

VIVIDH

A Vedanta Group Initiative

Verse



ISSUE 02

20
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Ideas for Transformation

Tech & AI
Transforming
Women's Safety

Sports
Bihar Cricket's
New Innings

Economy
Rise of Regional
Influencers

WHAT INDIA NEEDS, NOW STANDS ON FIVE STRONG FOUNDATIONS.



NSE: VEDL
BSE: 500295

**Powering industries of today,
incubating industries of tomorrow**

World's largest integrated zinc producer
Amongst top silver producers
Sole producer of nickel
Significant domestic copper & ferrochrome supplier



NSE: VAML
BSE: 544780

**Shaping tomorrow with the
'Metal of the Future'**

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Low carbon 'Green' Aluminium portfolio
3 MTPA Greenfield Expansion
Building downstream Aluminium Park



NSE: VOGL
BSE: 382914

**Unlocking India's hydrocarbon
potential**

India's largest private-sector Oil & Gas producer
44 blocks across a diverse hydrocarbon portfolio
\$5 Bn investment planned to scale production
Energy-security driven opportunity



NSE: VEDPOWER
BSE: 544781

**Reliable power for a
growing India**

Vision: 20 GW portfolio
Aims to be amongst top 3 Power Cos
Platform for future diversification
into Nuclear, Hydro,
Battery Storage (BESS)



NSE: VISL
BSE: 544784

**Strengthening foundations.
Building nations.**

Vision: 15 MnT steelmaking capacity
Focus on Green Steel, Speciality Steel
Integrated resources
(iron ore, met coke & gas pipeline)

DESH KI ZAROORATON KE LIYE

प्रस्तावना

इस 15 अगस्त जब आप सोकर उठें तो एक पल ठहरियेगा ज़रूर, क्योंकि उस दिन हमारा भारत अपनी आज़ादी के 80वें वर्ष में कदम रख रहा होगा। वह आज़ादी जिसे पाने की लड़ाई में पुरुषों, महिलाओं और बच्चों ने बराबरी से भाग लिया था, और हम आजीवन उनके कर्ज़दार रहेंगे।

मेरे लिए भारत के ये 80 साल सिर्फ बीता हुआ वक्त नहीं है, मेरा अपना जीवन भी है। हमारा सफ़र एक-दूसरे से कुछ इस तरह जुड़ा है कि मैं कभी इन्हें अलग करके देख ही नहीं पाता। हमारी शुरुआत लगभग एक जैसी ही थी। रास्ते बहुत मुश्किल थे और संसाधन बेहद सीमित। हर छोटी चीज़ के लिए संघर्ष करना पड़ता था। लेकिन पता है, जब बाहर से कुछ नहीं मिलता, तो इंसान हो या देश, दोनों को अपने जुनून और काबिलियत पर भरोसा करना पड़ता है।

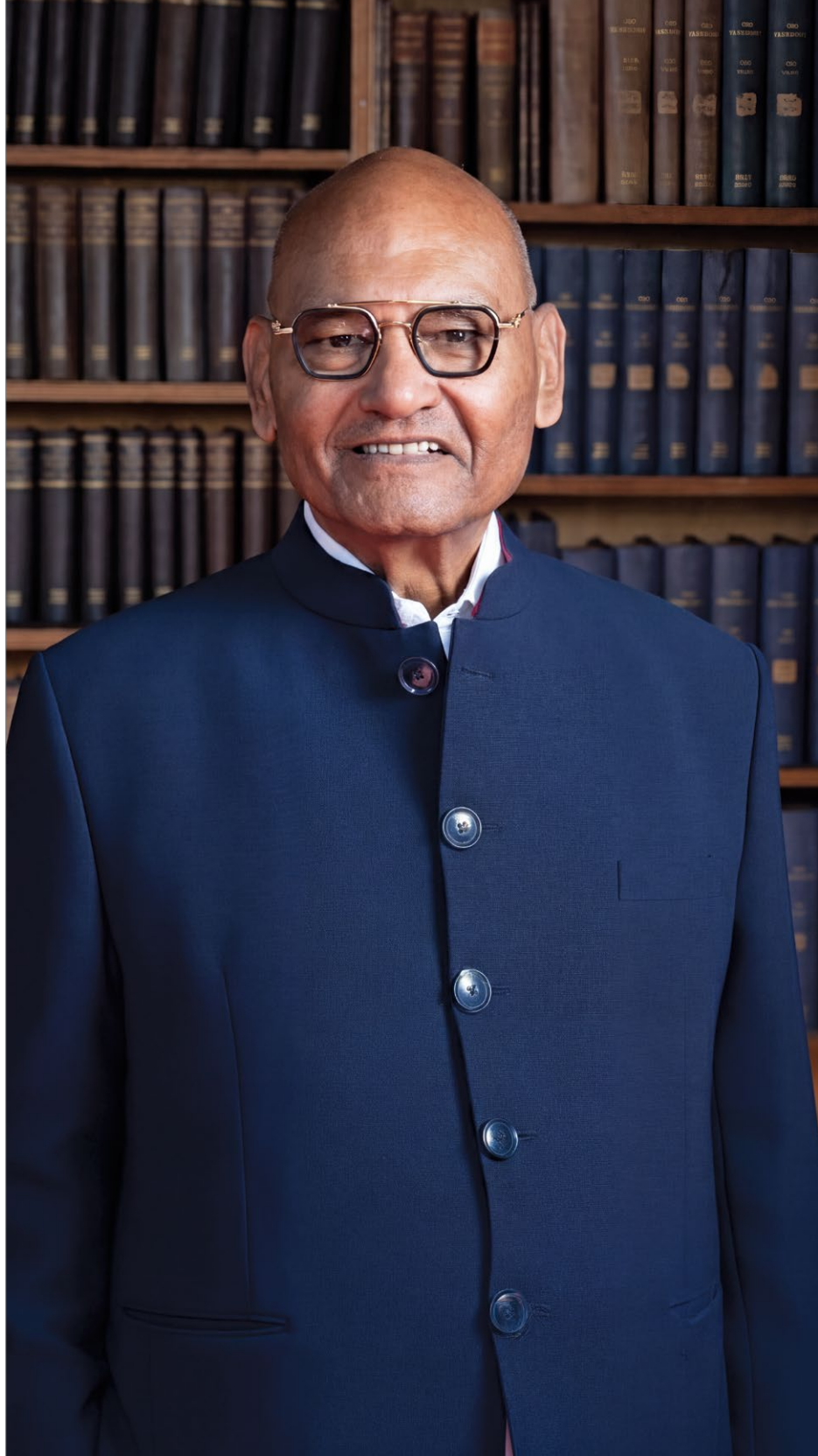
हम दोनों ने यही किया, और वहाँ तक पहुँचे, जहाँ पहुँचना कभी एक सपना लगता था। बिहार से निकलकर अभी तक की मेरी जो यात्रा रही, वह हमारे इस महान देश की अपनी तरक्की का ही एक हिस्सा है।

जहाँ कभी धूल उड़ाती कच्ची सड़कें थीं, आज वंदे भारत जैसी ट्रेनें दौड़ रही हैं। कभी चिट्ठी और पैसे भेजने में हफ़्तों लगते थे, आज एक बच्चा भी पलक झपकते ही ईमेल और क्यूआर (QR) कोड से डिजिटल पेमेंट कर रहा है। जिस देश को हर छोटी मशीन या तकनीक के लिए विदेशों का मुँह देखना पड़ता था, आज वहाँ "मेक इन इंडिया" का परचम लहरा रहा है। महिलाएँ जो कभी घर की चारदीवारी तक सीमित थीं, अपने संघर्ष और शक्ति से आज बड़ी-बड़ी फैक्ट्रियाँ चलाने से लेकर स्पेस मिशन तक को लीड कर रही हैं। देश के विकास में उनका योगदान अनमोल है, इन उपलब्धियों के लिए मैं उन्हें बधाई और धन्यवाद देता हूँ।

सच कहूँ तो मुझे लगता है कि जब हमारे पास कुछ नहीं था, फिर भी अपनी मेहनत और लगन से जब हम यहाँ तक आ गए हैं, तब आज तो हमारे पास बहुत कुछ है — असीमित संसाधन, आधुनिक तकनीक, प्रोग्रेसिव गवर्नमेंट और मज़बूत इच्छाशक्ति। अभी-अभी तो हमारे देश ने विकास की रफ़्तार पकड़ी है। वेदांता के माध्यम से हम भी देश की इसी रफ़्तार में अपना छोटा-सा योगदान देने की कोशिश करते हैं।

एक देश के रूप में हमें ऐसी महाशक्ति बनना है जो आर्थिक और सामरिक रूप से तो शक्तिशाली हो ही, पूरी दुनिया जिसके मूल्यों, नए विचारों और सबको साथ लेकर चलने की भावना का भी लोहा माने।

आज हम सब "I" – यानी व्यक्तिगत सीमाओं के पुराने दौर से निकलकर "AI" - आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस के असीम दौर में प्रवेश कर चुके हैं। अब समय आ गया है कि हम तकनीक की इस महाशक्ति की मदद से देश को All (All-inclusive Independence) - यानी सबको जोड़ती आत्मनिर्भरता की ओर लेकर जाएँ, जहाँ प्रगति का लाभ हर एक भारतीय तक पहुँचे।



"विविध वर्स" का यह नया संस्करण हमारी इसी साझी विरासत और आने वाले कल के संकल्पों का उत्सव है। इस पत्रिका का एक मकसद देश भर से ऐसी सकारात्मक कहानियों को सामने लाना भी है, जो यह बताती हैं कि हमारा भारत एक गतिशील, युवा, रचनात्मक और नवाचार से भरपूर राष्ट्र है, जो पूरी दुनिया को जीतने के लिए तैयार है। आइए, इस ऐतिहासिक वर्ष में हम सब मिलकर एक नए, समृद्ध और पूरी तरह आत्मनिर्भर भारत के निर्माण में अपना पूरा योगदान दें।

आपका,
अनिल अग्रवाल
चेयरमैन, वेदांता समूह

VIVIDH Verse

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Managing Director **Prakash Johari**

CEO **Sasha Somya**

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#TheAddress, Plot No. 62, Okhla Industrial Area

Phase III, New Delhi-110020, India

Phone: + 91 11 4301 1111, Fax: +91 11 4301 1199

Content contributions:

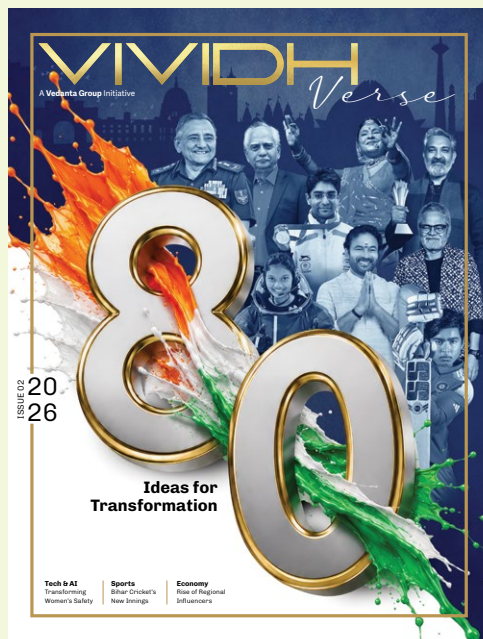
editorial@maxposuremedia.com

E-mail: info@maxposuremedia.com

Website: maxposuremedia.com



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About the cover

A tapestry of dreams and destinies, the cover artwork celebrates India at 80, where timeless traditions, fearless imagination and countless changemakers weave the story of a nation constantly reinventing itself.

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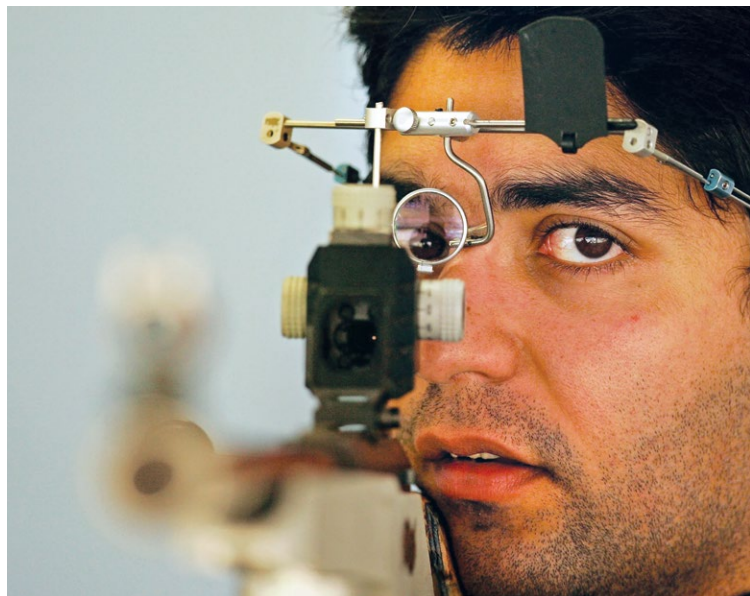


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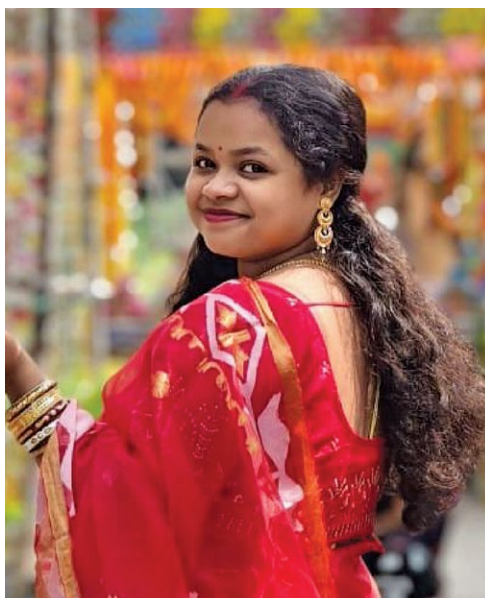


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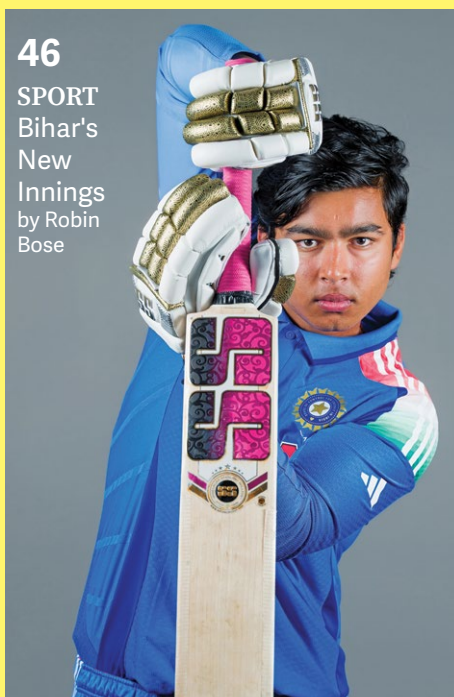
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Shri G. Kishan Reddy

Hon'ble Union Minister of Coal and Mines, Government of India

Through the prism of his own life, Shri G. Kishan Reddy explores the making of a new India, where humble beginnings, determined leadership and inclusive development shape a shared national destiny.

✉ @kishanreddybjp



General Anil Chauhan (Retd)

Former Chief of Defence Staff of the Indian Armed Forces

In this special guest editor's column, General Anil Chauhan (Retd) explores the invisible threads that will shape India's future: connecting people, institutions, innovation and the promise of shared progress.

✉ @CDS_AnilChauhan



Padma Shri Malini Awasthi

Celebrated folk singer and one of India's foremost cultural ambassadors

The Sangeet Natak Akademi Award recipient looks back on how India's artistic and musical traditions have evolved over 80 years of Independence.

✉ @maliniawasthi



Padma Shri S.S. Rajamouli

National Award-winning filmmaker

S.S. Rajamouli talks about the Indian film industry's extraordinary journey over the last eight decades, from hand-crafted sets and analogue filmmaking to visual effects, AI and immersive storytelling.

✉ @ssrajamouli

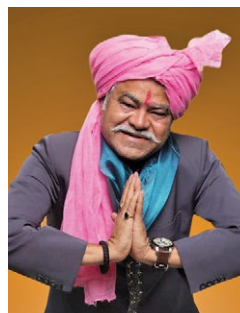


Padma Bhushan Abhinav Bindra

Olympic gold medallist sharp shooter

India's first individual Olympic gold medallist and entrepreneur examines how sport can drive excellence, resilience, inclusion and nation-building on the road to Viksit Bharat 2047.

✉ @abhinav_bindra



Sanjay Mishra

National Award-winning actor

The acclaimed actor, known for his performances in *Bhakshak* (2024) & *Masaan* (2015), reflects on eight decades of cultural transformation in an India that continues to reinvent its stories.

✉ @imsanjaimishra



Sachin Akalekar

Renowned contemporary artist

Featured in this issue is an original artwork by artist Sachin Akalekar. Known for his vibrant depictions of rural life and nature, he has exhibited at Mumbai's Jehangir Art Gallery and other global venues.

✉ @artistsachinakalekar



Marching Towards a More *Integrated* *Future*

As India approaches 80 years of Independence, the country's future will be shaped by its ability to connect people, institutions and opportunities, writes **General Anil Chauhan (Retd)**, former Chief of Defence Staff, in a special guest editor column.

W

hen I look back at my tenure as India's Chief of Defence Staff, I do not see a single reform, policy or operational achievement that defines those years. Rather, I see a larger shift in thinking, which extends beyond the armed forces and speaks to the future of India itself.

For decades, the Army, Navy and Air Force evolved as highly capable institutions within their respective domains. Their structures, cultures and operational philosophies were shaped by the specific challenges they were expected to confront. That model served the nation

well. But warfare, like the world around it, has changed.

Today's conflicts no longer unfold in clearly defined spaces. They span land, sea, air, cyber, space and the information domain simultaneously. Decisions are taken at unprecedented speed. Data moves faster than platforms. Technology evolves faster than doctrine. In such an environment, success depends extensively on collective integration. And this is what I would want to be remembered for, my efforts towards helping India's armed forces think, plan and respond together.



General Anil Chauhan (Retd), former Chief of Defence Staff, at his residence in New Delhi



General Anil Chauhan interacting with the people of Bagori in Uttarakhand

The CDS and the Imperative of Integration

Personally, the role of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) presented a very unique challenge. Unlike the conventional military career path, this was an institution that was still finding its shape. There was no established roadmap. The country itself was adapting to the idea of a single military advisor coordinating the three services. Building something new always carries uncertainty, but it also offers a rare opportunity to leave behind stronger foundations than the ones you inherited.

The office of the CDS itself emerged from the recognition that the future demands greater integration. The first CDS of India, General Bipin Rawat laid its foundations. My responsibility was to help institutionalise it and transform an idea into a functioning reality. Once officers and commanders understood how warfare itself was changing, the case for integration

became self-evident. Conversations gradually shifted away from questions of organisational ownership towards questions of operational effectiveness. The process remains unfinished, but it has already begun.

Today, the position is understood not merely within government but by the broader society as well. The concept of jointness has moved from being a structural reform to becoming an operational necessity, and its success has started to affect other walks of governance as well, which is most encouraging.

The need for such integration becomes clearer when viewed through the lens of technological change. Throughout history, technology has shaped warfare. The bow, the railway, gunpowder, radio communications and missiles each altered the character of conflict. What makes the present moment different is that we are not dealing with



India's commitment to self-reliance is reflected in its goal of achieving ₹3 lakh crore in defence manufacturing and ₹50,000 crore in defence exports by 2029. Self-reliance is not merely about boosting domestic production, but about ensuring India remains capable of defending itself without depending on others in times of crisis.

one transformative technology. We are confronting dozens simultaneously.

Artificial intelligence, robotics, autonomous systems, quantum technologies, advanced sensors, cyber capabilities and space-based systems are all evolving together. The battlefield is becoming increasingly interconnected and transparent. Information now travels faster than command structures were traditionally designed to handle.

The Return of Belonging

Some of the most satisfying moments of my career, however, have little to do with structures or doctrines. Among the memories that remain closest to my heart is one that unfolded far away from headquarters and policy discussions. After retirement, I explored my home state and travelled through parts of Uttarakhand's border regions that I had never previously visited. In the Nelong and Jadang valleys, I met communities displaced decades earlier following the 1962 conflict. Their villages had remained abandoned for generations. During a community gathering, village elders made a simple request to help them return to their villages, where their traditions and deities still resided.

At the time, I was retired and had no authority to act. Yet the conversation stayed with me. Circumstances later placed me in a position where I could raise the issue with the relevant authorities. As CDS, when I returned and saw parts of that process move forward, it offered a different kind of satisfaction. Not every contribution to national security is measured in military



Tech at the Frontline

- **Integrated Drone Network:** Drone ecosystems providing real-time battlefield intelligence and surveillance.
- **Artificial Intelligence:** AI-powered decision support for intelligence analysis, mission planning, and target recognition.
- **Digital Platforms for Self-Reliance:** Srijan-DEEP, a repository of capabilities and products of Indian defence industries, and the Defence EXIM Portal, a single-window system to streamline authorisations for defence exports and imports.

terms. Sometimes it is measured in the restoration of belonging.

Women, Leadership and the Future Force

The same principle applies to another area where India is undergoing profound change, in the role of women. One of the most visible moments during my tenure came when women officers represented the armed forces during high-profile Operation Sindoor briefings. The decision was not symbolic for its own sake. It reflected a broader belief that if India is serious about women's empowerment, the armed forces must participate in that journey. Few institutions carry greater symbolic weight in society. When women lead within military organisations, particularly in demanding operational roles, they reshape perceptions far beyond the barracks.

The inclusion of women in the National Defence Academy marks another important step. Integration is not only about structures; it is also about belonging. Institutions become stronger when every member feels ownership of the organisation's identity, traditions and future.

India at 80

As India approaches 80 years of Independence, I feel one of our greatest successes has been the resilience of our democratic institutions. We live in a region where many democracies have struggled to maintain continuity and stability. India's journey has not been without challenges, but our institutions have endured. That resilience has provided the foundation upon which all other progress rests.



The next phase of India's journey, however, will be fundamentally different from the first. The first 80 years were devoted largely to nation-building. The coming decades will be about influence and contribution. For much of our history, we were recipients of technology, doctrines and systems developed elsewhere. Increasingly, we are becoming providers. Countries now seek Indian training, Indian expertise and Indian perspectives. This shift may be gradual, but it is unmistakable.

As India approaches 80 years of Independence, I feel one of our greatest successes has been the resilience of our democratic institutions. The journey has not been without challenges, but our institutions have endured.



Opportunities for the Youth

India is becoming more self-reliant, more capable and more interconnected. For young Indians, in both metro cities and rural areas, this is a moment of unprecedented opportunity. I come from a modest background. I did not belong to a military family. I studied in an ordinary school. Yet the India of today is far more open and meritocratic than the India into which I was born. Talent can emerge from anywhere. Opportunity is increasingly determined by capability rather than geography now.

Technology has played a remarkable role in this transformation. Distances that once seemed insurmountable have collapsed. Geography is no longer the barrier it once was. A person in a Tier-2 or Tier-3 town can participate in the same economy, access the same information and aspire to the same opportunities as someone in a major city.

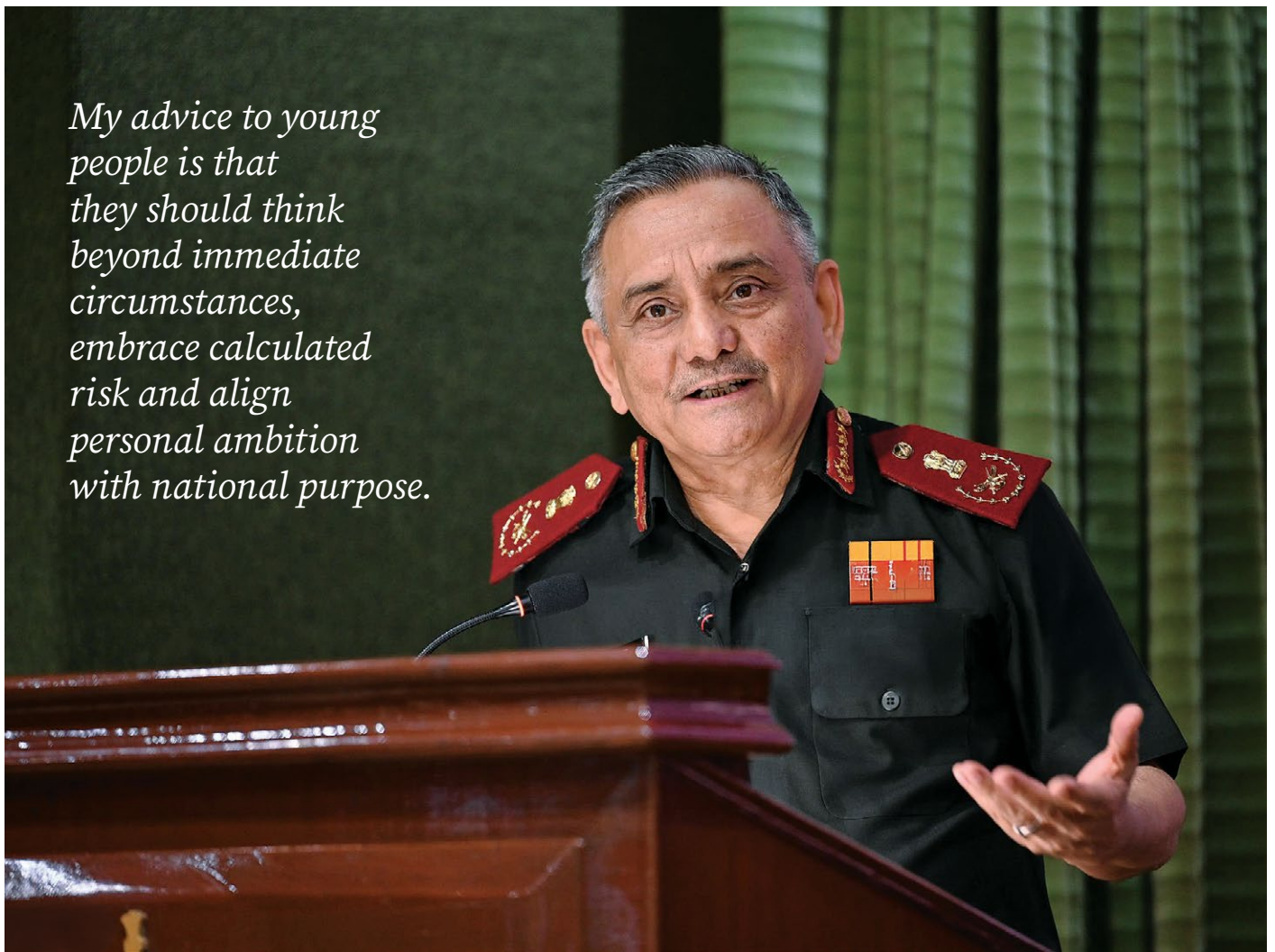
We are living through a period of profound disruption, be it geopolitical, economic or technological. The rules are changing faster than ever before. Success will belong to those who can adapt, anticipate and remain ahead of the curve.

