutical industry offers perhaps the clearest example. During global health crises, countries discovered their dependence on Indian pharmaceutical manufacturing. That experience altered perceptions—India was no longer just a supplier, but a strategic partner.



The Five Dimensions of Competitiveness

Modern supply chains now evaluate countries on five critical dimensions:

- Trust in reliable deliveries
- Quality consistency
- Scalability of production
- Compliance with global standards
- Innovation & Sustainability

India's future as a sourcing hub will depend less on being cheaper and more on being better.

What began as low cost outsourcing has evolved into a sophisticated ecosystem spanning electronics, defence, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and rail infrastructure.

The Mindset Shift

India's next leap requires a transformation of mindset:

- **Manufacturing Leaders:** Competing solely on price must end. Quality should be a competitive advantage. Factories must evolve into innovation centres, prioritising R&D, automation, digitisation, sustainability and workforce training.
- **Bureaucracy:** Government must shift from regulator to facilitator.



"India has become one of Apple's most important growth and manufacturing destinations, with a steadily expanding role in the company's global supply chain. Apple's growing production footprint demonstrates confidence in India's long-term manufacturing capabilities."

-Tim Cook, CEO, Apple



"India can take the lead" in applying advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence across industries including manufacturing, supply chains, life sciences and enterprise operations. He cites India's talent pool and digital infrastructure as major advantages."

-Christian Klein, CEO, SAP

Key Indicators

- India has emerged among the world's largest manufacturing economies.
- Manufacturing exports have expanded significantly across electronics, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, specialty chemicals, defence products and auto components.
- Engineering goods remain among India's largest export categories.
- Smartphone exports have become one of India's fastest-growing export segments.
- Apple assembled approximately 55 million iPhones in India during 2025, representing nearly 25% of global iPhone production, compared to about 36 million units in 2024.
- Research firms estimate India's share of global iPhone manufacturing has risen from approximately 6% in 2022 to nearly one-fourth of global output by 2025-26.
- India has become one of the world's largest exporters of pharmaceuticals, supplying medicines to more than 200 countries.
- The country is among the largest producers of vaccines globally and remains a critical supplier to international healthcare systems.

India on the Rise

- Manufacturing continues to expand across sectors, with 8 percent growth recorded in November 2025, led by automobiles, pharmaceuticals and metals.
- Industrial activity remains robust, with IIP growth reaching 7.8 percent in December 2025, the highest in over two years, followed by 4.8 percent growth in January 2026, driven by manufacturing expansion.
- India's total exports reached a record Rs. 69.76 lakh crore (US\$ 825.30 billion) in FY25, registering a 6.1 percent year-on-year growth, driven primarily by robust growth in services exports which experienced a 13.6 (YoY) increase.





"India has the potential to become a great superpower. Understanding and removing barriers can enable companies to establish themselves for trade, manufacturing, or any type of business in India. The combination of a simplified business environment, overall prosperity growth, and population growth represents a very powerful engine."

-Sundar Pichai CEO, Google



"Make-In-India is a Lion's Step. FDI for me is First Develop India and then Foreign Direct Investment. Industrialists don't come because of incentives, need to create development and growth-oriented environment."

-Prime Minister Narendra Modi

● ● India is moving beyond labour intensive goods to premium smartphones, aerospace components, missile systems and specialty chemicals ● ●

Speed, predictability and transparency are as important as incentives.

- **Political Leadership:** Industrial policy must transcend electoral cycles. Investors seek continuity and stability in infrastructure, education, energy security and logistics.
- **Workforce:** Demographic advantage must be matched by skills. Workers must manage automation, analyse data, ensure quality and contribute to innovation. Continuous learning must become cultural.

Sustainability Imperative

The next generation of sourcing will be defined not only by productivity but also by responsibility. Global customers expect environmental stewardship,

ethical labour practices and sustainable manufacturing. India's rise must therefore be accompanied by leadership in green manufacturing, renewable energy adoption, water conservation and circular economy practices.

The countries that dominate the future will not be those that manufacture the most, but those that manufacture responsibly.

Conclusion

India stands at a historic inflection point. The world is searching for trusted partners capable of supporting resilient, diversified and innovation-driven supply chains. Few nations possess India's unique combination of scale, talent, democracy, entrepreneurial energy and technological capability.

The opportunity is not merely to become another manufacturing destination, but to become the world's most trusted sourcing hub. Achieving this vision will require discipline, quality consciousness, policy consistency, infrastructure excellence and relentless commitment to global standards.

If China became the factory of the world through scale, India can become the sourcing partner of the world through trust, innovation and reliability. The coming decade may well be remembered as the period when India moved from participating in global supply chains to shaping them. ■

THROUGH THE CRACKS

In *Cracks in the Wall*, Author Neera Kashyap steps boldly into adult fiction with stories that are as lyrical as they are unsettling. Drawing on her journalistic eye and literary craft, she etches lives fractured by violence, loneliness, and spiritual longing — yet illuminated by resilience and hope. This finely wrought collection confronts uncomfortable truths while reminding us that even through the deepest cracks, light can stream in.



BY DR. VED MITRA SHUKLA

Though an Associate Professor of English at Rajdhani College, University of Delhi, the author is equally proficient in English and Hindi.

Neera Kashyap, by profession a journalist with long experience in print and developmental journalism, has also made a significant mark in Indian English literature. Her background in social and health communication informs her writing, while her literary contributions span children's stories, young adult fiction, poetry, short fiction, essays, and reviews. This breadth of work demonstrates her refusal to be confined to a single genre or age group. Kashyap's prose often carries the cadence of poetry, with imagery and lyrical lines woven seamlessly into her narratives. As Gita Hariharan aptly notes on the book's cover: "In language both precise and poetic, Neera Kashyap's stories are fine etchings of the visible and secret lives of people, places and events."

A Debut in Adult Fiction

Cracks in the Wall marks Kashyap's debut in adult fiction. The collection comprises twenty-six short stories, accompanied by a glossary and kinship terms — a thoughtful addition, given

the regional flavor of the narratives. Hindi, Bangla, Urdu, Sanskrit, and other linguistic elements enrich the texture of the book, grounding the stories in India's diverse cultural milieu.

Most of these stories first appeared in respected journals and magazines such as *Out of Print*, *Muse India*, *Setu*, *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, *Border-*

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In twenty six finely etched stories, Neera Kashyap confronts domestic violence, loneliness, and spiritual quests — revealing cracks in families and society, yet letting light stream through.

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less Journal, and *Indian Review*. Their prior publication underscores the time and care invested in shaping them, as well as the critical feedback Kashyap absorbed from editors across platforms.

Themes and Social Strata

Drawing on her journalistic eye, Kashyap writes with a keen awareness of ground realities. Her characters emerge from varied classes, cultures, and genders, their dialogues alive with authenticity. The stories collectively at-

