

DELHI LEDGER

A RECORD OF COST, CONSEQUENCE, AND CIVILIZATION

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DELHI LEDGER

Dharmic • Fearless • Constructive

Hari Om! ❖❖

A lot has happened since you held the last issue of this magazine. At Delhi Ledger, our focus is not on setting trends or narratives but on documenting and interpreting events with a record-first philosophy.

I am very excited to share another issue of our monthly magazine with you. This also seems like a good opportunity to set the right expectations moving forward. We may not always be the first, but you can count on us to be the most detailed, balanced, and reflective in our reporting, analysis, and interpretation.

This issue could have been a lot longer but at some point you have to declare, “That’s a wrap,” and reset the cycle of reporting and storytelling.

Our focus is primarily Delhi-outward, so local stories of national and international importance may sometimes receive greater emphasis than contemporary global stories currently running ‘hot’.

You will see “Delhi Ledger Counsel” highlighted in many places throughout the magazine. Once we have devoted ourselves to the analysis and interpretation of events, we then spend considerable time evaluating the most constructive counsel, as though speaking directly to policymakers and those entrusted with shaping public policy.

At this stage, and for the foreseeable future, we have chosen to remain an independent publication, free from external sponsorships and commercial influence, so that our editorial decisions remain guided solely by our convictions and our readers.

In time, however, we do plan to make this a paid premium magazine featuring a select number of advertisements that can genuinely add value to our readers' lives.

So if our work has added value to your thinking, the best way to support Delhi Ledger is to share it with those who would benefit from reading it, help place it in the right hands, and continue contributing your thoughts, ideas, and constructive feedback.

Hari Om! ❖

— Jay Kaushal
Founding Editor

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C O V E R S T O R Y



Representative image: Long queues, understaffed hospitals. Healthcare staff burdened by long shifting duties Image: AI-Generated. (Kaushal Media)

THE COST OF CARE

From examination controversies and workforce shortages to exhausted doctors, disillusioned nurses and overstretched hospitals, this cover story examines the widening cracks in India's healthcare system. It asks a simple question: Can a nation safeguard public health without first safeguarding those who provide it?

A System Under Pressure

From NEET paper leaks to nurse protests, and in fact the subsequent protests of students who were appearing for the NEET examination, things aren't going great. In all of this, the growing gap between the required number of healthcare workers and the actual supply is one big problem no one's talking about.

The CBSE OSM (On Screen Marking) fiasco that was exposed by a 17-year-old Sarthak Sidhant for marking irregularities in the marking of exam sheets was but a tipping point of a system in distress. Since then, there have been multiple exam paper leaks within the last 30 days itself. The Maharashtra Teacher's Eligibility Test (MAHA TET 2026), & the disruption of The Rajasthan Paramedical Council exam (RPMC) amid allegations of a massive cheating racket with alleged involvement of university insiders; uncovering of organized cheating rackets in RUHS (Rajasthan University of Health Sciences).

It is quite apparent that the healthcare system is in dire straits. And not just in India. That's the interesting part. There are sizable problems in service delivery in the UK with the National Health Service (NHS). There are problems of their own kind in the US with an access gap between the

number of individuals who actually need medical care and the number of personnel available at any given point of time to provide the same. In fact, the US also has the problem of basic, essential medicines like Insulin, quite often priced astronomically compared to most other countries.

However, in India, another case that caught the headlines within the last 30 days was the case of six pregnant women in Uttar Pradesh, (India's most populous state) being administered suspected counterfeit oxytocin injections that led to their deaths. There have also been multiple cases of women in tribal areas delivering children on the way to the hospital being carried on a cot or dying in labor, while being 'carried' to the hospital. This comes ironically at a time when India ministers are gifting ambulances to friendly 'developing' countries like Afghanistan and most recently, Seychelles.

These events ask questions that quite possibly the people in power won't find satisfactory answers to. At least not enough to satisfy the average responsible citizen who wants nothing to do with politics, or narratives, but expects decent, dependable healthcare in return for money spent and taxes paid.

“Does the state consider access to decent healthcare a **right** for its citizens?”

Now when you look at private hospitals, the situation may *look* very different. Private hospitals do provide a higher level of service but have been shown wanting in their 'reliability quotient'. Their services can often be unpredictably and steeply priced especially in the case of highly sophisticated interventions such as, ICU, HDU, or major surgery. Especially if you have no insurance.

The Hidden Gap Between Demand and Capacity

But that's everywhere, you could argue. That's everywhere in the world. India is just the most populous country in the world so the same trends common elsewhere are massively exacerbated and amplified here.

Right?

Why *should* this even be alarming?

To understand that deeper, you will have to consider a very important metric, and that is about the level of penetration that medical services have in the society.

For every ~770 people, there is only 1 hospital bed (combining govt. & private hospitals) and there is only 1 doctor per ~811 people. Obviously, the concentration is heavily skewed towards urban areas and metropolitan cities, so is the availability.

Contrast this with the US and most developed European countries where the doctor to population ratios is respectively ~1:370 and ~1:238, with a population to bed ratio strikingly similar.



Left:
Patients
await their
number in
'queue' for
days
sometimes.
Many of
these
people live
on bare
minimum
wages,
have no
health
insurance
and travel
from
different
parts of the
country to
avail
treatment.
Patient
attendants
often have
no means
to afford

accommodation or even decent food while waiting outside the hospital. Some charitable foundations and individual volunteers feed waiting attendants and patients outside the hospital. Below: Attendants resting on the floor of the air conditioned AIIMS Metro Station Gate No.4 to beat the heat. Photo by Jay Kaushal, Safdarjung Hospital, AIIMS Metro Station Gate No. 4, 1st July 2026.