My advice to young people is that they should think beyond immediate circumstances, embrace calculated risk and align personal ambition with national purpose. When these objectives reinforce each other, both the individual and the country benefit.

The Road Ahead

Ultimately, integration remains the defining idea. It begins with the armed

My advice to young people is that they should think beyond immediate circumstances, embrace calculated risk and align personal ambition with national purpose.



forces but cannot end there. It must extend to academia, industry, government, technology and civil society. Knowledge generated in universities must connect with real-world challenges. Industry must work alongside institutions. Infrastructure, logistics, communications and innovation must operate as parts of a larger ecosystem rather than isolated silos.

Many of the reforms undertaken in recent years, from shared military standards to common systems, simplified procedures and closer cooperation with civilian agencies, may appear technical in nature. Yet collectively they point towards the larger objective of creating a nation that functions more seamlessly and more efficiently than ever before.

Structures can be redesigned. Technologies can be acquired. Processes can be rewritten. But meaningful transformation occurs only when people begin to think differently.

The future will belong not to those who operate in isolation, but to those who learn to integrate capabilities, institutions, ideas and people. In warfare, as in nation-building, success depends on our ability to act as a coherent whole.



General Anil Chauhan is a retired four-star general of the Indian Army who served as the 2nd Chief of Defence Staff of the Armed Forces from 2022 to 2026. He was awarded the Param Vishisht Seva Medal in 2020.

✉ @CDS_AnilChauhan

Snapshots

 *Ideas*
02 to 15

14 Ideas Shaping India

As India marks 80 years of Independence, change is unfolding not just through landmark moments but in the choices people make every day. From the food on our plates to the technologies we adopt, these emerging trends offer a window into today's India.



The New Rail Renaissance

The Indian railway network is being reimagined as the backbone of a smarter India, with station redevelopment under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, landmark engineering like the Chenab Rail Bridge and modern services such as Vande Bharat Express trains. AI-driven signalling, Kavach safety systems and startups such as RailYatri and FreshBus are making train journeys faster, safer and more passenger-centric.

02



03

Space and Defence Leap

India's space economy is gaining depth as private companies move from possibility to capability. Bellatrix Aerospace is working on electric propulsion for satellites, Digantara focusses on tracking space objects and managing orbital risk, and GalaxEye is developing Earth-observation systems designed to be useful in varied weather conditions. These are not just startup stories; they represent a broader shift toward strategic autonomy in space and defence technology.

Algorithm Meets Yoga

As people become increasingly data-driven in their approach to wellness, artificial intelligence is transforming the way yoga is practised and experienced. From posture-correcting apps and smart yoga mats to personalised retreat-planning platforms and virtual yoga instructors trained on centuries of yogic knowledge, technology is bringing a new dimension to this ancient discipline.

04



Image: YogiFi

05

After-Dark Adventures

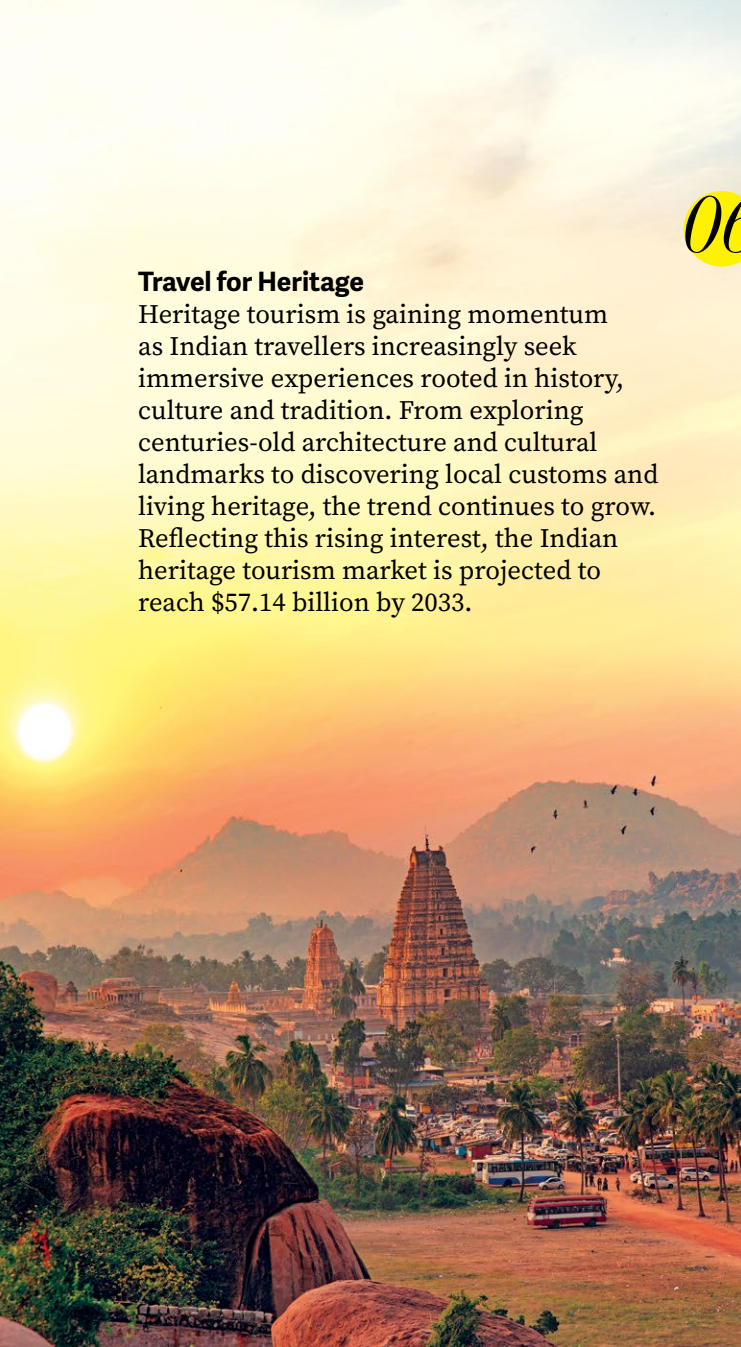
Night tourism is emerging as one of the biggest travel trends, with travellers swapping daytime heat for the cooler, more immersive experiences that unfold after sunset. From heritage night walks through Hyderabad's historic quarters to stargazing and astrophotography beneath Ladakh's pristine skies, travellers are discovering a whole new side of destinations under the cover of darkness.



06

Travel for Heritage

Heritage tourism is gaining momentum as Indian travellers increasingly seek immersive experiences rooted in history, culture and tradition. From exploring centuries-old architecture and cultural landmarks to discovering local customs and living heritage, the trend continues to grow. Reflecting this rising interest, the Indian heritage tourism market is projected to reach \$57.14 billion by 2033.



Nature Meets Dining

Amid a grove of trees, diners gather around rustic wooden tables as meals are slow-cooked over an open fire in gas-free kitchens, embracing the growing concept of nature-led dining. Restaurants such as Tipai by Wildlife Luxuries and Delhi's Fio Cookhouse and Bar are championing this movement with seasonal produce, zero-waste menus and locally sourced ingredients, ushering in a new era of sustainable dining in India.

07



08

Rise of Intentional Living

A quieter, more discerning idea is reshaping aspiration: owning less, but choosing better. Among Millennials and Gen Z, thrift, repair, resale and circular fashion are gaining cultural credibility as cost-consciousness meets climate awareness, and organisations such as Goonj and Banyan Nation are showing how textile recovery and plastic recycling can scale with dignity and economic logic.

Rise in Collectors

Driven by a growing appreciation for art and a quest for meaningful cultural experiences, India's art market is reaching new heights in 2026, fuelled by a rise in museum visits and collector interest. Recent market reports indicate that Indian art auctions have grown by 20% over the past year, reflecting a thriving ecosystem shaped by cultural expansion, economic prosperity and an evolving generation of collectors.

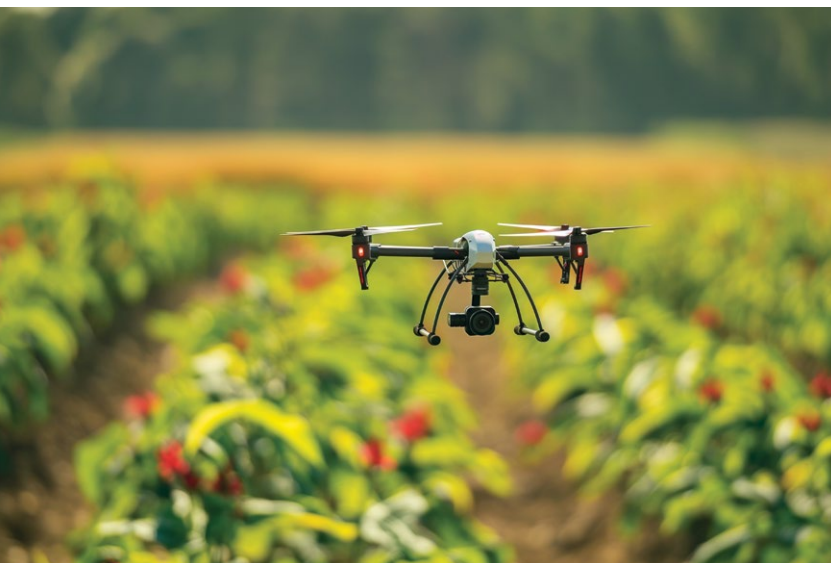
09



10

Smart Farming

Gone are the days when farmers had to wait for an agriculture officer's visit or rely on word of mouth for advice on weather and crop conditions. Today, AI-powered agricultural advisory platforms are providing instant, voice-enabled guidance on weather forecasts, crop management and farming practices in local languages. Farmers are also adopting innovations such as AI-powered smart collars for livestock that help monitor animal health. By making decisions faster and more informed, AI is making farming smarter and profitable.



11

India's Blue Frontier

India's Blue Economy is expanding beyond the familiar language of ports and fisheries into marine technology, ocean intelligence and sustainable materials. Companies such as Planys Technologies are developing underwater robotics for inspection and survey work, while Zerocircle is building seaweed-based biodegradable packaging as a cleaner alternative to plastic. Together, they point to a coastal economy that is becoming more scientific, more circular and more strategic.



Snapshots

Indoor Concerts

12

Across India, a quiet cultural shift is unfolding as homegrown *baithaks* and intimate concerts reclaim space from large auditoriums. Musical evenings now spill into courtyards, terraces and heritage homes. Reviving the spirit of traditional *mehfils*, gatherings like Ibtida-Ek Mehfil in Delhi and Cafe Mehfil & Resto in Jaipur dissolve the distance between artist and audience, fostering a shared cultural experience rooted in connection and storytelling.



Image: Ibtida - Ek Mehfil



13

Intelligent City Revolution

India's next-generation cities are increasingly defined by cleaner mobility, digital infrastructure and intelligent civic systems. Ather Energy is widening the EV ecosystem, Exponent Energy is known for its rapid charging approach, and Solinas Integrity is using robotics and AI to inspect water and sanitation assets beneath urban streets. The result is a city model that is less about spectacle and more about everyday efficiency.

The Era of Healthy Snacking

As snacking habits evolve, consumers are increasingly seeking healthier, more natural alternatives that align with active and mindful lifestyles, and this is where nuts are emerging. Driven by innovations in preparation like use of cleaner ingredients and bold flavour profiles, these nutrient-rich snacks are redefining indulgence. From oil-free roasting methods that preserve natural goodness to sophisticated flavours such as truffle, rosemary and smoked spices, nuts are transforming the snacking landscape.

14



15



Coffee Beyond the Cup

Coffee and caffeine are no longer just morning beverages. They are now spilling into snacks, desserts, cocktails and mocktails, expanding their appeal far beyond traditional brews. From the ever-popular coffee-infused tiramisu to drinks such as the frozen espresso martini and virgin espresso martini, coffee is carving out a new identity across menus. Brands are also introducing chocolates, candies and bite-sized snacks infused with caffeine.



Ideas 16 to 19

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India's Digital Public
Infrastructure Revolution

Idea 01

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The Next Billion
Conversations

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Transforming
Women's Safety

Idea 01

Pg 28
Preserving India's
Manuscript Heritage

Idea 01



The World's Largest *Digital Public Infrastructure*

At 80, India's digital transformation stands out as one of its most consequential governance achievements. The story, however, is not just about technology. It is about creating access across sectors and regions.

By Dr. Aruna Sharma

Eight decades after Independence, India's digital transformation stands out as one of the defining stories of its development journey, marked by rapid growth in the last decade and half. Other than digitisation, we have also witnessed great success stories in dairy, steel and expansion of postal services, which have advanced the country's focus on inclusive growth.

The Start

For me, the digital governance story began with Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). The objective was to overcome pilferage and ensure that benefits reached the intended beneficiary. We mapped financial institutions and worked towards ensuring citizens had access to a bank, post office, cooperative bank or regional rural bank within

Over the last decade, Digital India has become the foundation of India's digital economy and Digital Public Infrastructure. India now leads global real-time digital payments, with UPI handling nearly

49%

of worldwide transaction volume. The digital economy contributes nearly 12–14% of India's GDP.

a 5 km radius. Post offices and cooperative banks were digitised, government-funded works were geo-tagged and databases were brought onto digital platforms. This led to Samagra, a common database, ensuring that all departments work on same data to avoid duplication.

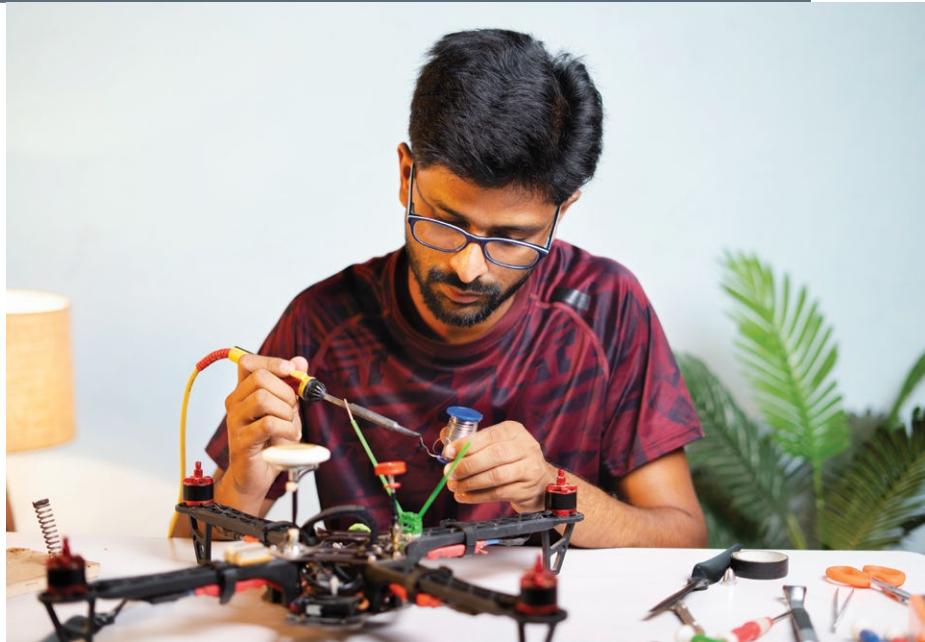
The Evolution

The next stage was digital payments. What began with DBT evolved into 24x7 digital transactions and later the UPI ecosystem. India adapted to e-commerce remarkably quickly, and today digital payments have reached even the hinterland.

Today, around 75 per cent of retail payments are made through UPI. The success of India's digital model was a result of coordination between the Centre, states, RBI, banks, development departments, telecom infrastructure and financial institutions. Once DBT began functioning successfully, fintech innovations scaled rapidly. Today, virtually all government-to-person and person-to-government transactions have become digital.

The Success

The biggest achievement of digitalisation was transparency across all sectors including scholarships, insurance, housing etc. Financial trails became visible, duplication reduced and elected representatives could track expenditure with much ease. The growth of e-commerce has similarly enabled entrepreneurs, MSMEs and home-based businesses to expand their markets, receive customer



Nation-Building Milestones

The Green Revolution

India's Green Revolution remains one of the country's most transformative achievements, ensuring food security and preventing famine-like situations.

Three Access Revolution

Equally transformative has been the expansion of three critical forms of access:

- Road Connectivity
- Internet Connectivity
- Financial Access

feedback and improve their products. India's digital development model stands apart because of its scale and inclusiveness.

What's Next

The next stage is intelligent use of data. Artificial intelligence and advanced analytics should be used to improve targeting, policymaking and quality of life. Equally important is India's need to develop its core technology stack to ensure resilience, security and self-reliance. Startups, researchers and innovators require an enabling ecosystem and policy consistency to make it possible.



Dr. Aruna Sharma is a practitioner development economist and policy advisor. She was Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and IT and also worked as Secretary Steel in Govt. of India. She works in the field of Digital Transformation, e-Governance, FinTech and Digital Assets.

The Next Billion Conversations

Narrowing India's digital divide through AI-powered language solutions, Bhashini and a new generation of innovators are bringing technology closer to citizens in their mother tongues.

By Meenakshi Rohatgi



During the Summit, India achieved a Guinness World Record for the “Most pledges received for an AI responsibility campaign in 24 hours,” with over

2.5
lakh

validated pledges reaffirming public commitment towards responsible AI adoption.

When millions of pilgrims gathered in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, for Maha Kumbh 2025, one of the world’s largest human congregations became a powerful showcase for India’s emerging language technology ecosystem. At the heart of the effort was Bhashini, the Government of India’s Artificial Intelligence (AI) driven language platform, which delivered real-time translation and voice-based assistance in more than 11 Indian languages, helping visitors navigate the event, access services and communicate across linguistic barriers. The multilingual assistant Kumbh Sah’AI’yak, powered by advanced AI models, demonstrated how technology can make public services accessible at mass scale.

Understanding Bhashini

Bhashini or BHASHa INterface for India, was conceived as the language layer of India’s Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). Since its launch in 2022, it has emerged as a cornerstone of the country’s effort to make the digital economy truly multilingual. From powering the PM-Kisan chatbot that helps farmers access government schemes in their mother tongues to bringing AI-enabled services to over 2.7 lakh Gram Panchayats through the e-Gram Swaraj platform, Bhashini is steadily embedding language inclusion into governance.

Through Project Vaani, a collaboration with Google and IISc (The Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru), it is helping create one of the world’s largest open-source speech datasets, capturing India’s rich diversity of dialects and accents. At the same time, by offering more than 1,000 pre-trained



“India has a complex language landscape. If this is tackled, it opens a very large customer base for any technology solution while enabling the same level of services across multiple sectors.”

- Prabhat Kumar (IRS), Chairman,
Pan-IIT Alumni India

AI models through open APIs (Application Programming Interface), the platform is enabling startups, researchers and developers to build a new generation of localised digital services, from healthcare transcription tools and multilingual audiobooks to voice-based citizen services.

The government calls it the “AI that speaks the language of India”. What appears today as a specialised use case may soon become as commonplace as UPI payments.

India’s USPs

India is one of the world’s most linguistically diverse countries, with more than 1,200 languages and over 19,500 dialects. Yet this diversity also creates challenges in communication, governance and digital inclusion, especially in Artificial Intelligence, where most global models continue to be dominated by English and Western linguistic

contexts. Bridging these gaps is critical to ensuring that digital transformation reaches every citizen. As Prabhat Kumar (IRS), chairman of Pan-IIT Alumni India, notes, “India has a complex language and literacy landscape. If this is tackled, it opens a very large customer base for any technology solution while enabling the same level of services across multiple sectors.”

Bhashini provides the datasets and public digital rails on which Indian companies are building language AI solutions. On this foundation, firms such as Sarvam AI are developing voice-first, Indian-language-first tools designed for local contexts, colloquial speech and regional expressions.

“Voice-first AI transcends literacy barriers and connectivity challenges, drastically lowering the entry barrier to technology services,” says Ankush Sabharwal, founder and CEO of CoRover.ai, the company behind BharatGPT. CoRover has already deployed multilingual AI assistants for public services, including MahakumbhAI Sahayata and an AI-powered chatbot for IRCTC.

Importantly, many of these voice-AI solutions do not require continuous internet connectivity and can function in low-network environments on basic feature phones. This makes them particularly relevant for rural

and remote communities that have often remained outside the digital mainstream.

For India, building its own AI models is not merely a technological ambition but a strategic necessity.

“If India’s AI ecosystem relies entirely on foreign models, there is always a risk that local priorities and realities are not fully understood or represented,” says Sabharwal.

The World Is Watching

India is fast emerging as a global AI leader. According to Stanford University’s 2025 Global AI Vibrancy Tool, the country ranks third worldwide in AI competitiveness.

The real differentiator, however, may be scale. With over one billion Internet users and more than 750 million smartphone users, India offers perhaps the world’s most demanding testbed for multilingual AI.

That potential is already becoming visible. Firms such as Gnani.ai report strong adoption of voice-AI solutions across Tier-II, Tier-III and rural India. Gnani.ai is an advanced Agentic AI platform that specialises in voice-first AI systems in Indian languages designed to automate, analyse, and manage customer interactions in the banking and financial sectors.

“It is interesting to see longer



Bhashini or BHASHa Interface for India

- Integrated with 23 government services
- 36 languages supported
- 350 AI models
- Translation engines
- Language & Speech models
- Multilingual AI pipelines
- Datasets & APIs



India: Unique landscape

- 22 official languages
- 121 major languages
- 270 mother tongues
- 19,500 dialects*

**As per Census of India 2011.*

Try For Yourself



Tool: **Multilingual voice AI**
Company: **Skit.ai**
What it does: **Collections, Marketing & Servicing**



Tool: **AI OrboScan**
Company: **Orbosis Global**
What it does: **Multilingual sales automation**



Tool: **Anuvadak**
Company: **Reverie Language Technologies**
What it does: **Website localisation & translation**



Tool: **Adi-Vaani**
Company: **Ministry of Tribal Affairs**
What it does: **Tribal language translation Servicing**

“People were hungry for digital access and are now comfortably conversing with AI agents in their mother tongue.”

- Ganesh Gopalan, CEO, Gnani.ai



conversations using out chatbots from Tier-III cities and rural areas than from urban areas,” says Ganesh Gopalan, CEO of Gnani.ai. “People were hungry for digital access and are now comfortably conversing with AI agents in their mother tongue,” he adds.

Gnani.ai’s enterprise-grade voice agents are already reaching 40 to 50 crore people through banks, microfinance institutions and retail partners.

What’s Next

The next frontier is AI avatars capable of interacting with users in their preferred language, dialect and tone across services ranging from banking and healthcare to education and bookings. Ganesh Ramakrishnan, principal investigator of BharatGen, India’s first government-funded sovereign multilingual large language model initiative, argues that “successful adoption requires treating the last mile as the first mile”. Sabharwal echoes the sentiment. “Too often, technology products are built

for English users first and adapted for other languages later. True inclusivity means treating every Indian language as equally important from day one.”

The possibilities are easy to imagine, such as a pensioner in rural Rajasthan asking about her benefits in Marwari, a weaver in Odisha seeking information on a government scheme in Odia, or a fisherman on the Konkan coast receiving weather alerts in Konkani. Such interactions could soon become as routine as scanning a QR code to make a payment.

Developers acknowledge that widespread adoption is still some distance away. Yet voice-AI systems are already becoming remarkably natural, with many users unable to tell whether they are speaking to a human or a machine.

If India can make AI work seamlessly for a farmer, a railway passenger, a telemedicine user, a tribal-language speaker navigating government services, or a student learning advanced skills in their mother tongue, it may offer a blueprint not just for the nation itself, but for the entire world, specially Southeast Asia.



Meenakshi Rohatgi is a senior journalist who writes on environment and technology. She has previously worked with The Times of India and MIT Tech Review India.



CUBEROOT

Tool: **CubeRoot**
Company: **Reverie Language Technologies**
What it does: **Multilingual voice AI chatbot**

CONVA AI

Tool: **CONVA**
Company: **Slang Labs**
What it does: **Voice Assistant as a Service Servicing**

REZO AI

Tool: **AI voice agents**
Company: **Rezo ai**
What it does: **India's Conversational AI**

haratGPT

Tool: **BharatGPT**
Company: **CoRover.ai**
What it does: **India's generative AI**

sarvam.ai

Tool: **Sarvam Translate/ Mayura**
Company: **Sarvam AI**
What it does: **Indian language translation**

India's Ministry of Home Affairs announced the deployment of **AI-powered facial recognition systems at 7** of the country's busiest railway stations in 2025.

Her Safety, *Powered* *By AI*

From panic buttons to predictive protection, AI-driven innovations are creating more responsive safety ecosystems for women in India.

By Harjot Kaur

As India enters its 80th year of independence, the commitment to women's safety has been hard-built across decades. Equality guaranteed in 1950, domestic violence legislation in 2005, and in the years that followed, tougher criminal statutes, fast-tracked trials and workplace harassment laws. Today, this journey has consolidated into Mission Shakti, bringing together helplines and community collectives under a single commitment. It is a substantial architecture. But it remains fragmented.

Artificial intelligence is the first technology capable of a full safety ecosystem, being preventive, protective and restorative. It gives women the option to gauge whether a park is safe

enough, whether a cab driver's route feels right or whether the walk home is a risk she can take tonight.

The Preventive Layer

India today generates more information about itself than at any point in its history: crime data, movement patterns, infrastructure gaps, local reporting and more. Until recently, all of it sat in silos, useful to researchers but invisible to the woman it concerned. AI changes that. A system can now weigh these signals across millions of geographic points and answer a question no helpline can: not where harm has been reported, but where it is more likely tonight, on this route, at this hour. Preventive intelligence, carried in her pocket.

