

THE

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# THE EMERGING WORLD

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## SAFFRON BROTHERHOOD RSS@100



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# TIMELESS CULTURE INFINITE INSPIRATION

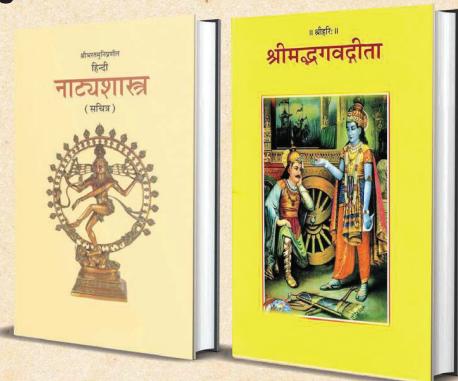
॥ यतो हृष्टः ततो हृष्टिः, यतो हृष्टिः ततो मनः,  
यतो मनः ततो भावः, यतो भावः ततो रसः ॥

*That is, wherever the hands go, the vision goes; vision connects the mind, emotions arise from the mind, and it is through emotions that interest in life is generated. If this eternal message of Natyashastra inspires the whole world even today, then the divine message of the Geeta is...*

॥ कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।  
मा कर्मफलहेतुभूमिते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥

*That means you are entitled to do the work, but never in the results. Therefore, do not do work with the expectation of results, nor get associated with inaction.*

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Volume 13 | Issue 2

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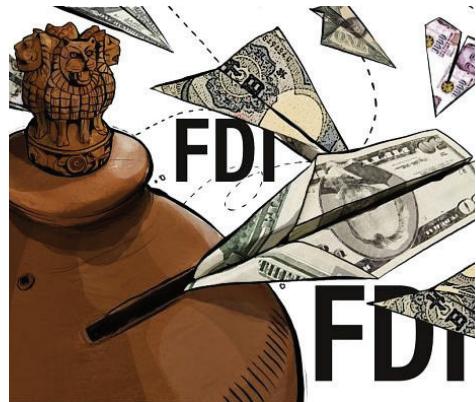
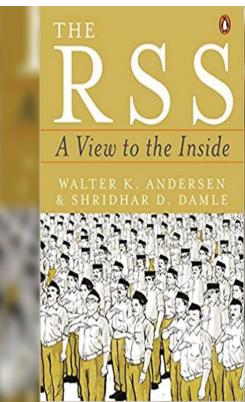
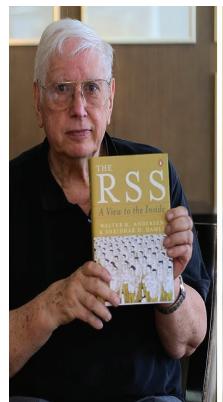
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Sowa-Rigpa Healing from the Himalayas

Owner, printer, and Publisher Manoj Kumar Pathak, printed at Sai Printing Press, B-42, Sector- 7, Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar, UP, 201301 and Published at D 288/20, Office No- 215 A, Wadhwa Complex, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi, 110092., Editor : Dinesh Dubey \*Responsible for selection of news under PRB Act.



Dear Reader, happy to offer you October 1-15 edition of your magazine that exclusively delves into the centenary year of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as the cover story marking its profound political significance as the ideological parent of the ruling BJP. With former Pracharak Narendra Modi as Prime Minister, the RSS's influence is at an unprecedented height, actively shaping India's socio-political, cultural, and educational narratives to project a 'nation-first' image and reaffirm its core mission of Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation). This political role is driven by ideological implementation—such as the abrogation of Article 370, the construction of the Ram Temple, and the push for a Uniform Civil Code—and organizational mobilization through its extensive grassroots network of over 80,000 shakhas, which serves as a vital volunteer base for the Sangh Parivar and the BJP's electoral success.

Economically, India faces a significant challenge with its net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows crashing 98 percent in May 2025 to a mere \$35 million, down from \$2.1 billion the previous year. This alarming drop is attributed to a combination of declining gross inflows and a surge in the repatriation of earlier investments, raising concerns in policy circles about global investor confidence. Read an analytical piece on the issue by our senior economic commentator. Our Ambassador in Ireland has scholarly reflected on the Durga Puja Festival. He highlights the Puja as a philosophical and spiritual heritage, embodying the two defining features of Bharat as an ancient civilizational state: the tradition of continuity in change and the unmatched capacity to harmonize infinite variety and plurality. This resilience and inclusive ethos stem from prioritizing the quest for knowledge and self-understanding.

Another piece thoughtfully presents 2nd October as a remarkable cultural and political coincidence as Vijayadashami and Gandhi Jayanti are celebrated on the same day. This convergence juxtaposes the symbolism of burning Ravana's effigies—representing the end of injustice and violence—with the call for nonviolence, truth, and compassion evoked by Mahatma Gandhi. Reflecting on rising tensions, a former history professor underscores Mahatma Gandhi's spiritual and ethical interpretation of Hinduism as a powerful, non-violent, and inclusive force during the independence struggle. His philosophy of equal respect for



all religions remains a compelling blueprint for countering exclusionary ideologies and fostering harmony in India's diverse democracy.

On the external front, despite US President Donald Trump's recent praise for his Indian counterpart and the US-India partnership, relations between the two countries are perceived to be on a downward trajectory. The current Indian sentiment of hurt and upset is noted, particularly because the positive views of President Trump toward India were widely expected to continue. A senior agronomist and vice chancellor discusses on India's journey toward nutritional sovereignty and food innovation featuring the inauguration of World Food India, which served as a call to reawaken India's ancient wisdom on food, health, and sustainability. Rooted in Ayurveda, this perspective sees food as medicine.

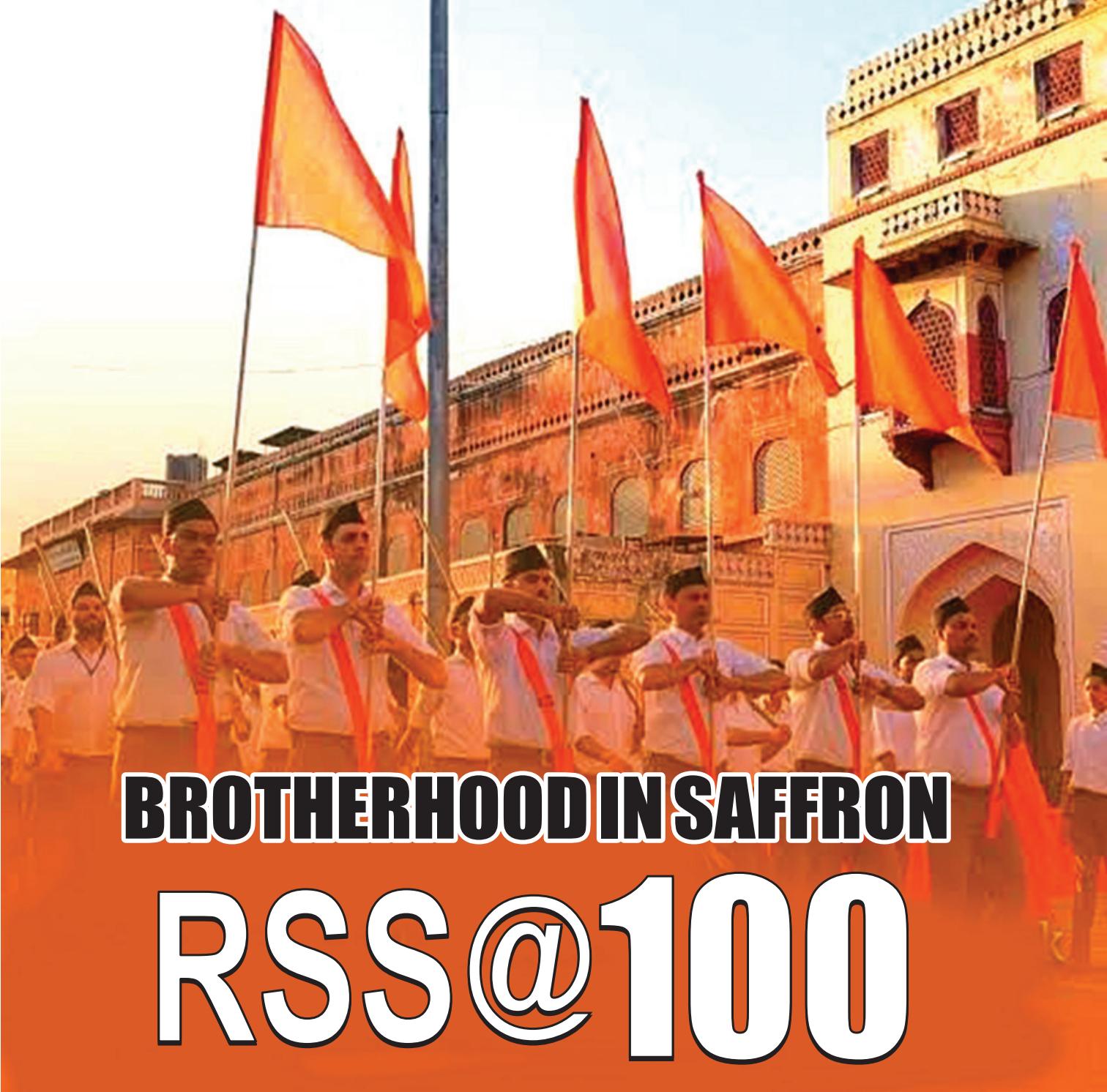
Yet another piece focuses on the ancient Tibetan system of medicine, Sowa-Rigpa, is also examined. Traced back at least 5,000 years, this holistic science prompts deeper attention to the meaning of healing in a world increasingly driven by commercialized and chemical-based healthcare. The pervasive social problem of child labor in India is addressed, noting that it blends poverty, weak social protection, gaps in education, and vulnerabilities in the informal sector. India, which houses a large share of the world's children, grapples with both traditional challenges (agriculture, hazardous work) and new ones (pandemic-driven vulnerability, school dropouts). A cultural commentator writes poignantly on cultural vibrancy of India's festival calendar contrasted with the quieter, insidious problem of noise pollution. Ongoing Navratri celebrations in Delhi have once again exposed the uneasy relationship between faith and noise, with loud music blaring late into the night and impacting the quality of life for many residents, particularly the vulnerable.

The issue also includes a literary analysis focusing on Mulk Raj Anand and Dalit literature. The piece traces the emergence of the phrase "Dalit literature" towards the end of the century, which has since gained complexity and attracted a host of writers. In a wider perspective, the foundation of this literature is seen as a global response to the pervasive issues of racial prejudice, segregation, ostracism, and the societal boundaries imposed by self-acclaimed elite groups.

With these key articles and much more, we hope this diverse and impactful issue enriches your understanding of the multifaceted issues penned by well-recognized experts. **Jai Hind!**



( Dinesh Dubey )



# BROTHERHOOD IN SAFFRON

# RSS@100

**Dr. Vishwanath Pandey**

The centenary year of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 2025 is marked by profound political significance, primarily due to its position as the ideological and organizational parent of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). With a former Pracharak (full-time RSS worker), Narendra Modi, as

Prime Minister, the Sangh's influence is at an unprecedented height, extending beyond elections to actively shaping India's socio-political, cultural, and educational narratives. The centenary celebration is being utilized to solidify this dominance, project an image of a 'nation-first' organization, and reaffirm its core mission of Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation) and cultural nationalism.

The key political role of the RSS in its centenary year can be understood through two lenses: ideological implementation and organizational mobilization. Ideologically, the Sangh has seen the successful implementation of long-standing agenda items by the BJP government, such as the abrogation of Article 370, the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, and the push for a Uniform Civil Code.

Organisational, its extensive grassroots network of over 80,000 shakhas (daily assemblies) continues to serve as the foundational, self-disciplined, and committed volunteer base for the entire Sangh Parivar, a force vital for the BJP's electoral success and for promoting its Hindutva worldview across all layers of society.

The centenary year also serves as a moment of reaffirmation and renewal for the RSS. It is a period of high-visibility outreach and a chance to propagate its five-fold societal transformation agenda (Panch Parivartan), which includes social cohesion and self-reliance (swadeshi). Its political significance lies in the fact that the RSS has transformed from a primarily cultural organization to an entity that, while maintaining its non-political facade, deeply influences the policies and direction of India's ruling establishment, making its vision for the nation a central force in the country's political trajectory.

**Organisational Structure:** The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has a hierarchical and decentralized organizational structure. It is designed to operate from the grassroots level up to a national leadership.

**Top Leadership:** Sarsanghchalak (Chief): This is the highest post in the RSS. The Sarsanghchalak serves as the organization's "guide and philosopher." The position is not elected but is nominated by the outgoing Sarsanghchalak. The current Sarsanghchalak is Mohan Bhagwat.

Sarkaryavah (General Secretary): This is the operational head of the RSS and is considered the "number two" position after the Sarsanghchalak. The Sarkaryavah is elected by the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS), the top decision-making body, for a three-year term. The Sarkaryavah is responsible for the day-to-day administration and affairs of the organization.

**Decision-Making Bodies:** The RSS has two main bodies for all important decision-making: the Akhil Bharatiya Karyakarini (Central Executive Council) and the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS) (All India Representative Council). The ABPS is considered the highest decision-making body, convening annually for three to four days. This crucial meeting, attended by the RSS top brass and functionaries from the Prant (provincial) level and above, includes representatives from all RSS frontal organizations. During the ABPS, a status report on the organization is presented, challenges are discussed, and the organization's broad direction for the coming year is decided, with the final message being communicated down to the Shakha (branch) level.

The Akhil Bharatiya Karyakarini, on the other hand, is the central executive council responsible for operational

## Geographical Structure

The RSS divides its organizational work into a tiered geographical structure:

- **Kshetra (Zone):** The entire country is divided into 11 zones, with each zone headed by a Kshetra Sanghchalak and Kshetra Karyavah.
- **Prant (State):** Each Kshetra is subdivided into several Prants, which roughly correspond to states or large regions. A Prant is headed by a Prant Sanghchalak and a Prant Karyavah.
- **Vibhag (Division):** Prants are further divided into Vibhags, which typically consist of a few districts.
- **Zila (District):** The district level of the organization.
- **Mandal:** A cluster of villages or a specific city area.

administration. Its membership comprises the RSS Chief (Sarsanghchalak), General Secretaries (Sarkaryavah), Joint General Secretaries (Sah-Sarkaryavah), and the heads and deputy heads (Pramukh and Sah-Pramukh) of the organization's various All India wings. These wings cover key functional areas such as physical (Sharirik), intellectual (Baudhik), media (Prachaar), public relations (Sampark), social services (Sewa), and logistics (Vyavastha).

The Akhil Bharatiya Karyakarini serves as the central executive council of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It is primarily composed of the RSS Chief (Sarsanghchalak), the General Secretary (Sarkaryavah), and multiple Joint General Secretaries (Sah-Sarkaryavah). These top officials form the core leadership responsible for the organization's overall direction and administration. The council's membership also includes the heads and deputy heads (Pramukh and Sah-Pramukh) of the RSS's various All India (Akhil Bharatiya) functional wings. These wings encompass critical operational areas like physical activities (Sharirik), intellectual activities (Baudhik), logistics (Vyavastha), social services (Sewa), public relations (Sampark), and media/publicity (Prachaar). Furthermore, the executive includes the Akhil Bharatiya Pracharak Pramukh and Sah-Pracharak Pramukh, who are in charge of the organization's full-time workers, known as Pracharaks.

In addition to these ex officio members, the Karyakarini frequently invites the Kshetriya Pracharak (senior full-time workers in charge of the eleven geographic regions or kshetras). There are also other special invitees, ensuring the council has comprehensive representation and input from all levels and major functions of the vast RSS organization.

**The System of Pracharaks: Key Campaigners of the RSS Ideology:** A unique and central aspect of the RSS structure is the Pracharak system. But, who they are? A pracharak is a full-time, lifelong volunteer who dedicates his life to the mission of the RSS. They are typically unmarried and live a minimalist life with few material possessions.

Pracharaks are the key to the organization's expansion and ideological dissemination. They are assigned to a specific geographical area or a specific affiliated organization and are responsible for starting new shakhas, strengthening existing ones, and promoting the RSS's ideology. The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, is a well-known example of a former RSS pracharak.

**The Basic Unit: Shakha:** The shakha is the fundamental unit of the RSS and its core working mechanism. It is a daily or weekly gathering of swayamsevaks (volunteers) at a local public space.

The shakha typically includes a range of activities like physical exercises, patriotic songs, games, and intellectual discussions on cultural and national issues. It is the primary vehicle for character-building and instilling the organization's values in its members.



**No Formal Membership:** The RSS does not have a formal membership process. A man becomes a "swayamsevak" simply by regularly attending a local shakha. The organization is exclusively for Hindu men and boys. That way a large number of Hindu sympathisers, who have not necessarily been voting for BJP, may conveniently

**Be considered grassroots supporters of RSS.**

**Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation):** The core objectives of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) are centered on the concept of Hindutva, or "Hindu-ness." While the organization presents itself as a cultural, rather than a political, body, its objectives are deeply intertwined with a vision of a Hindu nation.

The ultimate goal of the RSS, therefore is the establishment of a "Hindu Rashtra" or a Hindu nation. This vision is based on the belief that India's national identity is fundamentally Hindu. For the RSS, "Hindu" is not just a religious identity but a geo-cultural one, encompassing all people who consider India their "Matru Bhumi"

## Cultural Preservation and Promotion

A key objective of the Hindutva organisation has been the preservation and promotion of what the RSS considers to be Indian or Hindu culture, values, and traditions. This includes a focus on largely three topics:

- **Sanskrit:** Promoting a sense of cultural values and ethics.
- **Swadeshi:** Fostering economic self-reliance and the use of indigenous products.
- **Service (Seva):** Engaging in social service activities, including disaster relief, education, and healthcare.

(motherland) and "punyabhumi" (holy land).

**Character-building and Social Unity:** The RSS emphasizes the "man-making" mission, which is the moral, physical, and intellectual development of its members (swayamsevaks). This is a foundational objective pursued through the daily gatherings at its shakhas. The goal is to create disciplined, patriotic, and culturally aware individuals who can work for the betterment of society. The organization aims to foster a strong sense of social unity and discipline among Hindus, transcending caste, linguistic, and regional differences.

**Expansion and Organizational Reach:** The RSS has a continuous objective to expand its reach and influence throughout India and among the Indian diaspora. The centenary celebrations are a prime example of this. The organization aims to establish its presence in every corner of the country and create a network of affiliated organizations, known as the Sangh Parivar, to work on various fronts, including politics (Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP), education, labor, and student affairs.

**Ideological Influence:** While the RSS maintains that it is not a political organization, it is deeply influential in Indian politics through its role as the ideological parent of the BJP. A primary objective is to shape the political discourse and public policy of the country to align with its core ideology of Hindutva. This includes advocating for a Uniform Civil Code, cow protection, and a re-interpretation of Indian history.

The organisations inspired by the RSS work in diversified constituencies, such as education, urban slums, tribals, labour, farmers, teachers, students, art and culture, etc. Some of the key frontal organisations of the RSS include Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Sewa Bharati, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, Vidy Bharati, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Pragya Pravah etc. There are around three dozen such organisations.

# RSS Leadership Through Past Century

The RSS has been led by six Sarsanghchalaks since its inception in 1925. Each leader has contributed to the organization's growth and evolution, navigating different historical and political contexts.

## Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1925-1940)



Founder and Visionary of the organisation Dr. Hedgewar was a medical doctor who founded the RSS with the goal of "organizing Hindu society." His primary focus was on character-building and fostering a sense of national pride and unity

among Hindus. He established the foundational structure of the RSS, with the daily shakha (local branch) as its core unit. The shakha was designed to be a space for physical exercises, games, patriotic songs, and intellectual discussions to instill discipline and a sense of shared purpose. Hedgewar's focus was largely on cultural and social regeneration, distinct from mainstream political movements of the time. While he participated in the freedom struggle, he believed the RSS's role was to build a strong, unified Hindu society that would be the bedrock of a future independent nation.

## Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (1940-1973)



Known as "Guruji," Golwalkar's long tenure was crucial for the ideological consolidation of the RSS. He provided a philosophical framework for the organization, writing the influential book 'Bunch of Thoughts', which became a key text for RSS members. Guru Golwalkar's period was marked by significant challenges, including the partition of India, Mahatma Gandhi's assassination (1948) and the subsequent three-year ban on the RSS. He focused on strengthening the organization and expanding its reach, particularly in rural and tribal areas. Golwalkar initiated the establishment of several affiliated organizations, creating the Sangh Parivar. This included the formation of bodies for students (ABVP), workers (BMS), and later a political wing (Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the precursor to the BJP).