But in India, the demand is highly variable and ever growing. It seems that an effective and scalable solution for reliable healthcare is not easily available or has not been conceived yet.

Even some of the most prestigious hospitals in the city suffer from gaping service gaps. Do you know that recently there was a man masquerading as a doctor, taking money from patients, wearing a stethoscope, doctor's coat and a mask, moving about freely in one of the most prestigious hospitals of Delhi?

This is not something that was reported. It was handled at the level of the hospital itself.

The information about the same was provided to us by our sources who requested not to be named. In fact, let us tell you that this is not an isolated incident.

Our investigation indicates even the NEET paper leak this year may not be an isolated incident. Data for the qualifying candidates for NEET from previous years upon a closer analysis shows some centres *consistently* racking up large numbers of high-scoring qualifiers. Could that be a coincidence? Talent is after all unequally distributed & sometimes concentrated in pockets like Dagestan producing the world's best fighters consistently.

So maybe. But then. Maybe not.

Voices from the Frontline

Over the last five years, India has repeatedly seen fake doctors slip into hospitals, ICUs, private facilities and even government-linked centres. A review of publicly reported cases shows at least 15 hospital-linked incidents, apart from broader crackdowns such as Assam's recent drive in which 62 alleged fake doctors were arrested.

One wonders however, what of the patients who had no clue about the same?

What about the instances when a situation like this goes undetected and is grave enough to cause serious harm?

So far, there have been no answers given and one wonders if they were even proactively sought.

As alarming as this sounds, it is not even the tip of the real problem unfortunately.

Kangana Ranaut's recent movie, "Bharat Bhagya Vidhata" makes but a feeble attempt to address the *real* challenges faced by the steel frame of the Indian healthcare industry, or in fact, the healthcare industry anywhere: The plight of the support staff.

The nursing staff.

Nurses regularly have to deal with being treated as the lesser partner, even though they routinely spend just as many hours as senior doctors and consultants, if not more.

Says Sukriti Bhatia (name changed):

“I got into nursing because.. uh, I had taken medical stream at the higher senior secondary level. I didn’t get into, uh, a medical school, so nursing school was the next best option.

I needed a job. My parents had spent a lot of money on my coaching for clearing the NEET exam.

So naturally, I was under immense pressure to take up a job. However, one of the biggest things that I face as a nurse is constantly being treated as a lesser, even inexperienced partner in the workforce.”

Sukriti Bhatia works at one of the leading cancer hospitals in Delhi. She complains about erratic working hours, a lot of internal politics, strong hierarchical overtones, and a general *perpetual* pressure that exists, to consistently go beyond what she's paid to do. A consistent ‘ask’ at a moral level to do more than what is expected while being paid less than even the fresher doctor and with only 6 leaves per month.

When I ask Sukriti where she sees herself five years from now or even three, four years down the line, “Definitely not in nursing” is what she says.

“I definitely cannot take this anymore.

This seems like a thankless, tiring, endless job. One thing that, uh, troubles me more than anything else is that many of the resident DNB doctors

during their training actually have to learn the ropes about key processes from us.

But most of them end up working as consultants at a different hospital. Consultants and, in fact, senior nursing staff and administrative staff are always piling up administrative tasks onto our already packed schedule.

It's almost as if taking a short break sets off alarm bells all over the hospital that such and such nurse is slacking off. That's how even moments of rest are not part of the scene.

A consultant is always right. That is the general rule that we have to live by. The Chief Nursing Officer in fact seems more loyal to the management than her own nurses-bearing a few.

Quite often, that means making yourself small enough on a regular basis to put up with the whims and fantasies of doctors who automatically consider themselves superior than you and therefore with more power over you than anybody else. In the case of a conflict, the nursing administrators tend to side with consultants over us.

All in all, there is a lot more politics here than is tolerable for a job so stressful. There is stress hitting us regularly from all sides, dealing with unruly patients, dealing with the technical staff, getting work done by ward boys, ward girls, and nursing aides who quite often are much older than

us and treat their jobs like a government job. And the pay itself is not very lucrative for us to keep doing it.

I thought nursing would give me a very good second option since I wasn't able to become a doctor, to make an impact, to make a change. It seems, however, that the system is too saturated already with its own ways of working.

And as a nurse, we are not allowed to question it, just bear the burden silently and get on with our lives.”

The Surgeon's Burden

We spoke to nurses from leading Delhi hospitals and while the struggle of nurses generally seems to be consistent with the themes of the profession around the world, the element of a strict class-based hierarchy seems to be the biggest demotivating factor.

But then, we began speaking with surgeons. Surgeons as is the general theme in the world are amongst the highest paid professionals in any field. One would think that pay and prestige more than makes up for the pressures of the job.

What we discovered is eye opening to say the least.

“...No, that's not the case. Says Dr. Sudepto (name changed) working as a DNB student in one of the leading hospitals of the city. Our working hours are insane! We routinely have to work 38-hour shifts.”

“DNB is very important for me to become a full-fledged surgeon. Therefore, I have to silently bear as much burden as is put on me.

Otherwise, my career will stall. I couldn't get into a good government college, so my father paid a lot of money to get me admitted to a private college.

Now, I'm under a lot of pressure to make it and stabilize my family. I have not been home in the past four days, and I nap almost everywhere I can find an opportunity: on couches, staff napping rooms, or the chairs outside the OT. On a good shift, I can sleep 6-7 hrs. properly in the Doctor's Duty Room bunk.