The Protective Layer of AI

To call for help, a woman must unlock her phone, open an app and tap a button. It assumes she has time, free hands and a steady mind. An emergency usually takes all three away. AI-enabled wearables, voice triggers and behavioural detection bridge this activation gap. A single press on a discreet device, a spoken phrase or an anomalous movement pattern detected in the background.

Beyond the trigger itself, AI can act as a companion, quietly tracking a route, noticing when it deviates, checking in when something feels wrong. It can interpret the seriousness of a situation and escalate proportionately, alerting trusted guardians and emergency services, without requiring the woman to narrate the emergency in real time.

Apps to Know



Sakhi
Sakhi is a preventive personal-safety system for women, combining a safety intelligence app, an SOS-enabled discreet wearable, and a response network that reaches her protectors, the police, and other Sakhi users nearby.



INDIAi NariRaksha
A government-backed initiative that integrates AI with urban command centres to provide real-time safety alerts and support preventive planning for women in public spaces. Deployed in urban districts of Chennai and Bengaluru, currently.



SafetiPin
A technology platform and mobile app that uses crowdsourcing and AI to assess, map and improve the safety of public spaces.

What AI Can Do After an Incident

The hours and weeks after an incident are where AI's role is least understood. It begins with evidence collection and preservation and extends to support, through AI-assisted counselling available in her own language, at any hour. At the system level, incident clustering surfaces repeat-offence hotspots and intelligent routing connects survivors to the right One Stop Centre, counsellor, or legal aid. It reaches into community, through platforms where women share experiences and warnings, so that one woman's difficult night becomes another's caution. Every incident teaches the system, sharpening the models and the risk maps, so that the aftermath, handled well, makes prevention smarter.

The Next Frontier

However, technology cannot do this alone. It's our responsibility as a society to come together and create change. A device that alerts only a distant call centre is not safety. A device that mobilises the people closest to her, verified and accountable, is.

The next frontier is one of convergence, of mindset, community and the most powerful technology India has ever had access to, finally moving in the same direction at once.



Harjot Kaur is the founder of Sakhi. She has 15+ years of global AI and strategy experience across the energy, telecom and mining sectors.



भावी पीढ़ी को उपहार

डॉ. टी. एम. सरबोजी, जो डॉ. मणि मारन के नाम से लोकप्रिय हैं, उन्होंने पांडुलिपियों के संरक्षण का बीड़ा उठाया है। जानिए, भारतीय संस्कृति, सभ्यता, ज्ञान, विज्ञान की अनमोल धरोहर को संजोने वाले डॉ. मणि की कहानी...

त 25 वर्षों से डॉ. मणि अपना जीवन प्राचीन ताड़पत्र पांडुलिपियों को पढ़ने एवं संरक्षित करने के लिए समर्पित कर चुके हैं। उनका कार्य केवल नौकरी नहीं अपितु एक मिशन है। इसका उद्देश्य भारत की सदियों पुरानी ज्ञान परंपरा को पुनर्जीवित करना है। उनका यह अद्भुत समर्पण हमारे देश की संस्कृति को बचाने की दिशा में एक प्रेरणादायक उदाहरण है।

विलुप्त होते ज्ञान को संजोया

डॉ. मणि ने अपना मिशन तब आरंभ किया जब वह तंजावुर (तमिलनाडु) के प्रसिद्ध 'सरस्वती महल पुस्तकालय' में तमिल पंडित के रूप में कार्यरत थे। इस पुस्तकालय में 50 हजार से अधिक दुर्लभ पांडुलिपियां विद्यमान हैं। उन्होंने देखा कि इस पुस्तकालय में हजारों पांडुलिपियां धूल खा रही हैं क्योंकि उन्हें पढ़ने वाला कोई नहीं था। इन पांडुलिपियों को पढ़ने के लिए प्राचीन तमिल लिपियों (जैसे ग्रंथ लिपि और वट्टेलुत्तु) का ज्ञान आवश्यक था, जो अब बहुत कम लोगों को है। इस समस्या को देखते हुए, डॉ. मणि ने इस लुप्त हो रहे ज्ञान को बचाने का संकल्प लिया। उन्होंने युवाओं के लिए निःशुल्क कार्यशालाएं आरंभ कीं, जिनका नाम 'ईदगम' (इतिहास और संस्कृति के लिए युवा कार्यशाला) रखा गया। इन कार्यशालाओं में उन्होंने न केवल छात्रों को पांडुलिपियां पढ़ना सिखाया अपितु उन्हें पांडुलिपि संरक्षण के प्रति जागरूक भी किया।

समर्पण और साधना

उन्होंने छात्रों को समझाया कि ये पांडुलिपियां केवल अक्षर नहीं अपितु इतिहास, साहित्य, आयुर्वेद, ज्योतिष, गणित एवं कला जैसे विषयों का बहुमूल्य कोष है। उन्होंने छात्रों को यह भी सिखाया कि इन कोमल पांडुलिपियों को कैसे साफ किया जाता है। कैसे नमी, कीट एवं समय के प्रभाव से इन्हें बचाया जाता है। उनके प्रयासों से प्रशिक्षित हुए कई

अप्रतिम है डॉ. मणि का योगदान

ज्ञान का पुनरुद्धार: उन्होंने एक लुप्त हो रही कला को पुनर्जीवित किया है। इससे लाखों पांडुलिपियां शोधकर्ताओं एवं आम लोगों के लिए सहज उपलब्ध हो गई हैं।

संस्कृति का संरक्षण: पांडुलिपियों में प्राचीन भारतीय जीवनशैली, सामाजिक नियम एवं कला रूपों का विवरण है। इसे डॉ. मणि ने संरक्षित करने में मदद की है।

डिजिटल क्रांति का हिस्सा:

उनकी पहल 'ज्ञान भारतम् मिशन' के साथ मिलकर पांडुलिपियों के डिजिटलीकरण में सहायक सिद्ध हो रही है। ये दस्तावेज वैश्विक-स्तर पर ऑनलाइन उपलब्ध हो सकेंगे।

युवाओं को अपनी जड़ों से जोड़ा:

उन्होंने भावी पीढ़ी को अपनी जड़ों से जोड़ने का कार्य किया है। पांडुलिपियों को पढ़कर, युवा अपने इतिहास एवं सांस्कृतिक पहचान पर गर्व महसूस करते हैं।

वैज्ञानिक और साहित्यिक योगदान:

पांडुलिपियों में आयुर्वेद, सिद्ध चिकित्सा, ज्योतिष और धातु विज्ञान जैसे विषयों से संबंधित जो ज्ञान छिपा है, डॉ. मणि के प्रयासों से वह आधुनिक अनुसंधान के लिए उपलब्ध हो रहा है।



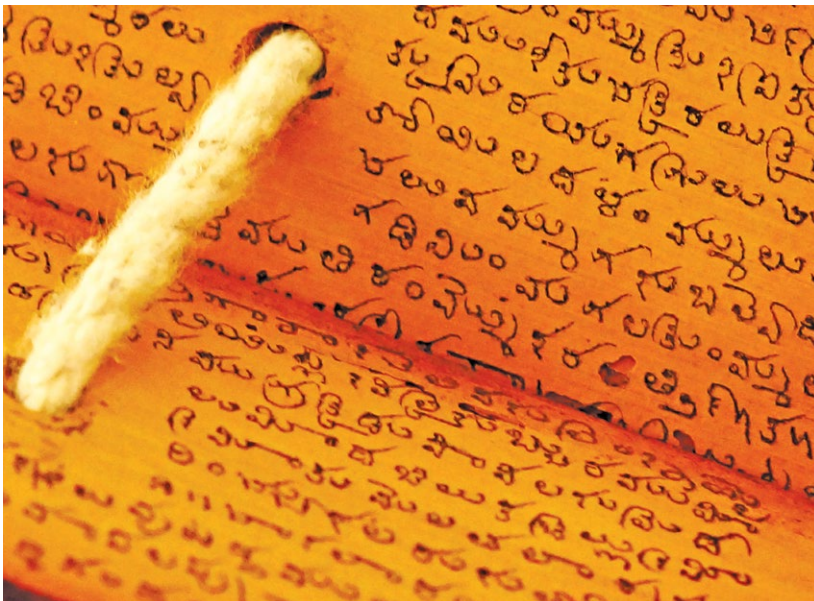
वैभव एवं भव्यता से भरपूर - तंजावुर

तंजावुर उत्कृष्ट वास्तुकला, समृद्ध इतिहास एवं कलात्मक वैभव के लिए प्रसिद्ध है। यहां का बृहदेश्वर मंदिर, अपनी अद्भुत नक्काशी और भव्यता के लिए लोकप्रिय है। द्रविड़ स्थापत्य कला का नायाब उदाहरण यह मंदिर यूनेस्को की विश्व धरोहर सूची में अंकित है।



"मणि मारन जी ने लोगों को सिखाया है कि 'तमिलसुवादियिल' यानी ताड़ के पत्ते की पांडुलिपियां पढ़ने एवं समझने की विधि क्या होती है।"

नरेंद्र मोदी
भारत के प्रधानमंत्री



छात्र आज तमिल विश्वविद्यालय, सिद्ध चिकित्सा अनुसंधान संस्थानों और मंदिर वास्तुकला विभागों में महत्वपूर्ण पदों पर कार्यरत हैं। डॉ. मणि का यह काम तमिलनाडु के कोने-कोने तक पहुंच गया है। वह इस ज्ञान को एक पीढ़ी से दूसरी पीढ़ी तक पहुंचाने का एक जीवंत माध्यम बन गए हैं।

राष्ट्रीय मिशन का अभिन्न अंग

डॉ. मणि मारन के काम को हाल ही में एक बड़ी पहचान मिली, जब यशस्वी प्रधानमंत्री श्री नरेंद्र मोदी जी ने अपने रेडियो कार्यक्रम 'मन की बात' में उनके प्रयासों की सराहना की। प्रधानमंत्री ने कहा कि डॉ. मणि का काम यह दिखाता है कि कैसे एक व्यक्ति भारत की बौद्धिक और सांस्कृतिक विरासत की रक्षा में बहुत बड़ा योगदान दे सकता है। डॉ. मणि की पहल 'ईदगम' अब 'ज्ञान भारतम् मिशन' का अभिन्न अंग बन गई है।

भावी पीढ़ी के लिए प्रेरणा

डॉ. मणि मारन का जीवन एवं कार्य इस बात का प्रमाण है कि एक व्यक्ति का समर्पण कैसे पूरे देश की विरासत को प्रभावित कर सकता है। उनका कार्य हमें स्मरण कराता है कि हमारा भविष्य हमारे अतीत से जुड़ा है। वह सुनिश्चित कर रहे हैं कि हमारे पूर्वजों का ज्ञान, उनके विचार तथा उनकी साहित्यिक रचनाएं सदैव जीवित रहें।

Sport

• Rugby • Cricket • Football

Ideas 20 to 23

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India as a Sporting Nation
by Olympian Abhinav
Bindra

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Catalysing India's Rise
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The Inspiring Story of Sesa
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Bihar's Contribution in
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Idea 01



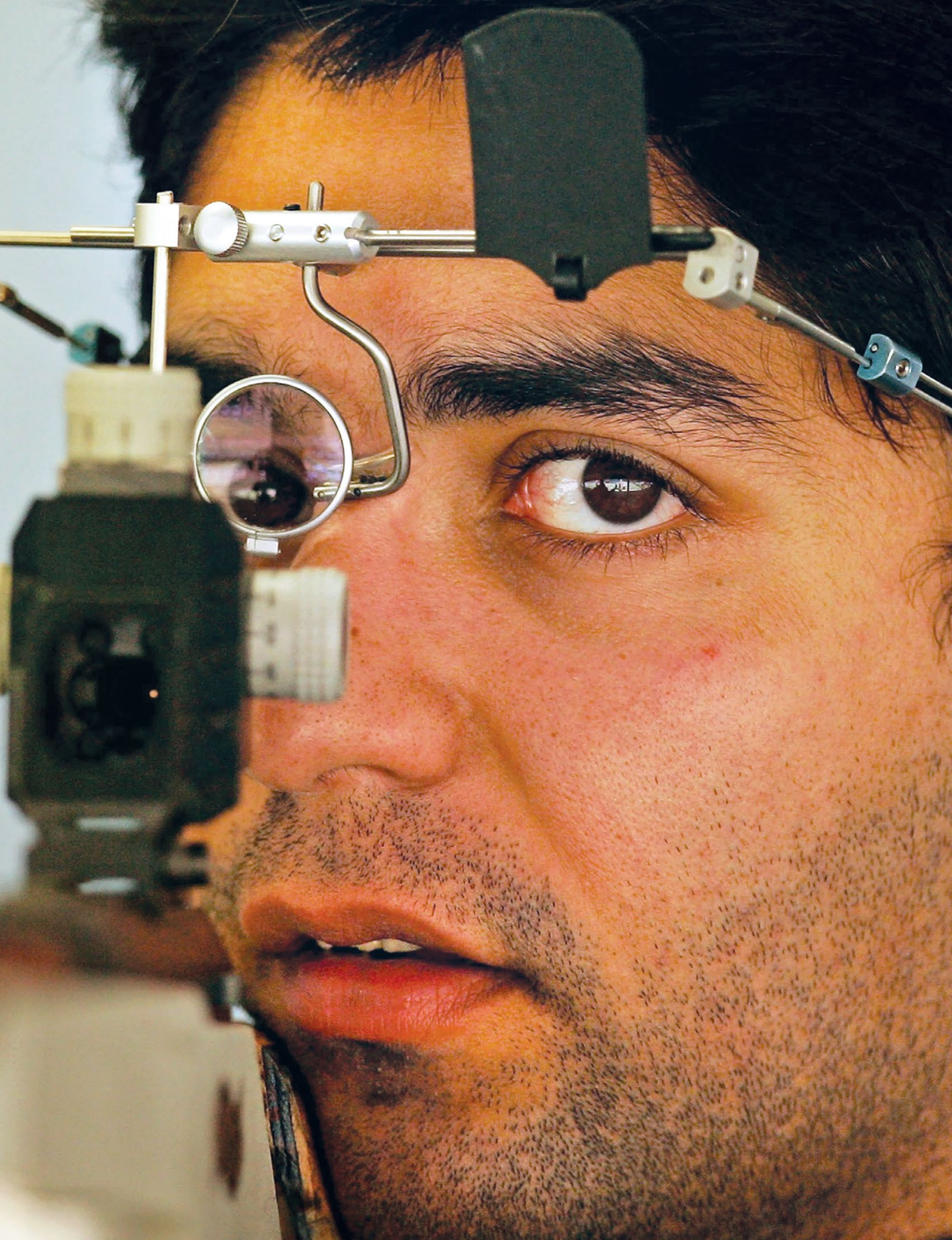
Aiming for a *Sporting* *Nation*

For a very long time, my world was no larger than the diameter of a target.

By Abhinav Bindra

It was a quiet world. There was no roar of a stadium, no teammate to pass the ball to, no opponent standing across a net. There was only breath, heartbeat, posture, pressure on the trigger and the unforgiving truth of a pellet landing a fraction of a millimetre away from where it should have. Shooting taught me very early that excellence is not dramatic. It is repetitive. It is lonely. It is built in silence, in boredom, in doubt and in the willingness to return to the same question every morning: can I be a little better than I was yesterday?

When I stood on the range in Beijing in 2008, I was carrying more than a rifle. I was carrying years of obsession, failure, experiment, injury, uncertainty and a private promise to pursue perfection even





Abhinav Bindra with
former International
Olympic Committee
President Thomas Bach

while knowing that perfection may never fully arrive. When the final shot was fired and the tricolour rose, I felt an emotion that is still difficult to describe. It was never only personal. That medal belonged to my coaches, my family, my support team and to a country that had waited a very long time to see one of its athletes stand alone at the top of an Olympic podium.

But time gives you perspective. In the years after Beijing, I began to understand that the real question was not how I had won. The real question was why the journey had been so difficult to repeat. What more could we do to ensure that future athletes had a smoother path to success? How could talent be supported by stronger systems, wider access to coaching and better infrastructure? How could aspiring athletes focus more on training, with the right ecosystem helping them navigate everything else?

The duty of a medallist is not to remain on the podium forever. The duty is to step down and help others climb.

From Athlete to Advocate

My journey was shaped by extraordinary people. My first coach, Lt. Col. J. S. Dhillon, gave me lessons that went far beyond shooting. He taught me discipline without cruelty, patience without complacency and ambition without shortcuts. He did not merely teach me how to hit a target; he taught me how to respect the process. That became the foundation of my life.

As an athlete, I chased performance. After retirement, I found myself drawn to a larger pursuit: potential. The potential of young Indians who may never have access to the things I eventually found through trial, error, privilege, luck and persistence. I did not want the next generation to depend on chance. I did not want them to wait until they were already elite before they received scientific support. I did not want them to learn about recovery only after injury,

At Paris 2024, Manu Bhaker became the first Indian athlete to win two medals at a single Olympic Games.



Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore won India's first-ever Olympic shooting medal with a silver at the

2004 Athens Games.

about mental health only after collapse, or about nutrition only after performance had already suffered.

That is why my work after sport has been rooted in one simple belief: champions should not be accidents. They must be built by systems.

The Winning Framework

India's sporting ecosystem has changed significantly from the time I first began competing. The conversation today is broader and more ambitious. We speak of sports science, athlete welfare, high-performance centres, mental conditioning, recovery, nutrition, injury prevention and data. These were once considered luxuries. They are now becoming the minimum standard.

The expansion of National Centres of Excellence, the Khelo India programme and the Target Olympic Podium Scheme reflects an important shift in thinking. We are beginning to recognise that talent identification is not enough; talent must be surrounded by coaching, infrastructure, nutrition, competition exposure and support staff. We are beginning to understand that an athlete preparing for the Olympic Games cannot be treated like a petitioner. An elite athlete is a national asset, and a young athlete at the grassroots is a national possibility.

Raising Standards

Still, infrastructure alone will not create a sporting nation. A synthetic track is not a culture. A gymnasium is not a philosophy.

The next frontier for Indian sport is not merely to build more facilities, but to build

deeper accountability. We must ask: Are our coaches being trained continuously? Are our athletes being listened to? Are our girls as safe, supported and encouraged as our boys? Are we measuring outcomes honestly? Are we using data to serve the athlete, or only to decorate presentations? Are we creating pathways for children in small towns, rural areas and government schools, or are we still waiting for talent to somehow find its own way to the top?

The Importance of Data and Failure

In my sporting life, I learned that emotion can inspire effort, but it cannot replace method. Passion is important, but passion without structure can become exhaustion. This is where sports science becomes profoundly human.

To some, data sounds cold. To me, data is empathy. When you analyse an athlete's movement and prevent an injury, you are protecting years of dreams. When you study

A truly developed India is one where millions of children play, creating the foundation for tomorrow's champions.



Abhinav Bindra became the first Indian rifle shooter to win a World Championship gold medal, scoring

699.7 (597+102.7) in the 10m Air Rifle event at Zagreb in 2006.



Bindra participated in the Olympic Torch Relay, ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games

recovery patterns, you are respecting the body behind the performance. When you help a young athlete understand that a poor result is information, not a verdict, you are freeing that athlete from fear.

One of the most important lessons sport gave me was the ability to fail with honesty. I lost far more than I won. I finished outside the medals at the Olympic Games before I won gold. And in Rio in 2016, in my final Olympic appearance, I finished fourth. Fourth is a difficult place. It is close enough to the podium to see it clearly, and far enough to walk away with emptiness. But even that result gave me something valuable. It reminded me that sport rewards preparation, but never guarantees reward.

That is why we must teach our children how to lose. It is a life skill. In an age where young people are growing up under

As we strive for a healthier India, sport must continue to find its rightful place alongside academics in every child's life. Every city must continue expanding access for quality sports facilities.

intense pressure, be it academic, social, digital or emotional, sport may be one of the most powerful classrooms we have. On the field, a child learns that effort matters. She learns to cooperate, to compete, to respect rules, to handle disappointment, to celebrate someone else's success, and to try again after failure.

Beyond Medals

Through the work of the Abhinav Bindra Foundation, especially in education and Olympic values programmes, I have seen how sport can

A shot of 10.8 helped Abhinav Bindra secure India's first ever individual Olympic gold, a feat unmatched until Neeraj Chopra triumphed at Tokyo 2020.



The 2014 Commonwealth Games yielded Bindra yet another significant gold medal before his Olympic swansong at Rio 2016.

quietly transform behaviour. Put children together on a playing field and many artificial barriers begin to fall. A boy who may not listen to a lecture on equality will understand it when a girl on his team scores the winning goal. A child who struggles in a classroom may discover leadership on a court. This is the power of sport, beyond medals.

Medals matter. They inspire nations. They give children heroes. They make governments, institutions and families take sport more seriously. But medals are the visible tip of a much larger iceberg. Beneath every podium there must be coaches, physiotherapists, psychologists, nutritionists, teachers, parents, administrators, volunteers and local playgrounds. If we only celebrate the medal and ignore the ecosystem, we will keep producing moments of brilliance, but not a sustained sporting culture.

The False Choice

One of the most urgent challenges before us is the old and damaging conflict between sport and education. For too long, young Indians have been told to choose: either studies or sport. This is a false choice, and it has ended many sporting careers before they even began.

Parents are not wrong to worry. A sporting career is uncertain. Injuries happen. Selection is unpredictable. Only a small percentage reach the highest level. Therefore, the answer is not to ask families to take blind risks. The answer is to build credible dual-career pathways. An athlete should not have to sacrifice education to chase a dream. Equally, a child should not

Creating Impact

Through initiatives in sports science, athlete wellness, education and grassroots development, The Abhinav Bindra Foundation works to make world-class sporting support accessible to more young Indians.

Numbers at a glance

150,000⁺
interventions

2,000⁺
athletes supported

5,000⁺
stakeholders impacted

25⁺
sports covered

40⁺
workshops conducted

have to abandon sport because the system cannot accommodate ambition. Flexible schooling, university support, scholarships, online learning, career counselling and post-retirement planning are essential.

Play as Policy

We must also expand the way we think about sport itself. Sport is not only the responsibility of a sports ministry. It belongs equally to education, health, urban planning, women and child development, corporate India and civil society. A playground is public-health infrastructure. A safe walking track is preventive medicine. A school sports programme is character education. A coach is a nation-builder.

As we strive for a healthier India, sport must continue to find its rightful place alongside academics in every child's life. Every school should have the time and space for play, and every city must continue expanding access to quality sports facilities.

As India approaches the next great milestone in its journey, we have a remarkable opportunity to shape the kind of developed nation we aspire to be. Development will be measured not only by highways, factories, unicorns and digital transactions, but also by the health of our children, the confidence of our girls, the resilience of our youth, and the dignity of our athletes.



Abhinav Bindra is an Olympic Gold Medallist, Arjuna Awardee and the youngest recipient of the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award. He was conferred with the Padma Bhushan in 2009.

@abhinav_bindra

Rugby's Tribal *Heartland*

In Odisha's rural pockets, this high-intensity sport is transforming lives, turning daughters into champions and villages into unexpected sporting powerhouses.

By Akshita M Bhanj Deo

The hot tropical sun bore down on our backs as we made our way through a thicket of trees, ushered in by a tribal troupe performing the danta dance, a mock fight drill with wooden bows, arrows, and swords. Rows of young boys and girls in *phuta jhala dhotis* and Nike shirts lined the mud path behind the dancers, girls in pettily draped sarees waiting eagerly for the match to start. We move through the paved road to the off-beaten track, reaching a sporting ground in Thakurmunda. The commentators in rudimentary mics strain to announce player names. My eyebrows go up as I realise the small

field is a 500-metre clearing with 5,000 people on either side, waiting for a rugby match to begin. The whistle blows. Twelve girls run onto the field in line, black and orange kits, cleats, French braids, each stopping mid-drill to touch the grass and close their eyes in prayer before sprinting to neon cones. I proceeded to watch some of the best contact rugby I had seen since the Hong Kong 7s.

Rugby was birthed in the Commonwealth of Nations, but there is a thread of similarity where it take hold — Pacific Islands, Māori New Zealand and rural South Africa. One ball. No infrastructure. A lot



The inaugural Khelo India Tribal Games (KITG) took place in Chhattisgarh between March and April 2026. The historic event featured over



2,500

tribal athletes from 30 states and union territories competing in seven primary disciplines and indigenous sports.



Under the guidance of Dibyaranjan Das, founder of FSSA, Odisha rugby has emerged as a national force, with sustained investments in coaching and talent identification.



of courage. In Mayurbhanj, where *Chhau* is a martial inheritance, the forest is the gymnasium, and communities have fought invaders for centuries across forest-laden hills, resisting the Mughals, the Nawabs of Bengal, the Marathas, the British and then blind capitalism itself, this sport didn't arrive as something foreign. It was recognised. In a country of 1.4 billion with barely 57,000 registered rugby players, against World Rugby's 101 member nations and an estimated 6 million players globally, Mayurbhanj's emergence is not an accident. It is a David and Goliath story manifestation.

India's relationship with the sport dates to 1871 but it took over a century for a real inflexion point in the sports story. The turning point came with an unlikely figure: Rahul Bose, Bollywood actor, former national rugby player, and President of Rugby India. In 2024, a 10-year agreement

Padia to podium

The Chief Minister's Trophy is a flagship initiative envisioned by CM Mohan Charan Majhi to strengthen grassroots sports and create opportunities for young athletes across Odisha. The second edition, held in 2026, brought together more than



30,000 athletes
from all 30 districts of Odisha.

between the Indian Rugby Football Union and GMR Sports launched the Rugby Premier League, broadcast on JioHotstar. Among the first women's matches of the RPL, three of the highest bids were from Bengal, Mumbai and Chennai teams. All three players were from Mayurbhanj. Behind them is one man and one borrowed ground.

Dibyanjan Das, former national rugby player and international referee, returned to Baripada after studying at the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences in Bhubaneswar and started the Future Star Sports Academy (FSSA) in 2019 with five students on a law college ground. After years of going door to door, picketing homes, persuading sceptical

Odisha's Hat-Trick

Odisha won all three women's titles at the inaugural ASMITA Rugby League – National, held in February 2026, at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar.