## Madhukar Dattatraya Deoras (1973-1994)



Balasaheb Deoras is remembered for his pragmatic approach and for pushing the RSS to become more socially and politically engaged. He famously stated that "if untouchability is not a sin, then nothing in the world is a sin." Deoras led the RSS during the Emergency of 1975-

77, when the organization was banned again. He directed RSS members to work underground and actively participate in the anti-Emergency movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan. This increased the RSS's visibility and legitimacy as a key opposition force. He launched initiatives to combat social evils like untouchability, emphasizing the concept of "Samajik Samarasata" (social harmony). His tenure saw the RSS move from a more insular approach to a more visible role in society.

## K. S. Sudarshan (2000-2009)



Sudarshan was known for his strong ideological convictions and his emphasis on "Swadeshi" (self-reliance). He was often critical of the economic policies of the Vajpayee government and called for a return to the

RSS's core principles. He strongly advocated for a renewed focus on indigenous Indian values in every field, from technology to politics. His tenure was marked by a more vocal and often critical stance towards the political wing, the BJP. Sudarshan oversaw organizational changes, including a greater emphasis on the use of modern technology to communicate the RSS's message.

## Rajendra Singh (1994-2000)



A physicist by training, Rajendra Singh, popularly called "Raju Bhaiya" was the first Sarsanghchalak who was not from the RSS's founding generation. His tenure was significant as it coincided with the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power at the

Centre. Under his leadership, the RSS-BJP relationship deepened. He provided ideological support to the BJP's first government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, but also maintained the RSS's independent identity as the ideological parent. Raju Bhaiya was known for his gentle demeanor and intellectual rigour. He made efforts to engage with a broader section of society, including academics and journalists, to explain the RSS's perspective.

## Mohan Bhagwat (2009-Present)



Mohan Bhagwat has been instrumental in the modernization and mainstreaming of the RSS. He has worked to make the organization more accessible and open, regularly engaging in public dialogue and holding press conferences. While remaining committed to the concept of Hindu Rashtra, Bhagwat has redefined it as a "cultural" ideal, not

a political one. He has emphasized that the Hindu Rashtra is a welcoming and inclusive nation for all faiths. Bhagwat's tenure has coincided with the most successful period for the BJP. The RSS has provided immense organizational and ideological support, and the relationship between the two organizations has become a central feature of Indian politics. He has also focused on building bridges with other communities, including Muslims and Christians, and has addressed a range of social issues from gender equality to environmental conservation.

## Key Aspects of the Centenary Celebration

The RSS had planned various events throughout its centenary year, which officially began on Vijayadashami (Dussehra) in 2024 and continued until the same festival in 2025. A primary focus of the centenary was a major outreach program. The RSS has set a goal to expand its reach and increase the number of its "shakhas" across the country, aiming to have a presence in every block of every state in India.

**Three-Day Lecture Series at Vigyan Bhawan:** The celebrations included a series of public events, such as Hindu conferences and intellectual meetings. A notable event was a three-day lecture series by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat in Delhi, titled "100 Years of RSS Journey: New Horizons," where he interacted with a diverse audience from various fields. Similar events are planned for other major cities.

The RSS has extended invitations to a wide range of individuals, including top academics, thought leaders and diplomats from various countries, to attend its events. This is part of an effort to present a comprehensive picture of the organization and its vision.

The centenary celebrations have been used to highlight and reinforce the RSS's core ideals, including unity, harmony, family values, environmental awareness, Swadeshi (self-reliance), and civic duty. The organization's leadership has emphasized that the centenary is not just a symbolic milestone but a moment for mobilization and a rededication to its mission of nation-building.

**Is RSS Against Minority Communities?:** The question of whether the RSS is "anti-minorities" or historically "anti-Muslim" is a highly debated topic. Critics of the RSS point to several historical and ideological factors to support the claim that the organization is anti-Muslim.

The RSS's core ideology, Hindutva, as articulated by its early leaders, has been seen by many as exclusionary. Key texts, such as M.S. Golwalkar's 'Bunch of Thoughts', portray Muslims (and Christians) as foreign threats to the Hindu nation. Critics argue that the RSS's vision of a "Hindu Rashtra" inherently marginalizes religious minorities and seeks to assimilate them into a majoritarian cultural identity.

The RSS has been accused of involvement in and complicity with several instances of communal violence and religious riots in India. Its role in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 is a major point of contention for critics. The organization and its affiliates are also often

accused of creating a climate of fear and hostility towards Muslims. Critics highlight the policies and rhetoric of the BJP, the political wing of the Sangh Parivar, as a reflection of the RSS's anti-Muslim stance. Policies such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) have been widely criticized as discriminatory towards Muslims.

The RSS and its supporters, however, reject the "anti-Muslim" label and present a different view of their objectives and relationship with the Muslim community. The RSS argues that "Hindu" is a cultural and national identity, not a religious one. According to this view, a Muslim or Christian who considers India their motherland and respects its culture is also a "Hindu" in a broader, civilizational sense. They argue that their aim is not to convert people but to unite all Indians under a common national identity. In recent years, particularly under the leadership of Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS has initiated several outreach efforts to the Muslim community. This has included meetings between senior RSS leaders and prominent Muslim intellectuals, as well as the creation of the Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM), a Muslim organization affiliated with the RSS. The stated goal of these initiatives is to bridge the "trust deficit" and foster a sense of shared nationality. RSS leaders often make a distinction between the average Muslim citizen and what they term "Jihadi" or "extremist" elements. They claim their opposition is to Islamic radicalism and cross-border terrorism, not to the Muslim community as a whole. This is a key part of their defense against accusations of being anti-Muslim.

RSS leaders, including Mohan Bhagwat, have repeatedly made public statements affirming that a "Hindu Rashtra" does not mean a nation without Muslims. Bhagwat has said that if it is ever said that Muslims are unwanted in India, the concept of Hindutva will cease to exist. They emphasize that the future of India lies in Hindu-Muslim unity. The debate over whether the RSS



is "anti-Muslim" is multifaceted. While critics point to the organization's foundational ideology, its historical role in communal conflicts, and its political influence on the BJP as evidence of an anti-Muslim agenda, the RSS itself and its supporters argue that their vision is one of cultural assimilation and national unity, not religious discrimination. The organization's recent outreach efforts and public statements add to the complexity of the issue, showing a more nuanced and, in some cases, pragmatic approach to its relationship with the Muslim community.

**RSS and Future of India as a Modern Nation:** A big question, usually raised by western commentators, whether India can grow as a modern nation under the influence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is in fact a complex one. The RSS is a large, influential organization that views its role as shaping India's cultural and national identity, which is rooted in its ideology of Hindutva (cultural nationalism).

**Arguments for Modern Nation Growth under RSS Influence:** Focus on National Pride and Identity: Proponents argue that a strong sense of national and cultural identity, which the RSS promotes, is essential for a cohesive and confident modern nation on the global stage. This can lead to unity and mobilization for national goals.

**Social Service and Grassroots Work:** The RSS and its affiliates (collectively known as the Sangh Parivar) are actively involved in extensive social work, including education, healthcare, rural development, and disaster relief. These contributions can directly aid in nation-building and address developmental deficits, which are key aspects of a modernizing society.

The RSS promotes ideas like Swadeshi (support for indigenous products) and Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India), which proponents see as a blueprint for economic self-sufficiency and strength, a hallmark of a modern power. The organization's focus on discipline and character-building is also seen as a positive foundation for a strong society. With the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which shares its ideological foundation with the RSS, leading the government, the RSS has significant influence on policy. Supporters point to major policy implementations and infrastructure development as signs of effective governance driving national growth and modernization.

#### India's Growth as a Modern Nation under RSS

**Influence:** Some analysts note that the RSS's economic vision, which is heavily rooted in Swadeshi and traditional models, sometimes diverges from the contemporary, globalized, and technology-driven economic priorities of the government. This potential conflict could hinder rapid, modern economic growth.

Critics argue that the RSS's emphasis on a singular "Hindu nation" narrative, based on the ideology of Hindutva, may marginalize non-Hindu communities and challenge India's constitutional principles of secularism and pluralism. A modern, diverse nation is often defined by its inclusivity and protection of minority rights, which opponents fear is compromised.

Concerns exist that the RSS's push to shape the cultural and historical narrative, including changes to textbooks and a focus on specific cultural aspects, might conflict with the principles of scientific temper and intellectual freedom essential for a truly modern, knowledge-based society.

The strong ideological stance of the RSS is seen by some as contributing to social and political polarization, which can undermine national harmony and democratic functioning—both crucial for long-term stability and modern progress. Whether India can grow as a modern nation under the RSS's influence depends heavily on how its core ideology of Hindutva is translated into policy and social action. The capacity of the RSS network for social mobilization, character building, and nation-building initiatives offers a framework for development and unity. The potential for communal polarization and ideological resistance to unbridled economic globalization or secular-pluralist ethos raises significant questions about the trajectory of modernization.

Ultimately, "modern nation" can be defined in multiple ways—technological and economic prowess, or a society defined by a deeply rooted cultural identity and discipline. How a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and culturally diverse nation's aspirations could be balanced with the RSS worldview of uniformity and Hindu nationalism is yet to be seen? Currently, RSS influence is actively shaping India's path, and its long-term impact on India's modernity will continue to be a subject of intense debate and evolving political reality.

**(Author, a senior academic, is an acclaimed biographer of Mahatma Madan Mohan Malviya)**

# RSS and BJP

## An Umbilical Cord Connect

Dr. Ajoy Rai

### Atal Bihari Vajpayee: The Architect of RSS-BJP Tango

Atal Bihari Vajpayee had a deep, lifelong association with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the



ideological parent organization of his political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), although their relationship often saw periods of tension and disagreement, especially when he was Prime Minister.

Vajpayee joined the RSS as a Swayamsevak (volunteer) in 1939 at the age of 12 and later became a Pracharak (full-time worker) after giving up his law studies. He often credited the RSS with laying the foundation for his political career and once described the organization as his "soul."

He was seconded by the RSS, along with Deendayal Upadhyaya, to work for the newly formed Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) in 1951, which later evolved into the BJP. He was a co-founder and senior leader of the BJP.

**Differences as Prime Minister:** When he led the coalition government (National Democratic Alliance or NDA) as Prime Minister (1998-2004), his pragmatic, moderate approach and focus on coalition politics often put him at odds with the more hardline ideological positions of the RSS and its affiliates (collectively known as the Sangh Parivar). **Policy & Appointments:** He was known for keeping the RSS at a distance, not allowing them to dictate government policy or crucial appointments.

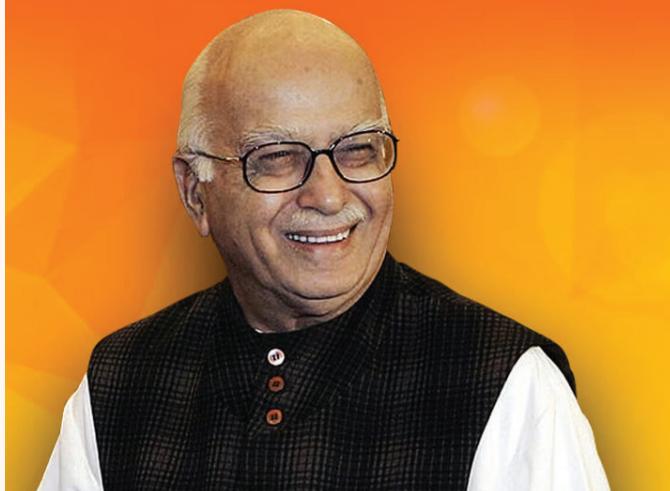
His initiatives for dialogue with Pakistan and his overall foreign policy were sometimes met with complaints

and criticism from the RSS. Mr. Vajpayee was widely seen as the "moderate face" of the BJS and later the BJP, which some within the Sangh Parivar, like former RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan, viewed with skepticism or criticism. Despite the working relationship's strain, Vajpayee never disavowed the RSS. He publicly defended the organization fiercely when it was criticized by rival political parties and maintained that he remained a dedicated Swayamsevak.

**L. K. Advani: The Man Behind BJP's Organisational Machinery :** L. K. Advani's relationship with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is one of deep, lifelong commitment, as he is a product of the organization and a key architect of its political wing's rise to power.

**Core Relationship and Ideological Roots:** Advani joined the RSS as a Swayamsevak (volunteer) in Karachi at the age of 14 in 1941. He later became a full-time worker or Pracharak, organizing RSS activities in Rajasthan after the Partition of India. He has often stated that his association with the RSS "gave meaning to his life.

In 1951, he was deputed by the RSS to the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the organization's newly formed political arm (the precursor to the BJP). This is the common path for Pracharaks moving into political life. Advani is



widely seen as the leader who cemented the BJP's ideological alignment with Hindutva, a concept central to the RSS. His 1990 Ram Rath Yatra in support of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement was a pivotal moment that dramatically boosted the BJP's popularity and gave the party a distinct, hardline ideological identity directly connected

to the Sangh Parivar's goals.

While Advani's commitment to the RSS ideology has been unwavering, his political leadership sometimes involved complex dynamics with the parent organization: The Sangh Parivar's Arbitrator: The RSS views itself as the ideological and organizational fountainhead for the entire Sangh Parivar (the "family" of RSS-affiliated groups, including the BJP). In moments of crisis or internal party disputes, the RSS has traditionally played the role of the final arbiter—a role Advani, despite his seniority, eventually acknowledged.

In his later years, Advani faced a difficult relationship with the RSS over leadership succession. The RSS reportedly advocated for a shift toward younger leadership, particularly urging Advani and other veterans to step aside, which led to friction and high-profile resignations when decisions, such as the elevation of Narendra Modi, went against his wishes.

Despite internal political differences, Advani remains fundamentally an RSS man. He has consistently praised the organization's focus on ethical values, character building, and moral uprightness in public life.

**Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi: RSS's Favourite Leader in BJP:** Murli Manohar Joshi is a veteran Indian politician and a key figure in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Joshi has been a lifelong member of the RSS, a right-wing Hindu nationalist volunteer organization, having come into contact with it at a young age in Delhi.

Dr. Joshi's early political activities, such as taking part in the Cow Protection Movement (1953–54) and



the Kumbh Kisan Andolan of UP (1955), were rooted in his connection with the RSS and its ideology. He was influenced by major RSS leaders like Guruji Golwalkar, Deendayal Upadhyaya, and Prof. Rajendra Singh (who was his teacher and later became an RSS chief). Unlike some other BJP leaders, Joshi has often been considered a strong favourite of the RSS leadership.

Before his full-time political career, Joshi was a Professor and Head of the Physics Department at Allahabad University, specializing in Spectroscopy. He is one of the

founding members of the BJP. He served as the National President of the BJP from 1991 to 1993. He held multiple cabinet posts in the NDA government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, most notably as the Union Minister of Human Resource Development (1998–2004), and also Minister for Science & Technology and Ocean Development.

A veteran parliamentarian, Dr Joshi has been elected to both the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) and the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament) multiple times. The veteran leader recently questioned the economic policies of the current government at an RSS meeting, highlighting concerns

**K. N. Govindacharya and Social Engineering:** Govindacharya is widely credited as the RSS ideologue and former BJP General Secretary who initially articulated the



BJP's strategy of "social engineering." This concept was part of a larger political strategy developed by the party, particularly in the 1990s, to expand its base beyond its traditional support among the upper castes and to appeal to Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and other marginalized communities.

**Govindacharya's Role and the Strategy:** Govindacharya, a former Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) pracharak (full-time worker), was a key intellectual force within the BJP, serving as its General Secretary from 1988 until 2000. He is associated with defining the shift toward broadening the party's social appeal.

The strategy involved the upliftment and promotion of leaders from backward caste groups, such as Kalyan Singh in Uttar Pradesh and Uma Bharti in Madhya Pradesh, to positions of prominence within the party and government. This "social engineering" strategy was crucial in helping the BJP establish a foothold in politically significant states, particularly in the Hindi belt, and was seen as a way to counter the rise of caste-based regional parties after the Mandal Commission's recommendations.

Today, while Govindacharya is objectively critical of the current BJP leadership and some of its policies, the strategy of social engineering—which involves crafting micro-coalitions and delivering welfare benefits to diverse caste groups—remains a core element of the BJP's mobilization efforts.

# Walter K. Andersen: The American Academic Who Opened the RSS to Western Scholarship

Dr. D. K. Dubey

Walter K. Andersen is an American academic and scholar known for his studies of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). He wrote his first book on the RSS in the mid-1980s when average western academics used to abhor the idea to focus on a right-wing fringe organization that mattered little in Indian politics. Very few people know that Walter studied at Allahabad University and had been a popular figure on the campus. Later he served a diplomatic stint at the U.S. Embassy, New Delhi, as a senior diplomat (1988-91). He also held varied responsibilities in the Department of State. He left the foreign service job to join as the Senior Adjunct Professor of South Asia Studies at Johns Hopkins University's Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) and was previously a political analyst for South Asia at the U.S. State Department. He co-authored the 1987 book *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*. He has extensive contacts within both the RSS and the BJP organizations.

Mr. Andersen has been a long-time chronicler of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), outlined the organization's century of evolution and its complex ties with the ruling BJP. He says initially a small, male-dominated cadre, the RSS has dramatically expanded into a major socio-political force with affiliated groups forming India's largest trade union, student, and farmer organizations.

**Mr. Andersen has produced what are considered authoritative books on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). His key works include:**

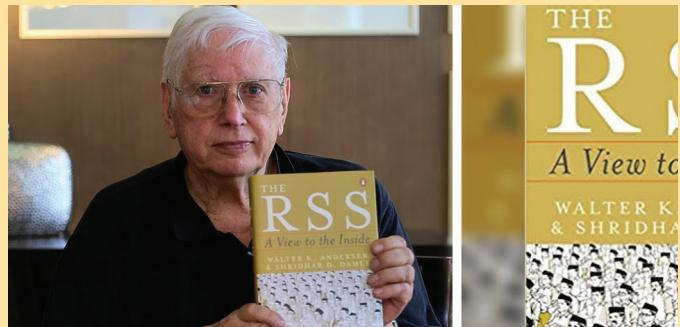
- The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism (1987).
- The RSS: A View to the Inside (2018), later re-titled Messengers of Hindu Nationalism: How the RSS Reshaped India.

Walter's books provide an in-depth analysis of the RSS, focusing on its evolution, ideology, organizational structure, and impact on Indian politics and society. The central theme is the RSS's focus on the long-term goal of Hindu consolidation through the core concept of Hindutva ("Hinduness"). In later analyses, Hindutva is often glossed as loyalty to Indian civilization rather than strict adherence to specific religious practices.

**Organisational Expansion and Affiliates:** Mr. Andersen's works meticulously detail the RSS's massive expansion, particularly over the last few decades, and its formation of hundreds of affiliated organizations (the Sangh Parivar) to penetrate nearly every sector of Indian life, including politics, education, trade, and social welfare. This network is maintained by recruiting members with organizational skills from the RSS core. He assiduously explored how the RSS has adapted to India's economic liberalization and rapid modernisation suggesting that the concurrent social dislocation and sense of rootlessness caused by these changes have made upwardly mobile groups and others feel a salience for the community bonds the RSS advocates, thus fueling its growth.

**Symbiotic Link:** A significant portion of the analysis focuses on the symbiotic link between the RSS and its political affiliate, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The books trace how the RSS has made conscious efforts to boost the BJP's electoral fortunes and the subsequent impact of the RSS on the country's public policy and decision-making.

Mr. Andersen's analysis delves into the inner workings of the organization, discussing the dedication of its full-time workers (Pracharakas) and exploring the internal debates and challenges the organization faces, such as issues related to caste, the urban-rural divide, and its stance on economic policy, which often contrasts with the BJP's global capitalism agenda. His work is widely considered essential for understanding the RSS, tracing its evolution from its



early beginnings to its current status as the most influential cultural organization in India.

**Deciphering the RSS-BJP Tango:** Mr. Andersen's work examines the evolving relationship and "tango" between the RSS and the BJP government, including the influence of the RSS on India's political environment. He has commented on the fact that a large crop of BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, come from the RSS background (Modi is a former full-time RSS worker). He has discussed the role of the RSS as a mediator in some cases, such as when it convinced L.K. Advani to accept Narendra Modi's nomination as Prime Minister. He is personally known to all the top leaders RSS and the BJP including PM Modi. He is a known expert frequently asked to analyze and discuss the RSS's ideology, internal debates, and its dynamic with the ruling BJP by electronic and social media channels.