Almost nobody cares about the pressure that we are under. Any mistake can have a huge impact on our career, invite shouting or scolding from the mentor doctor working above us we report to.

And sometimes, the doctor questions us openly in front of patients themselves. I can't wait to finish my DNB and get the hell out of here.”

Now, if you think that consultants and senior consultants, fully qualified physicians and surgeons, have it any better, you would be mistaken.

Doctors routinely find themselves facing the anger of patients' attendants when a critically ill patient cannot be saved, when unforeseen complications arise during treatment, or when prolonged intensive care results in medical bills far beyond what a family had anticipated.

Even after every possible intervention has been attempted, the financial burden of treatment remains payable. In some reported cases, disputes over unpaid hospital bills have even delayed the release of a deceased patient's body, further intensifying grief and confrontation.

Against this backdrop, violence against healthcare workers has become an increasingly serious concern. Surveys suggest that nearly three out of every four Indian doctors experience some form of workplace violence during their careers, with patients' attendants accounting for the overwhelming majority of assaults. In Delhi alone, ~150 assaults on doctors and hospital staff were officially reported between 2021 and 2025, underscoring how fragile hospital security has become even in some of the country's premier medical institutions.

The Economics of Healthcare

Now, what you need to understand and what nobody talks about is the mindset and the

psychological toll on a student right from the days of +1, +2 to medical school, then practice, then DNB or MD, and finally working as a surgeon, part of a team. The psychological toll is probably unfathomable. For students who opted for nursing as 'second choice' option to pursuing MBBS, the hierarchical shifting-duty job comes as a rude shock.

Is there any machinery in place at the level of the school or medical colleges or hospitals that *recognizes* or even *acknowledges* the immense pressure under which healthcare workers function?

Should there not be a compulsory visit to an in-house psychologist, counsellor, or therapist available for free provided by the hospital itself for the benefit of its workforce? Seems like a no-brainer, doesn't it?

And yet, nobody talks about it. Nobody even recognizes this as an important asset or an important addition to the administration of hospitals.

A lot of healthcare workers are working under severe sleep deprivation. Working at night, extended shifts, odd hours and rotating schedules that are known to disrupt circadian rhythms and, over time, affect hormonal regulation. Circadian disruption, chronic stress, hormonal dysregulation and persistently elevated cortisol have all been

associated with an increased risk of burnout, anxiety, depression and a range of other psychological disorders. Yet at an administrative or regulatory level, no one seems to recognize, acknowledge, or even *try* to remedy it. More and more doctors and nurses are leaving the country to get much better, higher-paying jobs in the US, Canada, and UK. That's how the top performers of a failing system deal with a system that mismanages them or refuses to acknowledge their sacrifices—they simply *leave*.

India produces some of the finest doctors and, in fact, healthcare workers in the world. Every experienced doctor or nurse who leaves the country is not merely one professional lost. They take with them years of clinical judgment, mentorship and institutional memory that cannot be replaced overnight.

We've already undergone decades of brain drain, testified by some of the top entrepreneurs in any given field, being of Indian origin, who made it big only by moving abroad.

Recognising the widening shortage of trained medical professionals, successive governments have attempted to bridge the gap by creating a cadre of mid-level healthcare providers, including Community Health Officers under the Ayushman Bharat programme, to strengthen primary healthcare delivery, particularly in rural India. Their role is not to replace fully qualified

physicians or surgeons, but to expand access to basic preventive and primary care where no doctor may otherwise be available.

Yet this only underscores the scale of the underlying problem. No amount of short-duration bridge training can substitute for the years of rigorous medical education, residency, clinical exposure, fellowship, emergency decision-making and specialist training that the country's physicians and surgeons undergo. Mid-level providers were never designed to shoulder that burden.

The consequence is often predictable. In areas where access to qualified medical professionals remains scarce, many patients continue to seek immediate treatment from unqualified practitioners, colloquially known as 'quacks', with sometimes tragic consequences.

In many leading hospitals, the next big mistake is probably waiting to happen with a severely tired, dilapidated, and fed-up workforce.

Says Mayank Kataria (name changed):

"I walked into this hospital, which is one of the best semi-government hospitals in the city, for a fistula surgery.

During patient preparation and pre-operative check-in, I had to get my weight checked by the anaesthesiologist, presumably to determine the appropriate dose of anaesthesia. What surprised

me was that, instead of measuring and noting my weight, she simply asked me what it was.

Now, I go to the gym regularly and had checked my weight only a few days earlier, so I told her what I remembered it to be.

She quickly noted it down, completed the paperwork and handed me the sheet. She looked a little tired, so I asked if she was doing okay. She smiled and said *Yes, I've been working a double shift. I'm okay. Just a little tired.*

I'm not a doctor, and I have enormous reverence for what doctors do. But I am an engineer, and my mind couldn't stop wondering whether there was any possibility of a serious error. What if I had remembered my weight incorrectly? Or what if it had changed over the previous few days? Anaesthesia is a serious part of any surgery, and I couldn't help wondering whether the exact dosage is critical for patient safety. I honestly don't know. It was simply the thought that crossed my mind.

My experience in fully private hospitals has generally been that all my vitals and details are checked thoroughly before I am wheeled into surgery. In contrast, my perception has been that many semi-government and government hospitals have some of the best surgeons, but the overall patient experience can often feel rushed because of the enormous workload they handle.

Even so, if we can manage it, we'll probably continue to seek treatment there. They're also far more affordable."