Champions in:

- U15 Girls
- U18 Girls
- Senior Women

The outstanding achievement underlined the state's growing dominance in women's sports and grassroots talent development.

families, absorbing rejection, he built something that now houses 55 tribal athletes in residential training, has produced over 200 medals across disciplines, and sent four players to represent India internationally.

One name shines out from the academy. Parbati Hansdah, identified in a remote Mayurbhanj village, joined FSSA's residential programme in 2019. In May 2026, she captained India at the inaugural CASA Rugby 7s in Tashkent. Sandhyarani Tudu, lean and relentless, has represented India three times and emerged as the country's top scorer at the 2025 Emirates Series in China. Then there is Sunita Hansdah, with an eight-medal haul whose rise from Mayurbhanj earned her a coveted contract with the Mumbai Dreamers in the 2026 Women's Rugby Premier League.

A professional contract, delivered to a girl from a tribal village, miles from the city of dreams. When I asked the girls what finally made their families come around, one grinned and motioned a rectangular silhouette in the air. The cheques. Odisha's strategic investment in sports infrastructure with state-of-the-art facilities, competitive athlete schemes, job offers tied to performance have turned winning into a livelihood. In a district where white-collar opportunities are scarce, sport has become more than just an aspiration or dream. It has finally become employment.



Akshita M Bhanj Deo, the former Editor-in-Chief of Travel + Leisure India, is a 48th-generation custodian of the Bhanja royal family of Mayurbhanj. She directs Belgadia Palace and the Mayurbhanj Foundation, which supports grassroots arts, sport and livelihoods across the region.



At the 2024-25 Goa Football Association Awards, SFA won multiple honours, including the Special Achievement Award for Overall Excellence in Football Management and the Organiser Award for outstanding venue management.



Mines to *Matchdays*

From a reclaimed mine in Goa to national football arenas, Vedanta's sports initiatives are demonstrating how sport can become a force for nation-building.



On a quiet morning in Sirsaim, Goa, the sound of football boots striking the turf and coaches calling out instructions echoes across the lush green fields of Sesa Football Academy (SFA). Founded in 1999 on the reclaimed Sanquelim Mines, the academy transformed a former mining site into a launchpad for rural youth.

Managed as part of the Sesa Community Development Fund, the SFA is one of the flagship CSR project's of Vedanta Iron And Steel Ltd (VISL), and is the only residential football academy in Goa, combining professional coaching with education, leadership and holistic development. More than a training centre, it is a model of how corporate social responsibility can create lasting social impact through sport. Over the years, it has nurtured generations of players. As its ambitions grew, SFA expanded to a purpose-built campus in Sirsaim in 2008, creating world-class infrastructure that today supports both boys' and girls' football, strengthening Goa's football ecosystem and contributing to the future of Indian football.

When Sport Becomes a Classroom

While trophies and medals often capture

headlines, the real impact of sport is measured in the lives it transforms.

For more than two decades, Vedanta has viewed sport not merely as competition, but as a platform for skill development. Today, after 27 years, the SFA boasts 14 who have donned the coveted India jersey, 230+ who have graduated as part of the residential training programme and played for top clubs in the country. The SFA cumulatively shaped 1400+ careers through the women's football initiative and the Vedanta Women's League. Denzil Franco, Adil Khan, Pratesh Shirodhkar, Glan Martins, among others, are household names in Goan football and are all alumni of the SFA.

"The Vedanta Women's League is a shining example of how grassroots initiatives can create a profound impact. Initiatives like this are instrumental in nurturing talent," says Maymol Rocky, Chairperson, Goa Football Association Women's Committee.

Creating Lasting Pathways

The Academy's impact is perhaps best reflected in the ecosystem it has created. It boasts of a proven structure of technical expertise, coaching support, physical and



mental conditioning which has played a significant part in player development through the tournaments and leagues. SFA fields a total of 10 teams for age-group football across multiple categories among boys and girls, develops local coaching talent and provides a steady pipeline of players for Goan and Indian football. Its coaching and support staff are drawn largely from local communities, ensuring that the benefits remain rooted in the region. “Having been associated with Sesa Football Academy, I have witnessed the extraordinary accomplishments of players spanning multiple generations,” says Padma Shri Brahmanand Sankhwalkar, former captain of the Indian football team.

Changing the Rules of the Game

If Sesa Football Academy’s contribution to youth football is significant, its impact

Built on reclaimed mines, SFA demonstrates how environmental restoration and community development can create lasting impact.



For over two decades, SFA has shown that sustained investment in grassroots sport creates champions on and off the field.



on women's football may be even more transformative. Recognising the lack of opportunities for girls, Vedanta partnered with the Goa Football Association in 2017 to launch the Vedanta Women's League, Goa's premier women's football competition.

Five of the League's seven champions have qualified for the Indian Women's League (IWL), while the league's consistency has enabled Goa to host IWL2, exposing local players to higher competition, better coaching and modern tactics. Over eight seasons, more than 1,400 women footballers have participated. Players including Karishma Shirvoikar, Michel Castanha, Pearl Fernandes, Valaina Fernandes and

Aaroshi Govekar have represented India.

In 2023, SFA launched its Senior Women's Team, earning promotion to the IWL in just two seasons. Its upcoming girls' residential programme marks another milestone for women's football in Goa.

From Aspiration to Achievement

By investing in infrastructure, coaching, grassroots talent and community engagement, Vedanta has built a sustainable model that advances both football and social development. Even as several Goan clubs scaled back or shut their academies, SFA continued to nurture talent, creating opportunities for young athletes and strengthening both Goa's football ecosystem and Indian football. Nation-building is not only about infrastructure or economic growth; it is about creating opportunities that empower people. At SFA, that vision is taking shape every day.

"The future of India will be shaped by the opportunities we create, and who we create them for. Through sport, we have the power to build confidence, leadership and resilience in young people. Sesa Football Academy reflects our belief that investing in people and the environment together creates lasting impact for generations," says Pankaj Kumar Sharma, CEO & Whole Time Director, Vedanta Iron & Steel Ltd.



Sport



Bihar's New *Innings*

By Robin Bose



Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Ishan Kishan and Mukesh Kumar may be Bihar's newest cricket sensations, but they are part of a sporting legacy decades in the making.

On a cold January morning in 2024, Patna's Moin-ul-Haq Stadium bore witness to one of the most surreal sights in Indian domestic cricket. As the powerhouse Mumbai team warmed up in bemusement, two separate Bihar squads turned up to play them, each claiming to be the state's rightful Ranji Trophy representative. One team was approved by Bihar Cricket Association (BCA) President Rakesh Tiwary and another by Amit Kumar, claiming to be BCA's Secretary. The stadium itself, with its weathered stands and a manual scoreboard frozen in time, stood in stark contrast to the manicured elite venues of the sport.

Yet, this dramatic standoff, which required the intervention of the courts and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to resolve, unlocked a deeper truth about the region: despite the chaos, Bihar's passion for cricket has never dulled. Now, a new generation of players, forged not in academies but in the dust and noise of local tournaments, is forcing its way into the national conversation.

Wonder Boy from Samastipur

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi was 12 when he made his Ranji Trophy debut. In a competition where most players spend years grinding through age-group cricket and state trials before earning a call up, the boy from Samastipur, a dusty town in Bihar, was already there.

By the 2025 Indian Premier League (IPL) season, Rajasthan Royals had paid ₹1.1 crore for the privilege of watching him play, and he repaid them spectacularly by becoming the youngest batsman to score a century in men's T20 cricket, reaching three figures off just 35 balls against the Gujarat Titans.



Ishan Kishan

Fast forward to 2026, and Sooryavanshi has consistently been top of the list for the IPL's highest run-scorers. Beyond IPL stardom, Sooryavanshi etched his name in history on his debut against England, becoming India's youngest-ever international cricketer after surpassing Sachin Tendulkar's long-standing record. Then, he followed it up by being named the Player of the Series in India's 3-0 victory in the T20Is in Zimbabwe.

Back in his town, people watched the action on phones and small television sets in tea shops. Some of them wept. They had watched this boy bat since he was nine.

The Lost Years

To understand where Bihar is clawing back from, the narrative must return to 2000. Jharkhand was carved out of Bihar as a separate state, and the BCCI's affiliation went with it. Jharkhand inherited the stadiums, sponsorships and development funds. Bihar was left with ageing grounds, frozen talent pathways and an association that quickly descended into factionalism.

For more than a decade, there were no selection trials and no certainty that the sport even had a future in the state. The only option for serious young cricketers in Bihar was grim: migrate to another state.

Critical Decision

Ishan Kishan grew up in Patna watching cricket the way most Bihar kids do. His family eventually made the tough call to shift his registration to Jharkhand. The migration eventually led him to the India Under-19 captaincy, to the fastest ODI



Hailing from Gopalganj district, Mukesh Kumar is a right-arm medium-fast bowler. He received his first India call-up for the ODI series against South Africa in 2022.

double century in history, and to becoming one of the IPL's most recognisable faces.

To get to where he is, one of Bihar's best cricketers had to stop being a Bihar cricketer. Mukesh Kumar's route was different, but no less telling. From Gopalganj, a rural district in western Bihar where cricket facilities are virtually non-existent, he shifted to Kolkata. Mukesh trialled for local clubs, impressed Bengal's selectors with his raw pace and worked his way into the national setup

During his early years, Sooryavanshi used to travel more than one way, from Tejpur to Patna to train at coach Manish Ojha's cricket academy.

across all three formats. Mukesh learned his craft in another system because his state had nothing to offer.

Joining that diaspora is Akash Deep from Sasaram, who also moved to Durgapur, West Bengal, to find better infrastructure before earning his India Test cap as a seamer.

Glorious Past

Kirti Azad, from Purnea, played for India in the 1983 World Cup, a detail that tends to get lost when people talk about Bihar's cricket history. Azad's ability to make headlines consistently proved that the talent was always there. Saba Karim was another early example. The wicketkeeper-batsman from Patna earned his Test and ODI caps in the late 1990s, and later served as a national selector and tried to improve the system. These men carried Bihar's cricketing identity through decades when the state could not officially field a team.

Then, there is Mahendra Singh Dhoni, born in Ranchi when it was still part of undivided Bihar, who wore the Bihar jersey as a young man before the partition reshaped everything. His epic journey from being a railway ticket collector to India's most decorated skipper began in exactly this kind of overlooked landscape.

Where the Game Breathes

The grassroot hubs of Bihar's cricketing resurgence in no way match the modern standards as there are no turf wickets or high-performance centres in these rural

Wunderkind

Two series, six matches, two half-centuries, a Player of the Match award and a Player of the Series honour. Vaibhav Sooryavanshi has already assembled an international résumé that suggests his journey is no longer just about precocious talent, but about becoming a cricketing sensation.

A Tiny Prodigy:

His first coach, Brajesh Jha, recalls him arriving at the academy as a "tiny child among all the seniors." He caught on so fast that he was selected for the state Under-17 team at the astonishing age of eight-and-a-half.

Unwinding with

Cartoons: To escape the intense pressure of public scrutiny at such a young age, Sooryavanshi once shared that he locks himself in his room and watches cartoons to unwind.

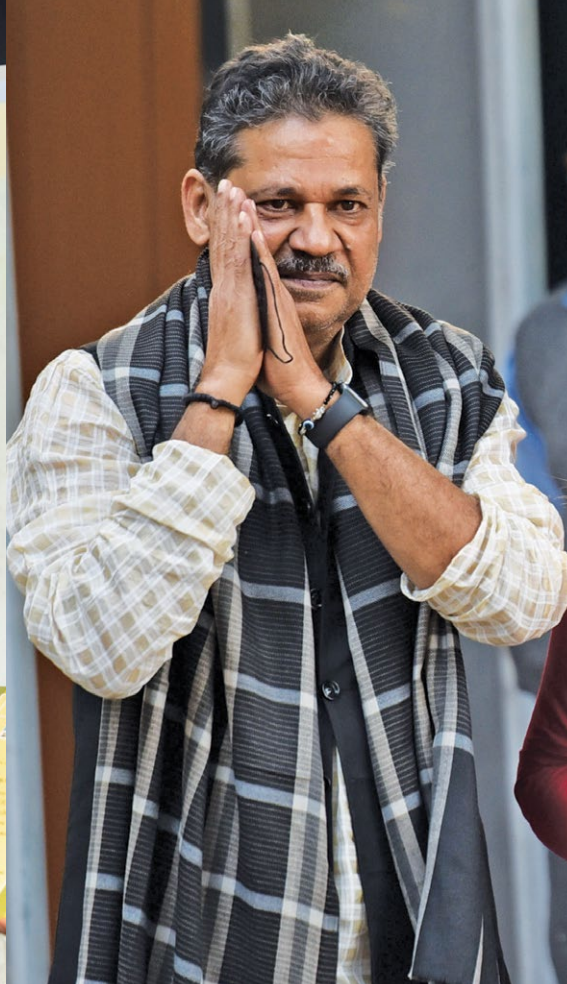


Former Indian skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni represented Bihar U-19 starting in 1998-99, debuting professionally against Bengal U-19 where he took a key catch as wicketkeeper

districts. What is present in abundance is tennis-ball cricket. These are energy-charged, highly competitive tournaments where fast bowlers learn to generate pace on concrete because anything slower gets hit to the boundary, and batsmen develop reflexes that no machine can replicate.

When Ranji Trophy finally returned to Patna's Moin-ul-Haq Stadium after the Supreme Court ordered the BCCI to reinstate Bihar's first-class status in 2018, the ground was in a state of visible mess.

Weed-covered stands, a crumbling manual scoreboard and dressing rooms that had clearly not been maintained for years.



From Saba Karim (left) to Kirti Azad (right), Bihar has produced several prominent cricketers who have made their mark on national and international stages

Thousands of fans turned up anyway. They packed the broken concrete and made noise for hours. The image revealed more about Bihar's relationship with the game than any infrastructure audit could.

Shifting Landscape

The reinstatement of first-class status fundamentally changed the landscape for local talent. For the first time in nearly two decades, staying in Bihar became a viable option, removing the absolute necessity to migrate for national recognition.

The administrative shift triggered positive consequences. IPL franchises have started paying attention to the lower tiers of the domestic structure in ways they did not five years ago. As big-city talent is crowded, scouts find real hunger in the smaller towns.

The bidding war for Sooryavanshi was a statement about where Indian cricket's next

generation is going to come from.

No More Waiting

Founder and Chairman of Vedanta Group Anil Agarwal recently said that Bihar should have its own IPL franchise, citing Kishan and Sooryavanshi as evidence of the state's talent pool. It is a thought worth taking seriously. A Bihar IPL team is not just a sporting proposition. It would be an infrastructure catalyst, a commercial signal and message to every child playing tennis-ball cricket that there is a path that leads somewhere.

Cricket has officially returned to Bihar, and the country is watching.



Robin Bose is a senior sports journalist who has reported for some of India's leading news outlets. In his free time, he enjoys playing golf.

Culture

• Folk Culture • Cinema • Art

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सुरों की सुपर-स्टार

होते हैं
प्रमुख राग 4

भारतीय शास्त्रीय संगीत में समय और मौसम के अनुसार राग गाए जाते हैं। ध्रुपद इसकी सबसे प्राचीन शैली है। प्रमुख रागों में राग यमन, राग दरबारी, राग भैरव एवं राग मल्हार शामिल हैं।



पद्म श्री एवं संगीत नाटक अकादमी सम्मान जैसे प्रतिष्ठित पुरस्कारों से सम्मानित लोक-गायिका विदुषी मालिनी अवस्थी बता रही हैं कि कैसे स्वतंत्रता प्राप्ति के 80 वर्षों की अवधि में भारत के कला एवं संगीत क्षेत्र में परिवर्तन देखने को मिल रहा है। बनारस घराने की इस विख्यात गायिका ने भोजपुरी लोकसंगीत को एक नया फलक प्रदान किया है। अंतर्राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर लोक-कलाकारों का सम्मान बढ़ाने में मालिनी अवस्थी का विशेष योगदान रहा है।

आलेख: शशिप्रभा तिवारी

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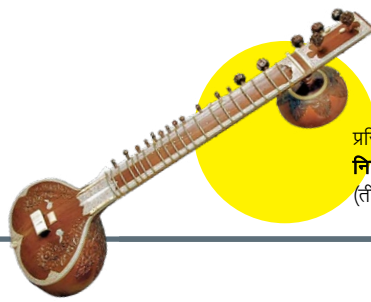
कसर लोग अचरज करते हैं कि भारत में बोली, भाषा, पहनावा और पर्व-त्योहार सबमें इतना वैविध्य है, परंतु उसके बाद भी देश एक है, संगठित है। भारत का सांस्कृतिक वृक्ष लहलहा कर मजबूती के साथ विश्व पटल पर खड़ा है। इसका मुख्य कारण है, भारत की कलाएं। हमारी बहुरंगी, लालित्यमई कलाओं की अदृश्य धरोहर जो हमारी अपराजेय अमर, अजर उर्वरा संस्कृति की मूल आत्मा है।

कला में बसी राष्ट्रीय चेतना

भारत की राष्ट्रीय चेतना कला एवं संस्कृति में बसती है। यह कला और संगीत से जुड़े कलाकारों में समाहित है। इसलिए कला और कलाकार पूज्य और सम्माननीय हैं। स्वतंत्रता के बाद इस ओर ध्यान दिया गया। कला-संस्कृति से समाज में प्रेम, सौहार्द, एकता, समानता, समरसता का भाव जागृत होता है। स्वतंत्रता के बाद सबसे अच्छी बात यह हुई कि स्कूल, कॉलेज, विश्वविद्यालय स्तर पर संगीत शिक्षा की व्यवस्था बनाई गई। इससे आम समाज में संगीत की सभी विधाओं के प्रति जागरूकता एवं रुचि बढ़ी। आज़ादी के बाद संगीत से जुड़े संस्थान स्थापित हुए, देश के प्रतिष्ठित कलाकारों को राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर सम्मानित करने की परंपरा रही, जिससे संगीत के प्रति राष्ट्र का सम्मान प्रदर्शित हुआ और यह आज भी यथावत कायम है।

संगीत एक जीवंत भाव है, स्वाधीनता के बाद इन आठ दशकों में इसमें भी परिवर्तन आया और इसे कई स्तर पर देखा जा सकता है। सबसे बड़ा परिवर्तन कला की परंपरा की शुद्धता को बनाए रखने का प्रयास रहा। आज इसी आधारशिला पर भारतीय





प्रसिद्ध सितार वादकों में **पंडित रविशंकर**, **उस्ताद विलायत खान** और **निखिल बनर्जी** के नाम प्रमुख हैं। इसकी उत्पत्ति फारसी शब्द 'सेहत' (तीन तारों वाला) से मानी जाती है।

संगीत फल-फूल रहा है। कला मुक्त प्रवाह है और प्रवाह सिर्फ बहना जानता है, अतः स्वाभाविक है कि स्वाधीनता के बाद अब तक कला में अनेक नवाचार हुए हैं। ऐसे में परंपरा और नवाचार को लेकर कलाकार समाज बंटा हुआ भी दिखता है।

पहले कलाकार कला मर्मज्ञ संगीत, नृत्य, वादन सभी क्षेत्र में शुद्धता के आग्रही थे। उन्होंने अपने पूर्वजों का अनुकरण किया और वही शिष्यों को सिखाया किन्तु जैसा होता है, कला की शुद्धता के प्रति आग्रही बनने में कहीं न कहीं संगीत की शुद्धता और व्याकरण पर ऐसा जोर पड़ा कि इससे भावी पीढ़ी भी प्रभावित हुई। वह समय घरानेदार लोगों का दौर था। युवा घरानेदार कलाकार गा रहे थे और स्थापित हो रहे थे। बीसवीं शताब्दी के सत्तर के दशक में घराने की विरासत को संजोने पर जोर था। तब परंपरा या विरासत को बनाए रखने के लिए आग्रह कुछ ज़्यादा था। लेकिन किसी भी परंपरा के प्रति अति आग्रही होना कभी-कभी नकारात्मक प्रभाव भी पैदा करता है।

गुरु-शिष्य परंपरा का योगदान

“विभावानुभावव्यभिचारिसंयोगाद्रसनिष्पत्तिः” भरतमुनि ने यह उक्ती कही, जिसके माध्यम से स्पष्ट होता है कि स्थायी भाव विभाव, अनुभाव एवं व्यभिचारी भावों के संयोग से परिपक्व होकर रस का रूप लेता है। रस का तात्पर्य कला में निहित अलौकिक आनंद के दार्शनिक आधार को भी

भारतीय कलाओं ने इन आठ दशकों में बहुआयामी यात्रा तय की है। इसमें कलाओं की शुद्धता को बनाए रखते हुए, नवाचार और प्रयोग भी खूब हुए हैं। देश की सांस्कृतिक एकता भी मज़बूत हुई है।

अनुभव करना है। कहीं न कहीं अपनी कला को पक्का करने या तैयारी पर जो ज़्यादा आग्रही हुए, वह परंपरा में बंध गए और बहुत गहरे व्याकरण एवं तैयारी में ही रह गए। वे लोग मौलिकता के घेरे में सिमटकर रह गए जबकि जो साधारण थे, उन्होंने अपनी पहचान और जगह बनाई, जो सामान्य परिवारों से आते थे, जिनके घरों में संगीत व्यवसाय रूप में नहीं था। बहरहाल संगीत संस्थाओं, विश्वविद्यालयों, महाविद्यालयों में आकाशवाणी, दूरदर्शन के घरानेदार हों या कोई भी आला कलाकार, उन्हें रोज़गार मिला। यह अलग विषय है कि इन संस्थाओं में आज संगीत शिक्षण का वह स्तर नहीं है, जो पहले हुआ करता था।

संगीत तो गुरु-शिष्य परंपरा में ही सीखा जा सकता है। बदलते समय में उस परंपरा का क्षरण दिखता है। पहले गुरु और शिष्य का संबंध सनातन और माता-पिता से बढ़कर होता था जिसमें अनुशासन था सेवा और समर्पण का भाव था। अब संगीत को ही लें, पहले गुरु-शिष्य परंपरा में गुरु पांच या छह रागों को सीखने-सिखाने पर जोर देते थे ताकि शिष्य का सीखना पक्का रहे। उनकी गुरु अप्पा जी बताती थीं कि उनके गुरु ने तो उन्हें एक राग को छह साल में सिखाया। पांच राग सीख जाओगे तो पचास राग सीखने का रास्ता मिल जाएगा।

मुख्य-धारा में आया संगीत

अस्सी के दशक में घर-घर शास्त्रीय संगीत पहुंचने लगा था। शास्त्रीय संगीत को मुख्य धारा में लाने की कोशिश हुई। इस क्रम में संगीत से जुड़े संस्थानों और कॉलेजों में संगीत के कोर्स की भी शुरुआत हुई। लेकिन इन्हें पूरा करने की जल्दीबाजी रहती है। जो छात्र या छात्रा ग्रेजुएशन करते हैं, उनके लिए संगीत एक ऐच्छिक विषय होता है।

एक विषय के तौर पर संगीत में उन्हें चौदह राग और चार ताल सीखने का निर्देश होता है। सैद्धांतिक रूप से तो





क्या आप जानते हैं?

गिटार की भांति दिखने वाला 'मोहन वीणा' तार वाला यंत्र है। इसे ग्रैमी पुरस्कार विजेता पंडित विश्व मोहन भट्ट ने बनाया था। इसे गोद में रखकर बजाया जाता है।



वर्तमान में लोक-कलाकारों को पद्म सम्मान से सम्मानित किया जाने लगा है। इससे केवल कलाकार नहीं अपितु स्थानीय बोली-भाषा एवं संस्कृति का सम्मान हुआ है

वे चीजों को रट लेते हैं पर व्यवहार में एक या दो राग को ठीक से गाना-बजाना वे नहीं सीख पाते हैं। ऐसे में कोर्स तो पूरा हो सकता है, लेकिन राग सीखने या संगीत को लोकप्रिय कैसे बनाएंगे? यह प्रश्न तो उठता ही है।

हमारे समाज की संस्कृति है कि लोग गुरु का सम्मान करते हैं। आमतौर पर पहले लोग अपने घर के बच्चों को कलाकार बनाने में विश्वास नहीं करते थे। कोई और गाता-बजाता हो तब उसकी प्रशंसा या आलोचना बड़ी आसानी से कर देते थे। लेकिन, इक्कीसवीं सदी में लोगों की धारणा बदली है। लोग अब अपने बच्चे की प्रतिभा को स्वीकार करते हैं और अभिभावक बच्चों को उनकी प्रतिभा या इच्छा के अनुरूप संगीत या नृत्य सीखने का अवसर देने लगे हैं।

भारतीय कलाओं का स्वर्ण काल

भारतीय परिदृश्य में सन् साठ से अस्सी के दशक को भारतीय कलाओं का स्वर्ण काल माना जाता है। चाहे हिंदुस्तानी शास्त्रीय संगीत, नृत्य, लोक संगीत अथवा सुगम संगीत की बात की जाए, उस दौर में पंडित ओंकारनाथ ठाकुर, सिद्धेश्वरी देवी जी, गंगूबाई हंगल जी, उस्ताद मुश्ताक हुसैन खां, उस्ताद अलाउद्दीन खां, उस्ताद बिस्मिल्ला खां, पंडित रविशंकर, पंडित पन्ना लाल घोष, पंडित किशन महाराज, डागर बंधु, विदुषी सितारा देवी,

गिरिजा देवी जी विदुषी किशोरी अमोनकर, बेगम अख्तर, पंडित गोपीकृष्ण आदि बहुत से श्रेष्ठ कलाकार हुए। उन्होंने जो उत्कृष्टता का मापदंड निर्धारित कर दिया, वह आज भी कायम हैं।

वह बताती हैं कि उन्हें याद है कि कमानी सभागार में एक कार्यक्रम में मात्र चालीस मिनट में ही अप्पा जी ने राग तुमरी, दादरा, भजन सब कुछ गाकर, अपनी प्रस्तुति को विराम दिया। वैसे तो वह दो घंटे तक एक ही राग या एक ही तुमरी या दादरा गाती थीं, पर उस शाम उन्होंने समय न होने के कारण कम समय में सब कुछ गा दिया। वह आश्चर्यचकित थीं। पूछने पर उन्होंने बहुत सहज भाव से कहा कि अब समय बदल गया है। हमने वह ज़माना भी देखा है जब रात भर कार्यक्रम चलते थे, सुनने वाले सुबह चार बजे तक बैठे रहते थे। लेकिन आज चार घंटे की कॉन्फ्रेंस में चार कलाकार बुलाए जाते हैं। इसलिए संभालना पड़ता है और सच्चा कलाकार यह जानता है कि थोड़े में ही सब कुछ किया जा सकता है।

स्वतंत्रता के आठ दशक में लोगों ने हिंदुस्तानी शास्त्रीय संगीत को जन-जन तक पहुंचाने की कोशिश की है। जब विशुद्ध शास्त्रीय संगीत के कार्यक्रम या समारोह का आयोजन होता है, तब दर्शक पूरे मनोयोग से लोग उन्हें सुनते और सराहते भी हैं। यह बदलाव संगीत क्षेत्र के लिए सुखद अनुभूति है।



The Next Big *Frame*

As Indian cinema marks 90 years of its talkie era, National Award-winning and Padma Shri recipient filmmaker **S.S. Rajamouli** reflects on the industry's extraordinary journey, from hand-crafted sets and analogue filmmaking to visual effects, AI and immersive storytelling.