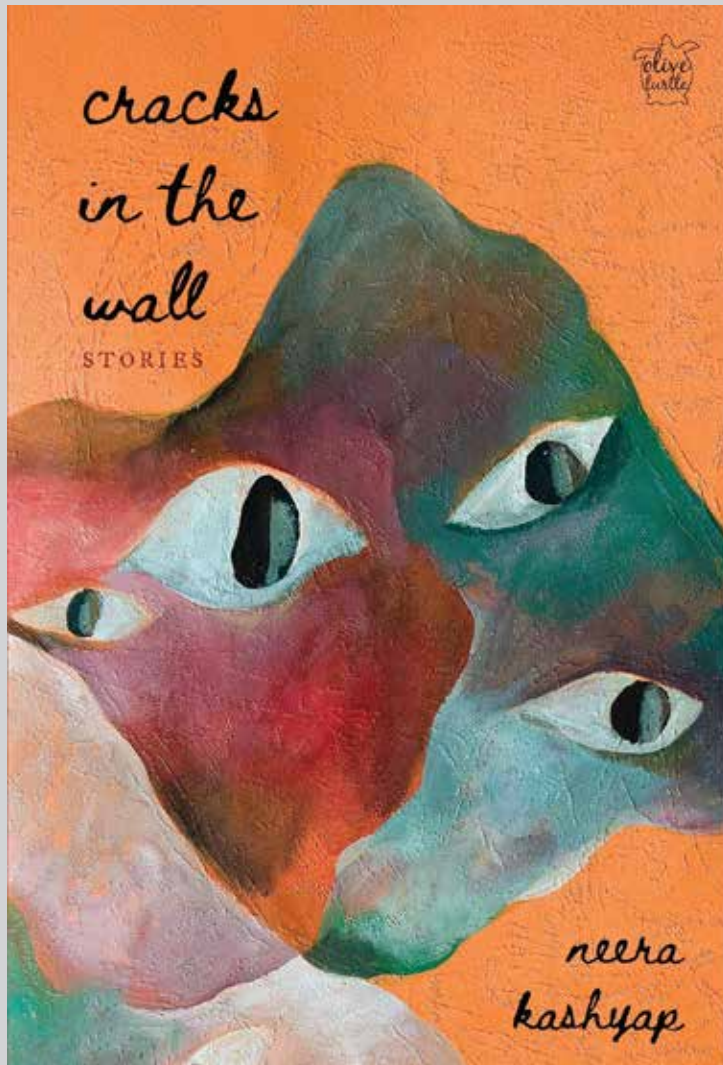
tempt to capture life in its multiplicity — familial, societal, and psychological struggles, as well as spiritual quests and dreams that deepen our understanding of the human psyche.

The blurb summarizes the collection's intent: "*Cracks in the Wall is a collection of short stories that deal with attempts to heal. It reveals multifaceted struggles — mental, familial, societal — individuals confront as they navigate their fears, traumas and desires through their lives.*"

The Title Story

The eponymous story, *Cracks in the Wall*, is particularly compelling. It addresses gender inequality and domestic violence with sensitivity and layered analysis. The narrative begins with proceedings of a women's court, where Gulabi lodges a complaint against her husband Ram Prasad. The abuse depicted is not limited to physical violence but extends to verbal humiliation, suspicion, fear, and psychological control. Kashyap does not shy away from realism: abusive epithets like *kuttiya*, *randi*, and *daayan* are used to capture the harshness of Gulabi's predicament.

Dialogues sharpen the story's focus. One villager asserts: "We know how to put our women in their place. Physical, mental and all that doesn't matter. They must obey, not answer back, not go astray like this." To which Anandi, a counsellor, responds: "Show-



CRACKS IN THE WALL

Author: Neera Kashyap

Publisher: Olive Turtle, a Niyogi Books Pvt Ltd publication

Year of Publication: Dec 2025

Pages: 300 pages **Price:** 595/- (Paperback)

400.90/- (Kindle Edition) **Category:** Stories

ISBN:978-81-19626-45-8

(Also available on Amazon Asia-Pacific Holdings Pvt Limited)

ing a woman her place is different from crushing a woman in that place.”(p. 83).

Gulabi embodies the dilemma of countless village women — trapped by economic dependence, responsibility for children, and parental reluctance to support daughters. Ram Prasad, meanwhile, symbolizes entrenched patriarchy, intent on controlling a woman’s individuality and dignity.

The story’s power lies in its mul-

tilayered portrayal: even Sushama, a social activist advocating for Gulabi, is herself a victim of domestic abuse. Kashyap reveals how women fighting for justice externally may remain silent sufferers within their own homes. The metaphorical title resonates deeply: the “cracks” signify fractures in families, marriages, communities, and within women themselves. Yet, the conclusion offers a

glimmer of hope — light streaming through the cracks as counsellors arrive to support Sushama.

Other Stories

While *Cracks in the Wall* anchors the collection in women’s discourse, other stories broaden its thematic canvas. *Narratives that Live* explores loneliness and spirituality; *The Silent Tree* delves into a child’s psychology and inner conflict; *Where Love is No Driver* critiques materialistic love; *Mother of All Beings* reflects on the relation-

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From village courts to inner conflicts, *Cracks in the Wall* captures women’s dilemmas and human struggles with poetic precision, leaving readers with questions that linger long after the last page.

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ship between nature and humanity. Across these narratives, Kashyap consistently foregrounds human values, environmental consciousness, gender equality, and the supremacy of spirituality over materialism.

Conclusion

Neera Kashyap’s *Cracks in the Wall* is a finely wrought collection that combines journalistic insight with literary craft. Her stories are not only about women’s struggles but about the fractures and healing processes within Indian society at large. They leave readers with uncomfortable questions — and therein lies their success.

This debut in adult fiction deserves a place in contemporary Indian English literature, both in academia and among lovers of fiction. Kashyap’s voice is precise, poetic, and deeply humane, making *Cracks in the Wall* a significant contribution to the short story form. ■

MADHYA PRADESH TOURISM

A LIVING HERITAGE ON THE WORLD STAGE

Madhya Pradesh has taken another significant step towards global recognition of its rich living heritage. The inclusion of the Maihar Band, the Agaria iron-smelting tradition and Nimari cuisine in India's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage not only celebrates the state's extraordinary cultural diversity but also strengthens its case for future UNESCO recognition.

PRAVASI INDIANS BUREAU (PIB)

Under the leadership of Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav, Madhya Pradesh continues to reinforce its identity as India's cultural heartland by preserving and promoting its rich living traditions. In a significant achievement, three of the state's unique cultural practices—the Maihar Band, the Agaria (Loh) iron-smelting tradition, and Nimari cuisine—have been inscribed in India's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the Government of India's nodal agency for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

The recognition marks a major milestone in preserving India's living traditions while significantly strengthening Madhya Pradesh's prospects for eventual inscription on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Expressing pride over the achievement, Dr Ilayaraja T., Secretary, Tourism, Government of Madhya Pradesh, and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, said the inclusion reaffirms the state's commitment to safeguarding its living heritage and further enhances its credentials for future UNESCO recognition.

Mr Abhay Arvind Bedekar, Additional Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, described the recognition as a celebration of



the state's extraordinary cultural diversity, indigenous knowledge systems and community traditions. He noted that the inscription would not only strengthen conservation efforts but also provide a major impetus to heritage, cultural and experiential tourism.

Agaria Iron-Smelting Tradition

Practised for centuries by the Agaria tribal community, this ancient indigenous iron-smelting tradition continues to survive through traditional furnaces, locally sourced iron ore and charcoal, without modern industrial

technology. Beyond metallurgy, it reflects deep scientific knowledge of natural resources, sustainable production and craftsmanship.

Skills such as ore selection, furnace construction, temperature regulation and metal refinement are still transmitted orally through the traditional *guru-shishya* system, making the practice a remarkable example of India's ancient technological heritage.

Maihar Band: A Century of Musical Excellence

Founded in 1918 by the legendary Ustad Allauddin Khan under the patronage of Maharaja Brijnath Singh Judeo, the Maihar Band is widely regarded as the world's first Indian classical orchestra.

For over a century, the ensemble has blended Indian and Western instruments—including the sitar, sarod, esraj, violin, cello, harmonium and tabla—while nurturing generations of accomplished musicians. Its most distinctive creation is the Nal Tarang, an innovative percussion instrument fashioned from tuned sections of discarded gun barrels, found nowhere else in the world.

Following its acclaimed performance at the Bhatkhande Music Festival in Lucknow in 1924, the Maihar Band became





a symbol of Madhya Pradesh's rich musical heritage. In 2016, it received the state's highest cultural honour, the Shikhar Samman.

Nimari Cuisine: A Living Culinary Tradition

The culinary heritage of the Nimar region, spanning Barwani, Khargone and Burhanpur, reflects generations of traditional knowledge rooted in local agriculture and community life.