Now, this is not an isolated scenario. Most individuals in Delhi opt for semi-government or government hospitals for outpatient procedures because of a significant difference in the cost.

But the conditions in government hospitals and semi-government hospitals even, most of the time, are found wanting at best.

It is worth noting that only a small fraction of Indians directly file income-tax returns, though almost everyone pays indirect taxes through consumption, especially GST. In FY2025–26, India's gross GST collections crossed ₹22 lakh crore, while net non-corporate direct tax collections stood at ₹11,83,405 crore. At the same time, the Union Budget allocated about ₹4.57 lakh crore towards food subsidy, fertiliser subsidy and rural employment support. The question, therefore, is not whether welfare spending is necessary. It clearly is. The question is whether even a fraction of such expenditure can be better rationalised and reallocated toward strengthening government hospitals, dispensaries, clinics and municipal healthcare capacity.

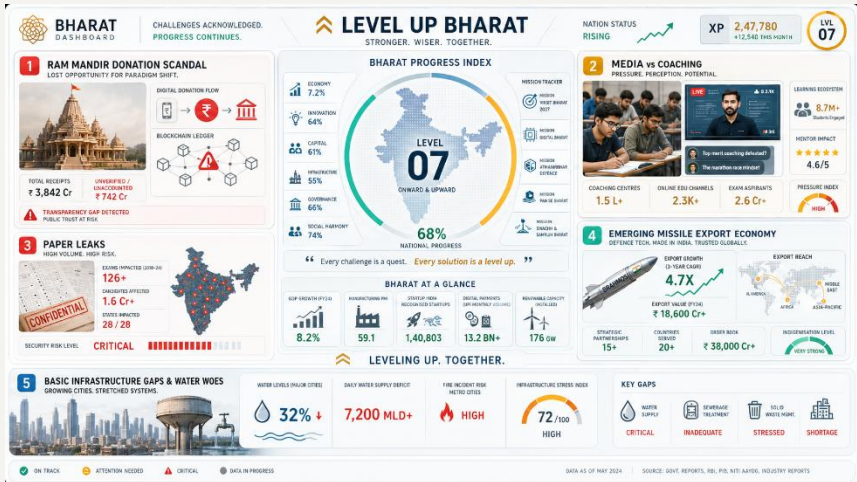
Delhi Ledger Counsel:

As much as it is the government's duty to care for the poorest of poor and vulnerable section of society, it is also the government's duty to plug brain drain and fix structural flaws in the system of public care.

Individuals who have chosen not to go abroad for a higher salary and a better quality of life, who have decided to stay here and serve the people of the country need to be incentivized and recognized by providing a little more power and funds in the hands of local municipal bodies, to revamp, improve, strengthen hospitals, government dispensaries, and clinics. This will have a compounding overall impact on the quality of healthcare services and, in fact, last-mile delivery of healthcare services to the people of the country, to the people of the city.

Additionally, a dedicated counselling department needs to be set up at every hospital to provide healthcare professionals necessary psychological help, care and assistance to cope with the rigorous demands of their profession. Retaining healthcare talent is often far more cost-effective than replacing it. Every experienced doctor or nurse who remains in the system strengthens not only patient care today, but also the training and mentorship of the next generation of healthcare professionals

B H A R A T



While the challenges are plenty, so are bright spots. India's is a growth story still being written. The only problem is many of these lessons didn't have to be learnt the hard way. Image: AI-Generated, (Kaushal Media)

CONGRATULATIONS ON LEVELLING UP!

There's a famous saying in life coaching circles: If things suddenly got more difficult, congratulations! you just levelled up. This is what seems to have happened to Bharat as a civilization and collective conscious in the last 30 days since the previous issue of this magazine was published. Let's take a bird's eye view of all major developments and analyze what they mean collectively and individually. Which opportunities

presented themselves and which mistakes could be improved.

Ram Mandir Donation Scandal: A lost opportunity for installing a paradigm shift

Millions in cash, gold, and silver donations made to the temple were allegedly siphoned off. Investigators allege the largest diversion took place during the 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela. CCTV footage reportedly revealed instances of temple staff colluding with bank employees to steal from counting rooms and hide the money. On the surface this looks like just another political, national level ‘scam’. Even the most tuned-in supporter of the ruling government is shaking their head in disapproval and disengaging from the Modi-high.

Zoom out just a tad from everything and look at the full story of the BJP govt’s 12 years at the helm of the largest population of the world, and you will see an opportunity lost—a *huge* one.

This could very well have been the BJP’s and Modi’s ‘ultimate statement’ on power and ‘good governance’ had they broken the wheel instead of regressing back to older broken models.

Why couldn’t the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya have been the only mandir anywhere in the world of its

kind where donations would be 100% UPI enabled digital and tracked by state-of-the-art blockchain technology?

It would have been the best possible ‘portal’ of change for every visitor, every devotee. This may well have pressured or rather ‘nudged’ all other mandir trusts to adopt the same model?

It often seems that the ruling govt doesn’t believe in its own revolution. It doesn’t believe in its own revolutionary moves.

Media vs Coaching: Misdirected Rage

चाणक्यनीति १३.२०

एकाक्षरप्रदातारं यो गुरुं नाभिवन्दते ।
श्वानयोनिशतं गत्वा चाण्डालेष्वभिजायते ॥

Teaching: “The one who teaches even one syllable must be honoured”

Essence: To dishonour the teacher is to dishonour the source of your own awakening.