Ninety years of Indian cinema is not merely a story of films. It is a story of imagination overcoming limitations. When I look back at the pioneers of Indian filmmaking, I am struck not by the technology they had, but by what they achieved without it. The early filmmakers achieved wonders with very little. They relied on imagination, craftsmanship and storytelling.

Long before sophisticated visual effects became available, filmmakers created magic through practical techniques, innovative editing and meticulous production design. Those early decades established an

important principle that continues to guide me and many other filmmakers: while technology may evolve, storytelling remains central.

Technology Evolution

The history of Indian cinema is also a history of technological transformation. The introduction of sound revolutionised filmmaking. Colour changed visual storytelling. Widescreen formats expanded cinematic scale, while digital technology democratised filmmaking for a new generation of creators. Each technological milestone altered both the creative process and the audience

Rajamouli is the highest-grossing Indian film director, earning more than ₹40 billion across 12 films. With a worldwide collection of appx



₹1,810 crore,

Baahubali 2: The Conclusion (2017) redefined Indian blockbusters. *RRR* (2022) followed with ₹1,387 crore.



When I look back at the pioneers of Indian filmmaking, I am struck not by the technology they had, but by what they achieved without it.

experience. Technology has expanded our ability to tell stories. But it is never the destination. It is the bridge between imagination and the audience.

Tradition & Innovation

One of the defining strengths of Indian cinema is its ability to combine tradition with innovation. India's storytelling heritage spans centuries, encompassing mythology, folklore, literature and oral traditions. Modern filmmakers continue to draw upon these rich cultural resources

while employing cutting-edge techniques to bring them to life. We have always adapted new technologies to tell our own stories. The tools may change, but our narratives remain deeply connected to our culture.

This philosophy is reflected in much of my own work, where large-scale visual effects coexist with themes inspired by mythology, heroism and collective memory. For me, technological excellence is meaningful only when it strengthens emotional engagement. Visual effects should support the story.

Digital Cinema Revolution

Over the past two decades, Indian cinema has undergone one of its most significant transformations. Advances in digital cinematography, computer-generated imagery and post-production technologies

The Roar Heard Worldwide

Praised for its visual effects and grand storytelling, *RRR* became the third Indian film and first Telugu film to receive nominations at the Golden Globe Awards.



The film's song *Naatu Naatu* won the Academy Award for Best Original Song, becoming the first song from an Indian production to win an Oscar in a competitive category.

have dramatically expanded creative possibilities. What once required elaborate physical construction can now be achieved through sophisticated visual effects. Historical worlds, fantasy landscapes and complex action sequences can be realised with unprecedented precision. This evolution is a testament to the growing capabilities of Indian technicians, artists and filmmakers.

Beyond Spectacle

People often associate my work with scale and spectacle, but I have always believed that scale alone means very little. The future of Indian cinema will not be determined by who spends the most money. It will be determined by who tells the most compelling stories. As technology becomes increasingly accessible, the true differentiator will continue to be creativity.

Artificial Intelligence

Looking ahead, I believe Artificial Intelligence (AI) will become one of the most influential developments shaping the future of filmmaking. However, I see AI primarily as a creative assistant rather than a replacement. Just as previous

Going Global

Rajamouli's upcoming film *SSMB29*, starring Mahesh Babu, exemplifies Indian cinema's new global ambition. Combining international locations, advanced visual effects, virtual production and large-scale world-building, the film reflects a shift towards stories designed for worldwide audiences. For Rajamouli, it represents the meeting point of India's timeless storytelling traditions and cutting-edge filmmaking technology to create narratives rooted in India yet with appeal across continents.



generations adapted to sound, colour and digital filmmaking, our industry will learn to integrate AI into creative processes. The challenge will be ensuring that technology enhances artistic expression rather than diminishing it. Advances in virtual production, real-time rendering and immersive technologies are creating entirely new forms of audience engagement.

As Indian cinema enters its next chapter, I see potential. India possesses a unique combination of cultural depth and youthful energy. For 90 years, Indian cinema has brought people together through stories. No matter how advanced our tools become, that human connection will forever remain our greatest strength.



S.S. Rajamouli is an acclaimed Indian filmmaker who primarily works in Telugu cinema. The director of *Baahubali* and *RRR*, he is credited to have pioneered the Pan-Indian films movement. He has won four National Film Awards and received the Padma Shri in 2016.

 @ssrajamouli

"युवा पीढ़ी है परिवर्तन की वाहक"

स्वतंत्रता के 80वें वर्ष में प्रवेश कर रहे भारत में बीते आठ दशक में सांस्कृतिक एवं मनोरंजन के क्षेत्र में बहुत कुछ बदला है। रुपहले पर्दे की कहानियों को कहने और सुनने के प्रकार भी इन परिवर्तनों से अछूते नहीं रहे हैं।

आलेख: संजय मिश्रा

परिवर्तन प्रकृति का एक ऐसा नियम है, जिसे यदि प्रकृति भी चाहे तब भी नहीं बदल सकती। आज हम भारत की स्वतंत्रता प्राप्ति के 80वें वर्ष की बात करते हैं, करनी भी चाहिए क्योंकि 1947 का वर्ष एक ऐसा परिवर्तनकारी मोड़ लेकर आया था, जिसके बाद से चीजें हमारे अपने हाथों में आई थीं। वे सपने, वे आकांक्षाएं, जिन्हें हमारे पुरखों ने देखा और जिनके प्रयासों के कारण हमें यह आज़ादी प्राप्त हुई, उन्हें पूरा करने का अवसर 1947 में हमें मिला। लेकिन हमें यह नहीं भूलना चाहिए कि भारत उससे पहले भी था और स्वतंत्रता दिवस भारत के गौरवशाली इतिहास की यात्रा में केवल एक मोड़ लेकर आया।

बाहरी प्रभाव से मुक्ति

आज़ादी के समय काफी चीजें थीं, जो अभी विकसित हो रही थीं। कुछ चीजें जो हमारी अपनी थीं, उनकी गति तेज़ थी और जो हमारे पास बाहर से आई, उन्हें हम लोग संवारने में लगे हुए थे। सिनेमा चूंकि हमारा अपना नहीं था, बाहर से आया था, इसलिए इस पर बाहरी प्रभाव काफी अधिक रहे। नाट्य शास्त्र हमारा था, शास्त्रीय नृत्य और संगीत हमारा था लेकिन सिनेमा में ऐसी बहुत सारी कलाएं थीं, जो बाहर से आई थीं। उन दिनों तो सिनेमा देखना तक गलत समझा जाता था। इसीलिए आप देखिए कि आरंभिक दौर में भारत में जो सिनेमा बना, उस पर कई तरह के बाहरी प्रभाव पड़े। देश के अलग-अलग भागों में सिनेमा अलग-अलग तरह से अपना रूप विकसित कर रहा था। बंगाल, पंजाब, दक्षिण में जिस तरह का सिनेमा बन रहा था, मुंबईया सिनेमा ने उससे अलग राह पकड़ी। इसमें विदेशी प्रभाव अधिक था और हाल-फिलहाल तक रहा। पहले के हमारे हीरो देखिए, वे विदेशी नायकों से प्रभावित थे, सिनेमा बनाने की जो शैली थी हमारी वह भी विदेशी फिल्मों से प्रेरित और प्रभावित रही। लेकिन धीरे-धीरे लोगों को यह समझ में आने लगा कि अपने लोगों को उनकी कहानियां दिखानी हैं तो उनकी जुबान में और उनकी शैली में ही दिखानी होंगी। इससे यथार्थवादी सिनेमा हमारे यहां उभरा और फिर एक सहजता आने लगी। कभी-कभी



फिल्मफेयर पुरस्कार

‘आँखों देखी’ (2014) और ‘वध’ (2022) के लिए उन्हें यह पुरस्कार प्रदान किया गया है।

बहुप्रतिभा-मुखी

उन्होंने कला निर्देशन, प्रकाश व्यवस्था और कैमरा वर्क सहित फिल्म निर्माण के अन्य क्षेत्रों में भी हाथ आजमाया है।



मुझे अफ़सोस होता है, जब हमारे कुछ फिल्मकार भारतीय दर्शकों को रिझाने के लिए विदेशी पैतरों का इस्तेमाल करते हैं, जबकि हमारे पास हमारी खुद की शैलियां हैं, हमारे नायक हैं, हमारे मूल्य हैं, उन्हें आगे लाना चाहिए।

कहानियों की कमी नहीं

अक्सर यह प्रलाप होता रहा है कि हमारे सिनेमा में अच्छी कहानियां नहीं आती हैं, जबकि सच यह है कि यदि भारत में कहानियों की कमी है तो फिर पूरी दुनिया में किसी के पास कहानियां नहीं हैं। आप चाहे हमारे पुराणों में देखिए, हमारे ग्रंथों में, हमारे इतिहास में और ज़्यादा पीछे न जाना चाहें तो अपने आसपास ही देख लीजिए, इस देश की मिट्टी इतनी उर्वर है कि आप जहां तलाशेंगे, कहानियां ही कहानियां मिलेंगी। लेकिन होता क्या है कि लोगबाग मेहनत नहीं करना चाहते। उन्हें लगता है कि कहीं से कुछ भी उठा लेंगे और कुछ भी बना देंगे। यह उचित नहीं है। आपको कुछ तो परिश्रम करना होगा। आप ‘बाहुबली’ को देखिए, कोई नई कहानी नहीं है। लेकिन जिस तरह से उसे विस्तार दिया गया है, जिस तरह से उसे फिल्माया गया है, वह एक अद्भुत कथा बनकर सामने आती है। इस तरह से जिस भी लेखक ने, फिल्मकार ने मेहनत की है, उसके काम को लोगों ने खूब सराहा है। डूबना पड़ता है, गहरा गोता लगाना पड़ता है, तब जाकर कहीं मोती मिलता है।

सिनेमा देखने का ढंग भी बदला

बीते वर्षों में दर्शक भी तो बदले हैं। बल्कि मैं कहूंगा कि दर्शक बहुत समझदार हुए हैं। पहले आप कुछ भी ऊल-जलूल चीज़ दिखा देते थे, तब दर्शक सवाल नहीं उठाते थे। लेकिन अब दर्शक सीधे पूछता है कि भई, यह क्या दिखा रहे हो, क्यों दिखा रहे हो या कैसे दिखा रहे हो। मैंने हमेशा से यह माना है कि आप चाहे कितने भी बड़े कहानीकार या फिल्मकार क्यों न हों, आप दर्शक को मूर्ख नहीं बना सकते। और आज के दर्शक के पास तो बहुत विकल्प हैं। आप जहां कुछ हल्का या बेकार माल दिखाओगे, वह दूसरे के पास चला जाएगा, तब बजाते रहो अपनी ढफली, गाते रहो अपना राग। अब ‘धुरंधर’ को लीजिए, इस फिल्म ने बताया न कि यथार्थ कैसा होता है। वरना इससे पहले तो इस किस्म की फिल्मों में तो वही सब होता था कि चीज़ें उड़ रही हैं, हीरो नाच रहा है। ऐसी फिल्में आती हैं तो दर्शक को भी लगता है कि यह मेरी



यादगार अभिनय

6 अक्टूबर, 1963 को बिहार के दरभंगा में जन्मे संजय मिश्रा ने “एप्पल सिंह” के रूप में अपार लोकप्रियता हासिल की थी। यह वर्ष 1999 क्रिकेट विश्व कप के दौरान ईएसपीएन स्टार स्पोर्ट्स द्वारा बनाया गया एक प्रतिष्ठित तथा विचित्र क्रिकेट प्रेमी चरित्र था।



मोबाइल से जो परिवर्तन आया है, वह तो अविश्वसनीय है। यह छोटा-सा यंत्र हमारी ज़िंदगी में इस तरह से घुस चुका है, जिसकी कल्पना तक नहीं की गई होगी। इसने पूरे समाज, पूरे विश्व और यहां तक कि इसे इस्तेमाल करने वाले शख्स तक को बदल डाला है।

समझ को हल्के में नहीं ले रही है। इसीलिए वह ऐसी फिल्मों को पसंद करता है जो उसे मूर्ख बनाने की कोशिश न करती हों। दर्शकों का जागरूक होना सबके लिए अच्छा है — उनके लिए भी और सिनेमा के लिए भी।

समाज और देश की बात

यह तय है कि जैसी राजा की सोच रहती है, उसके समय में वैसा ही साहित्य, वैसी ही कलाएं, वैसा ही सिनेमा उभरता है। बीते कुछ समय में यदि सिनेमा में उन चीजों पर अधिक बात हो रही है जिनसे दर्शकों में देश के प्रति या अपने इतिहास के प्रति गर्व का

भाव बढ़ता है, तो यह स्वाभाविक है। पहले भी ऐसा होता रहा है। आज़ादी के बाद जिस तरह का सिनेमा बन रहा था, वह उस समय के हालात और विचारों के अनुसार था। जैसे हम मनोज कुमार साहब के सिनेमा की बात करते हैं तो वह आम आदमी की समस्याओं को या देशप्रेम

की भावना को फिल्मों के माध्यम से लेकर आए। आज भी ऐसा कुछ हो रहा है तो वह न तो गलत है और न ही अस्वाभाविक। अभी मेरी एक बांग्ला फिल्म ‘फेरा’ आई तो कई लोगों ने लिखा कि इससे अच्छे बांग्ला सिनेमा की वापसी हुई है। तो, इस तरह का परिवर्तन जब आता है तब वह सकारात्मकता लेकर आता है। हाल ही में धार्मिक विषयों वाली बहुत सारी फिल्में बड़े-बड़े बजट में आई हैं और आगे भी बन रही हैं तो यह भी एक अनोखा परिवर्तन है। बीच में तो फिल्मों से ऐसे विषय बिल्कुल ही गायब हो गए थे। लेकिन अब तो युवा भी जाकर इन्हें देख रहे हैं तो लगता है कि सिनेमा में आत्मा लौटी है।

ओ.टी.टी. ने बदल डाली दुनिया

ओ.टी.टी. के आने के बाद पहले तो सिनेमा देखने का तरीका बदला। लोग यह सोचने लगे हैं कि अब हर चीज़ के लिए पैसे खर्च करके थिएटर तक कौन जाए, जब किसी ओ.टी.टी. पर आ जाएगी तब अपनी मर्जी से, अपने समय से देख लेंगे। फिर इसने सिनेमा बनाने का तरीका बदल डाला। लोगों को समझ आने लगा कि न तो हर कहानी बड़े पर्दे के लिए होती है और न ही हर कहानी ढाई-तीन घंटे की होती है। कुछ बातों को सहजता के साथ उससे कम या अधिक समय में भी कहा जा सकता है। और एक बड़ा परिवर्तन यह आया कि अब कलाकारों को काम बहुत मिलने लगा है। पहले मैं सोचता था कि हमसे पिछली पीढ़ी को काम पाने के लिए कितना संघर्ष करना पड़ता था क्योंकि अवसर बहुत सीमित होते थे। जब हम लोग आए तब टेलीविज़न आ चुका था और काम मिलने लगा था। लेकिन ओ.टी.टी. ने तो गज़ब कर दिया है। किसी के पास काम की कमी नहीं है और सिनेमा बनाने वाले तो दूढ़-दूढ़ कर, घर बैठे कलाकारों को पकड़-पकड़कर काम दे रहे हैं। इस तरह का परिवर्तन आए तो उसका स्वागत है।



संजय मिश्रा, राष्ट्रीय फिल्म पुरस्कार से सम्मानित प्रतिभाशाली कलाकार हैं। राष्ट्रीय नाट्य विद्यालय (एनएसडी) से स्नातक यह अभिनेता ‘आंखों देखी,’ ‘वध,’ ‘कड़वी हवा,’ ‘गिद्ध,’ ‘धमाल’ जैसी अनगिनत फिल्मों में अपने विविधतापूर्ण एवं यादगार अभिनय के लिए प्रख्यात हैं।

@imsanjanmishral

Culture

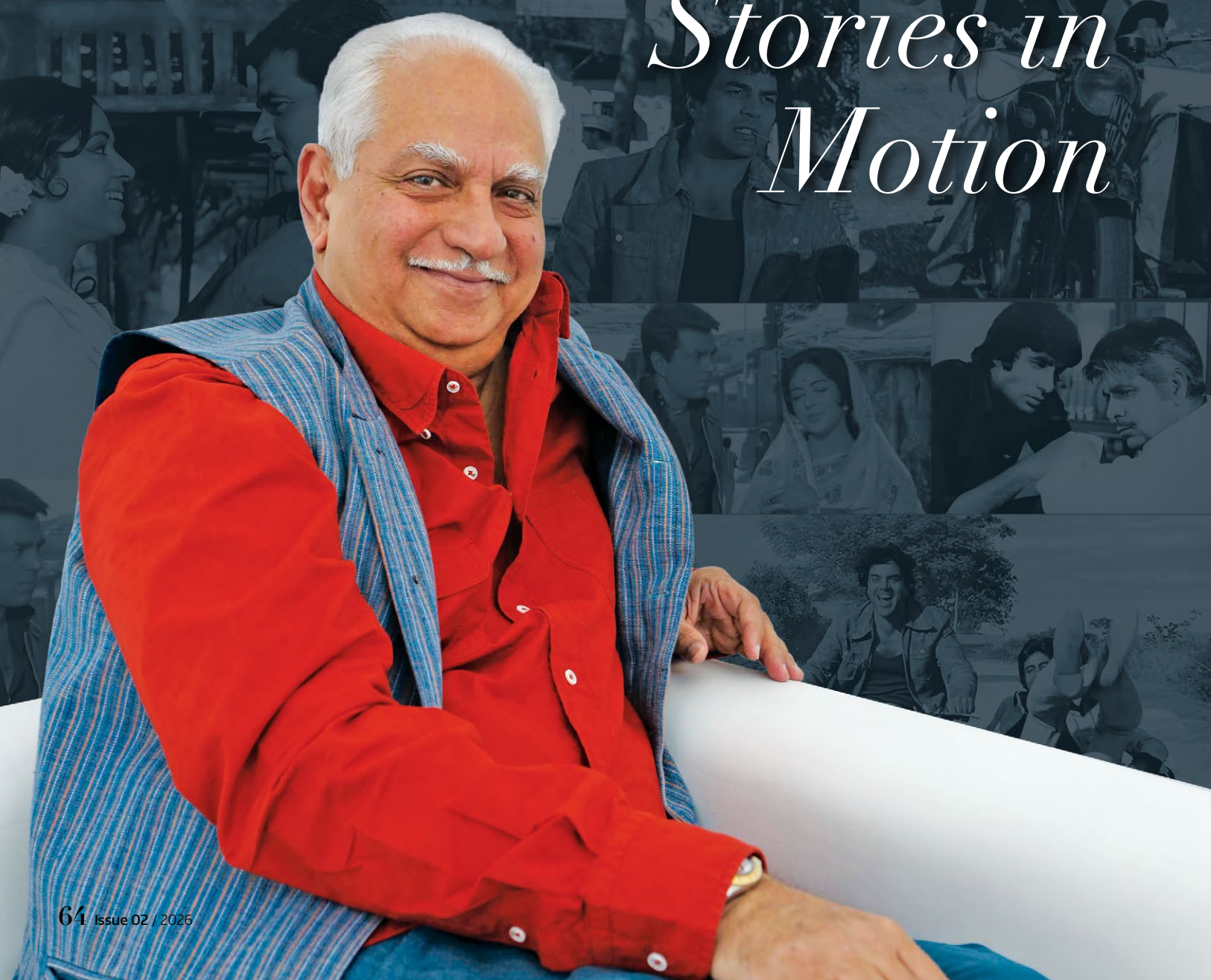


Sholay became a massive box office success, earning

₹30 crore

in the several years after its release in 1975.

Ninety Years of Stories in Motion



Veteran filmmaker **Ramesh Sippy**, director of classics like *Sholay* and *Seeta Aur Geeta*, reflects on Indian cinema's 90-year journey through storytelling, technological innovation and the enduring magic of the big screen.

By Dr. Aarti K Singh

For legendary Indian film director and producer Ramesh Sippy, cinema was not merely a profession, but a way of life. He was introduced to filmmaking at an early age by his father, producer G.P. Sippy, one of the defining figures of post-Independence Hindi cinema. "I grew up watching films being made and the studio was my classroom," he recalls.

He witnessed first-hand how filmmaking adapted to changing audiences, technologies and social realities while remaining rooted in India's

storytelling traditions. Looking back, he sees Indian cinema's nine-decade journey as a remarkable story of resilience and reinvention. "Every generation of filmmakers has found new ways to tell stories. That spirit of innovation has always defined Indian cinema," says Sippy.

The decades following Independence laid the foundations of modern Indian filmmaking, as directors, writers, actors and technicians created works that shaped the nation's cultural imagination. "People often assume that technology creates great



Sholay held the box-office record as highest-grossing film for

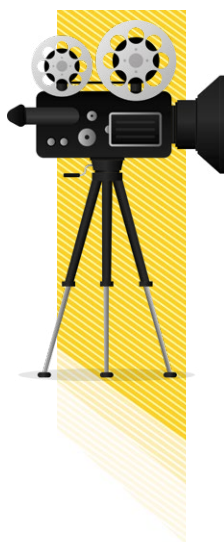
19 years



cinema. In reality, great cinema comes from vision," he explains. Few films embody that better than Sippy's *Sholay*.

Released in 1975, the film transformed the grammar of mainstream Indian filmmaking. It was also technologically ambitious, shot in 70 mm and presented with stereophonic sound, which was an unprecedented scale for Indian cinema. "Cinema has always evolved through storytelling and technology working hand in hand. With *Sholay*, we dared to dream beyond the conventions of the time. The 70 mm presentation and immersive stereophonic sound expanded not just the screen, but the audience's imagination. It is deeply gratifying that those innovations are still remembered decades later. But when we made *Sholay*, we were simply trying to make the best film possible. We were not thinking about creating history," Sippy reflects. He adds, "While *Sholay* belongs to an era when technology was beginning to transform filmmaking, its lesson remains timeless: technology succeeds only when it serves the story."

His contribution extends beyond cinema halls. In the 1980s, *Buniyaad* became one of Indian television's defining achievements, exploring the human impact of Partition and national transformation. "The medium changes, but storytelling remains the same. I have always believed that filmmakers should challenge themselves. Every production should teach you something new."



Having worked across multiple eras of filmmaking, Sippy has witnessed dramatic technological change. He began his career in an analogue world of film stock, physical editing and practical effects. Today, filmmakers have digital cameras, sophisticated visual effects and advanced post-production tools. "Technology is a tool. It can make storytelling richer, but it cannot replace storytelling."

As India celebrates 90 years of cinema, he believes film archives must be safeguarded, classic works restored and preservation technologies strengthened. Recent efforts to restore *Sholay* in 4K have demonstrated how technology can help preserve cinematic heritage for future generations. "Cinema is part of our cultural memory. Preserving it is as important as creating it."

As streaming platforms reshape viewing habits, Sippy sees continuity rather than disruption. The key, he believes, is maintaining quality and authenticity. Looking ahead, Sippy sees tremendous opportunities for Indian cinema. "We have an endless reservoir of stories, from history, literature, mythology and contemporary life. We have to combine that narrative richness with technological excellence," he advises, adding, "Cinema brings people together. It creates shared memories and shared emotions. That is why it endures."



Dr. Aarti Kapur Singh is a veteran journalist and cinephile with over three decades of experience, writing on films, food, culture, history and heritage for prominent media houses including National Geographic, CNN IBN and NDTV.

[@aaartiisingh/](https://www.instagram.com/aaartiisingh/)

Economy.

• Creator Economy • Policymaking • Startups

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The Silent Bedrock of a *Rising Nation*

Union Minister of Coal and Mines **Shri G. Kishan Reddy** traces the remarkable arc of a nation defining its own destiny and illuminates the catalyst of India's rapid rise: the vital natural resources and human potential shaping the road to Viksit Bharat 2047.

As India approaches 80 years of Independence, I find myself reflecting on two journeys: the journey of our nation and my own journey from a small village in Telangana to the privilege of serving India as a Union Minister.

At first glance, these may appear different. But at their core, both are shaped by the belief that progress happens when hard work meets opportunity, and when development reaches the lives of ordinary people.

Coming from humble beginnings in Timmapur village in Ranga Reddy district of rural Telangana, I have witnessed India's transformation from close quarters. Villages once struggling for basic necessities now have roads, electricity, and digital connectivity. Young men and women from small towns are building enterprises and competing globally. These changes are the result of sustained nation-building driven by infrastructure, industry, innovation, and opportunity. These transformations also reflect a larger national vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, of

building a confident, Atmanirbhar Bharat where opportunity reaches every citizen and development becomes the foundation of empowerment.

Beneath all of this progress lies an often-unseen foundation: our mineral wealth.

Over the decades, India has undergone one of the most remarkable transformations in modern history. Highways now connect regions at scale, railways move millions daily, digital systems reach the last mile, and India's technological ecosystem stands globally recognised. Yet behind every visible achievement lies something invisible but fundamental. Every bridge, railway line, airport, factory, solar park and defence system rests on resources drawn from beneath the earth. Minerals have quietly powered India's growth for decades.