Regional favourites such as Dal-Pania, Bafla and Bhutte-ki-Kees are prepared using indigenous recipes, seasonal produce and traditional spice blends. Served during festivals, family gatherings and religious occasions, these dishes embody the region's hospitality, cultural identity and enduring connection with its land.



From the Maihar Band to Nimari cuisine, Madhya Pradesh's living traditions now shine on the world tourism map – strengthening its case for future UNESCO recognition.



Strengthening Cultural Tourism

The inclusion of these three traditions in India's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage further establishes Madhya Pradesh as one of the country's richest repositories of living heritage. Beyond national recognition, the inscription is expected to encourage conservation, empower local communities, preserve traditional knowledge and create new opportunities for heritage and experiential tourism.

As the state continues to celebrate and safeguard its cultural legacy, this achievement marks another important step towards global recognition, further enhancing Madhya Pradesh's stature as one of India's foremost cultural destinations. ■

MOHAMMED RAFI

THE DAWN OF A LEGEND

Before he became the voice that defined generations, Mohammed Rafi was a boy from a small Punjabi village, imitating a wandering fakir's chant. From those humble beginnings to the bustling studios of Bombay, his journey was marked by discipline, devotion, and a rare gift that would soon captivate millions. This part traces the formative years that shaped Rafi into the singer who would become the soul of Indian cinema.



**BY DR. VENKATESH
GANAPATHY**

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

he Early Years

Mohammed Rafi's story begins in the rustic village of Kotla Sultan Singh near Amritsar, Punjab, where he was born on 24 December 1924. The village was modest, but it was alive with the sounds of folk songs, devotional chants, and the rhythms of daily life. These sounds seeped into the young boy's consciousness, shaping his musical instincts long before he ever dreamed of cinema.

Childhood Influences

Rafi's earliest memory of music was not from a formal stage but from a wandering fakir. The fakir's soulful chant echoed through the village lanes, and young Rafi, barely a child, began imitating the melody. At a local fair, he repeated the chant with such uncanny accuracy that the crowd erupted in applause. That moment revealed his gift — a voice that could



move hearts even without training.

His elder brother Hamid recognized the spark and encouraged him to pursue music seriously. Soon, Rafi was learning under Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and later Ustad Abdul Wahid Khan, absorbing the intricacies of classical ragas. This grounding in classical music would later give him the versatility to glide effortlessly between devotional bhajans, romantic ballads, patriotic anthems, and playful duets.

Lahore Days

By the early 1940s, Rafi had moved to Lahore, then a thriving cultural hub. He sang for All India Radio Lahore, performed at public concerts, and began to attract attention. His first playback opportunity came in 1944 with the Punjabi film *Gul Baloch*. Though modest, it marked the beginning of his cinematic journey.

One anecdote from this period captures his humility: after a performance, a senior musician remarked, "This boy's voice is like a river — it will find its way to every shore." Rafi, shy and softspoken, simply smiled, unaware that destiny was already preparing him for greatness.

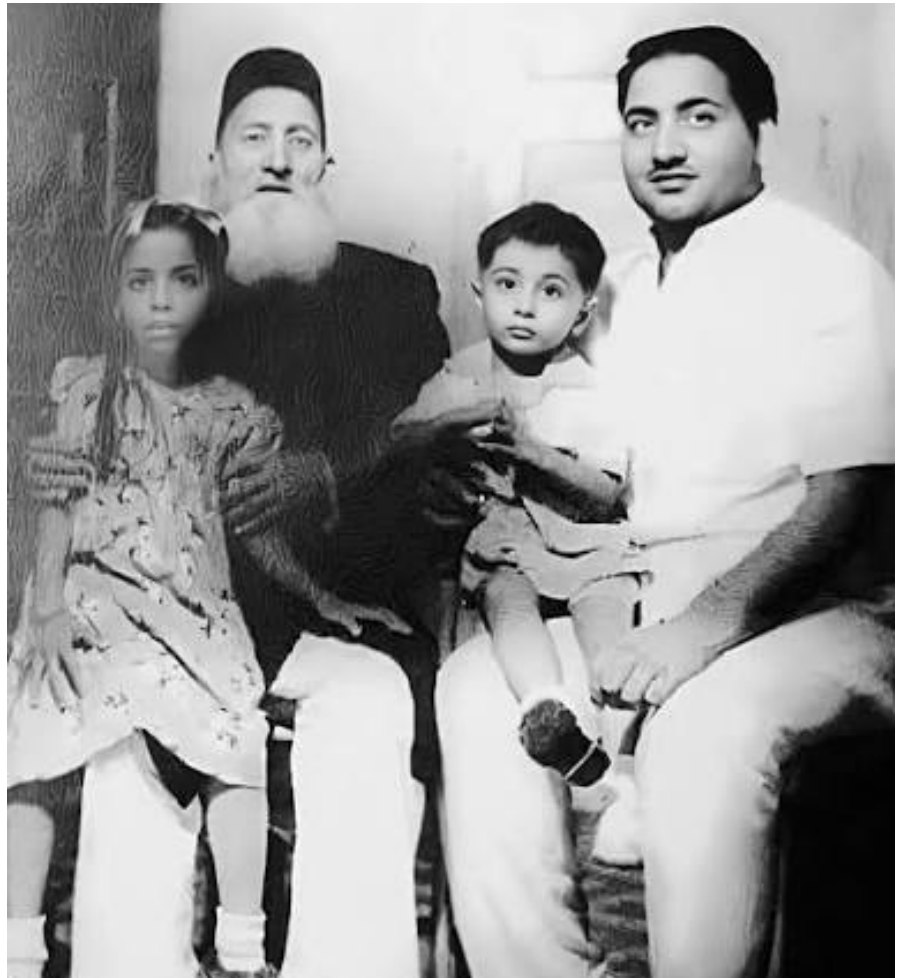
Migration to Bombay

The turning point came in 1944 when Rafi migrated to Bombay (now Mumbai). The city was buzzing with film studios, composers, and actors. Introduced to leading composers like Naushad, Rafi quickly became part of the vibrant film industry. His first Hindi film song was for *Gaon Ki Gori* (1945), but it was Naushad's *Anmol Ghadi* (1946) that truly showcased his potential.

Naushad later recalled: "*Rafi's voice had sweetness and strength. He could sing with the innocence of a boy and the depth of a sage. That duality made him unique.*"

Rising Star

By the late 1940s, Rafi was already being recognized as a rising star. His voice carried a rare blend of clarity and emotion, capable of expressing youthful exuberance and profound



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From a fakir's haunting chant in Kotla Sultan Singh to the courtyards of Lahore, Rafi's voice carried the sincerity of Punjab's soil — a gift that would one day enthrall millions.
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● ●
The boy who mimicked birds, carts, and mystics became the man whose voice embodied both poetry and prayer — Mohammed Rafi's roots in Punjab shaped a voice eternal.
 ● ●

sorrow. In an era dominated by stalwarts like K.L. Saigal, Rafi's adaptability set him apart. He could sing for any actor, any mood, any genre — and make it believable.

Audiences began to notice. His songs were not just melodies; they were experiences. Whether it was a romantic serenade or a patriotic anthem, Rafi's voice seemed to embody the collective emotions of a nation finding its identity after independence.

Emotional Depth

One of the most striking qualities of Rafi's early singing was his emotional depth. He once said, *A singer must feel the song before singing it. If I cannot feel it, how will the listener?* This philosophy became his hallmark. Even in his early years, he treated every song as a story, every note as a heartbeat. ■

TO BE CONTINUED...

BAL GANGADHAR TILAK

GALVANIZING THE COUNTRY THROUGH THE GĪTĀ

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was more than a fiery nationalist; he was a thinker who reimagined scripture as a call to action. In his *Gītā Rahasya*, written in Mandalay jail, Tilak rejected centuries of renunciatory interpretations and proclaimed the Gītā's true essence as Karmayoga — selfless duty. By turning philosophy into politics, he gave India's freedom struggle a moral foundation, transforming the sacred text into a manifesto for Swaraj.