Since the NEET paper leak unrest caught momentum, coupled with more paper leaks, online teachers and students asking tough questions, a domino effect cascaded within the larger system. Mainstream media began targeting online teachers and coaching institutes for keeping

students ‘trapped’ in a vicious system of endless preparation for exams, wasting their youth. Searing temperatures simultaneously leading to fires breaking out all over the place exposing infrastructure pushed to its limits. Unfortunate case of students being burnt alive in a coaching institute in Lucknow brought back memories of a similar incident that happened in Karol Bagh 2 years ago when students of Rau’s IAS Study circle drowned in the basement of the coaching center building during heavy monsoon rains.

One must concede that this underlying tension between the ‘mainstream’ and coaching institutes has been brewing for a while. It started a few years ago with recurrent cases of suicide and fatal accidents in popular coaching ‘hotspots’ in India such as Kota. Multiple incidents of fire and safety issues including a major case of fire breaking out in a coaching center near Batra Cinema, in Delhi’s Mukherjee Nagar.

Then a closer look began exposing the system all over the place. Apparently, there are ‘hotspots’ of coaching existing in key cities and districts all over the country where an independent ecosystem of coaching institutes, hostels, libraries, canteens and book shops, cyber cafes co-exist. The problem that the mainstream has with such hotspots is that they are unregulated yet concentrate hundreds of thousands of people around them.

Online teachers have actually played a huge role in decentralizing such ‘hotspots’. So, you no longer need to go to Mukherjee Nagar or Karol Bagh in Delhi to prepare for UPSCE and SSC, you have teachers on YouTube who have built an online community around coaching you for that exam. Similarly, you no longer need to go to Kota in Rajasthan for IIT JEE coaching, there are teachers online who help you achieve similar outcomes while cultivating a similar ‘experience’.



Once a bustling hotspot for students, teachers and civil services aspirants, Mukherjee Nagar's Outram Lane now bears a more or less deserted look. Coaching institutes and tuition centers have largely been reduced to 'admission centers' here. Classes are conducted online or in many different locations managed by the coaching institutes. A fire accident in

2023 coupled with cheap data and changing learning behaviors seems to have primarily lead the change.

In a country where the system has cracked down hard on educational institutions' freedoms and culture, it seems the youth is not in a mood to relent when it comes to the last bit of 'community' they have left in an age of AI. If anything, the entire ecosystem seems willing to fight back albeit silently. Why is that? Because this is probably what most mainstream channels, leaders and commentators are unable to understand fully: Whether online or offline, these coaching 'hotspots' serve a dual purpose that essentially helps the state rather than challenge it. They create an environment of knowledge exchange, idea exchange and instill a sense of responsibility and leadership by teaching young students to do their chores, get organized, learn to work together, help each other, learn focus and in fact, plan ahead in terms of the larger trajectory of their careers.

What the establishment perhaps doesn't realize is that preparation for exams is not a means to an end. It is a *character-building* journey. It's not the pursuit of happiness, it is the happiness of the pursuit that defines meaning for individuals in a society where quite often nothing else is under their control but their own mind, life and capabilities.

'Calling out' coaching 'hotspots' is like calling out stadiums and campuses which by the way the government hasn't been able to build in nearly

enough numbers as required given its rising & thriving Gen Z and Gen Alpha generations.

चाणक्यनीति १७.०१

पुस्तकप्रत्ययाधीतं नाधीतं गुरुसन्निधौ ।
सभामध्ये न शोभन्ते जारगर्भा इव स्त्रियः ॥

Teaching: “Book-learning without the Guru lacks authority in assembly”

Essence: Knowledge learned merely from books, and not in the presence of a guru, does not shine in an assembly.

No force, biological or non-biological, has the power to undo the essence from which the power of ‘Bharat’ flows. Gurus are to be honoured even before parents and God himself. That is the most fundamental tenet of *Sanatana*. Any establishment no matter how powerful, is not more powerful than successive kingdoms, invaders & empires; from the age of Dhanananda to the Ghaznavids, Ghurids & ultimately the British Raj, *combined*—who could *still* only become successful in burning down Nalanda, Takshashila and the Gurukul system but not the essence from which all of those great places were built.

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।
गुरुर्साक्षात् परब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

"Guru [is] Creator, Guru [is] Preserver, Guru [is] Divine Destroyer; Guru [is] Personified Ultimate Absolute-Reality, to Him [is] Revered Guru's Salutations."

—Guru Gita

Exam Paper Leaks & Disgruntled Students

It seems such an irony that a country which has given the world UPI, that has the capability of sending a mission to Mars within ₹450 crores, is struggling to conduct full proof examinations.

It is true that the scale of examinations conducted across departments, services and centers in the country on a yearly and monthly basis is colossal to say the least.

Every year, well over 100 million examination attempts are made across India in well over 10,000 distinct examinations spanning school boards, university admissions, professional licensing, recruitment and competitive services. It is very likely one of the largest examination ecosystems anywhere in the world.

You know the interesting thing?

Collectively, cost incurred by governments across India probably runs into thousands of crores.



Students protesting against exam paper leaks at Jantar Mantar. 1st July 2026, Photo by Jay Kaushal

Even so, ushering a transformation here still won't be *as* colossal as an abrupt nationwide ban on legal tender as was imposed by the Modi govt in 2016.

Why all examinations in a country the aims to become fully developed by 2047 aren't compulsorily being held online is a mystery that yet again betrays the govt's lack of faith in its own methods of transformation.

Why is “one nation one election” a bigger priority than “one nation one examination”?

Delhi Ledger Counsel:

Why can't India simply have one standardized examination that grades people into 'bands'. Make elective subjects compulsory to clear within a minimum number of bands depending on the service or office the candidate is applying to.