Mr. Andersen is of the opinion that given the depth of their historical, ideological, and organizational ties, it is highly improbable that the BJP could survive in its current form, or maintain its organizational efficiency and ideological coherence, without the RSS. He sees the RSS acts as the ideological anchor and a mobilization machine for the BJP.

He holds a firm view that while the BJP has developed a powerful election machine and national footprint, separating from its foundational source would strip it of a critical portion of its dedicated cadre, its core ideology, and its long-term vision, fundamentally altering its identity and viability as a political force. During his India visit early this year during a discussion at India Today conclave, Mr. Andersen highlighted the organization's structure, which features intense internal debates—even over its proximity to the current government—but stresses that once the leadership, such as RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, reaches a consensus, members firmly adhere to the decision. This unity is what has allowed the RSS to "stay together" despite its internal divisions. He noted that the RSS-BJP relationship is generally "more favorable" now than in the past, yet differences persist. For example, the RSS has been critical of the government's globalization-driven economic policy, fearing it overlooks individual well-being and favoring a different approach to labor and land issues. When disagreements arise, both entities often choose to postpone the issue until a consensus can be reached.

**Notion of Debate:** Despite accusations of being authoritarian, Mr. Andersen dismissed this as an exaggeration, asserting that the RSS is fundamentally committed to the "notion of debate" and the electoral process, viewing its role as creating a disciplined cadre to steer the country. The core ideology of the RSS, Mr. Andersen explained, is not strictly religious but focused on fostering Hindu cultural pride, aligning with the non-religious, cultural definition of Hinduism espoused by V.D. Savarkar. This emphasis on culture and national direction, rather than dogma, has fueled its massive expansion, enabled by a strong organizational structure of over 60,000 shakhas. Internationally, the overseas branch, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), adopts a more "good citizenship" focus, which Andersen likened to a domestic "MAGA" equivalent, but with an Indian cultural root.



# What's Causing Strains in U.S.-India Ties? Is it Short Term Irritant or a Deeper Anger



**Zaheer Mustafa**

US President Donald Trump's recent praise of his Indian counterpart and positive words for the US-India partnership notwithstanding, relations between the two countries remain on a downward trajectory. Indians seem hurt and upset, mainly because they did not see it coming. When Richard Nixon tilted toward Pakistan in the 1971 war, his anti-India views were well known. Trump, on the other hand, was viewed as favourably disposed to India and Indians.

New Delhi appeared to be in a strong position when Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Trump within the first month after the inauguration of the US President's second term. India seemed to have a head start in trade negotiations, the two countries seemed strategically aligned on China, the Russia factor appeared manageable, and US-Pakistan relations were still on shaky ground.

Eight months later, the picture has drastically changed. India is the target of the highest tariffs imposed on an American partner. Four years after being forced to withdraw from Afghanistan because of Pakistani betrayal, the US is improving ties with Pakistan. India's ties with Russia, which were deemed a minor irritant, have become a central issue. And the Quad and Indo-Pacific strategy, which were supposed to make India America's 'partner for the twenty-first century', appear now to be in doldrums.

Trump is an unconventional president and is neither known for consistency nor well-thought-out plans. He could easily take a U-turn and go back to his previous stance of seeing India as an indispensable

global partner. But Indian policymaking is far more structured. Once exposed to the vagaries of a mercurial President's temperament, India is likely to be careful in deciding how far it wishes to go in being a US partner moving forward.

**Misaligned interests :** Although public rhetoric and the media blame the downward spiral on trade issues and some stress in personal relations between the current Indian and American leaders, ties between the two countries have some inbuilt stress points. The two countries have differing histories and geographies, as well as divergent interests. The evolution of relations over the last three and a half decades defied this divergence and should never have been taken for granted. The policies of the previous five successive US administrations were driven by the strategic assumption that India's rise was in America's interests. India was to act as a counterweight to China's rise as the alternative Asian power. But India did little to fulfil that expectation, falling behind in modernising its military and maintaining control or even pre-eminence in its region.

Indians saw the partnership with the US as written in stone and assumed that an expanding economy automatically conferred on India great power status that would make it America's partner of choice. For all the various formats of bilateral dialogue, the India-US relationship never developed an institutional framework that could have prevented a free fall under circumstances like the current ones.

**Indian economy and democracy:** The closer US-India ties of the last three decades have rested upon three broad pegs. First among these are the people-to-people relationship and the notion of shared values, especially a shared belief in democracy. The second is the commercial dimension, reflected in enhanced bilateral trade. The third relates to defense and strategic cooperation. Before Indians assume that Trump's temperament is the only reason for the current crisis in relations, they should pause to consider that each peg of the relationship has faced challenges in recent years. They are just coming to a head now. The value-based dimension sustained the relationship during the worst years of the Cold War. But liberal Americans have been concerned about India's democratic backsliding, while conservative Americans



have taken offense at what they see as restrictions on religious freedom manifested in actions against Christian missionaries. Incidents, such as allegations of Indian security services being involved in on US soil of dissidents deemed terrorism supporters, have also not helped. Moreover, the assumption that the large Indian diaspora in the US could make up for any deficiencies in relations at the government-to-government level has also not panned out. Indian-Americans may be one of the wealthiest and best educated minorities in the US, but they have yet to build concomitant clout within the broader system.

Considering the size and potential of the Indian economy, the weakest leg of this relationship has always been the commercial one. US-India commercial ties have grown from \$6 billion in 1990 to \$190 billion in 2024. But to Americans, India remains protectionist, inward-oriented, trade skeptic economy. Unlike China did in the 1980s and 1990s, India rarely woos foreign companies and expects them to work within the heavily regulated system.

India never built the sinews of support across the American corporate ecosystem. The hope of access to the large Indian consumer market was always a draw that conflicted with reality. In the end, corporate America shrugged its shoulders and accepted that it would never make the kinds of profits it once did in China. Indians never understood the disappointment of US businesses as they congratulated themselves on India's economic achievements. For Americans, these accomplishments fell way behind their anticipation. Finally, American plans in the realm of defense and security also fell short, even though India and the US are more closely aligned in the defense realm than during the Cold War. The partnership involving military exercises, information sharing, logistics coordination, and defense sales grew too slowly.

Defence purchases costing \$24 billion from the US sound big to Indians but are abysmally low when compared to purchases by American allies in Europe, the Middle East, or Asia. Without a security alliance, the bonds between the two militaries lack sufficient gravitas. Again, hope outpaced reality. Projects –such as joint building of the next generation aircraft carriers – never took off. Interoperability of military equipment remained a distant dream.

It is true that cooperation between the two countries in the tech realm—both civilian and defense—has deepened in recent years. But friendshoring and tech transfer were reflective of strategic altruism, which is now flailing. Just as the protectionist impulses under Trump 1.0 continued under the Biden administration, so the desire to onshore (and build in America) will outlast Trump 2.0.

**Rehyphephication of ties:** American global strategy has often conflicted with India's regional interests, going back to the Cold War. But India and the US did not let American ties with Pakistan and India's relations with the erstwhile Soviet Union result in a breakdown in bilateral ties. These relationships are currently casting a shadow on the India-US relationship, not seen in many years. India was given an exception an under the 2017 Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) to enable it to continue business with Russia. The US expected to slowly wean away India from Russia. Even after the 2022 Ukraine war, India's ties with Russia were accepted albeit reluctantly. That no longer seems to be the case. The Trump administration, for purposes of its global strategy, appears willing to push India to apply pressure on Russia.

Similarly, American presidents since the 1990s have tried to insulate US relations with Pakistan from its partnership with India. But the emerging relations between Trump and the Pakistan army chief, Asim Munir, coupled with talk of stronger economic relations between the two countries and offers of mediation between India and Pakistan, could bring back the hyphen in US-India-Pakistan relations—something deemed undesirable by India's leadership.

As American allies in Europe and Asia look for ways to adjust and adapt to the current Trump administration, India is looking for ways to weather the storm. Formal US allies can find some comfort in security treaties and economic bonds going back decades. India, which does not have such arrangements with the US, will probably revert to its default

mode of multi-alignment.

India played up its presence in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), including the first bilateral meeting between Modi and President Xi Jinping in seven years. But the Indian PM's decision to skip BRICS plus virtual summit hosted by Brazil means that India still wants to hedge and maintain its partnership with the US without giving in to Trump's demands.

On the economic front, India will alleviate economic stress by signing trade agreements with other countries and boasting domestic consumption. New Delhi prefers American investment and technology, so its end goal will be to ensure that the commercial and tech relationship is back on track. India will likely continue with defense purchases from the US while reiterating its policy of diversification by purchasing from France, Russia, and Japan, in addition to indigenisation. Years of negotiations have taught foreign interlocutors that the way to convince India is never to coerce. As a civilisational State and a post-colonial country, any attempts to force India always backfire. Unlike most American allies, India views itself as an equal not a junior partner of the US. But the current US administration's public negotiating style will only make it tougher to resolve issues.

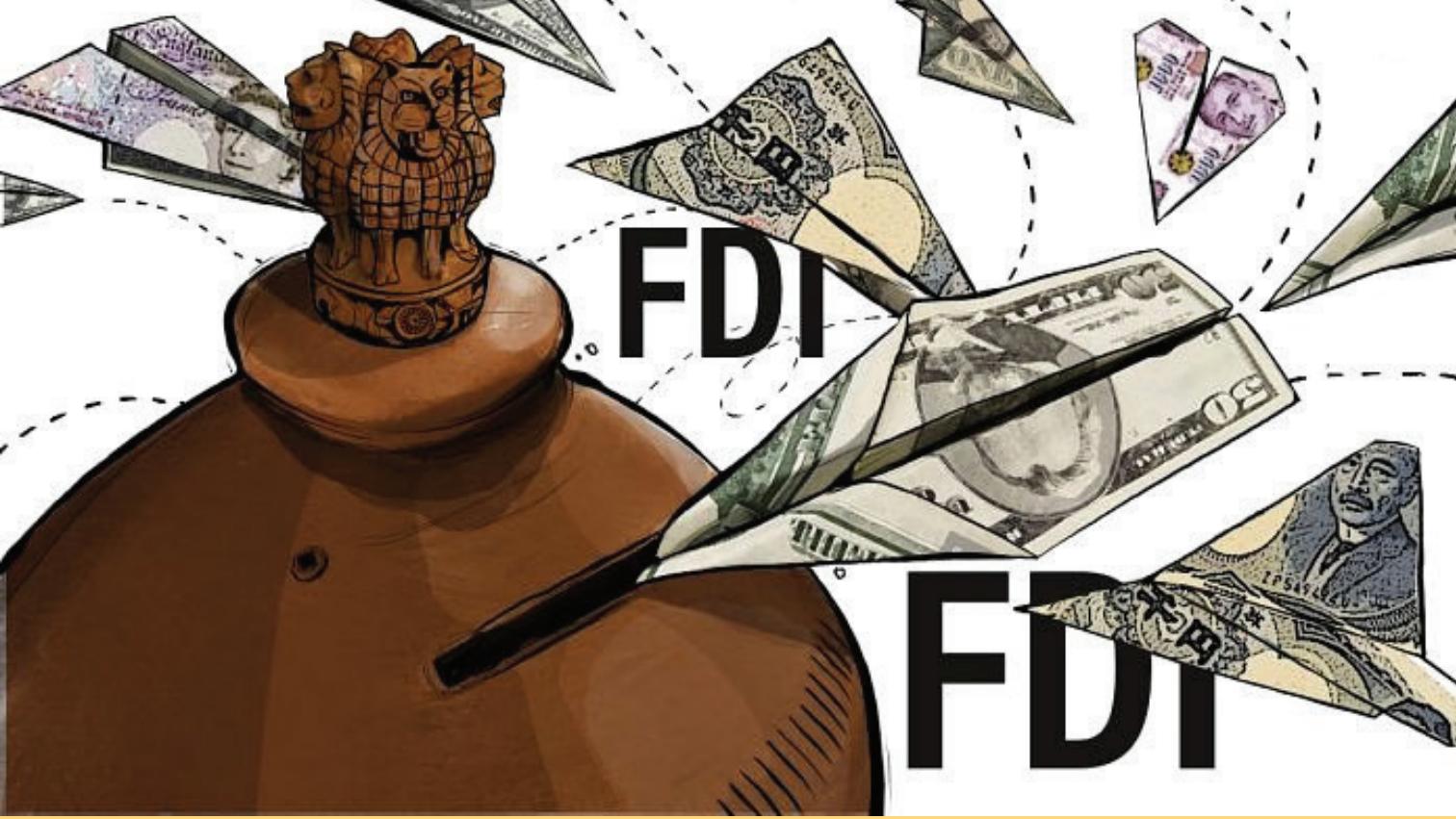
The core of the economic friction is a trade war initiated by the Trump administration. The bilateral trade between the two nations is valued at over \$190 billion annually, but talks to lower tariffs have collapsed. The US is pressuring India to open its vast agricultural and dairy sectors, which India has resisted. A significant escalation in this trade war was the US decision to impose additional tariffs on Indian imports. Initially, the US placed a 25% tariff on Indian goods, which was then announced to double to 50% from August 27. This move was explicitly described as a punitive measure against New Delhi for its continued purchases of Russian oil, which the US views as indirectly financing the war in Ukraine.

**Diplomatic Reset and Ongoing Negotiations:** Despite the aggressive tariff measures, the provided text indicates a potential "reset" in diplomatic relations. The US President, Donald Trump, stated that his administration is continuing negotiations to address trade barriers with India and that he intends to speak with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This shift in tone suggests a preference for a negotiated solution over sustained economic pressure. The upcoming visit of India's commerce minister to Washington is a key step in these ongoing efforts.

**The Role of the New Ambassadorial Nominee:** Sergio Gor, Trump's nominee for the position of US Ambassador to India and Special Envoy for South Asia, is described as a potential "bridge builder." His comments offer a glimpse into the US strategy. He downplayed the tariffs as a "little hiccup" and suggested that the US applies different standards to its friends, implying that India's actions are viewed in a different light than those of an adversary. Gor's stated priority is to "ensure that they're pulled in our direction, not away from us," highlighting the US goal of aligning India more closely with its foreign policy agenda, particularly on matters related to Russia.

**Broader Geopolitical Context:** The tensions with India over Russian oil are part of a broader US effort to exert pressure on Moscow. The text notes that Trump's patience with Russian President Vladimir Putin is "running out" and that the US is considering strong measures, including sanctions and tariffs, though these would require participation from European countries. This context explains why India's energy policy has become such a significant point of contention in its relationship with the US. In summary, the US-India relationship is in a state of flux. While trade disputes and the issue of Russian oil have created significant strain, there are clear signs of a diplomatic effort to de-escalate tensions and find a path forward. The personal rapport between President Trump and Prime Minister Modi, along with the appointment of a new ambassador with a mandate to improve ties, are factors that could contribute to a more stable and cooperative relationship.

**(Author, a JNU PhD in International Relations, is an editorial adviser at EW.)**



# India's Shaky FDI

## INFLows DOWN, OUTFLOWS UP



Shivaji Sarkar

Foreign direct investment (FDI) has long been considered a vital lifeline for India's growth story. It represents not just capital inflows but also a measure of global investor confidence in India's long-term prospects. That is why the news that India's net FDI inflows crashed 98 percent in May 2025 to a mere \$35 million—compared to \$2.1 billion in the same month last year—has set off alarm bells in economic and policy circles.

The drop was not a one-off statistical quirk. It was driven by a combination of declining gross inflows and surging repatriation of earlier investments. Gross FDI inflows in May fell 11 percent year-on-year to \$7.2 billion. At the same time, outflows in the form of repatriation and disinvestment soared 24 percent to \$5 billion. The arithmetic of shrinking inflows and expanding outflows meant that the net figure—the capital India can actually put to productive use—collapsed.

And yet, paradoxically, India's foreign exchange reserves remain healthy at \$ 702.57 billion, giving the impression that the overall external account is stable. The reality is more nuanced: reserves are strong, but the flow of fresh investment capital—the kind that builds industries, creates jobs, and upgrades technology—is weakening.

**Why the Collapse Matters:** The FDI has historically played a catalytic role in India's development. Post-1991 liberalization, inflows accelerated as multinational corporations tapped India's growing

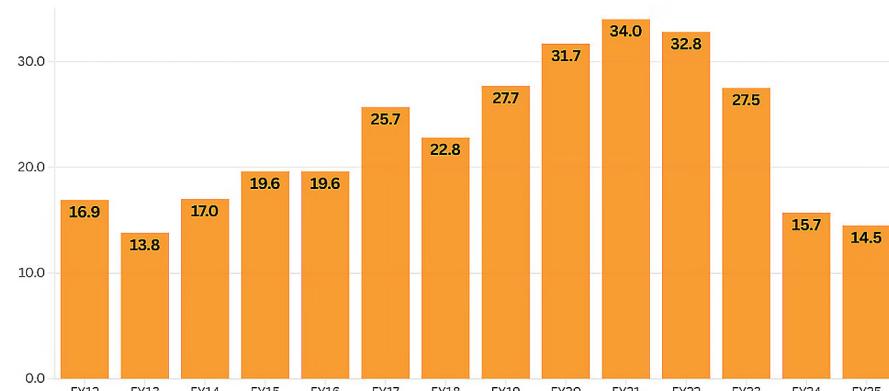
market. Over the years, inflows into automobiles, telecom, consumer goods, e-commerce, and IT services helped create an ecosystem that expanded employment and enhanced productivity.

A \$35 million net inflow—barely enough to fund a single midsize industrial park—underscores that foreign investors are hedging their bets. The most troubling element is the rise in repatriation. When foreign companies accelerate the pace of sending back profits or divesting equity, it signals that the Indian market is not offering adequate returns or that the policy climate is not as attractive as it once was.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said that Singapore, Mauritius, the UAE and the US together accounted for more than three-fourths of the total FDI inflows in May 2025. Manufacturing, financial and computer services were the top recipient sectors. On the other hand, top sectors for outward FDI included transport, storage and communication services, a bit of manufacturing, and financial, insurance and business services. Major destinations for outward FDI included Mauritius, the US and the UAE. lows.

## Net FDI has shrunk to the lowest in 12 years

Data pertains to the April-October period of each year, in \$ billion



Source: RBI • Note: Net FDI is the difference between gross inflows and repatriation/disinvestment.

## The Global Context

It is true that global headwinds are strong. The geopolitical churn from the continuing Russia–Ukraine war, tensions in West Asia and shifting US-China trade alignments has made capital flows volatile everywhere. Rising interest rates in the US have also pulled global capital toward safer US treasuries, leaving emerging markets to scramble for funds.

But blaming global conditions alone would be misleading. Other Asian economies have managed to attract steady inflows despite the turbulence. Vietnam, for instance, continues to secure record FDI commitments in electronics and supply-chain relocation. Mexico, riding the “nearshoring” trend of US companies diversifying away from China, has surged ahead as a manufacturing hub. India, in contrast, is still perceived as a complex market for bottlenecks, unpredictable taxation, regulatory hurdles, and land acquisition troubles remain persistent complaints from investors.

## Gross FDI inflows have largely stagnated while repatriation has shot up

Data is for April to October of each year, in \$ billion

■ Gross Inflows ■ Repatriation/Disinvestment



Source: RBI • Note: Negative values for repatriation/disinvestment is to denote money flowing out of the country.



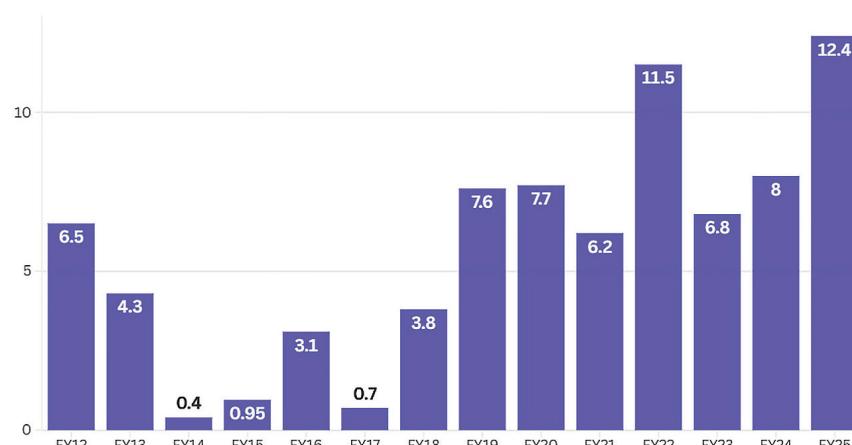
## Sectors in Focus

The sectoral composition of FDI also tells a story. Over the last decade, much of India's inflows have been concentrated in services, IT, e-commerce, and digital platforms. Investment in manufacturing, especially in high-tech sectors, has lagged.