For most of my early life in a farming village, I saw only what was visible: the fields, the seasons and the gradual arrival of roads providing better connectivity. It was much later that I realised a deeper

"Minerals are not merely geological resources; they are instruments of national development."

Union Minister of Coal & Mines
Shri G. Kishan Reddy



truth: everything visible in a nation's progress is supported by something invisible beneath it. Steel, cement, copper, aluminium and energy all begin underground.

Today, national strength is increasingly defined not only by land or military power, but by access to critical minerals and resilient supply chains. Lithium, copper, graphite, nickel and rare earth elements are strategic assets that determine energy security, technological independence and economic resilience.

In my current role as Union Minister of Coal and Mines, this understanding has become sharper and more urgent. Minerals are not merely geological resources; they are instruments of national development. They power industries, enable infrastructure, strengthen energy security and create livelihoods for millions. But more importantly, they transform human lives.

In mining regions across India, I have seen development expressed in simple but powerful ways: a young person becoming the first graduate in their family, a household gaining

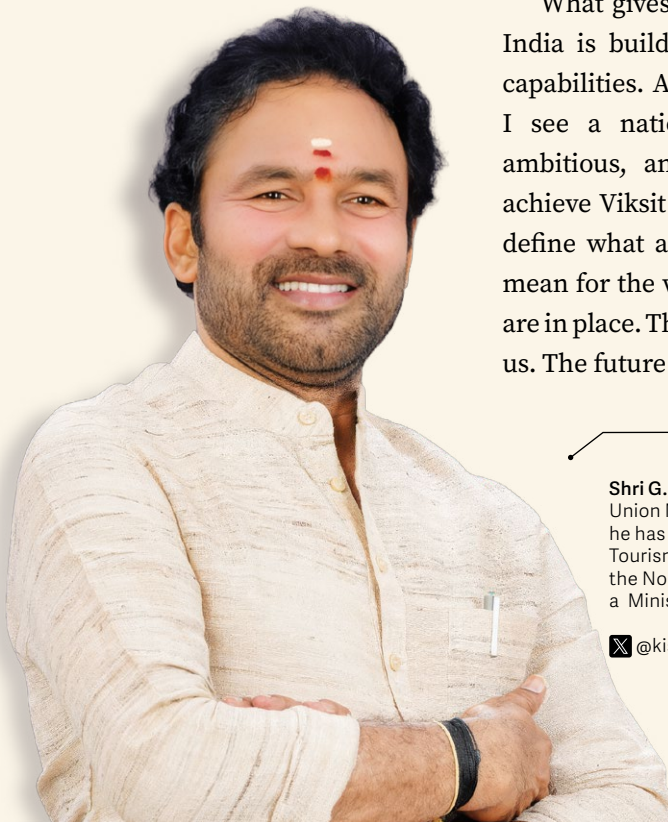
stability after years of uncertainty, a village gradually integrating into the mainstream economy through roads, schools and opportunity.

India's future will depend on how wisely we use these resources. The world is undergoing a historic transformation driven by clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and digital technologies. At its core are critical minerals. Securing and developing these resources is essential to the vision of an

Aatmanirbhar Bharat that can confidently meet its own needs while contributing to global growth.

The next phase of India's journey will depend on how effectively we harness our natural resources, strengthen our industrial capabilities, and empower our citizens. And at the centre of this transformation is youth. To the young people of India, my message is simple: your contribution may not always be visible, but it is always foundational.

What gives me confidence is that India is building enduring national capabilities. As I look at India today, I see a nation that is confident, ambitious, and ready, not only to achieve Viksit Bharat by 2047, but to define what a developed nation can mean for the world. The foundations are in place. The strength lies beneath us. The future is ours to build.



Shri G. Kishan Reddy
Union Minister of Coal and Mines, he has previously, led Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Development of the North Eastern Region, & served as a Minister of State for Home Affairs.

✉ @kishanreddybjp



The Five Pillars of Progress

Beyond statistics and schemes lies a broader story of nation-building, shaped by five interconnected pillars of governance.

By Deeksha Goel



The test of a nation's progress lies in the tangible well-being of its people, the effectiveness of institutions and the legacy of change that endures beyond electoral cycles. Governments, by their very nature, come to power riding on the promises of reforms, but often get plagued by shrinking appetites for risk. The defining characteristic of the last decade has been an attempt to move beyond that

reticence through accelerated reforms. One way through which to understand this is the Panchamrit framework built around the five Ss' of Samman (Respect), Samvad (Dialogue), Samridhi (Prosperity), Suraksha (Security) and Sanskriti (Culture).

29

Essence of Samman

A nation can only be as strong as its people and the strength of people comes from

Nearly 431 million



Indians were issued Ayushman Bharat cards, ensuring healthcare access, under the Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana

preservation of human dignity or Samman. Close to 120 million household sanitary infrastructure units were built under the Swachh Bharat Mission to ensure dignified living. Over 550 million beneficiaries were brought into the formal banking economy through the Jan Dhan Yojana. Efforts such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao sought to empower the girl child.

30 Clarity of Samvad

Democratic governance is ultimately about civic co-ownership. Across initiatives, there has been a conscious effort to convert state-led execution into Jan Andolans, making citizens stakeholders in national objectives. Be it extensive public consultation during the drafting of the National Education Policy, engagement with legal experts during the framing of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, or continued interaction with stakeholders from emerging sectors of the economy, the emphasis has remained on Samvad and participation.

31 Samriddhi with Responsibility

The integration of Direct Benefit Transfers through the JAM trinity of Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile plugged leakages running into billions of dollars while

ensuring benefits reached intended recipients. This was accompanied by regulatory transparency through platforms such as Udyam and the Government e-Marketplace (GeM), encouraging greater vendor participation and supporting the rise of entrepreneurship and startups.

32 Strength of Suraksha

Suraksha today is as much about strategic resilience as it is about conventional security. Measures ranging from the modernisation of border infrastructure to sustained efforts against extremism reflect one dimension of this approach. Equally important has been the pursuit of energy security. Investments in renewable energy infrastructure have positioned India among the world's leading clean energy economies, reducing future vulnerabilities.

33 Soul of Sanskriti

Investments in heritage and spiritual corridors such as Kashi Vishwanath, Mahakal Lok and Ayodhya have not only strengthened cultural infrastructure but also generated tourism, local employment and economic activity. The scale and organisation of events such as the Kumbh Mela demonstrate how cultural heritage can function as both a civilisational anchor and a developmental asset.



Deeksha Goel is a strategy and policy leader with a decade of experience in geopolitical research and institution-building. She serves as the Secretary of the Trust Board of India Foundation and co-leads Sharstone Global LLP as Co-Founder and CEO.

**15.2%**

of Indian creators are now registered as businesses or GST entities.

Ordinary, Online & Powerful: *How Rural India is Going Viral*

From village courtyards to smartphone screens, creators across India are fuelling a quiet economic revolution, turning authenticity into influence, entrepreneurship and income.

By Shruti Tomar

For years, India's digital culture was largely shaped by metropolitan voices. The biggest creators came from major cities and spoke to audiences that often reflected urban aspirations. That picture has changed dramatically. Today, some of the country's most influential storytellers are emerging from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and rural India, talking about their everyday lives in ways that are rustic, raw and deeply relatable.

Economies of Scale

The shift is not merely cultural. It is economic. The respected Koflucence Annual Report 2025-26, titled 'Decoding Influence 2026', points to a major transformation in India's digital landscape. As India moves

towards nearly 900 million Internet users, the bulk of recent growth has come not from metros but from smaller towns, villages and districts. TRAI and DataReportal estimates place active Internet users between 958 and 1,000 million as of end-2025. Affordable smartphones, low-cost data and mobile-first content consumption have brought millions online in just a few years.

The audience is no longer emerging. It has already arrived and is now the primary audience for much of India's digital economy.

New Opportunities

This has created unprecedented opportunities for people who previously had little access to mainstream media or



34

Pujarini Pradhan @lifeofpujaa

Draped in simple cotton sarees and speaking in English on topics from daily life and literature to culture, feminism, and personal reflections, Pujarini Pradhan has sparked conversations about authenticity, language and representation. Her unfiltered style contrasts with Instagram's polished norms.

She says, "Despite limited resources and limited exposure, my ambition was unlimited. When I started making videos, I had to figure it out on my own. I used to think where you are born decided how far you could go. But social media has made it possible for anyone even the remotest corner of India to create content and transform their life."

 897k followers



entertainment industries. A creator no longer needs to move to Mumbai, Delhi or Bengaluru to build a career. But an authentic story is a must.

"The internet used to reflect a narrow slice of the country, but audiences now prefer unpolished authenticity," says Insha Shaikh, Head of Talent, at influencer marketing agency HereWeGoAgain Media. "Small-town creators who share their everyday worlds, language, humour, family life and culture feel lived-in, not staged. In a sea of glossy content, that authenticity stands out. Brands are prioritising trust and relevance over pure reach, and decentralised creator infrastructure means you no longer must move to Mumbai to build a career."

What the Numbers Say

The numbers support that shift. According to industry estimates, India's influencer

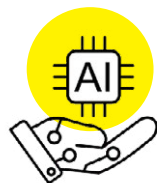
35



Ankit Singh @lankit_baiyanpuria

Ankit Baiyanpuria from Bayanpur village in Haryana is a powerful example of how social media can transform a personal setback into a national movement. Forced to give up wrestling after a shoulder injury, he found a new calling as a fitness creator, popularising traditional "desi" workouts such as sapate and inspiring millions through the viral 75 Hard Challenge. Blending fitness with discipline, mental resilience and cultural values, he was honoured with the 2024 Best Health and Fitness Creator award by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Social media can change your life if you use it to inspire, not just to impress," says Singh.

 8M followers



59%

of creators regularly or occasionally use AI tools in their workflow.

marketing industry is expected to cross ₹5,000 crore by 2027. Meanwhile, a 2025 Boston Consulting Group report estimated that in India, with over 2–2.5 million monetised content creators influencing more than \$350–400 billion in consumer spending, the ecosystem is projected to drive \$1 trillion+ in creator-influenced consumption by 2030. And could play an even larger role in the country's digital economy over the next decade.

Hyperlocal is the Key

“It is more of a structural change considering all the brands have now realised that using a hyperlocal influencer for their brand communications is way better to target a specific demographic rather than working with someone who has overall

reach,” says Sanchit Bhatt, Founder of HereWeGoAgain Media.

Brands today increasingly look beyond follower counts. Industry studies suggest that around 70 per cent of brands consider trust and credibility among their primary selection criteria when working with creators. For advertisers trying to reach consumers in specific regions, a creator speaking the local language, reflecting local realities often delivers better engagement than a national celebrity.

Advantage, Small Town

Danny Advani, Head of Strategy and Business at Dot Media Base, another leading influencer marketing company, believes this is where Tier-2 and Tier-3 creators have a distinct advantage.

Ismile Ahmed Khan @ismileahmedkhan

Ismile Ahmed Khan has built a growing digital following by turning everyday Indian experiences into relatable comedy. Through his Hinglish skits, campus-life observations and character-driven Instagram Reels, he demonstrates how social media can transform creativity and humour into a career. Balancing content creation with his studies, he has steadily cultivated an engaged audience that connects with his authentic, energetic storytelling. He shares, “Social media rewards authenticity and sometimes the most ordinary moments create the strongest connections.”

 80.8k followers



“The fastest growth is coming from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and regional clusters across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and the Northeast. This has worked because they offer regional language comfort and audiences want to see and hear people that sound like them and not the uber-polished metro clones,” Advani explains.

Audience Choice

The rise of creators from smaller towns has also challenged long-held assumptions about what audiences want to watch. One of the most talked-about examples is Pujarini Pradhan, the creator behind the popular Instagram account Life of Pujaa. Based in rural West Bengal, she went viral by speaking in English about village life, motherhood, books and everyday experiences. Her content resonated not because it was carefully curated but because it felt genuine.



37

Darshan Singh @farmingleader

Darshan Singh, a farmer from Patvi, Punjab, is India's most-subscribed agriculture creator and the founder of the YouTube channel Farming Leader, launched in 2017. What began as a search for practical dairy-farming solutions evolved into a platform reaching millions with advice on organic farming, dairy management, farm innovations and agri-products. By documenting successful farmers across Punjab and Haryana, he created a trusted knowledge hub. “The best way to learn farming is to watch successful farmers and apply what works. That's how I started,” says Singh, while adding, “But starting to create content is not easy. People around may ridicule you but if you are sure of your content, you will find your audience.”



222k followers

38

Santosh Jadhav @indianfarmer

A farmer from Sangli, Maharashtra, Jadhav co-founded Indian Farmer, a movement restoring pride in agriculture. After choosing farming over his family's jewellery business, he built an 11-acre organic farm that uses drones, AI and soil sensors, generating ₹25–30 lakh annually. Launched in 2018, Indian Farmer now reaches over 2million followers, sharing practical farming innovations. Jadhav champions technology-driven, sustainable agriculture and greater prosperity for Indian farmers. He says: “I want farming to be seen as an aspirational career choice. My dream is to bring QR-coded, fully traceable food to Indian markets.”



2M followers





E-commerce accounts for

23%

of influencer marketing spend, the largest share among sectors.

39

Darshan Magdum @darshanmagdum

Darshan Magdum, a 22-year-old singer and content creator from Kolhapur, has built a global following with his soulful, unconventional renditions of popular English songs. His talent has earned praise from international stars including Maroon 5's Adam Levine and BLACKPINK's Rosé. Today, he connects with over 887,000 followers on Instagram through music that blends authenticity with creativity. His advice? "Stay true to yourself. Every journey doesn't need everyone's approval."



887k followers



She presented a version of rural India that rarely appears in mainstream lifestyle content.

Similar stories are emerging across the country. In Maharashtra's Kolhapur, singer Darshan Magdum has built a large following through soulful covers and original content. His advice to aspiring creators reflects the mindset that has helped many small-town influencers succeed. "Not everyone will understand your journey," he says, "so focus on constructive feedback and stay true to yourself."

Kanpur-based creator Kapil Shukla, better known as KapilKanpuriya, has similarly built an audience by embracing local humour and culture. Criticism, he says, is part of success and should never stop creators from representing their roots with pride.

The Brand POV

Their success points to a broader reality. Social media is increasingly becoming a tool

Telangana Weatherman @telangana_weatherman_

T. Balaji, popularly known as the "Telangana Weatherman," has shown how social media can turn passion into public service. The 20-year-old civil engineering graduate from Hyderabad began forecasting weather at just 16 years and now reaches over 1.2 million followers with open-source predictions known for their accuracy. His updates help farmers, commuters and communities prepare for changing conditions, earning recognition from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the U.S. Consul. "Good weather information helps people make better decisions. That's the impact I want to create," he shares.



126k followers

40



41

Kritanjali Sinha @kritanjali.ri

Kritanjali Sinha is an Instagram creator from Karimganj, a small town in Assam, who balances motherhood, dance and content creation. She began making TikTok videos in 2018, then moved to Instagram, gaining virality during COVID with K-pop dance covers. A third-generation trained Kathakali dancer, she's now a dance teacher, multitasking mom, and community builder who shows women what's possible beyond traditional labels. She says, "My content is more than a reflection of my daily life. I want to empower rural women who feel they have limited choices and inspire them to build better futures."



131k followers



of economic mobility. Advertisers find highly engaged audiences that were previously difficult to reach. Home cooks turn recipes into food businesses. Fashion creators attract customers from across the country. Farmers share agricultural knowledge and generate income through partnerships and educational content. Tourism receives a boost as viewers travel to experience destinations they discover online. Cultural practices once considered too local or niche suddenly find national audiences. What appears to be content is often the foundation of a new entrepreneurial economy.

Bhatt believes the appeal of these creators lies in their authenticity. "Small-town creators bring authenticity because they live the stories they tell. They adapt Internet culture to their reality, local experiences, community values and everyday moments, so their storytelling feels genuine, relatable and culturally rooted."

42

Kapil Shukla @kapilkanpuriya

Based in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, he creates highly viral comedy sketches reflecting the quirks and realities of corporate life and small-town upbringings using the local Awadhi Baiswari dialect. "I chose to create content in a mix of Hindi, English and Awadhi because I wanted to connect with people like me, who speak Awadhi and are proud of that. The humour, warmth and unique style of conversation in Awadhi have a charm of their own. I believe people should experience Kanpur for themselves and explore the city's language, cuisine, culture and the people," shares the content creator.



812k followers



In Tier-3 and Tier-4 cities, creator engagement rates reach



4.5–5.5% the highest in the country.



43

Shahnawaj Khan shan_khan6288

Khan and his sister Zoya Khan from Siwan, Bihar, have built a successful fashion career through social media. What began as a local tailoring and design venture has grown into a wider platform, with the duo sharing bridal-wear creations, styling tips and fashion reels that attract clients from across India. Their content has helped transform their craft into a sustainable business and source of income. Khan shares, “Style isn’t about trends. It’s about confidence. That’s the real beauty.”



1.4M followers

The platforms themselves are also changing. Algorithms increasingly reward engagement and relevance rather than celebrity status alone. As a result, authentic storytelling can travel far beyond a creator’s immediate geography.

“As platforms shift from follower-driven to content-driven discovery, authentic and culturally rooted storytelling drives reach regardless of creator size,” says Advani. “Small creators win hearts through context. Their humour is local, their language is native and they are living the scenarios they portray.”

Channelising Trust

Perhaps that explains why audiences place such high levels of trust in creators from smaller towns and villages. Many are still seen as independent voices rather than highly commercialised influencers.

10 Pitfalls to Avoid

- Don’t chase virality
- Build a niche, not a follower count
- Never fake authenticity
- Don’t depend on one platform
- Treat content like a business
- Avoid bad brand partnerships
- Save before you spend
- Invest in skills, not gadgets
- Read every contract carefully
- Build assets beyond social media

Looking ahead, authenticity, niche expertise and regional storytelling are likely to remain the strongest drivers of growth. Thousands of small creators are quietly building businesses, communities and careers from places that rarely feature in lifestyle magazines or startup reports. Their rise represents more than a content trend. It signals a redistribution of opportunity. From modest rooms, village courtyards and small-town streets, a new generation of Indians is using social media to build livelihoods, shape culture and create better lives for themselves and their communities.



Shruti Tomar writes leisurely on lifestyle, relishes fashion and accessories, and wanders everywhere with vivid imagination. passionate about food, fashion, and the frivolous, she often hibernates, waiting for moments of inspiration.

Creator Blueprint: 6 Ways to Cash In

India's creator economy is no longer a collection of casual hobbyists; it is a hyper-professionalised, \$15 billion powerhouse. With the centre of gravity shifting toward regional markets and micro-niches, relying on platform ad-payouts is a relic of the past. For creators looking to build a sustainable digital empire, the path forward lies in data-driven strategy. Here are six high-yield content niches tailored for the modern Indian market.

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Vernacular FinTech & Legal

Why: Over 62% of brand briefs now demand regional language content. Furthermore, 15.2% of Indian creators are now formal, GST-registered business entities desperately needing corporate advice.

Monetisation: B2B retainers with SaaS accounting tools, mutual fund houses, and payment gateways.



45

Hyper-Local Reviews

Why: Micro-creators (2k–50k followers) in Tier-2/3 cities clock a 4.5% to 5.5% engagement rate, significantly outpacing metro-influencers.

Monetisation: Geo-targeted coupon codes. Creator-specific promo codes hold a massive 35% share of all brand promotions in India.

46

Infotainment Audio Podcasts

Why: India is the 3rd largest podcast market globally. Host-read ads dominate revenue because 73% of vernacular listeners highly trust podcast recommendations.

Monetisation: Hybrid model combining host-read corporate sponsorships with low-cost premium listener subscriptions.

47

Agri-Tech & Rural Vlogging

Why: Thanks to ultra-cheap mobile data, Tier-3 and Tier-4 regions have become the country's main digital consumer base.

Monetisation: Direct corporate partnerships with Agri-tech startups, machinery brands, and rural banking/NBFC firms looking for authentic regional faces.

48

EdTech & Skill-Based Funnels

Why: Fewer than 10% of Indian creators make a living on platform ad-revenue splits alone. The top earners bypass the middleman entirely.

Monetisation: Use short-form video content as a free marketing funnel to sell gated micro-credentials, ebooks, or live upskilling cohorts.

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Subculture & Local Tourism

Why: Brands are abandoning one-off posts; 62% of marketing professionals state that long-term creator partnerships yield the highest ROI.

Monetisation: Fixed-term ambassador contracts with state tourism boards, hospitality chains and D2C travel-gear brands.



Building A New Chapter in *Women's Well-being*

India's healthcare transformation is empowering women to make informed choices, says healthtech unicorn **Pristyn Care's** co-founder **Dr. Garima Sawhney**.

A few years ago, a woman in her early thirties came to my clinic with a problem she had silently endured for years: extremely heavy menstrual bleeding. Every month, she missed work, avoided social gatherings and struggled with fatigue from severe anaemia.

When I asked why she had waited so long, her answer was simple yet striking. "Doctor, I thought this was normal. I was too embarrassed to talk about it."

As a gynaecologist, I have heard many versions of this story. For decades, women's health issues in India remained hidden behind silence, stigma, and lack of awareness. From painful periods and infertility to pelvic disorders and menopause-related symptoms, many women delayed seeking care, either due to limited access or because they prioritised their families over themselves.

India's digital health market, now \$14.5 billion, is projected to reach

\$106.97 billion by 2033.

Women's digital health alone is expected to grow from 2026's

\$5.28 bn to **\$11.47 bn** by 2030.

Building Better Access

As India celebrates 80 years of Independence, one of the country's most remarkable transformations has been women's growing empowerment to take charge of their health.

In 1947, maternal mortality was high, specialist care was scarce, and conversations around women's health were largely absent from public discourse. Today, the landscape is changing rapidly. Menstrual hygiene is discussed in schools, fertility care is more accessible, telemedicine has brought expert consultations to remote communities, and advances in minimally invasive surgery have significantly improved outcomes. Most importantly, women are becoming active participants in their healthcare decisions.

Yet awareness alone was not enough. I remember another patient who needed a

relatively straightforward gynaecological surgery. Her condition was treatable, but the process was overwhelming. Multiple consultations, diagnostic tests, hospital visits, insurance approvals, paperwork, and scheduling challenges created stress that often felt greater than the surgery itself.

That experience revealed a larger truth: quality healthcare involves not only medical expertise but also access, convenience, transparency and trust. This insight led my co-founders and me to establish the healthtech unicorn Pristyn Care.

Redefining the Patient Experience

Our mission was to simplify the patient journey and make quality surgical care more accessible. Through technology-enabled care pathways, coordinated consultations, support with insurance processes, and streamlined treatment experiences, we removed the friction between diagnosis and recovery.

Over the years, Pristyn Care has improved access to specialised healthcare across India. For women, this has meant easier access to expert consultations, minimally invasive treatment options, and timely care for conditions such as fibroids, endometriosis, ovarian cysts, infertility-related concerns and other gynaecological disorders. Equally important, it has encouraged many women to seek treatment earlier rather than delaying until complications arise.

As our journey evolved, we recognised that improving access for everyone was only one part of the solution. Patients also deserve a better, more holistic healthcare environment for their treatment.



Since its launch in 2016, the Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) has provided free antenatal check-ups to over

7.47

crore pregnant women through 22,349 government health facilities nationwide.



By the numbers

- India's Maternal Mortality Ratio has fallen from 570 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 97 in 2023; an 82% decline, outpacing the global 48% reduction.
- The national telemedicine programme (eSanjeevani) has completed over 100 million consultations.
- India has over 2,500 registered fertility clinics and is the second-largest market globally for ART cycles.

This led to the creation of Pristyn Hospitals, built around the simple belief, that healthcare should be clinically excellent, technologically enabled and deeply patient-centric. Our aim is to create institutions where women can access specialised care with dignity, convenience, and confidence, supported throughout their healthcare journey.

The Road Ahead

Across the country, technology is helping bridge gaps in access, affordability and information. What was once available only in large metropolitan centres is increasingly reaching smaller cities and also underserved communities.

Looking ahead, I believe women's health will play a defining role in India's journey toward becoming a developed nation. The next frontier is not merely treatment but prevention. Every stage

of a woman's life, from adolescence to menopause, deserves informed, compassionate and accessible healthcare.

To young entrepreneurs, my advice is simple: build with purpose. The most meaningful businesses are not created by chasing valuations; they are built by solving real problems. When innovation is driven by empathy and societal need, impact naturally follows. Entrepreneurship, like medicine, is rooted in service. Our path had setbacks and uncertainty, but each challenge reinforced a simple truth: purposeful work outlasts fear.



Dr. Garima Sawhney is a gynaecologist, entrepreneur and co-founder of Pristyn Care, one of India's leading healthcare platforms.

Vedanta for India: *Powering Progress, Transforming Lives*

Charting Vedanta's deep contribution to nation-building in India's 80-year journey.



1 Social Impact Investment

4,000+

crore cumulative
CSR investments
across Vedanta
Group since 2011.

Focussed investments across thematic:



2

Women Empowerment

14+ Mn women impacted since 2016, including 10 Federations, 4000+ self-help groups via Project Sakhi across operations having 37.5+ Cr savings till date & microenterprise giving employment to thousands of women & FY26 revenue over 2.8 Cr having portfolio of 500+ Production. 7+ Cr earned by women via various livelihood initiatives.



3

Children's Well-being

14,688

Nand Ghars now operational across India.

0.47

 million

children, over 50% girls, benefited through 256 schools and 4,700 Nand Ghars/Anganwadis.

4

Communities Reached

5,100+ villages reached across India & Africa.



4.5 crore+ people impacted cumulatively since inception.

(including E-Shiksha programme)

31.08 million

women & children

Benefitted to date through targeted social welfare interventions.

1.75 million+

families Empowered with enhanced skillsets to secure sustainable livelihoods.

3.64 million+

beneficiaries across **730+** villages received **healthcare** in FY26 through **23** Mobile Health Vans.

5

Livelihood Generation & Skilling

10+

lakh livelihoods created/ supported.

05+

lakh youth trained through structured skill programmes.

20+

skill centres providing ~2 lacs CTC placements.

Agriculture & allied livelihoods:

Vedanta's farm-based initiatives have driven significant rural livelihood and agricultural impact by bringing over **1 lakh+** acres under cultivation and improving productivity with a **36%** increase in average yield per acre in FY26. The programme has supported livestock health with over million animals treated while generating.