Make physical performance tests and practicals an added feature depending on the service and institute being applied to. Similarly add psychological testing, Vivas, interviews and group discussions as additional 'bands' one must qualify for certain posts and offices.

In fact, make the score of such an examination valid for 2 years.

It is not as difficult as it sounds. Not something imagination and collaboration together cannot solve.

Even if such an exam will run into multiple days or even multiple weeks for some candidates, it would be worth it. 22-23 months flat would be freed up for the candidate after every 'exam'. This time can be used in gainful opportunities like volunteering and gaining practical experience as an apprentice or part time work or full-time study.

A nation that has ~615 million people (40% of the total population) below the age of 25, cannot afford to keep wasting their time in 'n' different exams throughout the year.

As long as the system doesn't begin thinking along these lines, some or the other examination will keep 'leaking' because the number of variables to track, stay on top of and manage is just not feasible.

The Emerging Missile Export Economy



Built in collaboration with Russia, BrahMos stands for Brahmaputra-Moskva, two important rivers in India & Russia

respectively. The BrahMos is arguably the world's fastest and most accurate supersonic cruise missile right now. Image: AI-Generated, (Kaushal Media)

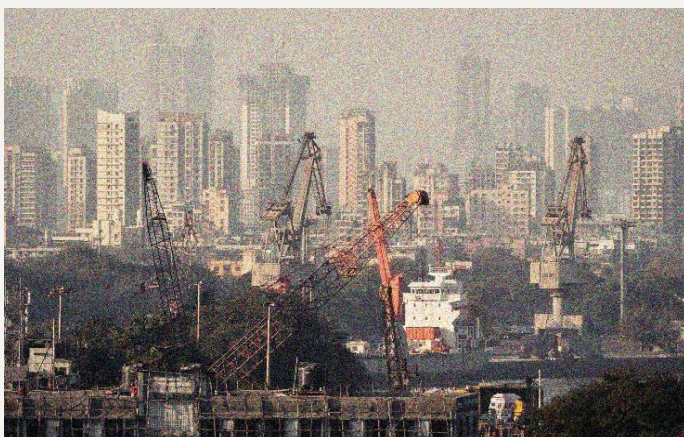
India has now aimed its guns (quite literally) towards exporting its flagship missile the “Brahmos” to mainstream economic superpowers. The UAE is in active discussions to procure India’s Brahmos missiles. Not only this, there are also speculations of India building an ‘AkashTeer’ like custom missile defense system for the middle eastern superpower. India has also signed an export contract with Vietnam for the Brahmos. It is also said to be in the final stages of discussions with Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand to export its Brahmos cruise missiles.

This is a big achievement. When critics put up questions like “What India has invented in the last 100 years?” The AkashTeer, Brahmos, Mangalyaan and UPI should probably rattle off the top of one’s head. But that rarely happens. I wonder why. Maybe it’s an outdated colonial-wired attachment to the narrative that “Bharat has never attacked anyone. It has always quietly absorbed aggression.” Maybe it conflicts with the actively curated image of “Bharat being the land of Buddha”. Who knows?

Basic Infrastructure Gaps and Water Woes

Major Indian cities like Mumbai and Delhi were found grappling with severe water crises especially in modern high-rise condos which by the way cost anywhere between the price of a Mercedes E Class

to a Bentley Continental GT. Not that these aspirational cars are going to be relevant any more with widespread ethanol blending planning to go from E20 blended petrol to E80 and E100; even as car manufacturers have expressed their inability to adapt engine design and technology to high percentage ethanol blended fuels any time soon. In fact, another big problem that seems to have been exposed about modern high rises is that current fire management infrastructure available with the fire department does not widely support fighting fires beyond the 5th/6th floor. *Once again, if the municipal bodies were democratized, empowered and funded before such ambitious large-scale development was initiated*, we might have anticipated such problems and prepared for them—perhaps even through foreign acquisitions of one or two specialized firefighting helicopters or engines for high risk areas.



iStock.com/mgstudy0

Many expensive high-rise condos in Mumbai lack even basic fire safety & water supply support.
Photo:



Global alliances are 'Going Dutch'. India under Modi arguably accelerated this shift towards nation-first politics. Image: AI-generated. (Kaushal Media)

‘GOING DUTCH’: THE END OF GLOBALIZATION?

Do you know that, in Dutch weddings, it isn't uncommon for you to be invited to the wedding ceremony but not the actual wedding feast?

Does that sound interesting or weird?

Well it's part of the Dutch weddings culture in the Netherlands. Quite often, the guests that are invited to the actual ceremony are not invited for

the feast, and vice versa.

Doesn't seem so surprising once you remember that the popular phrase "Going Dutch," or "Dutch Treat" where two people going out on a date or to eat, each pay for themselves only. The phrase does not come from Denmark, as is sometimes assumed, but from the Dutch, meaning the people of the Netherlands. Its origins are tied to the old English habit of using "Dutch" in a mocking way during the fierce Anglo-Dutch rivalry of the 17th century.

You would find it very interesting to know that before Britain became a superpower with the British East India Company, the Dutch were bigger maritime superpowers. In fact, New York City began its European colonial life as New Amsterdam, a Dutch settlement.

Now, when you go further back to explore *why* the Dutch are the way they are, I think their history and resilience give you a lot of clues about what shaped them. "Going Dutch," is not about stinginess. Behind the phrase lies a civilization shaped by water, trade, calculation, risk, and survival.