Recent policy pushes—such as Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for electronics, pharmaceuticals, and green energy—were expected to shift the balance. But the jury is still out. While Apple and its suppliers have expanded assembly operations in India, these are still

### Foreign investments by Indian companies shot up in FY25

Data is for April-October of each year, in \$ billion



largely low-value-add activities, with core components imported from abroad. The real challenge is to attract investment that transfers technology, develops supply chains, and creates long-term industrial capacity.

The surge in repatriation also reflects the maturity of earlier investments in IT and telecom. As these ventures generate profits, foreign investors understandably remit dividends. But when fresh inflows do not match or exceed these outflows, the net picture deteriorates sharply.

#### The Silver Lining

On the surface, the foreign exchange reserves at nearly \$702.57 billion act as a buffer. However, reserves are a stock, not a flow. They reflect past surpluses and interventions, not the ongoing health of capital inflows. Drawing comfort from reserves alone is like admiring the water level in a tank while ignoring that the inflow pipe is drying up.

# Govt. Policy Response

The government is not oblivious to the challenge. It has been actively engaging with global corporations, highlighting India as a democratic, stable, and growing market. Incentives under the PLI scheme, infrastructure expansion under the Gati Shakti plan, and sectoral liberalization in defence and insurance are part of the pitch.

Yet investors remain cautious. Policy unpredictability or recent inconsistent Trumpian tariff policies haunts India. Moreover, domestic bottlenecks such as judicial delays, land disputes, and high logistics costs undermine the investor-friendly climate.

## The Balancing Act



A critical but balanced assessment requires recognizing both sides. On the one hand, India remains one of the world's fastest-growing large economies, with a huge domestic market, a young workforce, and robust macroeconomic stability.

On the other hand, the recent collapse in net FDI is a reminder that potential needs a boost. Systemic reforms will help India win over nimble competitors.

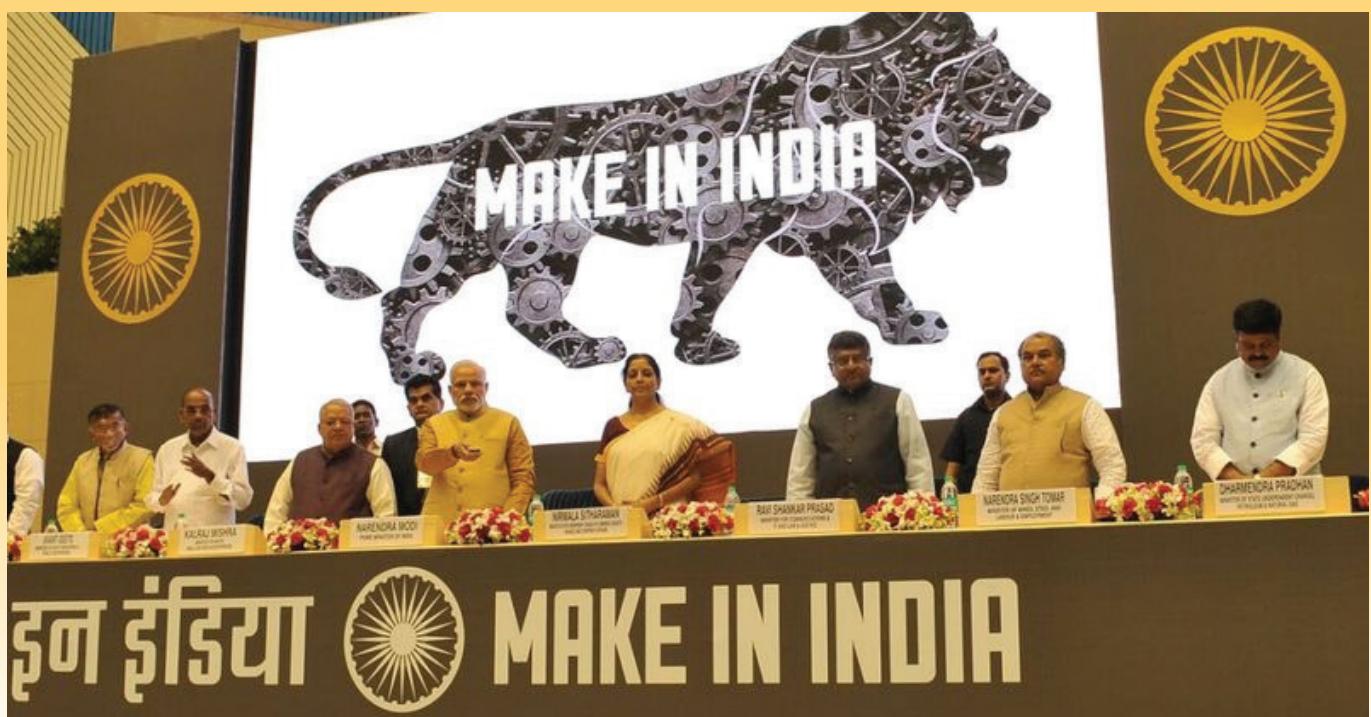
The government must focus on: Clear, long-term rules on taxation, trade, and e-commerce for policy stability. Take care of investor comfort and confidence. It would also have to create the manufacturing depth.

## A Wake-Up Call



India's 98 percent plunge in net FDI inflows in May 2025 is more than a statistical blip. It is a wake-up call that global capital is not automatically locked into India, despite its demographic and market advantages. The country cannot rely on domestic consumption and debt, missing the transformative impact of sustained FDI. For now, the robust forex reserves provide a cushion. But as the global investment race accelerates, India must ensure it does not sit out while others lap up opportunities. If the country can recalibrate its policies and truly unlock its potential, the current dip might yet be remembered as the turning point that spurred deeper reforms.

(Author, a well-recognised social and political commentator, has served as a Professor at the capital-based Indian Institute of Mass Communication.)





# CWC's Patna EBC Resolutions

## A Game Changer or an Electoral Gambit?



**Dr. K. Ranjan Sharma**

In the sweltering heat of Patna's Sadaqat Ashram on September 24, 2025, the Congress led Mahagathbandhan alliance announced a 10-point plan to uplift Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) at a Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting. EBCs make up 36% of Bihar's population, around 40% in Uttar Pradesh, and a large part of backward castes in states like Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and other Hindi heartland states.

The plan includes big promises: a law to protect EBCs from caste-based violence, similar to the SC/ST Act; giving 3 decimals of land in cities and 5 in villages to landless EBC families; increasing EBC quotas in local elections from 20% to 30%; reserving seats in private schools and jobs in private companies; setting aside 50% of government contracts up to ₹25 crore for EBCs, OBCs, SCs, and STs; and creating a special body to ensure these quotas are followed. Rahul Gandhi, with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, VIP's Mukesh Sahni, CPI(ML), CPI and CPM called it a "guarantee" to fight for EBC rights and protect democracy.

This plan targets Bihar's EBCs also known as Pachpania castes, a key voting group that has mostly supported

Nitish Kumar's JD(U) party, which introduced EBC quotas and scholarships in the past. With Bihar's elections coming in October-November 2025, the Mahagathbandhan wants to win over these voters, especially since Nitish's health issues and political flip-flops have supposedly weakened his hold. RJD even picked an EBC leader, Mangani Lal Mandal, as its state president to appeal to this group. The 2023 Bihar caste survey shows these artisan based EBCs are the largest group at 36%, compared to Yadavs (14%) or upper castes (15%), making them a game-changing vote bank. If this plan works in Bihar, it could spread to UP and other states, challenging the BJP's grip by focusing on caste issues.

**Nitish's Welfarism vs Mahagathbandhan's Radical-**

**ism:** The Mahagathbandhan's 10-point EBC plan differs significantly from Nitish Kumar's JD(U) approach to Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) in Bihar. Nitish, long an EBC champion, introduced a 20% quota in panchayats, EBC scholarships, liquor bans to curb social ills and other welfare schemes, relying on incremental administrative measures like student stipends and cycle programs and his personal appeal to consolidate EBC votes. Nonetheless, it prioritizes administrative delivery over transformative upheaval. Moreover, Nitish's health decline and NDA flip-flops in 2025 have dulled his edge, with critics calling his measures dated amid persistent EBC poverty and migration.

In contrast, the Mahagathbandhan's plan is bolder and unapologetically radical, aiming to structurally uplift EBCs beyond Nitish's welfarism. This structural overhaul aims to disrupt caste hierarchies, not just moderate them, targeting systemic issues like landlessness and violence. While Nitish's welfarism offers but limited mobility, Congress's ambitious framework, backed by RJD and other allies, targets systemic change, challenging JD(U)'s monopoly. This is a major shift, not just a twist, as it seeks to reshape caste politics and could redefine EBC loyalties in Bihar's 2025 elections and beyond, potentially influencing national politics. Although, Mahagathbandhan's bold vision risks legal and fiscal hurdles yet could redefine EBC empowerment, potentially shifting Bihar's 2025 polls and national caste politics if delivered properly.

**Congress's EBC Strategy: Appropriating Nitish's Base Amid His Decline:** Within Congress



circles, there's a clear strategic calculation viewing the Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs)—Nitish Kumar's long standing vote bank—as ripe for realignment, driven by his perceived political sunset. At 74, Nitish's health struggles, including frequent hospitalizations and visible frailty during 2025 rallies, have fueled whispers of retirement or a ceremonial role post-elections. Congress leaders like Mallikarjun Kharge have openly dubbed him "mentally retired" by BJP, a liability in the NDA whose flip-flops eroded credibility. Rahul Gandhi's barbs at the September 24 Patna CWC meeting hammered this: Nitish "did nothing for EBCs in 20 years, just used them as a vote bank," positioning the 10-point "Ati Pichhda Nyay Sankalp"

## Rahul Gandhi's EBC Initiatives: Timeline, Participants and EBC Voices

Rahul Gandhi's push for the Mahagathbandhan's 10-point "Ati Pichhda Nyay Sankalp Patra" for EBCs in Bihar began gaining momentum in early 2025, though groundwork traces back to late 2024 after the Lok Sabha elections. Gandhi has been vocal on caste justice since before 2024 polls, but focused efforts in Bihar started around March 2025, aligning with Congress's revival strategy ahead of assembly elections.

The initiative kicked off with Gandhi's first Bihar visit in January 2025, followed by a second in April, where he joined the 'Palayan Roko, Naukri Do' padyatra in Begusarai, emphasizing EBC and Dalit concerns like migration and jobs. By March, internal Congress consultations intensified, including meetings with state leaders to map EBC issues based on the 2023 caste survey. In May, Gandhi addressed an EBC-focused event in Darbhanga, reviving socialist outreach to backward castes. June saw RJD's historic appointment of EBC leader Mangani Lal Mandal as state president, signaling alliance buy-in. July's Delhi "Partnership Justice Conference" featured Gandhi's apology to OBCs for past oversights, pledging caste census and sub-caste equity. August's 15-day Voter Adhikar Yatra (August 17–September 1) covered districts, gathering grievances on vote theft and reservations. On September 23, INDIA bloc leaders met at Tejashwi Yadav's residence to finalize the agenda, leading to the September 24 launch at Patna's CWC meeting.

Key participants included Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, Tejashwi Yadav (RJD), Mukesh Sahani (VIP), and Left leaders like Dipankar Bhattacharya. Bihar Congress chief Rajesh Ram and in-charge Krishna Allavaru coordinated logistics. The bloc pledged 65% reservations post-consultations, drawing from Tamil Nadu's model.

EBC leaders and common representatives played a pivotal crucial role, ensuring grassroots authenticity. Rahul stressed, "This is not my vision, nor Congress's—it's the EBCs' own." Consultations involved EBC women, students, and leaders like Mandal (Dhanuk caste, ex-JD(U) MP), Sudama Prasad, and local booth-level agents from all parties. Over 1.6 lakh booth agents helped draft via Bihar SIR 2025, verifying lists with signatures. Field yatras and symposia in Araria and Darbhanga incorporated direct inputs on atrocities, landlessness, and quotas, making the document a bottom-up "guarantee" rather than top-down policy. This inclusivity aims to shift EBC loyalties from Nitish Kumar's JD(U), positioning the bloc as true champions.



as the antidote. This isn't opportunistic suspicion alone; it's rooted in electoral math. EBCs, 36% of Bihar's population swung decisively for Nitish in 2010 (45-50% for JD(U)-BJP) but fragmented since—backing Mahagathbandhan in 2015 (55%), NDA in 2020. With Nitish's grip waning—his schemes like EBC scholarships welfarism now seen as stale amid unemployment and migration—the INDIA bloc's promises (EBC Atrocities Act, land allotments, private quotas) aim to lock in this "swing factor" before his exit creates a vacuum.

Sources in the Grand Alliance confirm it's a "carefully strategised move" to ease EBC fears of RJD dominance, blending Rahul's social justice yatras with Tejashwi's youth appeal. Congress's play extends nationally: success in Bihar's October-November 2025 polls could export this EBC template to UP (40% EBCs), fracturing BJP's OBC monolith ahead of 2027. By calling Nitish Kumar's latest NDA efforts "desperate," Congress hopes to win over his supporters, using a caste census to challenge PM Modi's majority politics. There are risks—EBCs might not stay loyal, and the BJP is hitting back by calling it an "appeasement"—but with Nitish losing ground, it's a good time to try. If it works, it's a big win; if not, it's another opposition mistake.

However, political narratives often persist beyond a single election defeat. Rahul Gandhi emphasized the caste census during the Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan elections but saw no significant success. Undeterred, he continued to champion the issue, ultimately pressuring the BJP to agree to a caste census. Similarly, the BJP's push for the Babri Masjid demolition began in 1992 but only came to fruition after decades. V.P. Singh's Mandal Commission strategy led to electoral loss, yet the Mandal issue remained a potent force. Such ideas endure, reshaping politics over time despite initial setbacks.

The EBC plan sounds bold, but can it really work this election? The proposed EBC Atrocities Act could help

stop caste violence, which is a big issue in Bihar, where EBCs often face attacks from stronger groups like Yadavs or upper castes. Land promises are also crucial since most EBCs are poor farmers or tenants. Reserving private-sector jobs and contracts could lift EBCs economically, much like the 1990s Mandal movement that created OBC parties like RJD and SP. In Bihar's tight elections, where small vote shifts matter in 243 seats, winning EBC support could help Mahagathbandhan win 80-100 seats with high EBC populations. If successful, this could push Congress's caste census idea nationally, shaking up politics in UP's 2027 elections or beyond, forcing BJP to rethink its strategy.

**Nationwide Target for Congress:** The Mahagathbandhan's 10-point EBC plan, unveiled in CWC, Bihar in September 2025, could significantly influence Congress's national political standing while carrying both opportunities and risks. Targeting Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs), who form a substantial portion of backward castes in states like Uttar Pradesh (40%), Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh etc. the plan's focus on an EBC Atrocities Act, land distribution, private-sector quotas, and contract reservations aligns with Congress's broader caste census push post its 2024 Lok Sabha setbacks. If successful in Bihar's 2025 elections, it could galvanize EBC voters, weakening BJP's Hindi heartland dominance by fragmenting its OBC coalition, particularly where EBCs resent perceived Yadav favoritism. This could bolster Congress's social justice credentials, positioning it as a champion of marginalized sub-castes ahead of UP's 2027 polls and the 2029 Lok Sabha elections, potentially reviving its relevance in coalition politics.

**Yogi's Ban on Caste Protests vs. Mahagathbandhan's EBC Push: A Clash of Visions:** Yogi Adityanath's recent move in Uttar Pradesh to ban caste-based rallies and remove caste mentions from police records feels like a smart but selective crackdown. Citing an old Allahabad High Court order from September 16, 2025, that called



caste glorification "anti-national," the UP government prohibited political events promoting caste, vehicle stickers, and signboards. It's framed as protecting national unity, but opposition parties like SP and Congress cry hypocrisy—BJP has hosted caste events before. This could quiet EBC or OBC protests in UP, where caste politics boils ahead of 2027 polls, helping BJP consolidate upper-caste votes while painting rivals as divisive.

In contrast, Rahul Gandhi-led Mahagathbandhan's 10-point EBC plan in Bihar is a direct counterpunch. Launched on September 24, 2025—targeting Bihar's 36% EBC population. It's not just local; Rahul eyes national rollout via caste census, challenging BJP's narrative in UP and beyond. Yogi's ban is a defensive tactic to muzzle caste mobilization that threatens BJP's hold, but it risks alienating backward voters by stifling real grievances. The EBC initiative is bolder, pushing systemic justice over suppression, and could spark a nationwide shift if Bihar votes it in during 2025 elections. Together, they highlight India's divide: BJP's "unity above caste" vs. opposition's "justice through caste." The former maintains the status quo; the latter could redefine equity. Success for Mahagathbandhan might force BJP to adapt, proving talk of a casteless society rings hollow without action.

**EBC Plan's Feasibility:** However, the plan's national rollout faces hurdles. Legal challenges to private-sector quotas, fiscal strains for land reforms, and media suppression by pro-BJP outlets could limit its visibility and impact. Internal Mahagathbandhan rifts, especially with RJD, risk diluting execution, while BJP's "appeasement" narrative could alienate upper castes. Failure to deliver may deepen voter cynicism, damaging Congress's credibility. Yet, if executed, this bold caste-based strategy could reshape India's political landscape, making Congress a pivotal player in caste-driven federalism. But there are big challenges. The BJP calls this plan a "vote-grabbing trick" and points out Congress ignored EBCs for decades. Making private-

sector quotas legal is tough and could be struck down by courts, as seen with Bihar's 65% quota attempt. Giving land to millions needs money and planning, and land mafias could block it. Past promises by leaders like Lalu Yadav failed, making voters doubt new ones. Plus, fights within Mahagathbandhan—between Congress and RJD—could weaken their ability to deliver.

Another hurdle is media coverage. Mainstream outlets, often called "Godi media" by Congress and others for leaning toward BJP, barely covered this plan. Papers like The Times of India gave it little space, while Bihar's local dailies like Prabhat Khabar highlighted it. National papers like The Hindu mentioned it briefly, but TV channels like Republic and Aaj Tak focused on BJP's attacks. Studies show opposition news gets just 10% airtime compared to BJP's 70%, so many EBC voters, especially in rural areas with low internet access, might not even hear about it.

Ultimately, these resolutions are superb on game-changer status. In Bihar, they could fracture NDA's arithmetic, propelling Mahagathbandhan to power and validating caste-based federalism amid Modi's welfarism. Nationally, a win might ignite EBC federations, pressuring BJP to recalibrate (as post-Mandal) and forcing a 2029 Lok Sabha realignment toward sub-caste roughness.

But without media amplification and credible follow-through, they risk becoming another electoral mirage, perpetuating mistrust in a state where promises outpace progress. In short, this EBC plan could change Bihar's politics by winning over a huge voter group, possibly helping Mahagathbandhan win the state and inspiring similar moves elsewhere. But it needs strong follow-through, money, and media attention to succeed. Without these, it might just be another empty promise, leaving EBCs disappointed again. The plan has potential, but it's a tough road ahead.

**(Author, a JNU PhD, is an editorial adviser to EW. Views are personal.)**





# From Punjab to Tamil Nadu

## Women Freedom Fighters Ignited the Sentiments of Freedom at the Grassroots



**Vijaya Devshree**

During a memorial function of Ms. Saloni Narang, a celebrated author of her times, at the Chinmaya Mission building in New

Delhi, mourners also remembered her mother Manmohini Sehgal and grandmother Lado Zutshi Sehgal, who played a pioneering role in India's struggle for Independence.



Women from Punjab has been on the forefront of Indian freedom struggle, leading movements, and making immense sacrifices. Here are some of the notable women leaders from Punjab who contributed to the fight for independence:

**Gulab Kaur of the Ghadar Movement:** Gulab Kaur was born in Bakshiwala village in

the Sangrur district of Punjab. She left her husband and a plan to migrate to America to join the Ghadar Party. Positing as a journalist, she distributed revolutionary literature and arms, and gave inspiring speeches to encourage people to join the cause. She was imprisoned for two years in Lahore's Shahi Qila, where she was subjected to torture.



**Aruna Asaf Ali: The "Grand Old Lady" of Revolutionary Punjab:** Aruna Asaf Ali was a revolutionary from Punjab. She is best known for hoisting the Indian National Flag at the Gowalia Tank maidan in Bombay during the Quit India Movement in 1942. Her act of defiance and leadership earned her the title of "Heroine of the 1942 movement."