BY SUDHANSHU RANJAN

The author is a senior journalist, columnist, and prolific writer who retired from Doordarshan and All India Radio; he has authored several books, notably *Justice, Judocracy, and Democracy: Boundaries and Breaches* (Routledge) and *Justice versus Judiciary: Justice Enthroned or Entangled in India* (Oxford).

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a multifaceted personality endowed with revolutionary ardour and rare intellectual firepower. The man who coined the slogan “*Swaraj is my birthright and I will have it*” blazed a trail through struggle and sacrifice to make it a reality, so much so that Valentine Chirol called him “the father of Indian unrest.” Tilak fought with both sword and pen, writing articles that aroused people against unjust colonial rule, for which he was sentenced to long terms of imprisonment on charges of sedition.

A New Interpretation of the Gītā

Tilak's masterpiece was the *Śrī Bhagavadgītā Rahasya*, written during his incarceration in Mandalay jail (1908–1914). In it, he exploded the myth that the Gītā teaches *sannyāsa* (renuncia-

tion). This traditional exposition suited the imperial government, encouraging passivity. Tilak argued instead that the Gītā's essence is *Karmayoga* — selfless action without attachment to results. It is *Niṣkāma KarmaYoga* (desireless action), not renunciation.

This interpretation gave religious sanction to the freedom struggle. Written in Marathi as *Gītā Rahasya* (also called *Karmayoga Shastra*), it was quickly translated into many Indian languages and became a rallying point for Swaraj. Tilak rejected the Buddhist doctrine of conquering anger with nonanger, insisting politics was a worldly game, not for saints. He echoed Clausewitz's dictum that war is politics by other means, interpreting Krishna's words to mean that if someone comes with a sword, one must fight with a sword.

Mahatma Gandhi, however, interpreted the same verse as embodying nonviolence and equal respect for all religions. His exegesis was diametrically opposite to Tilak's, though both sought moral grounding in the Gītā.

Rejection of Earlier Exegesis

Tilak rejected earlier commentaries dominated by *nivṛttimārg* (renunciation). He questioned why a text meant to induce Arjuna to fight should emphasize only *moksha marga*. He inveighed against Ādi Śankara's *Bhāgavad Gītā Bhāṣya*, which emphasized Advaita Jñāna — realizing “I am Brahman.” For Śankara, action cleanses the mind but does not liberate. Tilak found this incongruous with the Gītā's context.

Śankara later moved towards devotion, as seen in *Saundarya Lahiri*, but



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By redefining the *Gītā* as a call to *Karmayoga*,
Tilak gave India's freedom struggle a moral
foundation — turning scripture into a
manifesto for *Swaraj*.

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Tilak remained silent on this shift. Other exponents like Rāmānuja emphasized *bhakti* and *śaraṅgati* (total surrender). Tilak, however, insisted that reviling *pravṛtti* (active engagement) had led to centuries of slavery. For him, the *Gītā* preached *Karmayoga*, making *Jñāna* and *Bhakti* recessive.

Writing in Jail

Tilak refused conditional release from Mandalay, declaring he would not efface himself from public life. He buried himself in study, amassing 400 books, learning Pali, German, and French, and reading European Indologists. He wrote *Gītā Rahasya* in five months (Nov 1910–Mar 1911), joining the ranks of Bunyan, Voltaire, and Paine who produced classics in prison.

Tilak concluded that the *Gītā* is a book of *Karmayoga*. Earlier commentators, he argued, misinterpreted it to align with the *Prasthāntrayī* (Upaniṣads, Brahmasūtra, *Gītā*), which emphasized renunciation. He insisted the *Gītā*'s tradition was congruous only with the Bhagavata religion, not renunciatory paths.

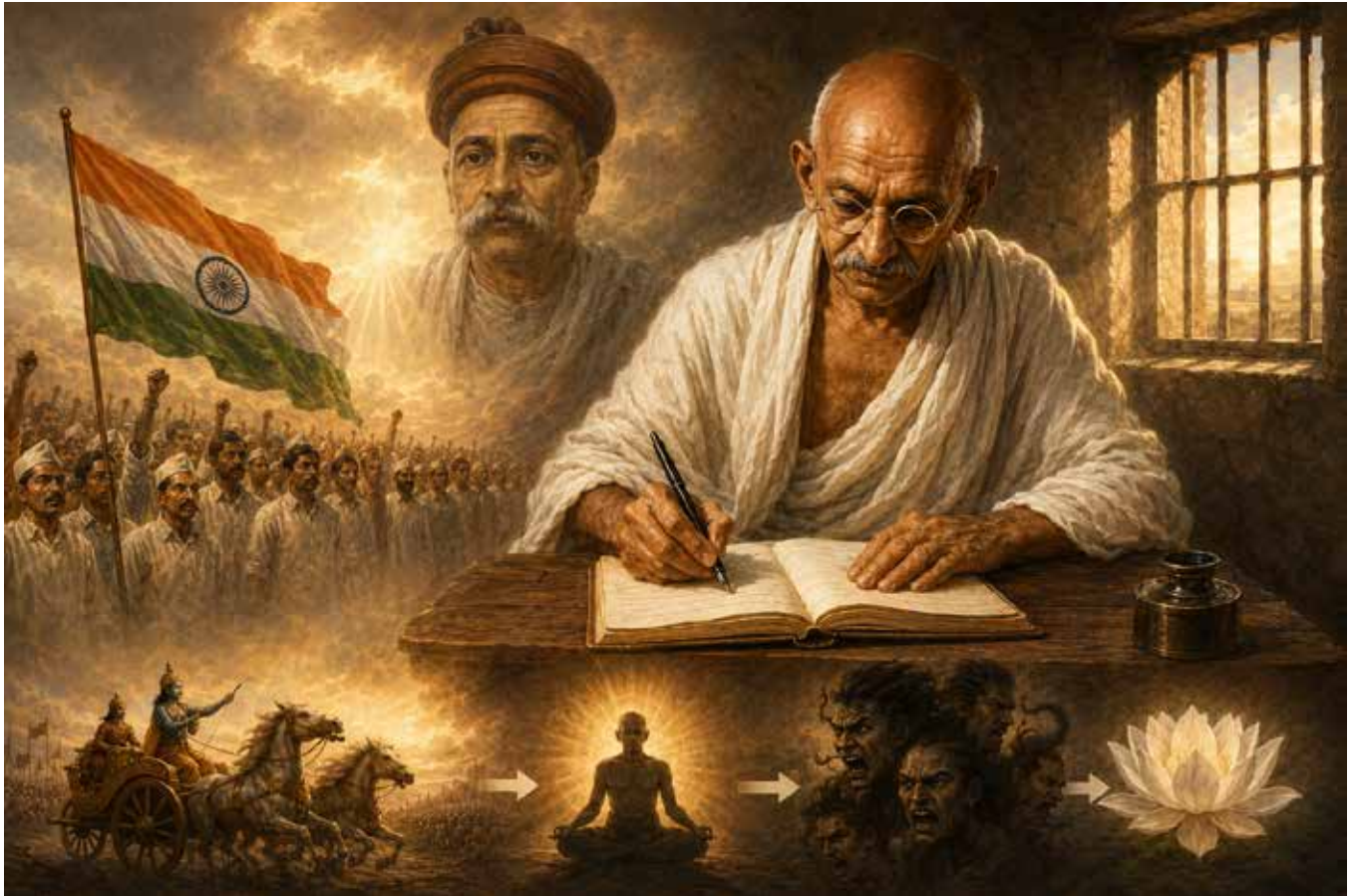
Conflict of Action and Renunciation

Tilak dwelt on whether a *sthitaprajña* (steadyinmind sage) should continue performing action after attaining knowledge. He explained that both abandoning action and performing it without desire for fruits are possible, but Krishna unequivocally told Arjuna that nobody can escape action.