You see, Gujarat and Mumbai offer an Indian parallel to the Dutch model of development. Gujarat's long coastline made it one of India's great maritime gateways, with ancient sites like

Lothal pointing to a trading imagination that goes back thousands of years. Mumbai, meanwhile, rose from a cluster of islands and a deep natural harbour into one of the great ports of the Arabian Sea. These civilizations learned to look *outward* because they didn't have much farming land or fresh water resources. Trading & sailing became a 'better' risk with higher rewards; coupled with careful accounting as a survival strategy.

The Return of National Interest

India under Modi can arguably be attributed to knocking off the first domino in the "Our focus is our national interest" domino-effect that has cascaded globally.

It seems to be undoing a lot of what globalization sought to achieve by carefully interlinking the self-interests of different countries together in a way that prevented wars.

Even a brief fleeting look at the newspapers of the past few months will tell you how countries seem to be now looking after themselves more than so called alliances, coalitions and 'blocs'.

Perhaps a stark example of this is what Benjamin Netanyahu, the PM of Israel said recently (In

essence): Maybe it is time we outgrew our dependence on the United States as a country. Build our independent weapons-production system.

The fact that strong allies such as the US and Israel are able to disagree and realistically mull 'replacements' in light of domestic interests is really this domino effect of 'Going-Dutch' steadily reaching a crescendo.

In fact, even Giorgia Meloni, the PM of Italy and traditionally a strong ally of the US, recently shot back at Donald Trump during the G7 summit in a sharp retort that went viral over one of Trump's usual unfiltered remarks, about Meloni: " she was begging me for a photograph during the summit"

"I don't know why the US president behaves this way towards allies, and not enemies of the West," responded Meloni, with her characteristic fervor; "but there is one thing he needs to remember: neither I nor Italy ever beg,"

"Meanwhile, the UK continues to pay for its seemingly ill-timed exit from the EU. With PM Keir Starmer becoming the sixth political casualty in a decade, the nation remains gripped by deep administrative, financial, and immigration crises."

Germany has announced its largest military expansion *since* the second world war, doubling its defence budget. Russia-Ukraine are *still* going *at it*

even after almost 4.5 years, with massive losses on both sides and negligible on-ground gains.

All of this, as Europe has been hit with one of its worst heatwaves on record, with public infrastructure collapsing in Germany, France and the UK, much of it simply not designed to tolerate such extreme heat. ACs are running out, people are sleeping out in the open and traffic signals are melting under temperatures as high as 42 degrees Celsius.

Realignment, Not Collapse

One can't help but think that if strong legacy alliances are going Dutch in the way they are, the East may become highly unpredictable. 'The East' has never really had a consistent, strong coalition or military alliance. The East is probably the most diverse in race, culture, topology, religion, region, financial capability and military capacity, technology etc., that you will find anywhere in the rest of the world.

There have hardly ever been issues that the countries and blocs in the East ever unanimously agree on even with their immediate neighbors... within their own country! In fact, even among the Muslim majority countries of the Middle East, there remain profound disagreements and dissent

on a variety of issues. A big one among them over interpretations of Islam itself.

A rising wave of self-interest over collective interest therefore does seem alarming from the perspective of a stable world order.

So, is this World War III in the making?

Well, unlike what clickbait videos on the internet and sensationalist podcasters will have you believe, the fears about World War III seem largely unfounded at this stage.

It seems more like a routine reorganization at a global level. Something that happens every few hundred years. You see history has a much longer timeline. Value systems align and realign in light of macro events.

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended World War 2 simultaneously forcing the world into a more *interdependent* order. But it was only a matter of time before changing strategic realities began to rebalance global equations. The arms race, tech revolution, multiple countries with nuclear and hypersonic missile capabilities, air defense systems and satellite surveillance networks, distributed value chains, supply chains, industrial capacities and manpower has simultaneously equalized and nullified the singular advantage that the US held on to for a long time.

The pandemic probably has proven to be the biggest realigning event.

We are moving into an era where personal interests are probably going to dictate discussion boards more than collective discourse.

More and more people are likely to immigrate, cash out, and prioritize smaller groups like their families, shareholders, communities and societies rather than a collective identity.

So is this a fragmentation of society happening slowly and steadily? More than fragmentation, it is a realignment of purpose happening at a large scale.

Everybody is taking a harder look at what is important to them, and this is very likely to throw up surprising alliances and surprising defections, both politically as well as socially.

“Going Dutch” doesn’t mean we aren’t going for dinner. It just means we are interested in the meaningful company of others but are only comfortable footing the bill for what we are in the mood for right now. To be honest that may just have set the tone for a new world order that is a lot more mature than the previous one which had become largely about keeping up pretenses.



The Delhi Metro is one of the largest metro networks in the world. Photo: Jay Kaushal

DELHI METRO: VANITY OR LIFELINE?

Did you know that, according to most recent estimates, almost 6 people die in the Mumbai local train every day? That's a lot. 6 people *every* day. That's close to 2,000 people in a year. The Mumbai local is the only traveling artery for a lot of working-class individuals in Mumbai who commute from one part of the city to the other; the suburbs to deep inside the city. At its peak, it was designed to carry a maximum load of 1.5 lakh

passengers per hour, per corridor. But this routinely extends to beyond 4 or 5 lakh, with trains carrying passengers beyond double the technical rating.