**Sucheta Kripalani:** Born in Punjab, Sucheta Kripalani was a freedom fighter and politician. She founded the All India Mahila Congress in 1940 and was a key leader in the Quit India Movement. She was arrested for her active participation in the movement and later became India's first female Chief Minister, serving as the head of Uttar Pradesh.





**Mata Harbans Kaur:** Regarded as the first woman freedom fighter from the Sri Muktsar Sahib district, Mata Harbans Kaur was associated with the Women's Wing of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army). She was deeply inspired by Netaji's call for freedom and joined the women's camp in Rangoon.

**Manmohini Sahgal and her Mother Lado Rani Zutshi:** Both of them influential women from Punjab who played a significant role in India's freedom struggle. Their contributions are a testament to the fact that the fight for independence was a family affair for many, with women leading from the front alongside their male relatives.

Lado Rani Zutshi was a leading revolutionary from Punjab who was active in the freedom movement from as early as 1919. A dedicated member of the Indian National Congress, she was known for her leadership and unwavering commitment to the cause. She was appointed as the 8th director of the War Council, demonstrating her prominence and influence within the movement.

She and her daughters, including Manmohini, led the movement in Lahore, actively participating in and organizing protests, especially during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Lado Zutshi's home was a hub of political activity, and she instilled a strong sense of nationalism in her children, who all went on to become active participants in the freedom struggle.

**Manmohini Zutshi Sahgal:** Manmohini Zutshi Sahgal was a prominent student leader and freedom fighter from a privileged family with close ties to the Nehru-Gandhi family. Born in Allahabad, she was the daughter of Lado Rani Zutshi and a cousin of



Jawaharlal Nehru.

Following her mother's lead, Manmohini became deeply involved in the anti-British campaign. She was an active participant in the Satyagraha movement and was imprisoned three times for her involvement in protests. Her autobiography, "An Indian Freedom Fighter Recalls

Her Life", provides a valuable firsthand account of her experiences in the freedom struggle, including her time in prison and her post-independence work in women's organizations and politics. She became a significant activist not only for India's independence but also for the empowerment of Indian women.



**Rajkumari Amrit Kaur:** Amrit Kaur was a highly influential Indian freedom fighter, social reformer, and politician who played a pivotal role both in the independence movement and in shaping post-colonial India. She is celebrated as the first woman to hold a Cabinet rank in independent India. In return from her education in England, she was drawn to Gandhi's philosophy and served

as his secretary for 16 years, living an austere life at his ashram in Sevagram. She was arrested by the British authorities for her involvement in the Dandi March (Salt Satyagraha) in 1930 and the Quit India Movement in 1942. Her most lasting legacy comes from her decade-long tenure (1947–1957) as India's first Union Health Minister in Nehru's cabinet.

**Women Fighters from Other Parts:** Although women leaders from Punjab were in the forefront of the struggle, the Indian freedom struggle saw immense contributions from women across all states, and their stories are a powerful testament to their courage and patriotism. Here are some of the notable women freedom fighters from various parts of India.



**Western India, Usha Mehta (Gujarat):** She is best known for organizing "Congress Radio," an underground radio station during the Quit India Movement. The station broadcasted messages to mobilize the public and evade British censorship.

**Madam Bhikaji Cama (Maharashtra):** She was a pioneering figure in the

freedom struggle, who spent much of her life promoting the cause of India's independence abroad. In 1907, she unfurled the first Indian flag on an international platform at the International Socialist Conference in Germany.



**Eastern India, Matangini Hazra (Bengal):** A veteran of the Quit India Movement, she was shot by police while leading a procession of around 6,000 volunteers. Even with a fatal injury, she held the Indian flag aloft and continued to chant "Vande Mataram."

**Pritilata Waddeddar (Bengal):** A revolutionary nationalist, she was a key member of a revolutionary group led by Surya Sen. She led a raid on a European club in Chittagong, and to avoid capture, she committed suicide with a dose of cyanide.

**Rani Gaidinliu (Manipur, Nagaland):** A spiritual and political leader from the Naga community, she led a revolt against British rule in the 1930s. Imprisoned at a young age, she spent 14 years in jail and was later hailed



as "Rani of the Nagas" by Jawaharlal Nehru.

**Kanaklata Barua (Assam):** A young martyr, she was a part of the "Mrityu Bahini" (death squad) during the Quit India Movement. At just 17 years old, she was shot and killed while leading a procession carrying the Indian flag toward a police station.

**Southern India:** Rani Velu Nachiyar (Sivaganga, Tamil Nadu) She was one of the earliest Indian rulers to wage a war against the British East India Company. She reigned as queen of the Sivaganga kingdom from 1780 to 1790 and is revered as a national hero in Tamil Nadu.

**Kittur Chennamma (Karnataka):** The queen of the princely state of Kittur, she led an armed rebellion against the British East India Company in 1824 in defiance of the Doctrine of Lapse. Her valiant resistance made her an icon of anti-colonial resistance.

**Sarojini Naidu (Andhra Pradesh):** She was one of the most prominent figures in India's history—a brilliant poet, a fierce freedom fighter, and a pioneering woman political leader. She is widely known by the honorific "The Nightingale of India" (Bharat Kokila), a title given to her by Mahatma Gandhi for the lyrical quality of her poetry. Naidu was instrumental in breaking the glass ceiling for women in Indian politics and public life. She was elected the President of the Indian National Congress in 1925 (following Annie Besant, who was of Irish descent), making her the first Indian woman to hold that post. After India gained independence in 1947, she was appointed the first woman Governor of an Indian state (the United Provinces, now Uttar Pradesh), holding the office until her death in 1949.



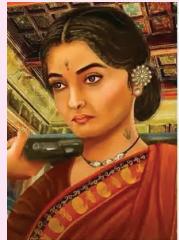
**Durgabai Deshmukh (Andhra Pradesh):** A prominent freedom fighter and social reformer, she was a key



member of the Constituent Assembly of India. She was an active participant in Mahatma Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha and was imprisoned for her role in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

**Uttar Pradesh and Bihar:** Many brave women from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar fought valiantly in the Indian freedom struggle, particularly during the 1857 Rebellion. Their leadership and sacrifices were crucial in challenging British rule.

### Women Freedom Fighters from Uttar Pradesh



**Jhalkari Bai:** A soldier in Rani Lakshmibai's army, she was a commander in the women's battalion. She was known to be a look-alike of the queen, and on several occasions, she disguised herself as Rani Lakshmibai to deceive the British and allow the queen to escape.

**Uda Devi Pasi:** A Dalit freedom fighter, she was a key figure in the 1857 revolt in Lucknow. She formed a women's battalion and played a crucial role in the Battle of Sikandar Bagh. Armed with a rifle, she reportedly climbed a tree and shot down several British soldiers before being killed.

**Sucheta Kripalani:** Born in Ambala (now in Haryana), she was a prominent Gandhian and a key leader in the Quit India Movement. She later became the first woman Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh.

**Kamala Nehru:** Wife of Jawaharlal Nehru, she was an active participant in the freedom struggle, particularly in the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement. She was often seen leading processions and picketing shops.



### Women Freedom Fighters from Bihar



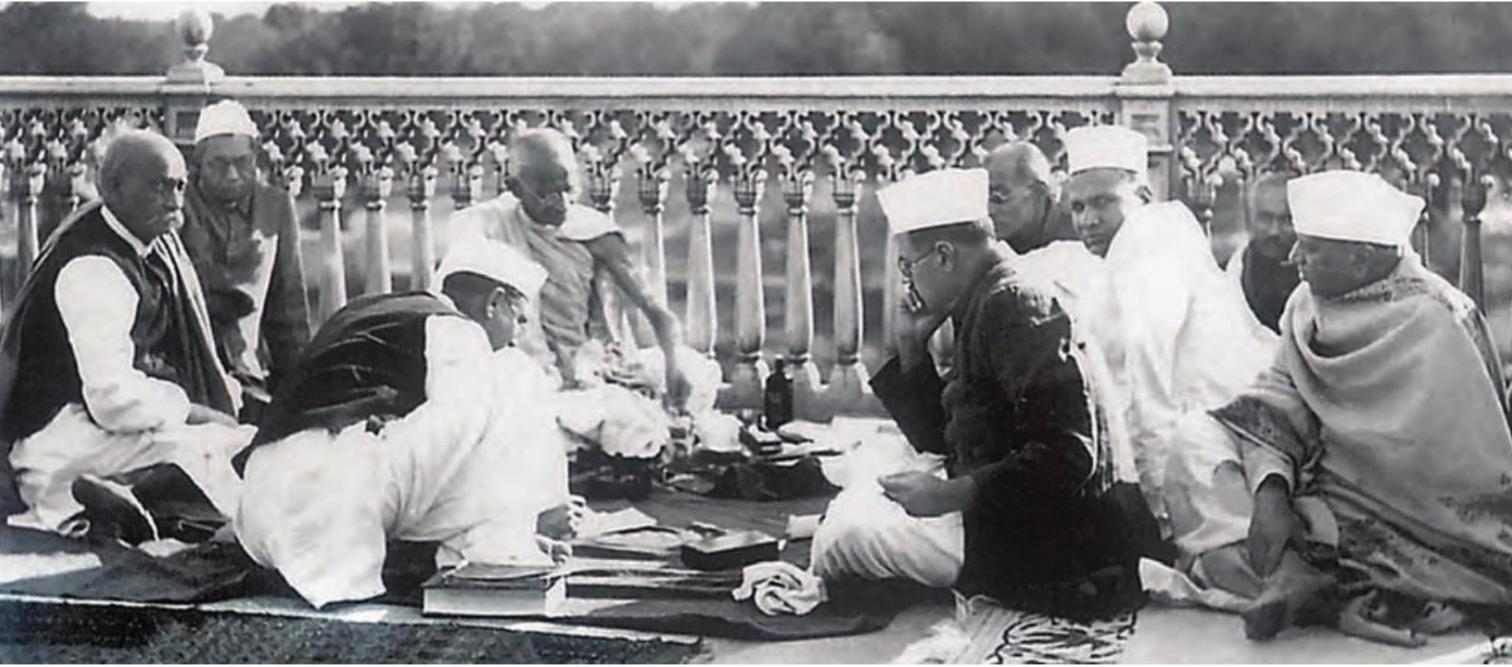
**Tara Rani Srivastava:** A revolutionary from Saran, Bihar, she and her husband, Phulendu Babu, led a procession to hoist the national flag at the Siwan police station. When her husband was shot, she bandaged his wounds and continued to march forward with the flag.

**Prabhavati Devi:** Wife of socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan, she was an active freedom fighter who was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. She founded the Mahila Charkha Samiti in Patna to encourage women to join the spinning wheel movement. She was arrested multiple times for her involvement in the Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements.

**Anees Fatima:** Also known as Lady Imam, she was a freedom fighter from Patna. She organized protests against liquor shops during the Non-Cooperation Movement and later led a procession of thousands of women during the Civil Disobedience Movement.

**Vindhyanavasini Devi:** After meeting with Mahatma Gandhi, she dedicated herself to social work and the freedom struggle. She was a permanent member of the Indian National Congress and was arrested for her participation in the Salt Satyagraha in 1930. This video highlights some of the many revolutionary women who fought for India's independence from Bihar! These are just a few examples that illustrate women freedom fighter indispensable contributions. The story of the Indian freedom struggle is undeniably incomplete without acknowledging the vital role of women. They weren't just supporters; they were frontline activists, political leaders, underground revolutionaries, and social reformers who shaped the movement's entire character.

(Author, formerly Director of IDP3, is a Manager and Trustee of SKD Educational Foundation.)



# Mahatma's Vision of Syncretic Unity

## A Timeless Antidote to Divisive Nationalism



Hasnain Naqvi

In an era of rising polarization, Mahatma Gandhi's inclusive Hinduism offers a blueprint for fostering harmony and countering exclusionary ideologies in India's diverse democracy.

Mahatma Gandhi's spiritual and ethical interpretation of Hinduism stood as a powerful force during India's struggle for independence, advocating unity and mutual respect across faiths. His philosophy, rooted in non-violence, truth, and the principle of equal respect for all religions, challenged the divisive nationalism that sought to define India through a singular cultural identity.

As India navigates contemporary tensions fueled by religious and political polarization, Gandhi's vision remains a compelling guide for fostering inclusivity and preserving the nation's pluralistic ethos.

This article explores Gandhi's approach to religion, his engagement with diverse faiths, and its relevance in countering exclusionary ideologies today.

**A Universal Hinduism: The Roots of Inclusion:** Gandhi's Hinduism was not a rigid doctrine but a dynamic pursuit of truth, which he equated with divinity itself. Drawing from ancient texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas, he embraced their ethical teachings while rejecting elements that clashed with reason or morality. Influenced by reformers like Tulsidas, who emphasized compassion, Gandhi crafted a Hinduism that was inherently open, valuing mercy and universal brotherhood

over dogma. His concept of Sarva Dharma Sambhav—equal respect for all religions—became a cornerstone of his philosophy, advocating that all faiths lead to the same divine truth.

This inclusive worldview was deeply personal, shaped by Gandhi's spiritual experiments detailed in *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. His Eleven Vows, which included non-violence, tolerance, and respect for all religions, reflected a commitment to multiculturalism in India's diverse society. For Gandhi, Hinduism was not exclusive to Hindus but a moral framework that could unite all Indians, regardless of faith. He saw religion as inseparable from public life, yet insisted it serve ethical ends, not political power, setting his approach apart from ideologies that sought to weaponize faith for dominance.

**Confronting Exclusionary Nationalism:** During India's freedom struggle, Gandhi faced a rising tide of communal ideologies that sought to define the nation through a narrow Hindu identity. These movements, advocating for a "Hindu Rashtra," promoted cultural and political dominance of Hindus, often marginalizing minorities like Muslims and Christians. Their vision, rooted in exclusion and occasionally inspired by authoritarian

models, stood in stark contrast to Gandhi's pluralism. Leaders of this ideology criticized Gandhi's secularism as appeasement, arguing it undermined Hindu interests, particularly amid communal tensions and calls for partition.

Gandhi's response was both philosophical and practical. He integrated Hindu-Muslim unity into his campaigns, such as the Khilafat Movement (1919-1924), which allied Hindus and Muslims against British rule, directly challenging narratives of inherent conflict between communities.

In the 1940s, as communal violence surged, Gandhi undertook fasts unto death, such as in Calcutta in 1947, to quell riots and appeal to shared humanity. He opposed partition, seeing it as a triumph of divisive forces, and consistently warned that exclusionary nationalism would fracture India's social fabric.

His clashes with proponents of this ideology were personal and intense. In 1947, Gandhi urged leaders of exclusionary groups to renounce communalism, emphasizing that true Hinduism rejected hatred and violence. His assassination in 1948 by a proponent of this ideology underscored the depth of this divide, yet it also galvanized public support for his vision of unity. The subsequent ban on certain organizations and the decline of communal groups in the immediate post-independence years reflected the enduring power of Gandhi's message.

#### **Strategies for Unity: Gandhi's Practical Legacy**

Gandhi's approach to countering divisive nationalism was multifaceted, blending moral persuasion with collective action. His non-violent campaigns, such as the Non-Cooperation Movement (1919-1922) and the Salt March (1930), mobilized diverse communities under the banner of self-rule (Swaraj), framing independence as a spiritual quest that required unity across faiths.

By emphasizing India's internal moral reform over mere opposition to colonial rule, Gandhi shifted the narrative from division to collective responsibility.

He also championed social reforms within Hinduism, fiercely opposing untouchability and discrimination, but rejected conversion for social gain, advocating for change from within. His fasts and public appeals during communal riots demonstrated a willingness to risk his life for harmony, earning him moral authority that resonated across communities. Post-independence, Gandhi's influence shaped India's secular Constitution, which enshrined equal respect for all religions, a direct rebuke to exclusionary ideologies.

**Relevance in Modern India:** In today's India, where religious polarization and cultural nationalism are resurgent, Gandhi's philosophy offers a timely antidote. His emphasis on truth, non-violence, and interfaith respect challenges narratives that prioritize one community over others.

Critics of divisive ideologies continue to draw on Gandhi's distinction between Hinduism's inclusive ethos and the aggression of exclusionary nationalism.

## **A Blueprint for a Pluralistic Future**

Gandhi's assassination in 1948 was a tragic attempt to silence his vision, but it instead amplified his message of unity. His inclusive Hinduism, grounded in tolerance and universal truth, remains a powerful counterforce to ideologies that seek to divide. In a nation as diverse as India, where multiple faiths, languages, and cultures coexist, Gandhi's legacy underscores the importance of building bridges rather than walls.

To preserve India's pluralistic democracy, policymakers, civil society, and citizens must draw on Gandhi's principles: fostering interfaith dialogue, ensuring equitable governance, and celebrating shared cultural heritage.

Educational initiatives that highlight India's syncretic traditions—such as the coexistence of Hindu, Muslim, and Christian practices in festivals and communities—can counter divisive narratives. Impartial enforcement of laws and proactive measures to prevent communal strife are equally critical.

India stands at a crossroads, much as it did during Gandhi's time. His vision of a nation united by ethical values and mutual respect offers a path forward. By embracing Sarva Dharma Sambhav and rejecting exclusionary nationalism, India can honor Gandhi's legacy and reaffirm its commitment to a democracy where every faith and community has a place. In a world increasingly fractured by division, Gandhi's message of unity remains not just relevant but essential for India's future as a beacon of pluralism.

Yet, attempts to co-opt Gandhi's legacy by such groups—selectively adopting his rhetoric while ignoring his pluralism—highlight the ongoing tension between these visions.

Gandhi's approach reminds us that true nationalism lies in embracing diversity, not enforcing uniformity. His call for universal brotherhood, rooted in spiritual convergence rather than religious supremacy, resonates in a world grappling with identity-based conflicts. By promoting dialogue, ethical governance, and mutual respect, Gandhi's Hinduism provides a framework for navigating India's contemporary challenges, from communal tensions to political polarization.

**(Hasnain Naqvi, a former member of the history faculty at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, is a known commentator on culture, society and pluralism in S-Asia.)**



# The Gandhian Message of Vijayadashami



**Dr. Niraj Krishna**

October 2025 presents a remarkable and unexpected coincidence. This year, Vijayadashami and Gandhi Jayanti are celebrated on the same day. This is more than a calendar quirk; it is the convergence of two powerful symbols of Indian consciousness: the blazing effigies of Ravana, representing the end of injustice and arrogance, and the garlands laid at the feet of Mahatma Gandhi's statue, evoking the call to nonviolence, truth, and compassion. One day, two messages: the end of violence and the start of nonviolence.

This coincidence prompts us to consider: may the convergence of these two symbols provide a new orientation for our times?

Dussehra is one of India's most ancient and popular celebrations. It recalls the event in the Ramayana when Shri Ram slew Ravana, establishing the victory of dharma over adharma. The day represents the fortitude to confront injustice. The fires of Dussehrat tell us that no matter how great arrogance seems, it will inevitably fall.

On the other hand, October 2 is the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi taught us that struggles should not be waged with swords or bows, but with satya-

graha and nonviolence. He demonstrated that the greatest strength is the ability to shake an empire without using a sword. The fascinating similarity here is that Dussehra teaches us to fight Ravana on the outside, whereas Gandhi teaches us to conquer Ravana within. One provides us power in the opposite direction.

Our civilisation is currently facing this challenge. Many feel that strong means, including the use of force, are necessary to confront injustice. However, we also understand that violence fosters more violence. This is where Gandhi's message becomes important. He reminds us that fighting is necessary, but the methods we use are just as important as the goal.

Ram killed Ravana, but his goal was more than just winning the war; he sought to restore dharma. Gandhi, too, emancipated India through nonviolence, but his goal was more than just regime change; he wanted moral upliftment for society.

In the Ramayana, Ravana is more than simply a person; he is a symbol of injustice. His death is more than just Ram's personal victory; it is a social moment in which dharma is re-established in society. Dussehra commemorates this victory. When we burn Ravana's effigy, we are symbolically stating that we will not accept injustice. The festival instills in us the courage to fight.

But a fundamental question arises: are we merely burning Ravana's effigy, or also the Ravana within us? Ego, greed, envy, and violence are all manifestations of Ravana. If we continue to nourish these within while burning effigies outside, the festival's significance is unfulfilled. This is where Gandhi teaches us the way. His satyagraha tells us that the initial stage of every struggle

is self-purification. Gandhi once said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." If we oppose corruption while still engaging in minor acts of corruption, our struggle will be ineffective.