₹15.5+

crore worth of assets and producing over **100+ lakh** litres of milk in FY26. Additionally, the initiative has strengthened local economies through 5 agri micro-enterprises and 8 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), collectively contributing to **₹20+** crore in revenue generation annually.

23.9 Cr+

revenue generated for FY26 through farm-based livelihood initiatives.



6

Sustainability in Action

36 million

tonnes fewer greenhouse gas emissions since FY21.

1.03

giga-watt of round-the-clock renewable energy secured

3.97 billion

units renewable energy utilised.



~4 million

trees planted.

99%

high-volume low-toxicity waste recycled.

56 acres

of degraded coastal land restored into a thriving mangrove ecosystem, supporting 200+ species and capturing ~7,500 tonnes of CO₂e.

Powered by People & *Driven by* *Purpose*

From resource development to rural impact, Vedanta's contributions to the exchequer play a role in India's growth story.

By Aasheesh Sharma



India's growth story is entering a new phase. Having crossed the \$4 trillion mark in nominal GDP, India is expected to remain the fastest-growing economy, projecting a growth rate of ~7% in FY26.

Yet, beneath these numbers lies a structural vulnerability that rarely makes the news: India's heavy reliance on imported raw materials. Currently, 50% of India's total imports consist of natural resources, including oil, gas, copper, aluminium and iron ore, draining close to \$400 billion annually from the nation's coffers.

The Supply Chain Risk

India's 2024-25 Economic Survey flagged that out of 33 minerals vital to economic security, 24 face a high risk of supply disruption. Shockingly, the country is 100% import-dependent for 10 critical minerals, including lithium, cobalt, nickel and vanadium. If India is to achieve its ambition of becoming a \$5 trillion economy by 2027 and a \$10 trillion titan within the following decade, it must secure these inputs reliably from within its own borders. This is the precise backdrop against which Vedanta's massive economic footprint must be read.

Today, Vedanta's businesses span aluminium, zinc, oil and gas, iron ore, steel, power and critical minerals, sectors that form the backbone of India's economy.

Public Sector to Global Powerhouses

The ultimate proof of Vedanta's value-creation blueprint lies in Hindustan Zinc (HZL) and BALCO, two former public-sector enterprises acquired during the government's disinvestment drive in the early 2000s. While the center realised ₹4,775 crore from the initial stake sales, the long-term yields have been exponential.

When Vedanta took the reins of HZL in 2002, experts estimated the company's mineral reserves would last barely five years. Today, through aggressive exploration and technology infusion, that mine life has been extended by another 50 years. HZL has evolved into the world's largest integrated zinc producer and ranks among the top five global silver producers.

Funding the Nation

Production is only half the story. Over the last decade, Vedanta has contributed a massive ₹4.5 lakh crore to the Indian exchequer, which





includes ₹34,000 crore in dividends directly to the government. In FY25 alone, Vedanta paid ₹55,349 crore in taxes, royalties, duties, and statutory payments. This massive sum represents roughly 37% of its consolidated revenue, firmly placing the conglomerate among India's top tier of corporate taxpayers.

Vedanta acts as a major foreign exchange shield and generator. Its aluminium, zinc, iron and steel exports pull in close to ₹50,000 crore annually (~35% of its revenue), strengthening India's trade balance.

Creating Livelihoods

Vedanta's fiscal weight is matched by its role as an employer: over 1.5 lakh jobs created directly and indirectly, alongside 500+ MSMEs developed around its operations. The effect is sharpest in Kalahandi, Odisha. Vedanta's Lanjigarh refinery now supports 5,400+ jobs and 12,000+ livelihoods, nearly 70% sourced locally, with household earnings more than doubling as families moved from uncertain farm income into formal employment. Barmer, Rajasthan tells the same story in a different sector: Cairn's oil and gas operations helped push the district's per-capita income to nearly twice the state average, making it Rajasthan's second-largest GDP contributor after Jaipur.

Investors have benefited as well. Vedanta delivered a total shareholder return of 48.6% in FY26, more than double the Nifty Metal Index while paying ₹34 per share in dividends.

Beyond the Balance Sheet

In FY26, Vedanta invested ₹422 crore in community initiatives, touching 70 lakh lives. Its social welfare initiatives supported 3.09 crore+ women and children, putting the company's social footprint on par with its industrial one.

Nand Ghar Flagship: Has converted 13,000+ rural Anganwadis across 16 states into modern early-childhood centres, with an agreement to build 25,000 more in Rajasthan.

Women's Livelihoods: The Sakhi (at HZL), Unnati (at BALCO) and Subhalaxmi (at Vedanta Aluminium) programmes have reached 44,000 households through 4,000 SHGs spanning Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

Skilling: Programmes benefited 27 lakh people over the year.

Value Unlocked:

A recent strategic corporate demerger into 5 independent entities has successfully unlocked ₹49,000 crore in shareholder value.



Aasheesh Sharma is a senior editor and communications professional. An experienced desk hand with bilingual proficiency, he won a News Television Award in 2023.

Roots & Renewal

• Reverse Migration • Heritage Dining • New-age Farming



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Idea 01





Hometown *Renaissance*

Across Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and rural India, a new generation of founders is building ambitious brands deeply rooted in where they come from.

By Konkana Ray

For decades, success in India came with a departure story. The brightest minds left for faster metros and shinier opportunities. Much of this regional imbalance was inherited from the colonial era, when investment flowed disproportionately into port cities and commercially strategic regions. Post Independence, as the young nation focussed on industrialisation and nation-building, these

established hubs naturally attracted further infrastructure, industry and talent.

Eighty years later, the landscape is different. Improved connectivity, digital infrastructure, e-commerce and social media have made it possible for entrepreneurs from small cities and rural India to create nationally relevant brands rooted in local knowledge, indigenous ingredients and regional identities.

India has over
2 lakh

startups as of
December 2025. Nearly

50%

of DPIIT-recognised startups now
originate from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.

“Rural India has immense entrepreneurial potential. But one has to combine traditional knowledge with modern thinking.”

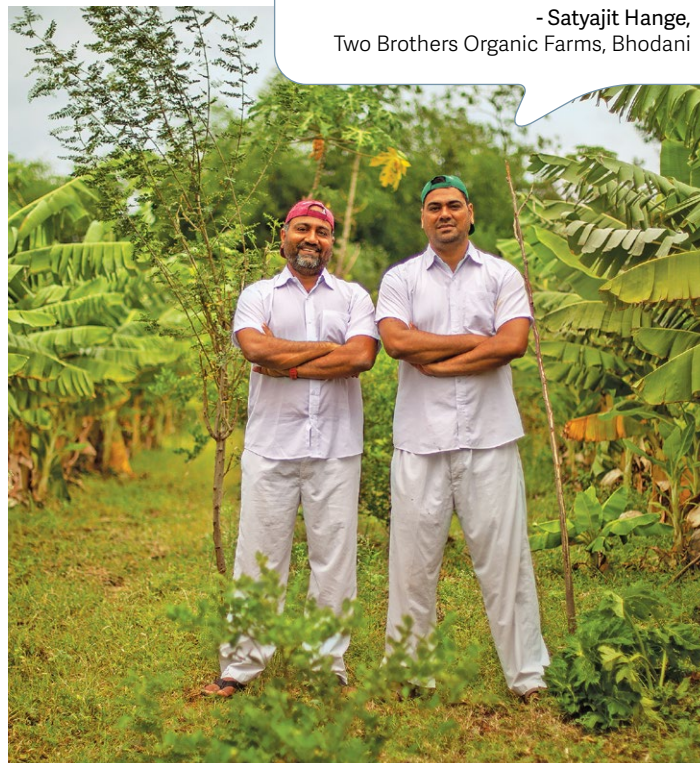
- Satyajit Hange,
Two Brothers Organic Farms, Bhodani

Clean Food

In 2012, brothers Satyajit and Ajinkya Hange walked away from corporate careers and returned to their ancestral village of Bhodani in Maharashtra with a dream to rebuild consumer trust in Indian food systems. What began on their family farmland has grown into Two Brothers Organic Farms, a clean food brand. “Being close to the soil and farmers creates authenticity and insight,” Satyajit says.

From reviving indigenous crops such as Khapli wheat to championing regenerative farming practices and soil health, the brand works closely with local farmers around residue-free cultivation while creating employment opportunities. Satyajit admits that building from smaller towns demands patience. “But what matters is how well you understand the problem and how creatively you build around it,” he adds.

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“The key to success is blending local identity with knowledge from the world.”

- Dushyant Singh, Coffee Sutra, Jaipur

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Coffee Culture

At a time when speciality coffee culture in India was still largely concentrated in metropolitan cities, restaurateur Dushyant Singh was building Coffee Sutra in Jaipur, Rajasthan, introducing craft brews, coffee cuppings and immersive coffee experiences. Through its interactive coffee lab concept, the brand helped translate coffee from a beverage to a cultural experience.

The brand's cafés are textured with native Rajasthan stone, hints of blue pottery, and Pichwai art, transforming the spaces into contemporary homages to regional craftsmanship. Doing so allowed the brand to generate employment opportunities closer to home, spotlighting regional craftsmanship. Singh's advice to aspiring entrepreneurs from smaller towns is simple: “Trust your vision, choose your mentors wisely and keep learning along the way.”

Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are expected to contribute nearly **66%** of new D2C orders in **FY26**, making them the fastest-growing markets for digital commerce. (Unicommerce)

Safe Skin

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“My entrepreneurial journey began from a very personal place, a search for skincare products that felt genuinely safe, transparent, and aligned with our values,” says Megha Asher, co-founder & COO, Juicy Chemistry, based out of Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu. Asher and her husband, Pritesh, began experimenting with formulations in 2014. Choosing to build from their hometown gave them the clarity and grounding needed during the early years. Being rooted in South India also shaped the philosophy of the brand. Wellness, ingredient consciousness and home remedies were already woven into everyday life there, not trends waiting to be rediscovered.

“Where you build from matters far less today than why you’re building. Strong ideas and consumer trust travel faster.”

- Meghna Asher,
Juicy Chemistry, Coimbatore



“Forests are no longer seen as backward spaces to leave behind. They are ecosystems capable of generating dignity, enterprise, and long-term opportunity.”

- Dr. Manisha Oraon,
The Open Field, Ranchi

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Farm to Plate

In 2021, dentist-turned-social entrepreneur Dr. Manisha Oraon co-founded The Open Field, an agro-tech platform working with forest communities in Ranchi. A few years later came The Tribal Table, an initiative that hosts pop-ups and farm-to-table experiences designed to place her ancestral food at the centre of contemporary culinary conversations.

“Our cuisines connect with ideas of sustainability and revival of traditional knowledge,” she says. She supplies mahua flowers, bamboo shoots, tubers, fermented rice and other foraged ingredients to spaces like Roseate House, Delhi and The Leela Palace, Jaipur. “Earlier, ingredients like mahua, tamarind and chironji were sold cheap with little value to the farmers. Through The Open Field, those same forest ingredients now reach a premium audience, creating new economic pathways for villagers,” she explains.

Three out of five new online shoppers since 2020 have come from Tier-3 cities and smaller towns. Meanwhile,

60%

of new e-commerce sellers since 2021 are also from Tier-2 cities or smaller. (Bain & Company x Flipkart)

Heritage Weaves

In 2023, media professional-turned-textile entrepreneur Moala Longchar founded Kintem, based in Dimapur, Nagaland, to reinterpret traditional Naga textiles for a contemporary wardrobe. *Mekhelas*, shawls, stoles and home textiles emerge from the label in earthy silks and natural yarns, shaped through traditional techniques like loom weaving, hand stitching and natural dyeing.

For Longchar, the journey was deeply personal. A second-generation textile entrepreneur, she grew up watching her mother run the Wapangla Weaving Unit, which worked closely with weavers across Naga communities. “For us, authenticity and credibility come from staying connected to the land and the people,” says Longchar. The label's studio functions out of the family's residential compound. That is not to say the challenges are absent. Fashion hubs such as Delhi and Mumbai still hold advantages in terms of exposure and networks. But Longchar senses a shift underway.

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“We see more young people from the Northeast returning home and building something sustainable within their own communities.”

- Moala Longchar, Kintem, Dimapur



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Perfumed Story

In Kannauj, Uttar Pradesh, a city that has supplied India with attar for nearly 3,000 years, Pranav Kapoor is reimagining perfumery. Through PKAPO, Kapoor has blended his culinary training with his family's centuries-old fragrance legacy. Think attar tastings on flower farms, distillery walks through copper stills, scent-paired dining and workshops.

But Kapoor's larger ambition extends beyond luxury experiences. “Through perfume tourism, I am attempting to reposition Kannauj on the global cultural map. In a city where nearly every household is tied to perfumery in some form, the rise of tourism holds new economic opportunities across the ecosystem,” he says.

“The interest in attar was always there. It just wasn't being spoken to in the right way. Kannauj's heritage can pave the way for a bigger footprint now.”

- Pranav Kapoor, PKAPO, Kannauj

Smaller FMCG brands—controlling two-thirds of the market—grew by

5-7%

in 2025, outperforming larger companies, whose sales volumes grew by

2-3%

in urban markets. (Kantar)

Small-town startup playbook

1. Solve a local problem that people face every day.
2. Build on what your region does best, eg, food, crafts.
3. Tell an authentic story rooted in your community and heritage.
4. Use social media and e-commerce to reach people.
5. Innovate to appeal to urban/global audience.
6. Borrow ideas from how smaller brands across the world have done it.
7. Sell an experience, not just a product whenever possible.
8. Start small and keep costs low in the early years.
9. Work with local farmers, artisans and communities to grow together.
10. Don't let geography limit your ambition.



Hometown Flavours

In Darbhanga, Bihar, sisters-in-law Kalpana Jha and Uma Jha spent years perfecting recipes that rarely travelled beyond family kitchens and festive gatherings. Then, in

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their 50s, they decided to turn that culinary inheritance into a brand. What began as a modest homegrown venture selling pickles and traditional condiments evolved into JhaJi Store, a regional food brand that would later gain national recognition after appearing on *Shark Tank India*.

“We wanted to carry the taste of Mithila beyond Bihar for people who had moved away in search of work or education, yet longed for the sharp familiarity of home on their plates,” say the sisters. Working with locally sourced ingredients from small farmers and traders across Samastipur and Muzaffarpur, they built the brand around traditional Maithili recipes such as mustard oil pickles, papads, chutneys and spice blends with the slow, homemade flavour industrial food brands often fail to capture.



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Seed to Sew

Oshadi Collective, founded by Nishanth Chopra in Erode, Tamil Nadu, began with an idea to make fashion premium without moving away from its rural source. After returning from London to his family's textile business, Chopra chose to build a regenerative “seed-to-sew” system where cotton is grown, spun, dyed, woven, and stitched in rural Tamil Nadu. Chopra explains his brand's USP: “Oshadi works closely with farmers, weavers, dyers and artisans using indigenous cotton seeds, natural dyes, handloom weaving and regenerative farming methods that restore soil health rather than exhaust it.” What began across a handful of acres has expanded into a globally recognised supply chain now.

“My idea is to make fashion remain deeply luxurious without severing its relationship with land, labour and craft.”

Nishanth Chopra,
Oshadi Collective, Erode

“Our journey began with just a handful of flowers in Kanpur has since expanded across temple towns like Varanasi, Ayodhya and Bodhgaya.”

- Ankit Agarwal, Phool, Kanpur

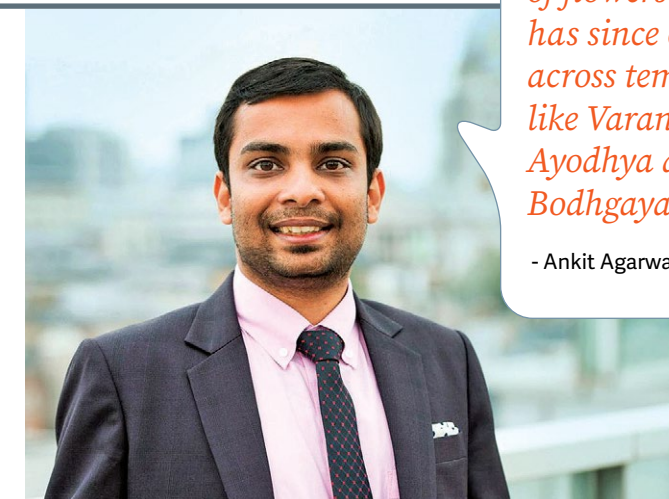
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Floral Recycle

Standing on the banks of the Ganga in Kanpur, Ankit Agarwal was struck by a paradox. Flowers offered at temples were eventually finding their way into the river as toxic waste.

In 2017, Agarwal quit his career in automation science and returned to his hometown to build a solution rooted in both sustainability and social impact. What emerged was Phool, India's first flower-cycling enterprise, which transforms discarded temple flowers into charcoal-free incense, biodegradable packaging materials and even vegan leather alternatives.

“We built our operations around women from marginalised communities, many of whom had previously worked



as manual scavengers” he explains. Inside workshops fragrant with dried marigold and rose petals, floral waste is sorted, sun-dried, powdered and hand-rolled into natural, toxin-free incense sticks, turning what was once discarded into something useful and beautiful.

Where to get help

- PMEGP – Subsidies and loans for setting up new businesses in manufacturing and services.
- MUDRA Yojana – Collateral-free loans for small and micro enterprises.
- Startup India – Tax benefits, mentorship and easier compliance for recognised startups.
- PMFME Scheme – Assistance for food processing businesses through subsidies and training.
- ODOP (One District One Product) – Branding, marketing and export support for district-specific products.
- NRLM – Credit and capacity-building support for rural entrepreneurs and self-help groups.

Spice Story

In Raipur, Chhattisgarh, brothers Akash and Ashish Agrawalla saw a clear contradiction. India was home to some of the world's richest spices, yet the industry continued to grapple with adulteration, inconsistent quality and outdated processing techniques. In 2018, they launched ZOFF (Zone of Fresh Foods) to modernise India's oldest kitchen staples without stripping them of their authenticity. The brand focussed on treating spices as products worthy of innovation. Agarwalla brothers invested in automated manufacturing, cool-grinding technology, and resealable zip-lock packaging, designed to preserve the natural oils, aroma and flavour often lost in conventional processing.

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Konkana Roy is an independent journalist who weaves art, culture, people, and places into immersive stories.



भविष्य रचते शिक्षित किसान

आमतौर पर हमारे देश में किसानों में शिक्षा-दीक्षा अपेक्षाकृत कम देखी जाती है। लम्बे समय से खेत और मिट्टी से जुड़े कृषकों का किताबी ज्ञान भले अपेक्षाकृत कम रहा हो किंतु व्यावहारिक ज्ञान में वे किसी से कमतर नहीं हैं। पारम्परिक खेती से जुड़े हमारे किसान आधुनिक तकनीक के अभाव में नवाचार करने में थोड़ा हिचकिचाते हैं, परंतु धीरे-धीरे अब किसानों की पारम्परिक छवि में बदलाव देखने को मिल रहा है। भारत की स्वतंत्रता के 80 वर्ष पूर्ण होने वाले हैं, इस परिदृश्य में खेत-खलियानों की तस्वीर भी बदल रही है। अब तो देश-भर में पढ़ा-लिखा युवा वर्ग भी खेती से जुड़ रहा है। मिट्टी तथा अपने खेतों की ओर लौट रहा है।

आलेख: **वीणा सबलोक पाठक**



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खेती से उद्योग की ओर (डॉ. जितेंद्र पाटीदार)

मध्यप्रदेश के रतलाम ज़िले के तीतरी गांव के किसान डॉ. जितेंद्र पाटीदार ने ग्रेप वाइन (विशुद्ध अंगूर का जूस) विषय पर न केवल डॉक्टरेट की है बल्कि अमेरिका में इंटरनशिप भी की है। अमेरिका से लौटकर उन्होंने गांव में पैदा होने वाले अंगूरों को नई पहचान दी, साथ ही वाइन उत्पादन करके वह किसान से उद्योगपति बन गए हैं। उन्होंने गांव के किसानों का एक समूह बनाया और सभी को साथ लेकर यह मुकाम हासिल किया। उन्होंने महाराष्ट्र के सांगली ज़िले से अंगूर की खेती के गुर सीखे और तीतरी आकर अन्य किसानों के साथ मिलकर अंगूर सहित अन्य उद्यानिकी फसलों को उगाना आरंभ किया।

कृषि पर आधारित स्टार्टअप (आशीष साबले)

धार ज़िले के आशीष साबले ने बीबीए की डिग्री लेकर कृषि को ही अपने स्टार्टअप से जोड़ने का फैसला किया। बचपन में ही पिता की मृत्यु के बाद माता चेतना साबले ने ही खेत और घर की जिम्मेदारी उठाई। आशीष भी बचपन से ही खेती से जुड़े हुए थे। बीबीए करने के बाद उन्होंने अपने खेतों और खेती में नवाचार करना शुरू किया। ड्रेगन फ्रूट जैसे दुर्लभ समझे जाने वाले फल की खेती करने का निर्णय लिया। ड्रेगन फ्रूट की खेती पर गहन अनुसंधान, इसकी मांग, आपूर्ति, बाज़ार मूल्य, उत्पादन लागत, निवेश और लाभ की संभावनाओं का विस्तारपूर्वक अध्ययन किया। आशीष ने इसे फसल नहीं, अपितु एक सुअवसर के रूप में देखा।

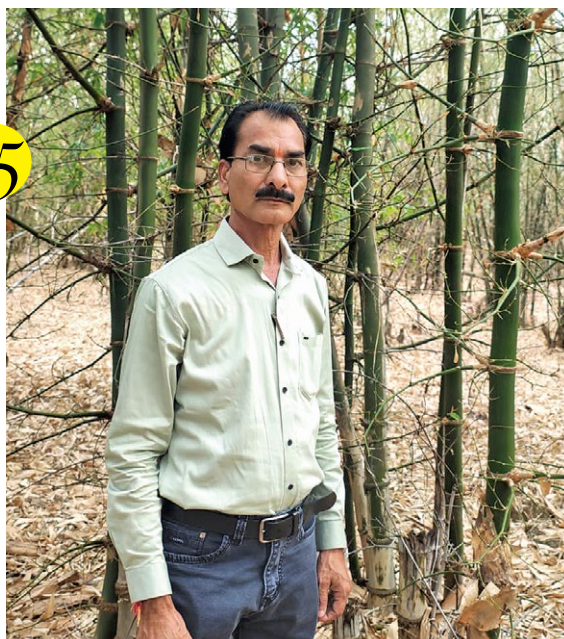
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बंजर खेत पर उगाया बांस (सुदेश नामदेव)

समाजशास्त्र में स्नातकोत्तर (एमए) की डिग्री लेने वाले मंडला ज़िले के भूआ बिछिया कस्बे के किसान सुदेश नामदेव ने नौकरी के बजाय अपने बंजर खेत को हरा-भरा बनाने का निर्णय लिया। बांस की खेती से उनकी किस्मत ही नहीं बदली अपितु वह अन्य किसानों के लिए प्रेरणास्रोत भी बन गए। अब तो लोग उन्हें बांस विशेषज्ञ के रूप में जानते हैं। लगभग दस साल पहले मात्र एक एकड़ की बंजर ज़मीन से शुरू हुआ बांस की खेती का सफ़र सौ एकड़ तक पहुंच गया है। आरंभ के चार साल मेहनत करके अब सुदेश को भरपूर आमदनी हो रही है। तभी तो बांस को हरा सोना कहा जाता है। राष्ट्रीय बांस मिशन के सहयोग और सब्सिडी के साथ उन्होंने 'भीमा' और 'चलता' प्रजाति के बांस लगाए हैं। इनका उपयोग फर्नीचर के साथ-साथ अगरबत्ती, आइसक्रीम और अन्य खाद्य सामग्री की स्टिक के लिए किया जाता है।



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छोटी आयु में अनेक आविष्कार (समीर अहिरवार)

पढ़े-लिखे किसानों के साथ-साथ ही कुछ विद्यार्थी भी अपनी ज़मीन से जुड़ रहे हैं और नए-नए प्रयोग कर रहे हैं। दमोह ज़िले के बारहवीं कक्षा के छात्र समीर अहिरवार आज क्षेत्र में ही नहीं बल्कि पूरे प्रदेश का जाना-पहचाना नाम बन गए हैं। समीर ने देखा कि रात में सिंचाई या अन्य कार्य करते समय किसानों को सांप, बिच्छू अथवा अन्य रेंगने वाले जीवों का गंभीर खतरा बना रहता है। कई बार यह खतरा जानलेवा भी साबित होता है। इसी के समाधान के रूप में उन्होंने 'किसान मित्र छड़ी' विकसित की है, जो वाइब्रेशन तकनीक के साथ काम करती है। यह 5 से 15 मीटर के दायरे में खतरा भांप लेती है। यह बैटरी आधारित है और छोटे सोलर पैनल के माध्यम से चार्ज होती है। इसमें मोबाइल चार्जिंग सुविधा भी है। इसमें लगी टार्च रात के अंधेरे में रास्ता भी दिखाती है।

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इंजीनियरिंग छोड़ बने किसान (श्याम कारपेंटर)

मध्यप्रदेश के नीमच ज़िले के किसान श्याम कारपेंटर ऐसे ही एक युवा किसान हैं, जो इंजीनियरिंग करने के बाद अच्छी-खासी नौकरी छोड़कर वापस अपनी ज़मीन और जड़ों तक पहुंचे हैं। मसाला एवं सुगन्धित फसलों की खेती कर श्याम उसकी प्रोसेसिंग, ग्रेडिंग और पैकिंग कर उन्हें ग्राहकों तक पहुंचा रहे हैं। बचपन से ही उनकी पढ़ाई में गहरी रुचि थी। उन्होंने मैकेनिकल इंजीनियरिंग की डिग्री हासिल की और जल्द ही उन्हें नौकरी भी मिल गई। परिवार और समाज की सामान्य धारणा यही थी कि वह शहर में पढ़ाई और नौकरी करने के बाद कभी वापस अपने घर नहीं लौटेंगे। परंतु आठ साल तक नौकरी करने के बाद उन्होंने वापस अपने घर और खेत की राह चुनी।





Return of India's *Indigenous Kitchens*

From Monpa women cooking in a century-old Himalayan home to tribal homestays in Bastar and fine-dining chefs championing forgotten ingredients, a new generation of food custodians is ensuring that India's culinary heritage survives not in museums, but on plates.