Tilak cited parallels in *YogaVasīṣṭha*, *Ganeśa Gītā*, and Aristotle, who argued that both philosophy and political activity are proper, but nonaction is not superior. Tilak concluded that even a sage must perform prescribed duties with a disinterested mind, and that *Karmayoga* and renunciation are equally valid paths to liberation.

Varṇāśrama and Swadharma

Tilak spoke of action in terms of duties of the four castes (*varṇāśrama dharma*). Śankara too supported this system but interpreted caste as an *upadhi* (illusory equipment), not ultimate reality. Vinoba Bhave emphasized *swadharma* — one's natural duty — warning against



Rejecting centuries of passive exegesis, Tilak insisted that selfless duty, not withdrawal, was the true path — electrifying a nation to rise against colonial rule.

adopting another's dharma. He illustrated with metaphors: a fish cannot survive in milk, only in water.

Vinoba stressed that desireless action benefits both individual and society, while Gandhi echoed that selfless service purifies. Vivekananda emphasized harmony with personal dharma, while Aurobindo clarified that the Gītā's mention of *cāturvarṇa* referred to ancient ideals, not the rigid caste system.

Not Feasible to Give Up Karma

Tilak argued it is impossible to abandon action altogether, as some actions are natureborn. Wordsworth too emphasized wisdom gained from direct inter-

action with nature over bookish knowledge, showing that apparent inactivity can still be meaningful action.

Gandhi's Counter to Tilak

Gandhi contradicted Tilak on violence. Writing *Anāsaktiyoga* in Yerwada Jail (1929), he kept Tilak's *Gītā Rahasya* by his side. Gandhi agreed that one must renounce attachment, not action, but insisted that detachment makes violence impossible. For him, the war in the Gītā was allegorical — an inner conflict between noble and ignoble tendencies. He exhorted killing inner enemies like anger and greed. Gandhi emphasized the 26 godly virtues in Chapter 16, with nonviolence foremost.

Using the Gītā for the National Movement

Tilak converted the Gītā from a text of personal salvation to one of national action. Its new interpretation galvanized Indians to fight colonial rule. Released from Mandalay, Tilak was dismayed at Congress's passivity. He electrified youth with speeches:

"Freedom is my birthright...We ask for Home Rule and we must get it. The science which ends in Home Rule is the science of politics and not the one which ends in slavery. You have a soul and I only want to wake it up."

Conclusion

Tilak used the Gītā to instill confidence in a demoralized people, disabusing them of guilt for engaging in worldly duties. His reinterpretation gave philosophical legitimacy to political action, transforming the Gītā into a weapon of national awakening. Gandhi disagreed on violence but shared Tilak's emphasis on selfless duty. Together, their readings ensured the Gītā remained central to India's moral and political imagination. ■

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LIGHTS ON — AND THE MAGIC BEGINS...



On stage, **SANDEEP DUTTA** emerges as the master of light design. In this free wheeling conversation with *PRAVASI INDIANS'* **MADHU SEN**, his exceptional talent shines through — blending technology with artistic nuance to transform performers and their craft. For reimagining the focus of spotlights and turning illumination into storytelling, Dutta has been honoured with numerous awards, including the coveted National Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, 2023, for stage light design. Excerpts...

What inspired you to opt for a career in light design for events?

My inspiration came from watching Ram Lila and other cultural performances during Durga Puja celebrations as a child.

When I came to Delhi in the late 1980s, I was fortunate to meet my mentor and guide, Gautam Bhat-tacharya, a renowned light designer. He introduced me to R. K. Dhingra, one of the founders of Modern Stage Service, among the leading light

How have art and artists shaped your concept about light design? Could you share an anecdote or two?

Artists have been my greatest teachers.

During a rehearsal, the celebrated Odissi dancer, Ranjana Gauhar, once told me, "Your blue wash is washing out my 'abhinaya' (nuanced expressions). I need the audience to see the tear in my eye." That one sentence taught me that lighting for dance must first serve expression and clarity, and only then beauty.

The result was stunningly powerful—the makeup, expressions, and movements acquired a far greater emotional depth and intensity.

These kinds of experiences taught me that every art form has its own grammar of light, and a lighting designer must first understand the language of the performance.

What are the challenges that creative light designers face, and how do you navigate such complex situations?



and sound equipment house with 360-degree in-house facilities. Under his guidance, I learnt both stage lighting and sound, while immersing myself in dance, theatre, and music performances.

I soon realized how a single beam of light could transform the entire mood of a performance. In Indian culture, light means 'prakash'—that which reveals truth, beauty, and emotion. I was taught not merely to illuminate the stage, but to reveal the story through light. That philosophy drew me into the world of lighting design and continues to guide my work and since has ever remained my passion.

● ●
**Not merely to
 illuminate, but to reveal
 the story — that is the
 true dharma of light.**
 ● ●

On another occasion, while working with the renowned Bharatanatyam artist, Geeta Chandran, on a Bharatanatyam piece depicting 'raudra rasa' (The fierce expression) she asked me to eliminate all white light. We used only deep amber tones and shadows.

The biggest challenges are limited time, limited budgets, and venues that are not designed for dance or theatre productions.

There are occasions when we have barely twenty minutes to focus fifty or more lights before a performance begins. In such situations, prioritization becomes essential. I always ask myself: What are the three things the audience must see? The performer's face, the costume, and the stage floor. Everything else is secondary.

Equally important is early communication with the choreographer or director. Lighting should never be an afterthought—it should evolve



alongside the choreography and become an integral part of the performance.

Could you share one of your most challenging moments and the lessons learned from it?

During an outdoor festival, the power failed just five minutes before the performance. When the system restarted, our lighting console had lost all the programmed cues. We had no choice but to operate the entire performance manually.

We quickly reworked the production using only three carefully positioned pools of light. Surprisingly, the performance received tremendous appreciation from both the audience and the artists.

That experience reinforced an important lesson: constraints do not diminish creativity—they refine it. Since then, I have always ensured that every production has a simple emergency lighting plot as a backup.

Your experience spans more than twenty years in this specialized field. How receptive has the artistic fraternity been to technological changes where digital and multimedia are repackaging performances?

● ●
A sudden power failure forced him to improvise with just three pools of light – and the performance won greater applause than ever.
● ●

The artistic fraternity is far more receptive today than it was two decades ago.

Twenty years ago, many artists had only begun to appreciate the creative potential of stage lighting. Later, when LEDs, digital projections, and multimedia entered the scene, there was some hesitation. Many feared that technology would make classical performances appear overly theatrical or “filmy.”

On the contrary, today, younger dancers and theatre practitioners actively explore multimedia possibilities. However, the key lies in balance. Technology should deepen the experience of ‘rasa,’ not overshadow it. Whether it is a projected temple backdrop for an Odissi performance or subtle vi-

sual textures in contemporary dance, technology must remain a sensitive collaborator rather than becoming the focal point.

The performer should always remain at the heart of the presentation.

Technically, what are the advancements in stage light design, and how have you used them to enhance performances?

Stage lighting technology has evolved tremendously over the years. Some of the advancements regularly used by me include:

- * High-CRI LED fixtures, which reproduce skin tones, silk costumes, and intricate textiles with remarkable accuracy while generating far less heat than traditional tungsten lights.
- * Wireless DMX systems and moving wash fixtures, which offer greater flexibility, especially for touring productions across diverse venues.
- * Projection mapping and gobos, which help create architectural and scenic environments without relying on elaborate physical sets.
- * Pixel control and media servers, which enable subtle visual textures and dynamic backgrounds, particularly in contemporary productions.

While these technologies expand creative possibilities, my guiding principle remains unchanged: technology should enhance the mood and storytelling without diverting attention from the artist.