Dussehra is more than just a commemoration of a mythological event; it is a holiday that serves as a constant reminder to society that no matter how powerful injustice appears, it will eventually cease. It teaches us to not be fearful. Rama fled into exile, but he would not give up. Even when Sita was kidnapped, he did not surrender; instead, he rallied allies, formed an army, and waged a difficult war. This message continues to motivate us today: when we see injustice in society, we must not remain silent. If a farmer, a labourer, or a student's rights are violated, they must speak up.

But how we raise our voices is as important. Gandhi's life gives us this very lesson. He confronted colonial Britain with truth and nonviolence. The Champaran Satyagraha is one example of this. When indigo farmers were exploited, Gandhi did not incite them to violence. Instead, he organised them, stated their demands, and forced the British to back down via peaceful resistance.

This strategy is still useful today. Corruption, communalism, gender violence, and caste discrimination are today's Ravanas. We must resist them, but mankind must not perish in the process. Violence, hatred, and revenge-driven politics only breed new Ravanas. Gandhi's approach reminds us that the goal is not to destroy, but to transform the opponent.<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> Today's India is marked by severe social and political division. Hate campaigns on social media, yelling bouts during TV debates, and episodes of mob violence on the streets are all realities of our time. Anger and outrage alone will not address these problems.

Dussehra inspires us to fight injustice, whereas Gandhi Jayanti reminds us that victory must be gained through love, not hatred. We must fight, but the fight should not be limited to changing administrations; it should include transforming society. This message is equally significant in politics. Today, power fights are limited to winning elections. Bitterness, personal assaults, and divided politics are ripping our nation apart. Gandhi and Rama's meeting serves as a reminder that politics should be about more than just power. This theory applies to both society and our own lives. There are mini Ravanas in our relationships as well: ego, rage, and doubt. Dussehra instructs us to burn the Ravanas, but Gandhi teaches us to do so with compassion. Argue if you must, but don't end the relationship. Speak the truth, yet with respect.

When we burn Ravana's effigy on October 2 and lay flowers at Gandhi's statue the same day, they should not appear to be two distinct customs. They are two chapters from the same narrative. The first chapter provides us the courage to ascend, while the second guides us in the right route. Dussehra teaches us why we must fight; Gandhi Jayanti teaches us how to fight. Without combining both, our struggle will remain incomplete. Burning effigies of

Ravana will not change society, nor will merely garlanding Gandhi's picture bring transformation. We need both Rama's courage and Gandhi's compassion.

We must accept that it takes courage to burn the Ravana outside, but it takes even greater patience to defeat the Ravana within. External wars can be won with weapons, but inner wars can only be won with self-control. Violence may bring victory, but peace comes only through nonviolence. And that is the true confluence of this day — to be inspired by the symbol of violence to confront injustice and by the symbol of nonviolence to end it in a just and humane way. Today reminds us that burning the effigy of Ravana is easy, but true victory comes only when we also turn to ashes the anger, selfishness, and ego within us. Dussehra gives us strength, and Gandhi gives us direction. Together, they represent the perfect balance of power and peace.

The Ravana we burn on Dussehra is a symbol. The real Ravanahides within us—in our anger, selfishness, and hatred. Burning him is difficult because he is tied to our ego. Gandhi used to say that the hardest battle is the one we fight with ourselves—the battle of self-control.

Imagine if, on this day, we not only burn the effigy but also resolve to renounce even one of our inner flaws. If one person abandons anger, another envy, another greed—this festival would cease to be mere ritual and become true spiritual practice. Dussehra gives us the symbol of strength. It makes us active and reminds us that we must stand up against injustice. Gandhi Jayanti gives us the symbol of peace. It shows us the path of patience, compassion, and dialogue. Together, these two create balance in life. What we need today is to master this balance. Strength without peace turns into violence. Peace without strength turns into cowardice. The union of Vijayadashami and Gandhi Jayanti teaches us that we must neither drown in violence nor remain passive. We must become alert, courageous, and compassionate. When the effigy of Ravana is burnt and garlands are placed on Gandhi's statue, it is not just a coincidence of two rituals. It is a deep philosophical message—the confluence of violence and nonviolence. Struggle against injustice is necessary, but the path of struggle must remain just.

Today gives us a chance to reflect on what kind of warrior we want to become—one with the sword or one with Satyagraha. Perhaps we need to become both—brave like Rama and compassionate like Gandhi. That is the true victory festival—when we defeat both the outer Ravana and the inner one. Therefore, let this Vijayadashami not just be a celebration but a moment for introspection. Let us look within and ask—have we conquered the violence inside us? Do we carry justice and compassion together in our struggles? The union of Dussehra and Gandhi Jayanti reminds us that the true victory lies in balancing strength and peace. This is the real message of the day—the end of violence, the beginning of nonviolence.

**(Author, a Doctor of Laws, is senior columnist and commentator.)**



# When Devotion Turns into Noise



**Manoj K. Pathak**

Every year, India's festival calendar transforms the urban landscape into a tapestry of color, music, and community bonding. Yet, beneath the surface of this cultural vibrancy lies a quieter, more insidious problem—noise. In Delhi, the ongoing Navratri celebrations have once again exposed the uneasy relationship between faith and noise pollution. For four consecutive nights, the city has been engulfed in loud music blaring from boomboxes and speakers, echoing well past midnight. For many residents—particularly the elderly, children, and patients—the celebration has become less about devotion and more about enduring sleepless nights.

The situation is disturbingly reminiscent of the Kanwar Yatra period, when neighborhoods across North India are held hostage to processions that mistake noise for fervor. Both these occasions highlight a pressing question for modern India: why has religious expression become synonymous with decibels, and what price are citizens paying for this conflation?

Decades of research leave no room for doubt—noise pollution is not a benign inconvenience. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized noise as a significant environmental threat to health, second only to air pollution. While occasional loud sounds may startle or annoy, the sustained exposure to night-time noise—such as that experienced during festivals—has far more damaging consequences. Even when we are fast asleep, our bodies remain responsive to ambient sounds. The amygdala, a part of the brain that regulates emotions such as fear and anxiety, is particularly sensitive to sudden noise intrusions. Each burst of sound, whether from a loudspeaker or firecracker, prompts the release of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. While these hormones are vital in emergency situations, their chronic release wears down the body over time. Studies have consistently linked noise-induced sleep disturbance to a range of long-term health issues: cardiovascular problems, including hypertension, heart attacks, and strokes; metabolic disorders such as type 2 diabetes and obesity; mental health decline manifested as anxiety, irritability, and depression; and cognitive impairment in children that affects attention spans, learning, and memory. What

makes this especially concerning is that the harm is not limited to those with pre-existing conditions. Even healthy adults are at risk when subjected to repeated rest deficits.

Festivals in India are celebrated as moments of renewal, spirituality, and community solidarity. Navratri, in particular, is meant to honor the feminine divine, fostering devotion through dance, music, fasting, and collective prayer. Yet, somewhere along the way, the emphasis on spirituality has been replaced by spectacle. Boomboxes and DJs blasting popular songs until the early hours of the morning have become commonplace. Ironically, these practices not only disturb the peace of neighborhoods but also betray the essence of the festivals themselves. Hindu philosophy, with its deep emphasis on balance and harmony, hardly advocates for excess that causes distress to others. The contradiction is striking: while devotees chant prayers for health, prosperity, and peace, their methods of celebration often compromise the very health of their neighbors. The question must be asked—do gods truly demand noise to be appeased? Or is this a human misinterpretation, where collective enthusiasm has been allowed to override consideration and empathy?

India is not without noise control laws. The Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000, clearly prohibit the use of loudspeakers and public address systems between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., except in special cases with prior permission. The Supreme Court of India has also reinforced these restrictions, noting the fundamental right to sleep as

The worst affected by this unchecked noise are often those least capable of defending themselves. The elderly, already prone to insomnia and fragile health, suffer disproportionately from sleep deprivation, which exacerbates cardiovascular risks. Children, whose developing brains and bodies require consistent, quality sleep, find their learning capacity, emotional regulation, and immune response impaired. Patients recovering in hospitals or at home face even graver consequences, as recovery depends heavily on rest. When noise steals this away, it prolongs illness and increases suffering. For these groups, the issue is not about tolerance or cultural sensitivity—it is a matter of survival and dignity.

The challenge, therefore, is not to pit faith against science, but to find a middle ground where cultural traditions can thrive without compromising public health. Authorities must ensure that loudspeakers are shut down after 10 p.m., without exception. Religious organizers should be held accountable for violations. Communities themselves need to embrace quieter alternatives, such as devotional music, cultural performances, and collective prayer that uplift rather than agitate. Awareness campaigns can play a key role in educating the public about the hidden costs of noise pollution, fostering self-regulation and empathy. Technology too can assist, with decibel meters and AI-based monitoring systems helping track violations in dense urban areas. Resident Welfare Associations and local committees could mediate between devotees and residents, ensuring that celebrations retain their joy without crossing into intrusion.

At its core, this debate is not only about noise or health—it is about what kind of society India wishes to be. Do we measure devotion by the loudness of speakers, or by the depth of faith? Do we value community joy more than individual well-being, or can we redefine joy in a way that includes rather than excludes? Festivals are moments when society looks inward, reconnects with tradition, and projects its values outward. If these values include respect, empathy, and harmony, then surely celebrations must reflect the same. The gods, after all, are unlikely to find satisfaction in the suffering of innocents.

The cacophony of Navratri nights in Delhi is more than a nuisance; it is a public health hazard, a governance failure, and a cultural misstep. Science has made it abundantly clear that noise pollution is not harmless, and spirituality too offers no justification for causing distress to others. India stands at a crossroads where its rich cultural traditions must be harmonized with the demands of a modern, health-conscious society. Devotion need not be noisy to be sincere. By choosing restraint, empathy, and innovation, we can ensure that festivals truly uplift the community—spiritually, emotionally, and physically. As the city prepares for more nights of Navratri, perhaps it is time to ask ourselves a deeper question: do we want our gods to be celebrated through noise, or through the peace that allows every citizen—young or old, healthy or sick—to rest, heal, and live well?

**(Author, a journalist and commentator, is senior editorial adviser @EW.)**





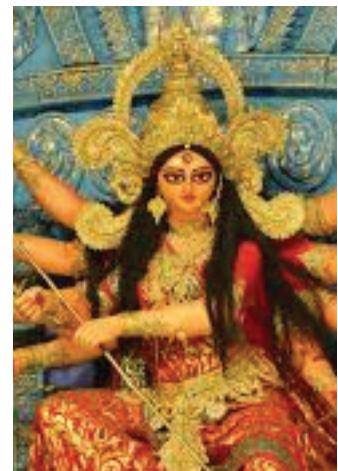
# Durga Puja Festival as a philosophical and spiritual heritage of India

**Akhilesh Mishra, Ambassador of India to Ireland**



Two defining features of Bharat, as an ancient civilizational State are the tradition of continuity in change sustained over several millennia and the unmatched capacity to harmonize infinite variety of plurality of faiths, languages, costume and cuisine, ideologies and socio-economic ways of life. The secret of this extraordinary resilience and inclusive national ethos lies in the tradition of attaching the highest priority to the quest of knowledge,

understanding of the true nature of self (Aham) and the physical world (Idam). The Vedic rishis and sages, after deep introspection and meditation on the reality, came to the conclusion that the ultimate knowledge is the knowledge of the own self (Atma), which in turn, was realised to be nothing but the supreme being (Parmatma or Parmeshwar or Parambhram). They also saw the physical world as nothing but creation and manifestation of the supreme being (though there are some difference of views and perceptions on the precise nature of the linkage between Parmatma and worldly existence (Jagat).



The Vedic literature often uses the imagery of a tree with roots above in the supreme divine and branches coming down (Urdhva Moolam Adhah Shaakham). This notion is used both for the Parmatma and its physical manifestation in form of the visible worldly reality. Since the Parmatma is the ultimate, immutable, eternal reality of Sat Chit Anand, this image of tree also becomes a symbol of the all-inclusive spirit of unifying everything from the smallest and subtlest to the grossest and largest of things as well as the unity in the infinitude of diversity of people, animals, birds, flora and fauna, and even inanimate matter, in the same way as the numerous branches may seem to someone with a narrow vision as an independent reality, but to the contemplative mind, all the branches, sub-branches, leaves, flowers and fruits are one with the same trunk, the same root and the same seed (the seed and the root are not visible to the normal eyes: Jaatenkure Kathamu hopulabhet beejam).

In ancient Bharatiya Gyan Parampara, entire knowledge is one, though there may be infinite

branches. The ultimate knowledge is Parambrahma, knowing which everything becomes known (Ya ekam jaanaati sa sarvam jaanaati, ya sarvam jaanaati sa ekam jaanaati). Similarly, there is a fundamental unity in numerous paths and ways to achieve the Parmatma, through the practice of the teachings of Upanishads, to the epics, the puranas and various vernacular bhakti and tantra literature to the rural and tribal traditions – all are parts of the same ancient eternal tree, with branches coming lower and lower to make the fruits accessible to everyone including children and the illiterate. Similarly, the concept of Dharma itself is all-inclusive, providing for the fulfilment of worldly as well as other worldly purusharthas (Yato abhyudaya niha shreyas siddhihi sa dharma) and the sustainer of the order not just in the human society but at the cosmic level.

A unique and distinctive feature of the Bharat's philosophical and spiritual identity is in being the only civilization in which the supreme being is not defined exclusively in terms of masculine gender, and has the tradition of female deities as well as



female rishis mentioned in the Vedas. Gifted with the Trikaldrishti, the Vedic rishis often spoke Parambrahma without a specified gender, sometimes referring it in neutral gender (Tat) and sometimes identifying all the genders with different forms of the same supreme being:

**Naiva stri na pumaanasi na chaivaayam napunsakah**

**Yat yat shariram aadatte ten ten sa yujyate**

Among the social representations of the multi-dimensional, multi-faceted, unified vision of Sanatan Dharma, the tradition of Durga Puja is one of the most important cultural heritages of the people of Bharat across the regional and socio-economic, ideological, political boundaries. The Durga Puja celebration embodies the inclusive and harmonizing ethos of Dharma, with the combination of worship of the female deity, artistic, literary and cultural creativity, social harmony and wide economic activity as well as fostering of the spirit of national unity through tourism and pilgrimage and galvanizing people against the colonial rule and love for the motherland, conceptualised as Bharat Maataa. Though celebrated under different names—Shardeeya Navraatri in the north, Garbaain Gujarat, Ramleelaa in Uttar Pradesh, and Durgaotsav in Bengal—the essential message of the festival remains the same: the triumph of dharma over adharma, of resilience over tyranny.

Bengal's Puja: From Royal Ritual to Civic Re-

naissance

Durga Puja in Bengal has come to acquire a special place in the national consciousness. Historically, it began in the 16th century, with King Kansa Narayan of Malda organizing the first public celebration. The city of Calcutta (now Kolkata), established by Job Charnock in 1690, became the epicenter of this transformation. As the city grew, so did the grandeur of Durga Puja. The Baroyari Puja—group worship by twelve families—emerged in the late 18th century, and by 1910, the first Barowari Durga Puja was celebrated, democratizing the festival and making it accessible to the common people.

Today, Bengal's Puja is truly a community festival. Pandals are not mere tents—they are temporary temples of art, where mythology meets modernity. Themes range from climate change and feminism to indigenous resistance and historical memory. Sculptors from Kumartuli craft idols with poetic precision, while musicians, poets, and designers collaborate to create a five-day cultural renaissance.

The broadcast of the musical tribute to Mahishasura Mardini on All India Radio, especially the iconic voice of Birendra Krishna Bhadra and the chanting of “Jago Tumi Jago” have become inspirational call to awaken the soul of the civilization, suppressed due to the centuries of foreign rule and subjugation.

**The contemporary message of Durga Puja:**  
The centuries old tradition of worship of Goddess Durga as Shakti in various forms is a living tribute

to the cultural and civilizational heritage of our country, the spirit of attaching the female gender not just equality but according her primacy and superiority over the male counterparts: sahastram hi pituhu maataa gauraven atirichyate. Woman is not to be treated as weak, as Mahatma Gandhi had boldly stated: To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior.

The Durga Puja conveys the message that even in physical power, the Shakti is superior to Shiva; and she is invoked to destroy the evil powers which are even beyond the devas to defeat. It is Shakti whose energy empowers all divine powers:

**Brahmaa jagat srijati paalayati indireshah shambhuh vinaashayati devi tav prabhaavaih:** In the contemporary times, Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi has sought to bring self pride in the national spiritual, civilizational and cultural heritage an important component of the nation building agenda. In this context, empowerment of women and according them the dignity and respect due to them has been the central theme of the Government's socio-economic development policy. Women and girls are not just seen as the beneficiaries of the welfare

programs but provided the opportunity to serve as the agents of change and spearhead "women-led development".

On the international front, Indian women have been pioneers in the global norm-setting on gender issues. It was the Indian delegate to the UN Commission on Human Rights, Hansa Jeevaraj Mehta who fought vigorously for ensuring a gender-sensitive language in the UN declaration. But for her efforts, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights might have been the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man. Today, Indian women are participating, displaying tremendous professional excellence in all walks of life, including those areas which were stereo-typically male-dominated such as participation in challenging international peace keeping missions abroad, serving in Indian armed forces, playing leading role in science and technology including front line leadership positions in space research.

**Yaa devi sarva bhooteshu shaktiroopen sanstitha**

**Namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namah.**

**(Author of this piece is a distinguished diplomat, currently serving as India's ambassador to Ireland.)**





# Reviving India's Nutritional Legacy A Dialogue Between Tradition and Innovation



## Prof. Saket Kuswaha

On September 25, 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated World Food India 2025 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, marking a pivotal moment in India's journey toward nutritional sovereignty and food innovation. The event wasn't just a showcase of agricultural prowess—it was a call to reawaken India's ancient wisdom on food, health, and sustainability.



India's culinary heritage is vast and deeply philosophical. Rooted in Ayurveda, food is seen not merely as sustenance but as medicine, memory, and moral duty. The Charaka Samhita reminds us: "Ahārasambhavo vāyur, ahārasambhavāḥ prajāḥ, ahārasambhavo loko, nāsti ahārasamo rasāḥ."

**From food arises life-force, society, and the world itself—there is no essence greater than food.**

Traditionally, Indian food culture can be classified into three nourishing categories:

- Fermented foods like buttermilk, curd, and idli, which aid digestion and gut health
- Roasted foods such as farey (boiled gram delicacies) and fire-roasted grains, rich in minerals and fiber
- Steamed foods like rice and lentils, offering lightness and nutritional balance

Yet, in the age of globalization, these wholesome practices have been overshadowed by processed imports and fast-food habits. Despite India's rich food diversity, its native dishes remain underrepresented in global markets, while children increasingly con-

## Reclaiming India's Nutritional Wisdom

In 2014, the Government of India allocated 150 crore to fortify the nation's food grains with essential micronutrients—a visionary step toward restoring public health through dietary reform. This initiative aimed to incorporate eight critical nutrients—Vitamin A, B-complex, Zinc, Iron, Magnesium, Calcium, Selenium, and Iodine—into staple crops like gram, paddy, maize, mustard, pulses, and harvest-plus varieties. These nutrients, often missing from daily diets, are vital for immunity, cognitive development, and metabolic balance. Yet the challenge remains: how to integrate these enhancements into the kitchens of millions who rely on home-grown grains, bypassing the packaged food industry altogether.

India's food culture, once deeply intuitive and health-centric, has been disrupted by globalization and urban mimicry. The traditional classification of food—fermented, roasted, and steamed—offered not just taste but therapeutic value. Buttermilk, curd rice, idli, farey, and fire-roasted grains were rich in probiotics, fiber, and digestibility. These dishes, once consumed with all five fingers, symbolized a tactile connection to nourishment. Ayurveda teaches that touch activates enzymes and enhances digestion, yet today, cutlery has become a status symbol, severing this intimate bond between body and food.

Globally, countries like Switzerland and Japan have pioneered automated nutrient vending systems, infusing grains with micronutrients even in transit. China has advanced insect-based protein supplements—"insectaceuticals"—to boost amino acid profiles in cereals. India, despite its agricultural abundance, lags in deploying such innovations at scale. With 70% of households relying on home-grown grains and cultural resistance to synthetic additives, the challenge is not just technological but philosophical.