By Chandreyi Bandyopadhyay

Shahi litchi of Muzaffarpur, Bhagalpuri Zardalu mango, Katarni rice, Marcha rice of West Champaran, Magahi paan and Mithila makhana and the sweet delicacy Silao Khaja are some of the many food items from Bihar that carry the GI tag.



Over the past decade, India has witnessed a remarkable rediscovery of its regional and indigenous food traditions. Once overshadowed by global cuisines and homogenised restaurant menus, local dishes, millet-based foods, heirloom ingredients and community food practices have returned to the spotlight, often becoming as sought-after as fine dining experiences. Driving this revival are not only celebrity chefs, but also a growing network of community-led restaurants, heritage kitchens and tribal homestay dining experiences that are preserving recipes, supporting local livelihoods and celebrating cultural identity.

Chug Valley, Arunachal Pradesh

Tucked away in the remote Chug Valley near Tawang, amid Monpa villages and Himalayan forests, Damu's Heritage Dine offers one of India's most distinctive



Ladakh

Founded by Nilza Wangmo, an influential voice preserving Ladakhi food culture today, Alchi Kitchen in Sham Valley of Ladakh is run by an all-women team cooking from generations of culinary memory. Be it *chang* (a traditional fermented barley drink), buckwheat *tain tain* with apricot oil (buckwheat noodles finished with apricot oil), *khambir* with butter tea (a dense, whole-wheat Ladakhi bread), each dish they serve is a quiet archive. Every dish is prepared fresh and cooked over a wood-fired oven. The award of the Nari Shakti Puraskar in 2019 confirmed the impact of the initiative. Choose from a menu starting at ₹40 to ₹350.

Another restaurant preserving local food traditions is the Heritage Kitchen at Stone Hedge in Nubra Valley. Set in the 150-year-old family home of Stanzin Tsephel, it serves a seven-course meal curated by chef Jigmet Mingyur. Surrounded by shelves of family cookware, the menu moves from *khunak* (a savoury Ladakhi tea) through *ngamthuk* (barley soup with soft-dried yak cheese), *pola* (a lightly spiced pulao with Silk Route echoes) and *gya-thuk* noodle broth. Desserts include phating chu made with local apricots or phemar, a roasted barley pudding topped with apricot ganache. The standard meal is priced at ₹1,500 for vegetarian and ₹2,500 for non-vegetarian.



Jharkhand is home to **32 tribal** communities, each with its own distinct food culture.



pie filled with fermented yak cheese), *tsa tsa thukpa* (a corn soup in fish-mint broth), and red rice with *shya marku*, a slow-cooked chicken stew. Before the meal, guests are guided through a living museum that introduces them to Monpa history, customs and everyday life. In 2024, Damu's Heritage Dine won the International Responsible Tourism Award for its incredible work in employing and upskilling local communities. A lunch costs approximately ₹1,500 per person.

Ranchi, Jharkhand

Founded in 2018 by Aruna Tirkey, a rural development professional turned food entrepreneur, Ajam Emba, meaning "great tasting food" in Kurukh, the language of the Oraon community, is a women-run restaurant dedicated to reviving indigenous tribal culinary traditions while supporting local organic farmers.

Tirkey grew alarmed watching childhood staples like *ragi* disappear from local

community-led dining experiences.

Damu means "daughter" in Duhumbi, the local language, and the eight women who run the restaurant are indeed the daughters of Chug. Members of the village's all-female self-help group, they serve as chefs, cultural custodians and storytellers, using food to preserve and share Monpa traditions.

Set inside a century-old restored Monpa home, the intimate diner seats just 11 guests at a time and operates by prior reservation. Founded by Nishant Sinha and supported by organisations including the Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ArSRLM) and WWF India, the initiative creates sustainable livelihoods while giving local communities an incentive to protect the forests and community-conserved areas around them.

Head chef Rinchin Jomba and her team prepare traditional and contemporary Monpa dishes using locally grown organic ingredients, including millet momos stuffed with seasonal greens, *churra gombu* (a corn



Chaprah or *kai chutney*, is Jharkhand's fiery red ant chutney prepared using red weaver ants and their eggs, ground with garlic, ginger and chillies

kitchens and reappearing in upscale supermarkets at prices her community could not afford. Ajam Emba is among the handful of restaurants in Jharkhand serving the state's indigenous cuisine.

With walls painted with murals of community tales, Ajam Emba serves food cooked in earthen pots over wood fires and wrapped in leaves. Tirkey says, "We are forgetting our food. Loss of food also means loss of culture and identity. That's what I want to preserve."

The menu includes *ragi roti*, *chilka roti*, red rice, local mutton and country chicken, seasonal herbs, snails and fish. Dishes made with *mahua* and *jheerul* flower routinely sell out. A hearty meal can cost anything from ₹200 to ₹1,000.

Bhubaneswar, Odisha

Founded by sisters Tanaya and Trupti Patnaik, Odraa takes its name from the region's ancient appellation and celebrates Odisha's diverse culinary heritage through a menu inspired by coastal cuisines, inland food traditions and temple cooking practices. Ingredients like *ambula*, *badi*, *chuda*, and local greens appear in the menu bought from local markets. They source *sarsatia*, a rare tree-resin delicacy from Sambalpur, where only two families still make it, and also *hendua* (dried bamboo shoots) and fermented preparations. Co-founder Tanaya Patnaik explains, "Our menu reflects the story of agricultural heritage and culinary wisdom passed down through generations." A meal here costs ₹400 to ₹800 per person.



Kurleo Kodi

This Goan-style crab is a rich, coastal seafood dish featuring fresh crab in a fragrant, spiced coconut gravy. It is prepared by toasting whole spices and fresh coconut, grinding them into a thick paste, and simmering the crab until tender.



Assagao & Chorão Island, Goa

For most visitors, traditional Goan food begins and ends with vindaloo and fish curries. But beyond these familiar favourites, a richer culinary heritage survives in family kitchens and community traditions, which is being preserved by Avo's Kitchen in Assagao and Soul Travelling's Island Culinary Experience on Chorão Island.

Avo's Kitchen is grounded in a deep passion for preserving Goa's Saraswat Hindu food traditions, with a menu running from *ghotache sasav* (seasonal curry made with mangoes), prawn *ambot tik* (tangy spicy curry) and *tisreo* (clam dish). A fish thali here could cost anywhere between ₹390 to ₹750.



Alternatively, look for home chef Shubhra Shankhwalker's curated tables highlighting food from the Gaud Saraswat Brahmin community traditions.

Local tour company Soul Travelling's offering is more participatory. Their Chorão Island culinary experience visits a local family for cooking demonstrations and a lunch of dishes that are not available commercially. Ingredients are sourced from a *kulagar* (traditional spice farm) and crabs come fresh from a nearby pond. Priced at approximately ₹1,999, their menu is a tribute to tribal wisdom where *khatkhate*, a hearty vegetable stew with a coconut-and-jaggery base and *kasai*, a healing herbal concoction, reflect recipes that live through oral narratives.

Dhudmaras, Chhattisgarh

Nestled in the tribal heartland of Bastar, near Jagdalpur, the Bastar Tribal Homestay in Chhotobodol offers an immersive

Tribal delicacies to know

Bamboo shoot dishes: Fermented and fresh bamboo shoots are widely used across states such as Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh.

Smoked meats of Nagaland: Many Naga communities preserve meat through smoking, a technique that not only enhances flavour but also helps food last longer.

Mushrooms and edible flowers: These continue to be an important source of nutrition for tribal households across India, showcasing an extraordinary knowledge of local biodiversity.

introduction to the region's indigenous foodways and farming traditions.

Run by Shakeel Rizvi, the homestay invites guests on village walks and cooking excursions that place tribal agricultural practices and culinary knowledge in context. Meals are prepared over wood fires by women from local self-help groups and served on sal-leaf utensils.



In Manipur, researchers documented 68 types of wild edible plants, mostly leafy herbs and shrubs, consumed regularly.

Mizoram boasts over 70 varieties of traditional greens, while Meghalaya's villages cultivate an astonishing

200+ food plants, including 52 vegetable types and 31 leafy greens.

Heritage reimagined

Mrinalika and Akshita Bhanj Deo, the 48th generation of the Bhanj dynasty in Mayurbhanj, Odisha transformed their ancestral palace into a sustainable tourism venture, serving GI-tagged tribal delicacies such as bamboo chicken, *enduri pitha* wrapped in turmeric leaf, and *kai chutney* made from red ants.



The star dish is *chaur bhaja*, a tribal version of a meat pilaf, best enjoyed with a local *mahua* brew.

Dhurwa Dera, another farm-to-table landmark, on the banks of the Kanger River, is run by Mansingh Baghel of the Dhurwa tribe. The two rooms here are built from bamboo, clay and stone roofing in the style of traditional tribal dwellings and the kitchen serves local, simple delicacies. Millets like *kodo* and *ragi* are served with *chapda* (red ant chutney) and dishes made of sal flowers and bamboo shoots. It attracts many tourists who come to enjoy centuries' old tribal cuisine.

Gondwakadi, Maharashtra

Internationally acclaimed chef Amninder Sandhu's degustation menu at Palaash at Tipai Wildlife Resort in Tipeswar does something rare. It elevates Vidarbha's indigenous larder to the realm of fine dining. The menu reads like a field inventory of the region, highlighting *ambaadi* (sorrel), *chinch* (tamarind), *bhamrooda*, *gutti aloo*, Nagpur black crab and *mahua*. Sandhu's method is distinctive, bringing together bamboo-smoked proteins, ash-charred vegetables, *lambi roti* with liver pâté and wild mushroom glaze. This is not nostalgia dressed as fine dining, but a serious initiative involving the training of local women in the craft of fine dining while drawing upon traditional ingredients and techniques.



Chandreyi Bandyopadhyay is a freelance journalist who writes about offbeat travel, food and culture. Her bylines are in Deccan Herald, Firstpost, Travel & Leisure and more.





The Great *Return*

The cheetah's absence since the 1950s left a quiet ache in the nation's natural heritage. But today, across the sun-drenched plains of Kuno, that ancient rhythm has returned, thanks to India's landmark Project Cheetah.

By Sankalp Kishnani

Few conservation stories in India carry the weight of the cheetah's return. Once a familiar presence across the country's dry grasslands, scrublands and open forests, the cheetah gradually disappeared under the pressure of hunting, capture for sport, shrinking habitat and loss of prey. India officially declared it extinct in 1952.

Project Cheetah, launched at Kuno National Park on 17 September 2022, represents a landmark attempt to restore this missing part of India's natural heritage. Because the Asiatic cheetah survives only as a critically endangered population in Iran, India sourced healthy African cheetahs from Namibia, South Africa and Botswana.

Testing Adaptive Management

Large carnivore reintroductions are long-

term projects measured over decades. The project faced severe initial hurdles, including adult mortalities, cub losses in extreme heat, and monsoon-related skin infections. However, the field response adapted dynamically to these setbacks. Management teams increased water availability, added shade, provided supplementary feeding when belly scores fell, and monitored the animals twice daily.

No cheetah was lost to the harsh summer heat of 2024, proving the value of adaptive management. The 2025 brochure records nine natural mortalities. But mortality alone does not settle the question.

A Breeding Population Emerges

Breeding success has provided the strongest evidence that the cheetahs are



Project Cheetah at a Glance

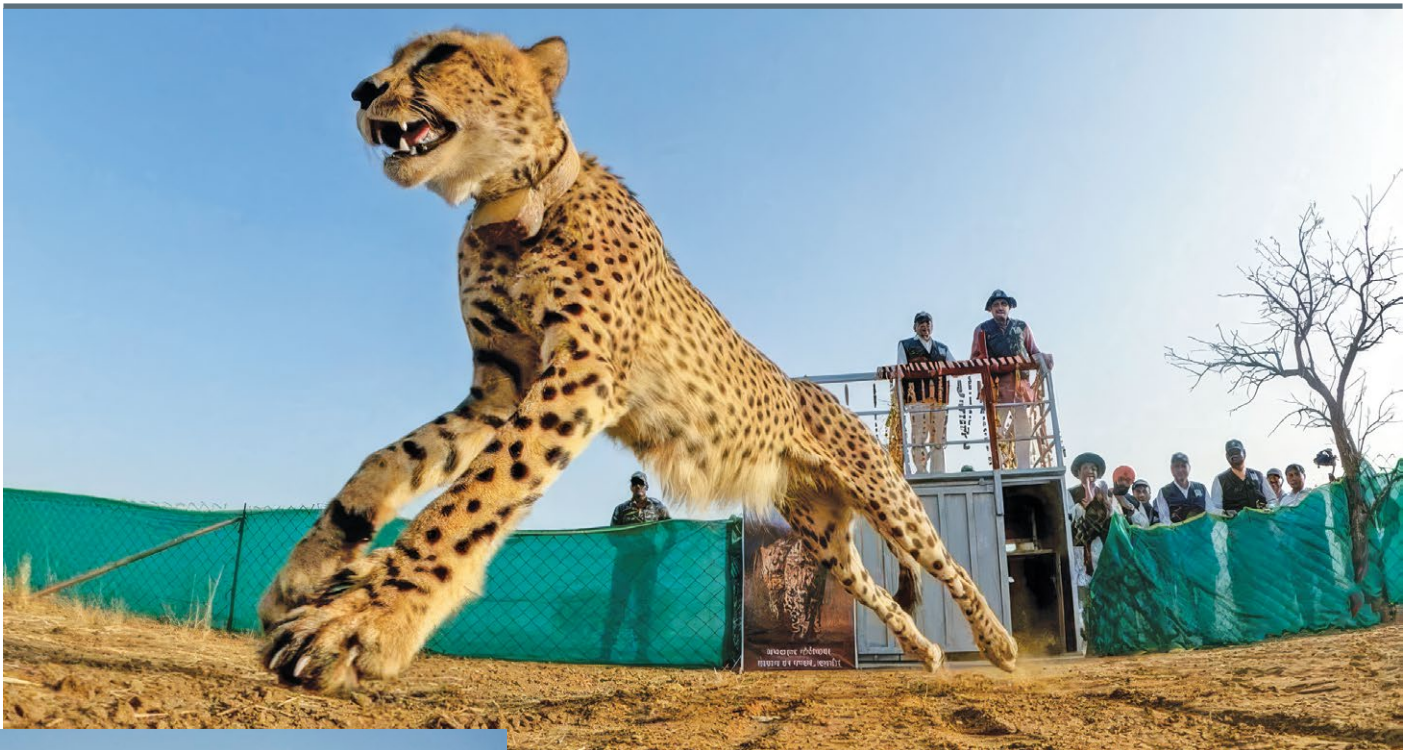
- **1952** — Cheetah declared extinct in India
- **17 Sept 2022** — 8 cheetahs arrive from Namibia
- **Feb 2023** — 12 cheetahs arrive from South Africa
- **March 2023** — First cubs born in India
- **Feb 2026** — 9 cheetahs arrive from Botswana
- **June 2026** — India's population reaches 53
- **Current Status:**
27 thriving cubs, 7 litters, and 3 founder populations.





Next Steps

The next phase will focus on consolidation and expansion through additional translocations, development of new sites such as Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh, and strengthening of a metapopulation framework across identified landscapes. Sustained sourcing of cheetahs from African countries is envisaged to maintain genetic diversity.



Shri Subharanjan Sen the then PCCF (Wildlife) and CWLW, Madhya Pradesh and Shri Uttam Sharma, Project Cheetah Director at Kuno, carrying the Botswana Cheetah at the time of release.

truly adapting. The first wild cubs were born in India in March 2023. Since then, multiple litters have been born, including a second generation born to an Indian-born female. By June 2026, India's total cheetah population reached 53 individuals, including 49 in Kuno National Park and 3 in Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary. While establishing a fully self-sustaining population across multiple landscape will take years, the project has surpassed its short-term survival benchmarks.

Beyond the Cheetah

The project's larger value lies in pulling vital attention and funding toward an overlooked dry-forest landscape. Grasslands have been restored, protection has been tightened, and water has been pushed into dry areas using solar-powered lifting systems. Consequently, recent reports have recorded increased sightings or the return of other rare species, such as the Indian wolf, dhole and forest owlet.



Sankalp Kishnani is an Indian Institute of Forest Management alumnus who has worked with WWF and the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, contributing to wildlife conservation..

Youth & Education

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 *Ideas*
70 to 80

Pg 110
Wonder Kids
Ideas 10

Pg 112
Atal Tinkering Labs
Idea 01

Wonder Kids *Titans of Change*

They're students, coders, activists and artists rewording India's future. Their stories of grit and passion map a new generation of possibility.



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Nav Agarwal— a 17-year-old Delhi teen, co-founded OneStepGreener in 2018 at age 11 to tackle India's landfill crisis and pollution. The non-profit now recycles over 100,000 kg matter across 13 cities, incentivising waste segregation. Nav won the Children's Climate Prize and BBC's Earth Champion award for driving sustainable change.



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Harshita Priyadarshini Mohanty, a 12-year-old, inspired by Padma Shri farmer Kamala Pujari is a passionate agri-conservator who has conserved over 60 rare millet varieties. Combining fieldwork, seed-saving techniques, and community outreach, she champions biodiversity, food security, and traditional farming knowledge across Odisha, inspiring youth-led conservation movements and local seed sovereignty.



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Uday Bhatia, a class 12 student, has built a ₹250 inverter bulb that lights rural homes for eight to 10 hours, ensuring uninterrupted evening study time. His low-cost innovation tackles erratic power cuts, helping village children learn after dark and offering a practical, scalable solution for energy-poor communities.

Komal Panda, 22, an industrial design student at NID Haryana won the James Dyson Award 2024 (India) for Novocarry, an innovative, sustainable carrying solution addressing mobility and ergonomic needs. Komal blends user-centred design with eco-conscious materials, positioning her as a rising voice in Indian product design.

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Ranvir Sachdeva, an 8-year-old technologist from India, became the youngest keynote speaker at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi. Coding since age three, he's the world's youngest TEDx speaker on AI at six, and author of "Are You Born with AI?" He links ancient Indian philosophy to modern AI, advocating ethical innovation.



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माही मलहानी जो दिल्ली के मयूर विहार के एमिटी इंटरनेशनल स्कूल में क्लास 12 की छात्रा हैं, उन्होंने मात्र 17 वर्ष की आयु में AI से चलने वाला रोबोट बनाया है। यह 90 प्रतिशत कामयाबी के साथ सही तरीके से कचरा इकट्ठा करता है और उसे अलग करता है। TRASHbot नामक इस रोबोट को घरों, स्कूलों और सोसाइटी में टेस्ट किया जा रहा है। वर्ष 2023 में उन्हें शहर का कचरा साफ करने का ख्याल आया। इसके लिए उन्होंने 2024 में आईआईटी, दिल्ली में संचालित रैंचो लैब्स से संपर्क साधा। उनका सपना पूरा करने में रैंचो लैब्स का अहम योगदान रहा है।



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प्रतीक शिंगारे ने 14 वर्ष की आयु में स्टेयरलेसजर्नी ऐप बनाया है, यह एक ऐसी पहल है जो पुणे, गोवा और कोलकाता में आसानी से मिलने वाली जगहों को वेरिफाई और मैप करती है ताकि दिव्यांग लोग अधिक स्पष्ट जानकारी और कम डर के साथ बाहर निकल सकें। स्टेयरलेसजर्नी ने पुणे, गोवा और कोलकाता में 50 से अधिक आसानी से मिलने वाली जगहों को मैप किया है। अभी, यह इंस्टाग्राम और लिंकडइन के जरिए चलता है। शीघ्र ही वह एक वेबसाइट भी बनाएंगे।

जाह्नवी डांगेती एक युवा भारतीय अंतरिक्ष यात्री उम्मीदवार हैं, जिन्हें टाइटन स्पेस इंडस्ट्रीज द्वारा वर्ष 2029 में होने वाले टाइटन्स अंतरिक्ष मिशन के लिए अंतरिक्ष यात्री उम्मीदवार के रूप में चुना गया है। आंध्र प्रदेश के पलाकोल्लू की निवासी 23 वर्षीया जाह्नवी नासा के एक सेंटर में हुए इंटरनेशनल एयर एंड स्पेस प्रोग्राम (IASP) को पूरा करने वाली पहली भारतीय हैं। इलेक्ट्रॉनिक्स और कम्युनिकेशन इंजीनियरिंग में ग्रेजुएट, वह स्पेस एक्सप्लोरेशन को आगे बढ़ाने के लिए समर्पित हैं और उनका लक्ष्य मंगल ग्रह पर कदम रखने वाले पहले भारतीयों में से एक बनना है।



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अर्नव महर्षि औरंगाबाद निवासी ने 17 वर्ष की आयु में दो रिहैबिलिटेशन टूल्स बनाए हैं। एक AI-पावर्ड एप्लिकेशन, जो फाइन मोटर रिकवरी को ट्रैक करता है और दूसरा वियरेबल डिवाइस, जो पैरालिसिस (लकवा ग्रस्त) मरीजों को ऊपरी अंगों की मूवमेंट वापस पाने में मदद करता है। उनके काम के लिए उन्हें 2025 में साइंस और टेक्नोलॉजी में 'प्रधानमंत्री राष्ट्रीय बाल पुरस्कार' से सम्मानित किया गया था। वह जब 14 साल के थे, तब एक एक्सीडेंट में पैरालाइज्ड हो गए थे। बस तभी से उन्होंने तय किया कि वह दूसरों को ठीक होने में मदद करने के लिए टूल्स बनाएंगे।



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रोशनी गुप्ता (17 वर्षीया) बेंगलुरु निवासी किशोरी ने पांच देशों के 1680 से अधिक जरूरतमंद छात्र-छात्राओं को बिना डरे और झिझके अंग्रेजी बोलना सिखाया है। माल्या अदिति इंटरनेशनल स्कूल में कक्षा 11 में पढ़ रही यह छात्रा 'प्रोजेक्ट विद्या' द्वारा इंटरैक्टिव वर्कशॉप, स्टोरीटेलिंग और क्रिएटिविटी का इस्तेमाल करके जरूरतमंद स्टूडेंट्स को आत्म-निर्भर तथा कुशल संपन्न बनाने में मदद कर रही हैं। इनमें से अधिकांश केयर होम और सरकारी स्कूलों में बच्चे हैं। 2023 में लॉन्च होने के बाद से 48 वर्कशॉप आयोजित की गई हैं।



नवाचार का मंच: अटल टिकरिंग लैब

भारत की स्वतंत्रता को 80 वर्ष पूरे होने वाले हैं, ऐसे में शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में भी व्यापक बदलाव देखने को मिल रहा है। अटल टिकरिंग लैब ने आधुनिक शिक्षा के रास्ते खोले दिए हैं।

आलेख: पुरु प्रखर

देश के दूरदराज़ के गांव के सरकारी स्कूल में पढ़ने वाला बच्चा भी अब पूरी तत्परता, तन्मयता और आत्मविश्वास के साथ आधुनिक प्रयोगशाला में नए-नए प्रयोग कर सुनहरे भविष्य की ओर बढ़ रहा है। यह संभव हो पाया है अटल टिकरिंग लैब की बदौलत। देश के पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री अटल बिहारी वाजपयी के नाम पर इसका नाम रखा गया है। भारत सरकार के नीति आयोग के अंतर्गत अटल नवाचार मिशन (एआईएम) द्वारा साल 2016 में भारत-भर के स्कूलों में अत्याधुनिक नवाचार कार्यक्षेत्र स्थापित किए गए हैं।

कल्पना एवं कौशल का संगम

अटल टिकरिंग लैब वास्तव में ऐसी आधुनिक प्रयोगशालाएँ हैं, जहाँ छात्र विज्ञान और प्रौद्योगिकी के विभिन्न उपकरणों का प्रयोग करके नए विचार विकसित कर सकते हैं। इन प्रयोगशालाओं

में छात्रों को रोबोटिक्स, इलेक्ट्रॉनिक्स, 3डी प्रिंटिंग, इंटरनेट ऑफ थिंग्स (आईओटी), आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस (एआई), सेंसर तकनीक और कंप्यूटर उपकरण जैसी आधुनिक सुविधाएं एक साथ उपलब्ध हैं। ये लैब छात्रों को व्यावहारिक पहुंच प्रदान करती हैं। यहाँ विद्यार्थी अपनी कल्पना और कौशल के साथ ऐसे-ऐसे नवीन और आधुनिक प्रयोग कर रहे हैं, जो कभी उनके लिए असंभव और नामुमकिन समझे जाते थे। 2016 में अपनी स्थापना के बाद से, देशभर के स्कूलों में 10,000 से अधिक एटीएल स्थापित किए गए हैं। इनमें विशेष रूप से वंचित क्षेत्रों, जिनमें दूरदराज़ के पिछड़े समझे जाने वाले जिले और ग्रामीण क्षेत्र भी शामिल हैं। नवंबर 2025 तक, देशभर के 35 राज्यों के 722 जिलों में फैले एटीएल में 1.1 करोड़ से अधिक छात्र सक्रिय रूप से जुड़े हुए हैं। अगले पांच वर्षों में सरकारी स्कूलों में 50,000 अटल टिकरिंग लैब्स (एटीएल) की स्थापना का लक्ष्य है।

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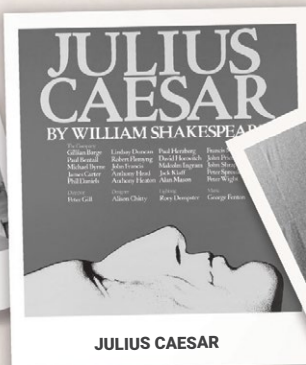


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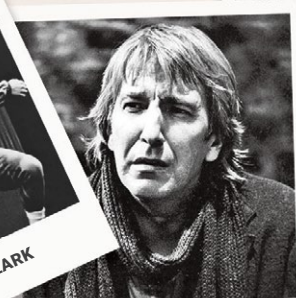
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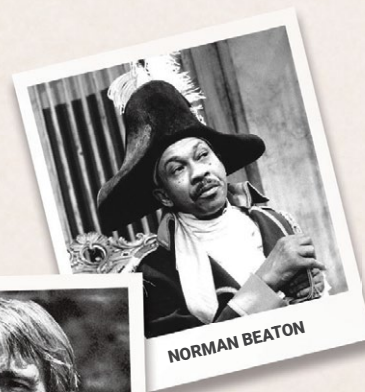
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