How is light a synergizing element in the overall stage presentation?

Light is the invisible force that unifies every element of a performance.

Music creates rhythm, dance gives form, and the stage design creates space—but light brings focus, atmosphere, and emotional depth. It directs the audience’s attention, shapes their emotional journey, and influences what they ultimately remember.

A thoughtfully designed lighting plan allows the performers, music, costumes, and stage design to exist as one harmonious visual experience.

Without light, there is no stage.

With light, even an empty space can become an entire world.

You are the recipient of several recognitions, including the National Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, 2023. What do these honours mean to you?

Receiving the National Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, 2023 was deeply humbling and immensely meaningful.

For many years, lighting was viewed merely as technical support. This recognition acknowledges lighting design as a genuine artistic discipline within Indian performing arts.

For me, the honour extends far beyond personal recognition. It celebrates every lighting designer, programmer, technician, and operator who has worked behind the scenes with dedication and passion. Most importantly, it tells young people that lighting can be pursued as a lifelong artistic 'sadhana' (Life-long devotion).

Pandit Birju Maharaj Ji often spoke about how even a single 'deep-ak' (Lamp), placed thoughtfully, could evoke profound devotion. That simple yet profound philosophy continues to influence my own approach to lighting design.

● ●
**From Ranjana
 Gauhar's tear to
 Geeta Chandran's
 raudra rasa,
 Dutta shows
 how light must
 serve the artist's
 expression
 before beauty.**
 ● ●



You have been associated with many cultural institutions and iconic artists. Whom do you look up to in particular?

I have had the privilege of learning from gurus and performers across Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, theatre, and many repertory companies.

I especially admire artists who consider light as a creative collaborator rather than merely a technical necessity.

Where do you see Indian performing arts five years from now and its global presence?

I believe Indian performing arts will have an even stronger global presence over the next five years—not merely as traditional or ethnic expressions, but as contemporary world art.

With digital platforms, live streaming, and international touring, a perfor-

mance staged in Delhi can now reach audiences in Berlin, Tokyo, or New York and other countries in real time.

Our challenge will be to preserve the soul of our artistic traditions while adapting to global performance environments. Sensitive lighting design will play an important role in translating Indian aesthetics effectively across cultures and stages worldwide.

You have travelled to several countries. How is the Indian art shaping our nation's global image?

I have had the opportunity and privilege to work in numerous countries through festivals and international collaborations. Wherever, I have travelled, audiences have connected deeply with Indian performing arts because of their spirituality, discipline, and timeless storytelling.

Indian art represents one of our country's greatest forms of soft power. Whether an audience witnesses a Kathak 'tukra' (small dance piece) or a Mohiniyattam 'padam' (signifies a shift from Nritya to Abhinaya), presented with thoughtful lighting, they experience an India that is both ancient in its wisdom and vibrantly alive in the present.

Lighting helps bridge cultures by making these artistic experiences universally accessible.

What is your take on self, lights, and action? Could you share your vision or mission?

For me, 'You' is the artist. 'Action' is the performance. 'Lights' is my dharma—to reveal both truthfully, sensitively, and with integrity.

My dream is that, in the coming years, artists will no longer say, "Light theek kar do" ("Just fix the lights"). Instead, they will say, "Let's design the light." That makes all the difference.

Because when light is created with understanding, empathy, and artistic intent, it does far more than illuminate a performance. It becomes an inseparable part of the storytelling—and remains in the audience's memory long after the curtain falls. ■

JOURNEYS WRITTEN IN THE STARS

Humanity has looked to the heavens for guidance since the dawn of civilisation. Across cultures and centuries, astrology has evolved as a traditional discipline that seeks to interpret the subtle relationship between celestial movements and human experience. Its foundation is the Janam Kundli, or birth chart, which records the planetary configuration at the exact moment of birth. Rather than portraying destiny as fixed, astrology attempts to identify life's opportunities and challenges, encouraging greater self-understanding while prescribing practices such as meditation, mantra, charity, fasting and gemstones to foster balance and positive living.



BY ACHARYA DINAIK

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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.

अगस्त 2026 मासिक राशिफल

मेष (Aries)



अगस्त का महीना ऊर्जा और नए अवसर लेकर आएगा।
कार्यक्षेत्र में आपकी मेहनत की सराहना होगी।
कोई रुका हुआ काम पूरा हो सकता है।
आर्थिक स्थिति बेहतर रहेगी, लेकिन अनावश्यक खर्चों से बचें।
परिवार में किसी शुभ कार्य की योजना बन सकती है।
प्रेम संबंधों में मधुरता बढ़ेगी।
स्वास्थ्य में पेट और सिरदर्द से जुड़ी छोटी परेशानियाँ हो सकती हैं।
शुभ रंग: लाल
शुभ अंक: 9

वृषभ (Taurus)



यह महीना धैर्य रखने का है।
नौकरी या व्यापार में धीरे-धीरे प्रगति होगी।
किसी पुराने मित्र से लाभ मिल सकता है।
निवेश सोच-समझकर करें।
परिवार में जिम्मेदारियाँ बढ़ सकती हैं।
दांपत्य जीवन अच्छा रहेगा।
स्वास्थ्य में गले या सर्दी की समस्या हो सकती है।
शुभ रंग: सफेद
शुभ अंक: 6

मिथुन (Gemini)



नई योजनाएँ बनेंगी और करियर में बदलाव के संकेत हैं।
विद्यार्थी वर्ग को सफलता मिलेगी।
विदेश या दूर यात्रा के योग बन रहे हैं।
आर्थिक लाभ के नए रास्ते खुल सकते हैं।
प्रेम जीवन में स्पष्ट बातचीत जरूरी रहेगी।
मानसिक तनाव से बचें।
शुभ रंग: हरा
शुभ अंक: 5

कर्क (Cancer)



परिवार और भावनात्मक मामलों में यह महीना महत्वपूर्ण रहेगा।
नौकरी में वरिष्ठों का सहयोग मिलेगा।
रुका हुआ पैसा वापस आ सकता है।
घर या वाहन से जुड़ा कोई निर्णय ले सकते हैं।
जीवनसाथी के साथ समय अच्छा रहेगा।
स्वास्थ्य में नींद की कमी या थकावट महसूस हो सकती है।
शुभ रंग: सिल्वर
शुभ अंक: 2

सिंह (Leo)



आपके आत्मविश्वास में वृद्धि होगी।

नेतृत्व क्षमता के कारण समाज में सम्मान बढ़ेगा।
व्यापार में नए अवसर मिलेंगे।
सरकारी कार्यों में सफलता मिल सकती है।
प्रेम संबंध मजबूत होंगे।
परिवार में किसी सदस्य की उपलब्धि से खुशी मिलेगी।
स्वास्थ्य सामान्य रहेगा।
शुभ रंग: गोल्डन
शुभ अंक: 1

कन्या (Virgo)



यह महीना मेहनत और अनुशासन का रहेगा।
नौकरी में अतिरिक्त जिम्मेदारी मिल सकती है।
धन लाभ होगा लेकिन खर्च भी बढ़ेगा।
विद्यार्थियों के लिए अच्छा समय है।
रिश्तों में गलतफहमी से बचें।
स्वास्थ्य में पाचन तंत्र का ध्यान रखें।
शुभ रंग: हल्का हरा
शुभ अंक: 5

तुला (Libra)



अगस्त आपके लिए संतुलन बनाने का महीना है।
साझेदारी में काम करने वालों को लाभ मिलेगा।
कोर्ट-कचहरी या कानूनी मामलों में राहत मिल

सकती है।
 प्रेम जीवन बेहतर रहेगा।
 परिवार में बुजुर्गों की सलाह फायदेमंद होगी।
 स्वास्थ्य अच्छा रहेगा।
 शुभ रंग: नीला
 शुभ अंक: 7

वृश्चिक (Scorpio)