Ayurveda offers a timeless truth: "Yat chintyam hitam āyuh, tad auṣadham"—that which promotes health is medicine. By this definition, food is the first medicine. The goal of modern nutrition policy should not be to replace tradition but to enhance it. India must reclaim its culinary wisdom, fortify it with science, and globalize it with pride. Only then can food become what it was always meant to be—not just sustenance, but sovereignty.



## Nutrient Loss in Indian Soil

While India's agricultural output has soared in recent decades, a silent crisis has emerged beneath the surface—nutrient depletion in soil, leading to micronutrient deficiency in food. This paradox—bumper harvests with declining nutritional value—has been directly addressed by the Ministry of Agriculture and allied scientific bodies. The root cause lies in the over-reliance on chemical fertilizers, particularly NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potash), which boost yield but ignore essential micronutrients like Zinc, Magnesium, Iron, and Boron.

A landmark study published in the Indian Journal of Fertilizers (Vol. 17, Issue 5, 2021) states:

“Over 48% of Indian soils are deficient in Zinc, 37% in Boron, and 36% in Iron. Long-term use of NPK without micronutrient replenishment has led to a decline in crop quality and human nutrition.”

**(Source: Tiwari et al., ICAR-Indian Institute of Soil Science)**

This deficiency has cascading effects.

Crops grown in such soils lack the natural vitamins and minerals once abundant in indigenous farming. As a result, even Ayurvedic herbs, which depend on soil vitality for their medicinal potency, are losing efficacy. The very foundation of Ayurvedic pharmacology—prakriti-based healing through plants—is compromised.

To address this, agro-scientists recommend biofortification, soil health cards, and integrated nutrient management (INM).

The National Bio-Energy Mission and Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) promote organic inputs and micronutrient-rich compost. Yet adoption remains slow, especially among smallholder farmers. The way forward lies in restoring soil consciousness. India must shift from yield obsession to nutrient stewardship, blending traditional composting, crop rotation, and indigenous seed banks with modern soil analytics. Only then can food reclaim its medicinal value, and Ayurveda return to its full healing potential.

sume nutrient-deficient foreign cuisines.

The rise of gut disorders and lifestyle diseases across Asia signals a deeper crisis: the disconnect between tradition and modernity. India's response—through nutraceuticals and food-tech innovation—aims to restore this balance. But the real transformation lies in reclaiming our indigenous food wisdom, cultivating it consciously, and celebrating it globally.

**Healing the Soil:** The true crisis in India's food system lies not in culinary habits alone, but in the health of the soil itself—a silent casualty of decades of chemical overuse. The physics of soil has deteriorated: excessive fertilizers harden the surface, preventing root penetration and nutrient absorption. The biology of soil, once rich with microbial life, is now sterile, reducing the natural decomposition and nutrient cycling essential for plant vitality. The chemistry of soil—its mineral balance and vitamin profile—has been severely disrupted, leading to crops that are high in yield but low in nutritional value.

A 2022 study published in *Frontiers in Environmental Science* confirms that long-term chemical fertilizer use reduces soil porosity, microbial biomass, and micronutrient availability, directly impacting food quality and ecosystem resilience (Singh et al., 2022). This degradation doesn't stop at crops—it extends to cattle feed, which draws from the same soil. As a result, dairy products lose their nutritional density, forcing farmers to rely on external supplements to maintain livestock health. The entire food chain—from soil to milk—is now chemically dependent.

Contrast this with mushrooms, whose deep mycelial roots extract minerals from untouched soil layers. Their nutritional richness is a testament to soil intimacy, yet their cultivation remains climate-bound and rare. This underscores the urgency of soil research and rectification—through organic composting, crop rotation, and microbial restoration.

Equally vital is the revival of indigenous Indian stream foods like farey, dal dulha, and the tactile tradition of finger and food. These dishes are not just

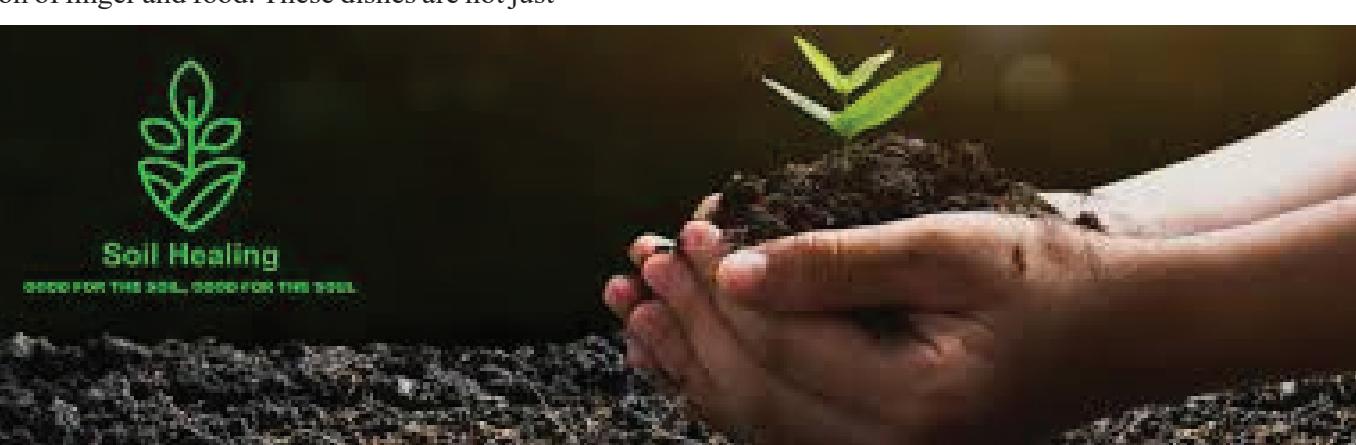


culturally symbolic—they are digestively intelligent and nutritionally complete. Research into freezing techniques, nutrient preservation, and packaging innovations could make them viable in flights, hospitals, and VIP settings, restoring pride and accessibility to India's culinary heritage.

India's journey toward *Viksit Bharat* cannot rest on rhetoric; it must rest on nutrition that empowers its people. The missing practice of GIP (Good Industrial Practice) GAP (Good Agriculture Practice) and GLP (Good Laboratory Practice). Good has left our food chain fractured—industries chase profit over purity, farming loses its biodiversity, and laboratories fail to guarantee quality. Unless these principles are enforced with urgency, India will keep speaking of progress while silently battling hunger, malnutrition, and lifestyle diseases. If we truly want to achieve *Viksit Bharat*, we must revive our nutritional legacy, fuse it with innovation, and commit to policies where every grain grown, every product processed, and every meal served reflects the strength of a healthy nation.

In the end, food is not just what we eat—it is how we live, how we heal, and how we remember. To restore the meaning of Indian food, we must begin where it all starts: in the soil. Only then can we reclaim our health, our heritage, and our future.

**(Author, a distinguished agriculture scientist, currently serves as the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ladakh, India.)**



# Sowa-Rigpa Healing from the Himalayas



**Amit Pandey**

In a world where healthcare is increasingly commercialized and chemical-driven, the question of therapy—what it truly means to heal—demands deeper attention. India, known globally for Ayurveda, also nurtures other indigenous healing traditions that blend medicine, food, spices and spirituality. Among them, Sowa-Rigpa, the Tibetan system of medicine, stands as one of humanity's oldest holistic sciences—traced back at least 5,000 years, as documented in manuscripts and affirmed by Prof. Wanchuk Dorjee Negi, Vice Chancellor of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (CIHTS) in Sarnath, Varanasi.



**Prof. Dr. Tashi Dawa**

Tibetan medicine, known as Sowa Rigpa (Science of Healing) is an ancient, holistic system that continues to be practiced and is gaining recognition in modern times both within its traditional regions and internationally.

**Here are the key aspects of Tibetan medicine in the contemporary world.:** Sowa Rigpa has spread far beyond the Tibetan plateau, with practitioners, schools, and clinics in India (especially Dharamsala and Ladakh), Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, parts of the former Soviet Union, and increasingly in Western countries like the US and Europe. In India, Sowa Rigpa is officially recognized as a "science of healing" by the government, leading to the establishment of institutions like the National Institute for Sowa Rigpa (NISR) for research and development.

Tibetan medicine's holistic, patient-centered approach—focusing on diet, lifestyle, and herbal remedies—is often sought as a complementary or alternative therapy, especially for chronic diseases and for promoting overall well-being. There is a growing effort to validate the efficacy of

Tibetan medicine through modern scientific methods, including clinical and laboratory studies, to facilitate its integration into conventional healthcare.

Diagnosis still relies on traditional methods like pulse reading, urine analysis, and detailed questioning, with treatments including herbal formulas, dietary and lifestyle advice, and external therapies like moxibustion and massage.

#### Sowa Rigpa as a Holistic Model

It emphasises the balance of the body's three functional principles or "humors" (rLung, mKhris-pa or Bile, and Bad-kan or Phlegm) and views health as an inseparable connection between the body, mind, and spirit.

More than treatment, Sowa-Rigpa is a ritual of compassion, a philosophy rooted in Buddhist darshan, and a legacy of resilience. Its journey from Himalayan monasteries and imperial courts to a modern university campus in Sarnath is not just a tale of medical practice, but of cultural survival, adaptation, and service to humanity.

**Royal Healing: Manuscripts of Memory:** The Himalayan healing



**Vice chancellor, Wangchuk Dorjee Negi**

system that we call Sowa-Rigpa did not emerge in isolation. Its institutional development is traced to the Thang Dynasty (8th–12th centuries), which ruled vast Himalayan and Central Asian territories. Constant warfare meant soldiers were often wounded in remote terrains where no formal hospitals existed. This forced the refinement of portable, effective therapies using herbs, acupuncture, and acupressure. What began as battlefield medicine evolved into a structured healing philosophy.

Historical records—including Tibetan, Chinese, and even French sources—reveal the dynasty's wide reach: from China, Mongolia, and Nepal to Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Bengal's Teesta basin. Place names themselves preserve these cultural echoes. Darjeeling (from Dorge-ling, or land of the thunderbolt) and Shimla (from Shingla, land of cedar trees) are reminders of a geography where healing and spirituality were seen as interwoven.

The golden era of Tibetan medical knowledge (7th–9th centuries) saw



rulers like Songtsen Gampo and Trisong Detsen sponsor large-scale translations of Indian and Chinese texts into Tibetan. Some of these works, including the foundational medical treatise Gyud Zhi (Four Tantras), still guide practitioners.

Remarkably, manuscripts such as DhinHong, preserved in libraries like the one at Sahasdhara Road, Dehradun, describe both medical practices and territorial expansion, stretching from Baltistan and Lahaul-Spiti to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. These are not just historical curiosities—they are testimonies of how an empire invested in healing as much as in warfare.

The library at CIHTS, Sarnath, continues this legacy. Ancient texts, stitched in silk threads or written on handmade paper, remain preserved in their original form. They are not only guides to medicine but chronicles of compassion, where healing was framed as a sacred duty.

**Treatment: A Layered Choreography:** Starting with acupressure, then moving to herbal applications, metallic suction, and acupuncture. Acupuncture itself is the most intricate part—requiring years of training to master correct needle placement and depth. When applied with expertise, it can shift energy flows and restore harmony.

Sowa-Rigpa is versatile, addressing internal medicine, pediatrics, gynecology, psychiatry, surgery, and orthopedics. Its therapies echo Ayurveda's Panchakarma in their reliance on natural remedies, but its philosophical underpinning is uniquely Buddhist: impermanence, compassion, and service. Healing is not simply curing—it is about aligning the patient with dharma and balance.

The Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath remains the nerve center of Sowa-Rigpa in North India, offering academic training and patient care. Its outpatient department (OPD) receives 60–70 patients daily, many from surrounding villages who seek side-effect-free treatment. Students from Nepal, Bhutan, and Mongolia also join, making the institute a regional hub for traditional

medical education.

Encouragingly, the government has sanctioned a 100-bed Sowa-Rigpa hospital on campus, soon to be inaugurated by the Prime Minister. Staffed by graduates and postgraduates of the system, it will provide institutional backing to what has so far survived through cultural resilience.

Yet, the challenges are formidable. Financial support is lacking—there are no stipends for trainees, nurses, or ward staff. Without structured funding under the AYUSH framework, sustaining both education and service delivery is uncertain. Medicines, too, are a problem. Many herbs used in Sowa-Rigpa are sourced from Nepal, Bhutan, and Mongolia.

The university has begun cultivating an herbal garden, but the scale is small, and without a dedicated pharmacy, shortages remain frequent.

This paradox is striking: a healing system with profound benefits struggles for survival, not due to lack of relevance, but due to neglect in policy and resources. As Prof. Negi notes, “Healing cannot be separated from compassion, but compassion also needs institutional support.”

Crucially, recognition at the policy level already exists. In 2009, the Ministry of AYUSH officially recognized Sowa-Rigpa as one of India's traditional systems of medicine, placing it alongside Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani. A year later, in 2010, UNESCO inscribed Sowa-Rigpa on its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, underlining its global significance. As one UNESCO cultural expert remarked, “Recognition brings visibility, but survival depends on empowering local communities to sustain their own knowledge systems.”

An AYUSH official similarly emphasized at the time: “Sowa-Rigpa is not merely a system of treatment; it is a cultural lifeline of the Himalayan people.” These statements highlight a contradiction—global applause and national recognition coexist with institutional fragility.



**A Journey Through the Heart of Wisdom:** Walking into the CIHTS campus in Sarnath feels less like entering a university and more like stepping into a sanctuary. The corridors lined with ancient texts, the soft rhythm of prayer wheels, and the calm presence of scholar-practitioners create an atmosphere where learning and healing are inseparable.

During a conversation, Prof. Tashi Dawa described acupuncture as not just a technique but "a dialogue between the body and the cosmos." He spoke of the kidney as a gateway to balance, of diagnostic rituals that combine poetry with precision, and of treatments that unfold like choreography. It was a reminder that therapy in Sowa-Rigpa is an art as much as a science.

The deeper one engages, the clearer it becomes that Sowa-Rigpa is not about resisting modern medicine, but about complementing it. It embodies a philosophy that true healing begins with compassion, history, and balance. In an era where healthcare is too often reduced to profit and prescription, this ancient Himalayan science reminds us that medicine can also be meditation.

**Healing Beyond Borders:** From the battlefields of the Thang dynasty to the classrooms of Sarnath, from manuscripts on silk to acupuncture needles of today, Sowa-Rigpa's journey is a testament to endurance. It has outlived empires, adapted to modernity, and continues to offer healing without side effects to thousands.

But its survival is not guaranteed. Without structured government support, cultivation of herbs, and recognition within AYUSH, this 5,000-year-old tradition risks being confined to museums rather than hospitals. The upcoming 100-bed hospital is a promising start, but a comprehensive framework is essential.

In essence, Tibetan medicine is navigating a dynamic period, evolving as a global, "neo-traditional" system that is simultaneously committed to its ancient spiritual and medical texts (like the Four Tantras) and actively seeking its place in the evidence-based, pluralistic world of modern medicine.

Sowa-Rigpa's greatest gift is its reminder that healing is not merely about treating the body. It is about compassion, resilience, and service to humanity. In the quiet libraries of Sarnath and the practiced hands of its teachers, this legacy still breathes. The challenge for India is whether it will allow this heritage to remain a living science—or reduce it to a forgotten relic of the mountains.

Standing amidst ancient manuscripts and the quiet pulse of healing, I felt not like a visitor—but like a seeker in the heart of wisdom. The air at CIHTS carried the scent of herbs and history, and every conversation echoed with compassion. It was a journey into knowledge that doesn't just cure—it consoles, teaches, and transforms. In the silence of Sarnath, I met a legacy that still breathes.

**(Author recently visited Varanasi to acquire a better sense of Tibetan medicine, a key component of alternative systems of medicine in the region.)**



## The Philosophy and Practice of Healing

Unlike modern medicine, Sowa-Rigpa sees illness as a disharmony of the elements—earth, water, fire, and air. Diagnosis is an art that combines vision (examining body, urine, phlegm), touch (pulse reading), and questioning. A practitioner does not just detect symptoms but reads the person as a whole—body, mind, and spirit.

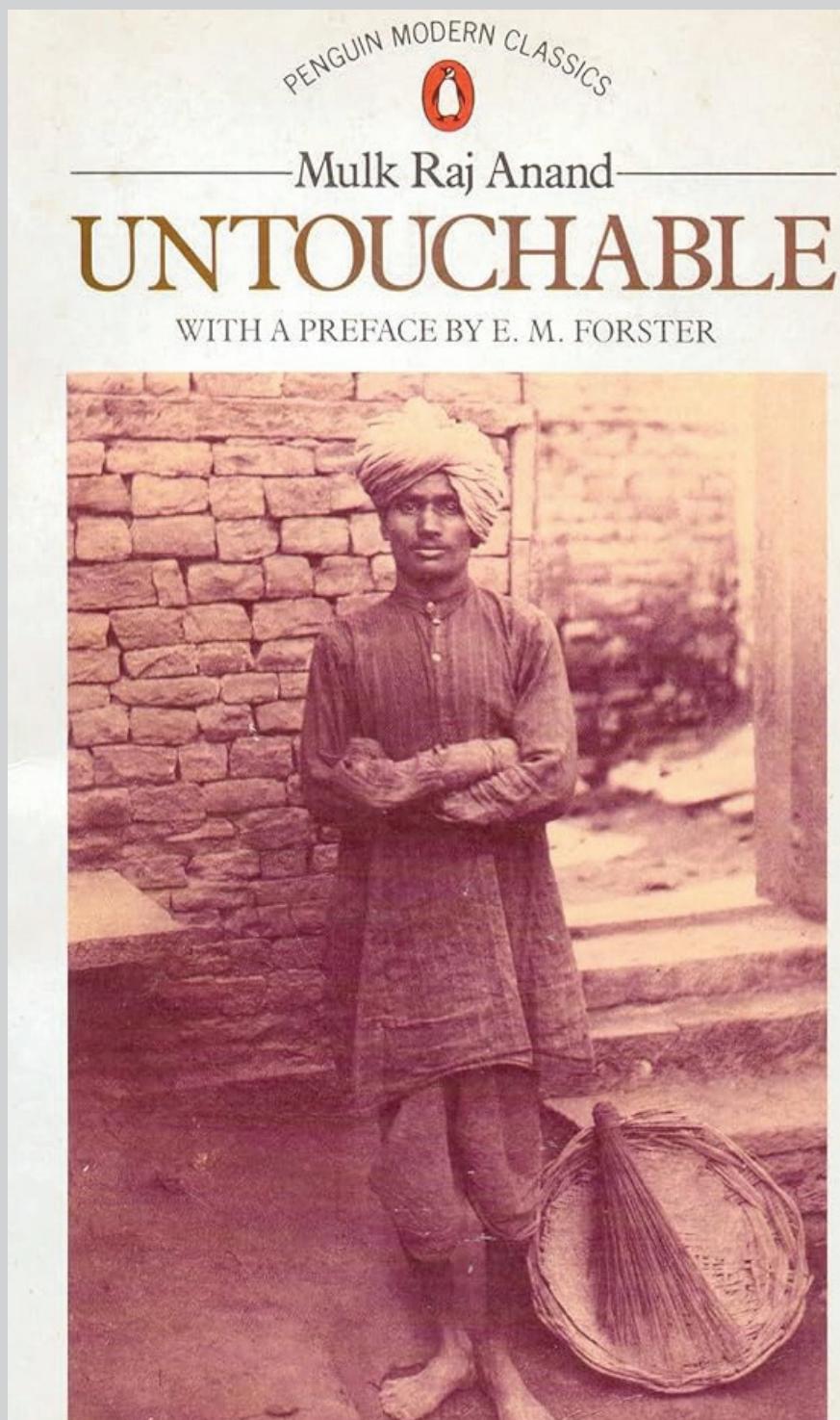
Prof. Dr. Tashi Dawa, Head of Alternate and Orthopedic Therapies at CIHTS, explains that in Sowa-Rigpa, the kidney holds central importance. It is not treated as a nephrological organ but as the regulator of life's energies. Disorders ranging from migraine and spondylitis to anxiety are often traced to kidney imbalance. Healing, therefore, begins with restoring this subtle balance.

# Mulk Raj Anand's "Untouchable" The First Literary Salvo at Dalit Discrimination



Afroz Ashrafi

Towards the end of the 20th century a phrase was coined commonly referred to as Dalit literature and with each passing day the phrase coined assumed complexity of dimensions and directions with a host of writers emerging on the literary scene to be the prophets of the 'Dalit literature'. Across the globe, the wind blew, and the society of different hues emerged. In the wider perspective, initially it was seen in terms of racial prejudice harboured by the superior breed of people and self-acclaimed bourgeoisie phantoms who guided the destiny of the human society; and imposed codes of conduct to be followed by every single citizen but not without raising walls and boundaries of segregation; ostracism and insulation.