काफी समय से रुके काम पूरे हो सकते हैं।
 करियर में अचानक अच्छा अवसर मिलेगा।
 धन लाभ के संकेत हैं लेकिन किसी पर आंख बंद करके
 भरोसा न करें।
 रिश्तों में ईमानदारी बनाए रखें।
 स्वास्थ्य में ब्लड प्रेशर या तनाव का ध्यान रखें।
 शुभ रंग: मरून
 शुभ अंक: 8

धनु (Sagittarius)



भाग्य इस महीने आपका साथ देगा।
 धार्मिक या आध्यात्मिक रुचि बढ़ेगी।
 यात्रा के अच्छे योग बनेंगे।
 व्यापार में विस्तार संभव है।
 नौकरी में प्रमोशन की चर्चा हो सकती है।
 प्रेम संबंधों में स्थिरता आएगी।
 स्वास्थ्य में कमर या पैरों का ध्यान रखें।
 शुभ रंग: पीला
 शुभ अंक: 3

मकर (Capricorn)



मेहनत का पूरा फल मिलने लगेगा।
 संपत्ति या जमीन से जुड़े मामलों में लाभ हो सकता है।
 नौकरी में बदलाव सोच रहे हैं तो अवसर मिलेगा।
 परिवार के साथ समय बिताने का मौका मिलेगा।
 वैवाहिक जीवन अच्छा रहेगा।
 स्वास्थ्य में जोड़ों के दर्द की समस्या हो सकती है।
 शुभ रंग: ग्रे
 शुभ अंक: 8

कुंभ (Aquarius)



नए लोगों से संपर्क बढ़ेगा और उससे लाभ मिलेगा।
 करियर में नई शुरुआत हो सकती है।
 आर्थिक स्थिति मजबूत रहेगी।
 तकनीक या शिक्षा से जुड़े लोगों को सफलता मिलेगी।
 प्रेम संबंधों में भरोसा बनाए रखें।
 स्वास्थ्य में आंखों और नींद का ध्यान रखें।
 शुभ रंग: आसमानी
 शुभ अंक: 4

मीन (Pisces)



अगस्त आत्मचिंतन और नई शुरुआत का समय है।
 रुका हुआ कार्य आगे बढ़ेगा।
 नौकरी या व्यवसाय में लाभ मिलेगा।
 परिवार में सुखद वातावरण रहेगा।
 प्रेम संबंधों में पुरानी गलतफहमियाँ दूर होंगी।
 स्वास्थ्य में पानी की कमी और कमजोरी महसूस हो सकती है।
 शुभ रंग: पीला
 शुभ अंक: 7

अगस्त 2026 विशेष संकेत

युवाओं के लिए करियर निर्णय का समय
 निवेश में सावधानी रखें
 स्वास्थ्य और फिटनेस पर ध्यान देना लाभ देगा
 परिवार और रिश्तों में संवाद बहुत जरूरी रहेगा

कचरे के पहाड़ों तले दबते शहर

कचरा केवल गंदगी नहीं, बल्कि हमारी जीवनशैली और लापरवाही का प्रतिबिंब है। महानगरों की चमक दमक के पीछे कचरे के पहाड़ खड़े हैं, जो हवा को विषाक्त, पानी को जहरीला और मिट्टी को बंजर बना रहे हैं। भारत के शहर हर साल करोड़ों टन ठोस अपशिष्ट पैदा करते हैं, लेकिन उसका निस्तारण अधूरा और अव्यवस्थित है। यह समस्या केवल पर्यावरणीय संकट नहीं, बल्कि सामाजिक जिम्मेदारी की परीक्षा भी है। जब तक नागरिक और सरकार दोनों मिलकर समाधान नहीं खोजेंगे, तब तक शहरीकरण की रफ्तार हमें स्वच्छ भविष्य की बजाय कचरे के अंधकार की ओर ले जाएगी।



डा. प्रशान्त सिन्हा

लेखक एक जाने माने पर्यावरणविद हैं।

कचरा केवल सड़क पर पड़ा हुआ गंदा सामान नहीं है, बल्कि यह हमारी लापरवाही का आईना है। यही कचरा हवा को दूषित करता है, पानी को जहरीला बनाता है और मिट्टी की उर्वरता को नष्ट करता है। जब हम प्लास्टिक, पॉलीथीन और गंदगी को यूँ ही फेंक देते हैं, तो हम केवल अपने आसपास की सफाई नहीं बिगाड़ते, बल्कि आने वाली पीढ़ियों के लिए भी संकट खड़ा कर देते हैं।

आज देश के शहरों में सालाना 6.2 करोड़ टन से अधिक ठोस कचरा उत्पन्न होता है। कोई भी नगर या कस्बा इस समस्या से अछूता नहीं है। एक ओर प्राकृतिक पहाड़ टूट रहे हैं, तो दूसरी ओर कृत्रिम कचरे के पहाड़ खड़े हो रहे हैं। दिल्ली, मुंबई और अन्य महानगरों में विशाल कचरा स्थल इस विडंबना के जीवंत उदाहरण हैं।

विश्व बैंक की रिपोर्ट बताती है कि







महानगरीय क्षेत्रों में रहने वाले लोग प्रतिदिन औसतन 1.2 किलोग्राम ठोस कचरा पैदा करते हैं। भारत के शहरी क्षेत्रों में लगभग 37.7 करोड़ लोग सालाना अनुमानित 6.2 करोड़ टन कचरा उत्पन्न करते हैं। यह आँकड़े स्पष्ट करते हैं कि शहरीकरण की गति के साथ साथ कचरे की मात्रा भी तेजी से बढ़ रही है।

मुंबई का देवनार स्थल 110 हेक्टेयर में फैला देश का सबसे बड़ा कचरा ढेर है। दिल्ली के गाजीपुर, मुबारक चौक और ओखला में भी कचरे के पहाड़ खड़े हैं। लेकिन दुखद यह है कि न सरकार और न ही जनता अपने ही बनाए कचरे की जिम्मेदारी लेने को तैयार है। दोनों पक्ष एक दूसरे पर दोषारोपण कर समस्या को और गंभीर बना देते हैं।

कचरे की समस्या का मूल कारण हमारी उपभोक्तावादी प्रवृत्ति है। बढ़ती क्रय शक्ति ने हमें पुनः उपयोग की संस्कृति से दूर कर दिया है। डिब्बाबंद और प्लास्टिक पैक वस्तुओं की अंधाधुंध खरीद ने कचरे के पहाड़ को और ऊँचा कर दिया है। रीसाइक्लिंग और निपटान की व्यवस्थाएँ अधूरी हैं, ऊपर से हमारा गैर जिम्मेदाराना व्यवहार स्थिति को

● ●
दिल्ली और मुंबई जैसे महानगरों में गाजीपुर, ओखला और देवनार स्थल पर कचरे के विशाल ढेर शहरीकरण की भयावह तस्वीर पेश करते हैं।

● ●
प्लास्टिक पैक वस्तुओं की अंधाधुंध खरीद और पुनः उपयोग की परंपरा से दूरी ने भारत को कचरे के संकट में धकेल दिया है।

● ●
कपड़े का झोला अपनाना, घरेलू कचरे का पुनः उपयोग और जिम्मेदार नागरिक व्यवहार ही इस समस्या से निकलने का रास्ता है।

और बिगाड़ देता है।

समाधान स्पष्ट है—कचरे का उत्पादन कम करना। यदि हम कम कचरा पैदा करेंगे तो निस्तारण की समस्या भी कम होगी। हमें अपनी उपभोक्तावादी आदतें बदलनी होंगी। खरीदारी के लिए कपड़े का झोला अपनाना होगा, पुरानी वस्तुओं को पुनः उपयोग में लाना होगा और घरेलू कचरे का प्रभावी निपटान करना होगा।