Amidst such proclaimed and visible bias there came about a cluster of writers such as Chinua Achebe, Coetzee, Osman Berrada, Mungoshi, Edward Said and Alia Riffat from the African continent, who were engaged relentlessly in the evaluation of those reeling under the wails and cries manufactured by the privileged sections. Alex La Guma raised the banner of protest and, in the process, laid down the foundation stone of protest literature.

This spectacle could not remain confined to Africa alone. It gradually filtered down to the east that provided even a more productive and fertile land to let the literature of the same brand flourish with identical issues and concerns. Urdu and Hindi fiction in particular showed enough urgency of reason and purpose to write about those crushed under the imposing boots of racial prejudice; as writers like Ghazanfar, and Wajahat Sagheer picked up this thread to weave around their fictional structure, to make stories and expose the janus-faced human society. In Hindi fiction also, there are voices steeped in sobs and surrender, the will to trudge the unconventional paths and the might to tame the tradition of a hostile society that has built a hype and gloss around its existence. Jabir Hussain also shares the galaxy with the select group of writers known as the commentators on the Dalit history and identity.

My concern here is to dismantle the thesis that the advocates of the suppressed were born in the African continent whether it is apartheid or struggle for freedom for such concerns were even more prominent in Indo-Anglican writings; and the writer to take to such writings and expose the gory faced, stony hearted monster of the society, having created too many taboos, guided by an ideology too cruel to survive in a society is Mulk Raj Anand. In fact the so-called Dalit literature has its root in Indo-Anglican fiction and the genesis of such writings could well be traced back to 1935 when Mulk Raj Anand wrote his first novel "untouchable", followed by "coolie" in 1936. Together, these two novels, if seen in totality, fully qualify and deserve to be clubbed with a subaltern group.

Mulk Raj Anand is no ordinary name in the realm of Indo-Anglican fiction as his contribution is as profound and monumental as that of R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao and the very few could have anticipated then that the first stone R.K. Narayan cast in Indo-Anglican fiction would lead to an array of writers converging on the fictional scene and will be stretched to the extent that will culminate into "The Hungry Tide" of Amitab Ghosh" and "Shalimar" the clown of Salman Rushdie.

My objective in this article is to attempt a modest evaluation of Mulk Raj Anand's "untouchable" and to try and find the subaltern dimensions. It's confined alone to the analysis of the novel in question and discover how Anand's mind went down to the root of a serious menace, which in retrospect, has become a fashionable coffee house discussion. Anand has a body of creative corpus to his credit that went a long way in determining the direction of the Indo-Anglican fiction.

Together with R.K. Narayan, Anand created and introduced Indian English fiction to the world outside not as mere imitator of the western masters but as a genuine talent for creativity that did eventually earn him the epithet of the "man with a rolling and wagging tongue" who rode a crest of unparalleled publicity in Indian literary history and beyond.

E. M Forster rightly said that only Mulk Raj Anand could have written "Untouchable". This observation is made by the writer of "A Passage to India" who did his best to dismantle the chasm between the East and West. But ironically, he failed in his attempt to discover the real India only to be dismissed as muddle by the Western imagination at large. The very line that untouchable could only have been written by an Indian and by an Indian is a recognition of the fact that Mulk Raj Anand knew exactly what he wanted to write and how hard and difficult it might have been to see the disdainfully outcaste treated so realistically through the razor-sharp imagination of Anand. "Untouchable" indeed is the byproduct of human conduct induced through the caste system authored though by a cunning and chiseled sculptor of society. The novel is a moving pathetic tale of an individual pushed to the brink of a society that uses, abuses and discards him for having belonged to that strata of the Hindu society which has a time-tested belief in exploitation and sustained through an inborn prejudice against a fellow citizen.

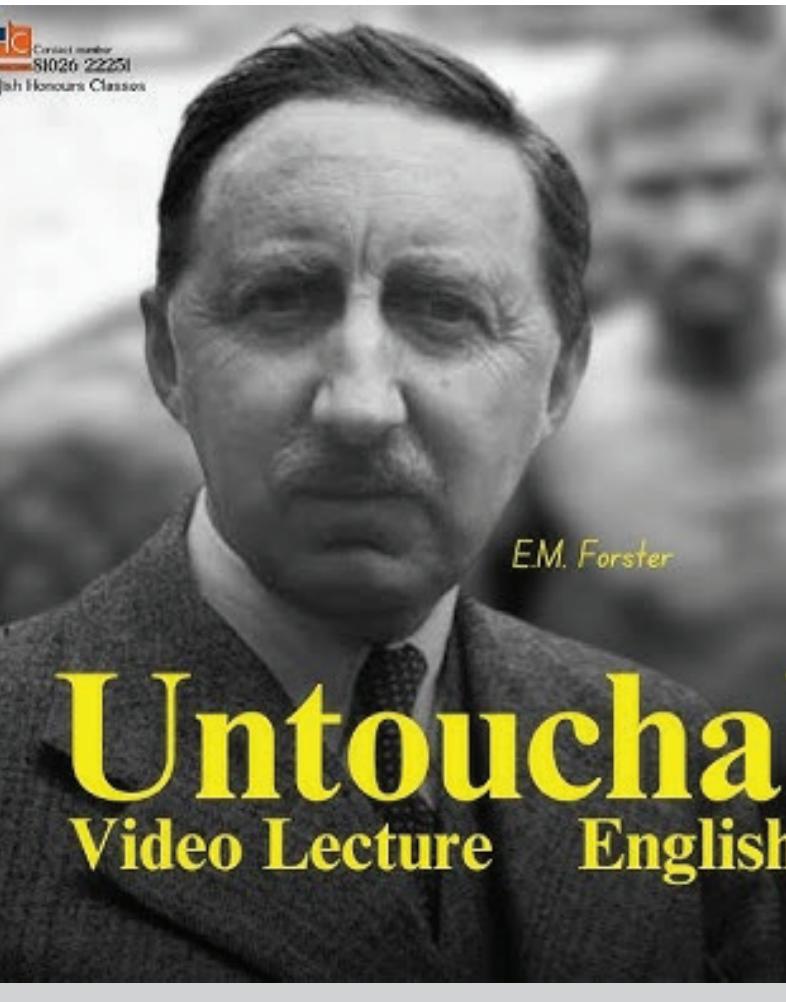
As effectively as he can is a reference to the powerful narrative, the life-like dimensions that Bakha has, and the ugly face of the society's barbarian intent.

Bakha, the central character of the novel, is neither a tragic protagonist nor a stoical figure but a tortured individual whose soul is into shreds. Anand therefore ,in "untouchable," naturally qualifies to be a proletarian commentator who does not say sorry but feels it.

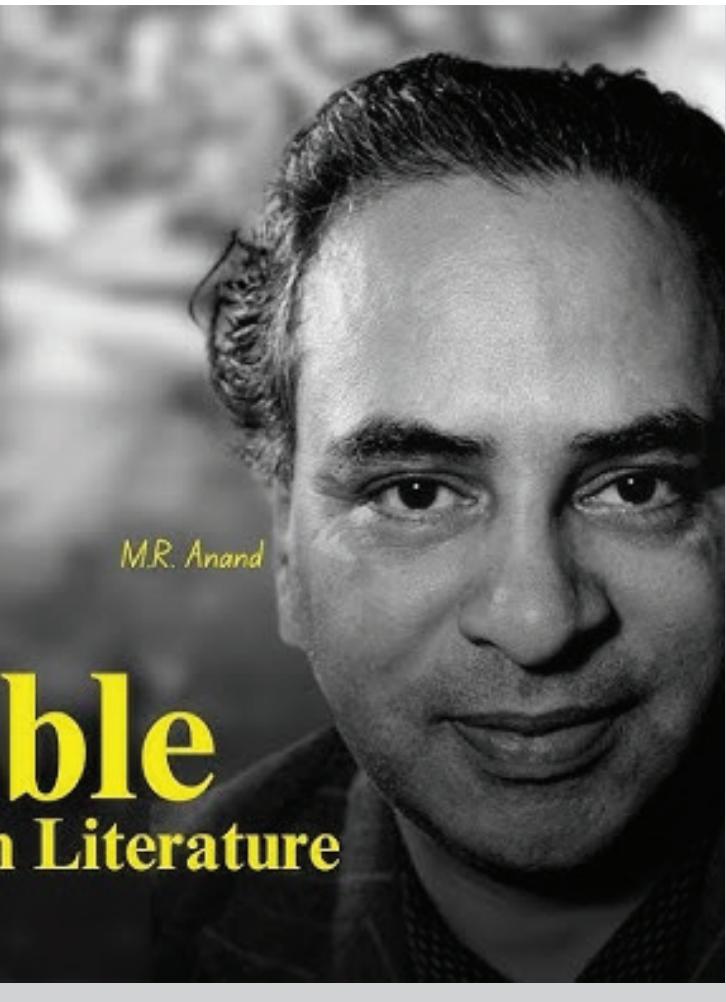
This description brings to mind the photographic fidelity of how those victims of a lop sided social system live.

"Atleast so thought Bakha, a youngman of





E.M. Forster



M.R. Anand

# Untouchable

## Video Lecture      English Literature

eighteen, strong and able bodied, the son of lakhan, the jemadar of all the sweepers in the town and the cantonment, and officially in charge of the three rows of public latrines which lined the extremest end of the colony, by a brookside" (Untouchable pp-1 Penguin Books)

Bakha is introduced to the reader on the very first page of the book and from there Anand never loses sight of this character, so rich, vivid, pregnant with an illusory vision and false hopes.

"But Bakha was a child of modern India"

(Untouchable pp-2 Penguin Books) tells enough about what Anand had in mind while delineating him. Bakha, though out and out an outcaste, acutely aware of his wretched origin and enduring the travails of humiliation heaped upon him day and night, but was equally determined to recast himself, pledged to a commitment to go for a transition in his own life, to build his own destiny regardless of how hard and tough the road ahead him is. Even his father's invectives did not deter him, instead instilled into him a confidence that never existed in actuality, the honest confession that he was the lowest of the low, born to serve people of high castes and to remain servile did anguish his soul. His wild fantasies, lingoes and adventures did not act as impediments to the realisation that

he has a right to be a dream merchant.

"He had begged one Tommy for the gift of a pair of trousers. The man had given him a pair of breeches which he had to spare."

(Untouchable pp-3) Bakha has had every desire to be the one like Tommy, to be a gentleman, to be loved and respected the way a sepoy or Tommy is honoured. Anand in the portraiture of Bakha draws upon every minor detail to project the dreams and desires, the wishes and urges of a downtrodden who everyday builds pictures that stands castled at the end of the day. How tough and ridiculous the existence of an outcasteis, could be gauged from the fact that his every attempt to look different from his clan borders on an imaginative flight of fancy and highways to romance comes crashing down in eventual realisation that he is born to lead a life of humiliation orchestrated by the Babus effecting any catharsis with regard to a downtradden's of the society that does little precious to think about existence. The two events in his life have a permanent scar and abandon his dreams to dustbin. First, Sohini, his sister modesty outraged by a priest and given the reluctance of the girl to concede what the priest did and how she defiled the priest, but the priest goes scot free. The cries of "posh, posh, sweeper" coming torments his

soul and bemuses him to the extent that he begins to hate his entire existence. In Bakha, Anand has exposed the blatant and macabre designs of those self-appointed conscience keepers of the Hindu society who wallow in mud and slush and create divisions on the social level that further compound the agony of the marginalised. Look at his submission.

Bakha was shy, knowing he had no right to indulge in such luxuries as apeing the high caste people. He humbly mumbled; Huzoor it is all your blessing. Charat Singh was feeling kind, though he did not relax the grin which symbolised six thousand years of racial and class superiority.

**(Untouchable pp-8)** Six thousands years of racial and class superiority can suffice to tame the meek resistance and can induce an invincible complex into the psyche of a battered creature like Bakha is. Many boots trampled over him, and umpteen abuses pierced through his tender and sensitive heart and coerced into servility without any grudge. Anand goes deep into the soul of a besmirched individual who does not look beyond the life of broom and basket. Castigated for imitating styles and condemned for trying to raise head above the permissible heights. The mentality created to torment the existence of the low born saga of Bakha is the result of the brazen Manuvadi mindset. How sensitive an artist Anand is can be realised after one has carefully outlined what he meant by creating a character like Bakha. Not only a destitute, but the butt of all ridicule and sundry. The traumatised, scornful, and merciless societal conduct towards a fellow citizen is the stigma, a real blot on the glossy but hollow face of a remorseless society.

Bakha is a representation not of bare facts associated with dalit existence, but a sordid projection of an evil, of a stigma, and of the ferocity, the bias is fraught with. It is to the credit of Anand that he creates splendid images of squalor, dirt, and filth with passionate indifference. The understanding of such a social squalor reflects Anand's proximity towards those discarded disdainfully by the hypocritical nature of the human conduct.

The photographic fidelity that Anand creates is an allusion to the mass of experiences and observations Anand had in his kitty and to manipulate such experiences into fiction cannot be possible without the necessary fictional prowess, the imaginative coherence and the ability to tell tale with such amazing authority and incomparable clarity. The Dalit's fashionable to talk about Dalit literature, a trend that stories are much in vogue today, almost customary and every writer is trying to hold on but what has been discussed

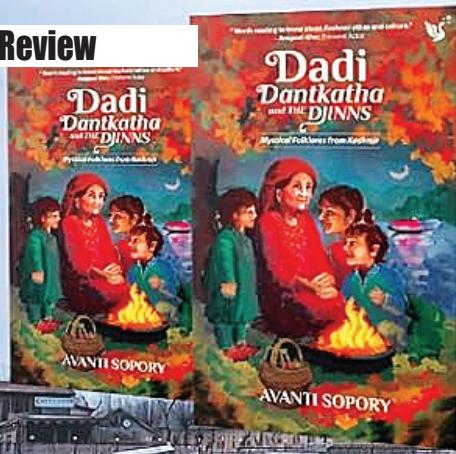
today, was well anticipated by Mulk Raj Anand way back in 1935 and the two novels "Untouchable" and "Coolie" speak volumes about what Anand had visualised and wrote in them. Bakha is one of the thousand characters, one among many and so is Monuaa of Coolie, who are destined to be in servitude for centuries together, whom Ghandhi called Harijan, the children of God and crime committed against them is the crime against humanity may have convinced Bakha's and alleviated their fears. The fact, however, is different. Bakha is a painful portrait of an individual in distress, representative of social indignation whose world of fancy survives for a brief period, whose dreams are crushed under the rutheless weight of social contradictions and is born to serve.

The face of India may have changed, and visionaries and builders of modern India may have gone euphoric, but the unpalatable fact remains that Bakha is still there in some form or the other. Though the novel was written in 1935 but the nature and dimension of the problem perhaps was not as serious as today.

Until yesterday, it was a problem only; today, it is a social menace. The problem of untouchability did not die with Anand or Gandhi. It is more relevant in the context of today's social structure where the chasm between the high and low is ever so widening. where the proletarian is more pronounced a proletarian and the bourgeoisie, a more pronounced bourgeoisie.

Today there are hundred thousand Bakhas who are denied access to dreams and condemned by Manuvadi's are persisting with their satanic designs, eternally to a life of abuse and humiliation. The Manuvadi's are persisting with their satanic designs the Brahmins stick even harder to obduracy and those marginalised are still waiting for the resurrection of prophets to have their lots redeemed. The novel's idea is no longer radically novel nor the solutions in sight save and except to see them as a body of people who could be used for political ends. They are limping individuals delivered from the subaltern wombs. The subaltern strain in "Untouchable" is clearly evident, and Mulk Raj Anand as the author of Dalit literature that may have assumed diverse hues today. But the first stone of Dalit fiction in particular and literature in general was cast by Mulk Raj Anand. Bakha and Monuaa are metaphors today. May be, there are people writing on such themes, but to create a Bakha or Monuaa cannot be the business of an ordinary imagination.

**(Author is a senior faculty member in the department of English, College of Commerce, Arts & Science, Patna. Views are personal.)**



# KASHMIRI FOLKLORE- Dadi Dantkatha and The Djinns

**RC Ganjoo**

Avanti Sopory is a prolific writer with deep knowledge of Kashmiri art, culture, and language. Her writing career began at the age of 12 when her first poem was published in a Srinagar newspaper. The memory of her family's migration in 1989 has shaped her work, and she intends to preserve the lore and stories passed down from her grandparents. Sopory's published works include: *The Kashmir That Was* (2022), *Catching the Fading Rays* (2015), *Ancient and Lost Temples of Kashmir* (2023).

Her latest book, *Dadi Dantkatha and The Djinn* (2025), is a collection of Kashmiri folklore aimed at connecting younger generations to their cultural roots. In addition to her writing, Sopory has a diverse professional background spanning the corporate, education, and training sectors. She regularly contributes to various online and offline platforms and has been featured in several anthologies. Currently, she is working on three new books across different genres, continuing to explore her keen interest in how history and culture have shaped her native Kashmir.

'Dadi, Dantkatha and the Djinns', was released on 20th September at Ata Galata, a haven for book lovers in Bangalore. The event opened to an eclectic mix of readers and folktale enthusiast, who had warmed up to the venue. The book has about 27 folktales from the valley, which gives a heartwarming glimpse into the world of storytelling tradition in Kashmir. The author who hails from the valley has drawn inspiration to write these stories from the family memories, the oral traditions, historical books like *Rajatarangini* and from the senior generation in her community.

Story telling is one of the oldest traditions of humanity. Long before books were mass published or written on bay leaves, they were passed on from one generation to another through oral medium. The wisdom that our ancestors carried was a passively learnt by the younger children - considering these learnings to be sacrosanct. In this book, the author brings to life the relevance and the impact of these growing up years in Kashmir. The book starts with Avanti's failed attempt at finding any book on Kashmiri folktales at her place of dwelling. She is able to find books from across the globe and the country, but there were none available from Kashmir. Her disappointment at finding any folktales for her children, led her to write this book. The absence planted a seed and gave birth to this project. The honest personal

note, sets the tone for the book – it's not just a compilation, but a heartfelt act of preservation and retelling. The narrations are retold in a style which has a universal tone of compassion, love and brotherhood.

In the introductory note, the author gives a vivid description of winter nights and how the entire valley would get immobile and standstill under the shroud of three to four feet of snow. During those silent times she remembered only a few sounds - of the vessels being washed by her mother in the kitchen, the loud thud of the lump of snow slipping down from the tin roof of her house and the honey dipped narrations of the stories by her grandmother.

The book starts with the story of the ferocious Queen Didda and her masterful ways of choosing the heir to the throne, titled 'Finding the Heir', and ends with the hilarious 'Pathan and the Pandit', showing how the native escapes a physical scuffle with his mere wit. This shows that the sequencing of stories has been thoughtful. Avanti has tried to introduce the reader to stories of strong women from ancient Kashmir, like Lalla Ded, Mata Bhagbhari, Sanykesar and many more. These stories are filled with grit, determination, faith and strength. Through simple narration, the author wishes to inspire the younger readers to keep their faith and courage even during difficult times.

Equally notable is the story of Suyya, who was the first engineer of the valley and the town of Sopore got its name after him. With his mere common sense, he saved the province from the over flowing Wular lake. The other stories of kings like 'Prince Harsha and Luddha', 'Make no Haste', etc. remind the readers that folktales are often history's closest confidante. The book doesn't just reflect on the kings, queens or the noble men and women. There are many stories which have regular natives as the heroes of the stories. Everyday wisdom and humour is celebrated through stories like – 'Greedy Merchant', 'Ants in my Pants', 'Who was Right?', and many more. These are easy stories for young readers and the beautiful illustrations by Mr. Anil Nakhshi has given an interesting dimension to the story-telling. With bold lines, and evocative scenes, it will help the children to visualize djinns, mythical birds, enchanting rivers, talking animals, mystic men and women. Beyond entertainment, the stories trigger the historical and nostalgic chord for the grown-ups, a passive learning for the kids and a life lesson for the generation Z. Engaging, thoughtful, and culturally relevant "Dadi, Dantkatha and the Djinns", is a great nostalgic read, and will create fond memories for the younger ones in their family and friend circle.

**(Mr. Ganjoo, a senior Kashmir journalist, has authored two books on Kashmir.)**



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