1970 से पहले गाँवों के किसान रसोई से निकलने वाले जैविक कचरे को खेतों में खाद बनाने के लिए ले जाते थे। लेकिन प्लास्टिक युग और रासायनिक उर्वरकों पर सरकारी सब्सिडी ने इस स्वस्थ परंपरा को समाप्त कर दिया। अब समय आ गया है कि हम इस परंपरा को पुनर्जीवित करें और जैविक कचरे को पुनः उपयोगी बनाएँ।

सबसे महत्वपूर्ण बात यह है कि जितना अधिक कचरा हम पैदा करेंगे, उससे छुटकारा पाना उतना ही कठिन होगा। इसलिए हमें संकल्प लेना चाहिए—

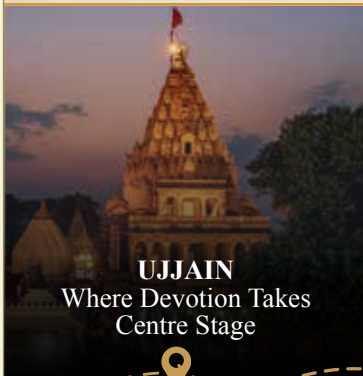
न कचरा फैलाएँगे, न फैलने देंगे। धरती को स्वच्छ रखेंगे, भविष्य को सुरक्षित रखेंगे। ■



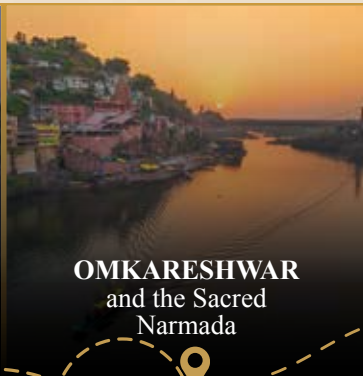
Experience the Sacred Month of *Shravan* In Madhya Pradesh

This Monsoon

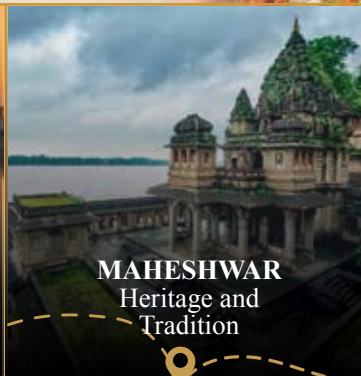
As the sacred month of Shravan unfolds, centuries-old chants of Har Har Mahadev once again echo across the temple towns, river ghats and ancient pilgrimage routes of Madhya Pradesh. With the arrival of the monsoon, rivers swell, landscapes turn lush and temple bells resonate across historic cities. It is a time when devotion deepens and travel transforms into a spiritual experience.



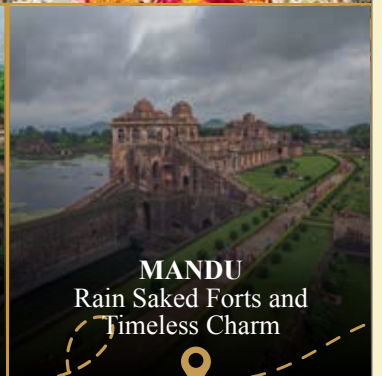
UJJAIN
Where Devotion Takes
Centre Stage



OMKARESHWAR
and the Sacred
Narmada



MAHESHWAR
Heritage and
Tradition



MANDU
Rain Saked Forts and
Timeless Charm

The Auspicious Month of Shravan

Shravan is one of the most sacred months in the Hindu calendar, dedicated to Lord Shiva. Across Madhya Pradesh, villages and temple towns come alive with rituals, bhajans, community processions and traditions lovingly preserved for generations. Mist-covered hills, flowing rivers and rain-washed heritage sites create a stunning backdrop for this season of devotion.

Ujjain: Where Devotion Takes Centre Stage

At the centre of this spiritual landscape is the Mahakaleshwar Temple in Ujjain, one of the twelve Jyotirlingas. Devotees gather for the famed pre-dawn Bhasma Aarti, while on select

Mondays, the Mahakal Sawari transforms the city into a grand celebration of faith with music, decorated processions and chants accompanying the deity through the streets. A few hours away, the Omkareshwar Temple stands on an island shaped like the sacred symbol Om. During Shravan, pilgrims carry holy water from the Narmada to offer at Shiva temples, while evening aartis along the ghats create moments of quiet reflection. The nearby Statue of Oneness, dedicated to Adi Shankaracharya, adds a deeper philosophical dimension to the pilgrimage.

Where Rivers and Faith Meet

The Narmada remains central to Madhya Pradesh's spiritual identity, flowing from Amarkantak through Maheshwar and Jabalpur. Beyond the celebrated Jyotirlingas, revered shrines such as Bhojeshwar Mahadev

in Bhojpur, Jatashankar Temple in Pachmarhi, Chitrakoot and Orchha enrich this interconnected sacred landscape.

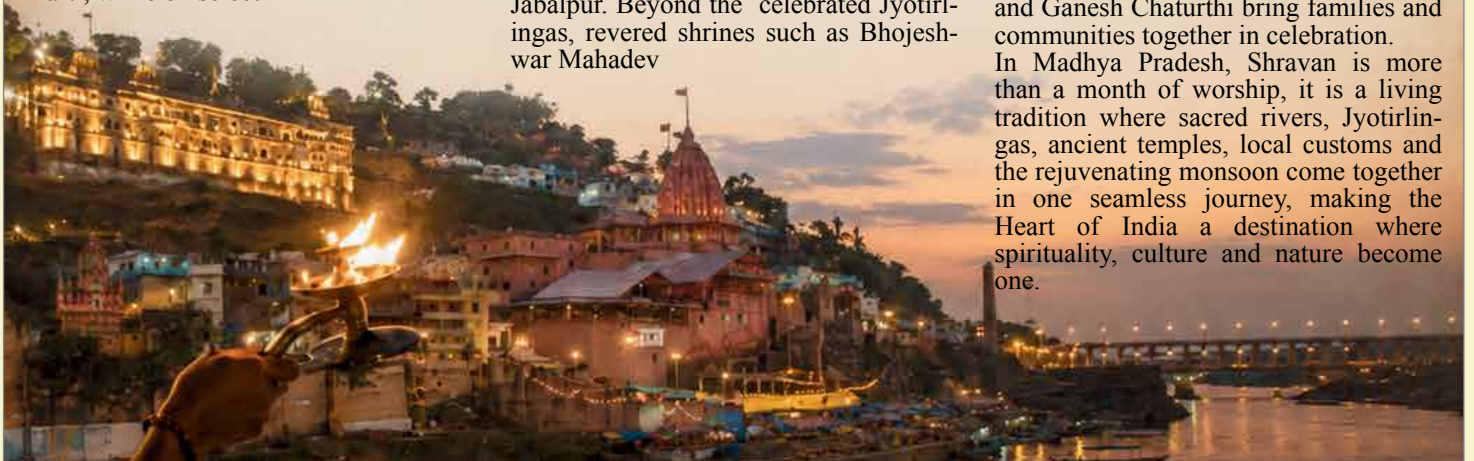
A Monsoon Pilgrimage

This spiritual journey aligns beautifully with Madhya Pradesh's monsoon circuit—Indore, Ujjain, Omkareshwar, Maheshwar and Mandu. Along the way, travellers can witness evening aartis, explore the Ahilya Bai Fort, discover Maheshwari textiles, savour regional cuisine and conclude amid the mist-covered forts and rain-soaked beauty of Mandu.

From Shravan to Festive Celebrations

As Shravan gives way to the festive season, Raksha Bandhan, Janmashtami and Ganesh Chaturthi bring families and communities together in celebration.

In Madhya Pradesh, Shravan is more than a month of worship, it is a living tradition where sacred rivers, Jyotirlingas, ancient temples, local customs and the rejuvenating monsoon come together in one seamless journey, making the Heart of India a destination where spirituality, culture and nature become one.



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