Bengaluru has a similar problem. It doesn't have a reliable metro network. There's one still coming up now, albeit slower than is required. This is a lot similar to Mumbai, where a Metro network is still being built to be a meaningful replacement or at least an alternate to the Mumbai local, but with very little success. In fact, the construction work itself causes traffic jams, bottlenecks, safety hazards, waterlogging etc. This is a lot more so for Bengaluru where massive traffic jams are a huge problem because, the city didn't plan and act on an effective commute strategy in the initial stages of its development itself, like it *should* have. As the city began to grow and more and more people began to spread out to the suburbs, in the absence of an effective public commute strategy, the infrastructure began to crumble under the weight of the volume just as it had begun to play catch up.

Delhi's Biggest Urban Advantage

Delhi, on the other hand, has the unique distinction of having one of the cleanest, most reliable, most extensive metro networks in the country, and even the world as a whole. In fact,

comparatively speaking, from the perspective of the 'developed' world, the Delhi Metro is still one of the best out there. It's probably the only saving grace of an otherwise disorganized civic infrastructure in the capital. The fact that Delhi has a reliable, high-quality commute network capable of ensuring women, children and old people can move between two extremes of the city (let's say Noida to Dwarka, which is roughly ~42 kilometers) in a clean, safe, air-conditioned environment within an hour's duration is a big achievement taken at a city scale.

But all is not well when it comes to the economics of such a solution. Delhi Metro continues to report accounting losses, running into 1000s of crores over the years. And what seems like a paradox is that as the losses keep mounting, so does the expansion of the metro network. Some part of the city is almost always, perpetually, under some kind of development work associated with the Delhi Metro. This means traffic diversions. This means traffic bottlenecks, delays, dust, pollution, potholes exposing the roads in a way that can and does routinely cause, accidents.

Expansion of this metro network is therefore very important but it's a paradox how development work associated with probably the single dependable civic amenity in the city manages to become its own kind of nuisance to the people. Over the years, the Delhi Metro in itself has

become somewhat of a brand, and it has become the identity of Delhi.

The Economics of Expansion

However, a question that begs to be asked is, is this really economically *sustainable*? Is it really solving the problems that it was designed to solve, or is it just what you would call, in entrepreneurial terms, a vanity metric, a vanity asset? You see, even the highest statue in the world, the Statue of Unity in Gujarat, has but modest revenue through tourism. Nothing can take away from the fact that it is the highest, tallest statue in the world, beating the Spring Temple Buddha statue in China before it. But nothing can take away from the fact either, that ₹2,989 crores was spent in building it, of which a very small percent has since been recovered through tourism.

Sure, it is a long-term asset. But in a country which is strapped on resources, a country where ~64% of the population is dependent on at least one form of government benefits, where only 4-5% of the population pays income tax, can we really *afford* a misstep when it comes to making investments with disproportionate returns?

It is true that not everything is about returns. A lot is also about morale. And I'm pretty sure that being

a country which can boast of the tallest statue built anywhere in the world is definitely something to be proud of. It is probably being taught in textbooks around the world, as you read this. In GK textbooks, Google searches, India itineraries, ChatGPT queries, it's being consistently repeated. India has the tallest statue anywhere in the world. But as vanity metrics go, everything that makes you look good doesn't necessarily give equivalent or justifiable ROI.

The Last-Mile Problem

The Delhi Metro is lacking in one of the biggest areas that any reliable, scalable transportation network needs to master, which is last-mile connectivity. What that does is it quite often causes people to bypass entering the metro at all and traveling by bus, cab, bike, scooter, whether their own or through an aggregator network like Ola, Uber or Rapido etc. What builds efficiency is a certain *predictability* when it comes to connectivity.

Learning from Global Cities

For example, in the US, you know that having a car, your own car, is the most reliable way to get

anywhere in the country. The highway network is built to support that, and, it's part of the culture. In the same way, in London, you know, the 'tube' is built to help you get anywhere in the city. It is built underground, and it's one of the most dependable, reliable public transit systems out there. It's in fact a legacy public transit system. It's well advertised, a part of the 'culture'. And most interestingly, most importantly, *continuous*. It has existed for a long time.

So instead of trying to build additional and alternate systems, which do prevent single-point failures in transit, it is important to keep in mind that they do also harm economies of scale and public awareness, popularity, perception and planning.

For example, in the case of Mumbai, arguably, the Mumbai local train network should have been expanded *first* rather than trying to build an alternate network in the form of the Mumbai Metro. Such planning gives the people clear expectations. It also creates clear efficiency in terms of public transit.

Building an Integrated Transit Ecosystem

In the same way, promoting the Delhi Metro should be accompanied with creating a complete

transit work and a retail ecosystem around it, building offices, co-working spaces, retail chains, shops, restaurants, salons, malls, even stores that provide domestic produce such as Reliance Fresh, etc. in metro stations. Increasing feeder bus services by earmarking dedicated lanes for the same would make more sense than a haphazard strategy of making personal vehicles available at attractive interest rates for finance to boost domestic consumption. Working on the DTC bus services *and* working on the metro feeder bus services *and* allowing battery rickshaws while *also* allowing a highly fragmented, inconsistently regulated network of ever-growing auto rickshaws *and* aggregator apps all at once, essentially means splitting time energy and attention in thousands of directions. That is just a bad strategy if one seeks to reasonably be able to manage anything well.

This is what leads to creation of bottlenecks, traffic jams, transit delays, shipping delays. And the subsequent disregard for traffic rules where everybody is just trying to get anywhere they can as fast as possible by bypassing whatever rules stop them from getting where they need to go in time.

The Road Ahead

It seems that the Delhi Government's focus on seizing all registrations for petrol-driven vehicles,

petrol-driven two-wheelers 2028 onwards is a step in the right direction, but it still doesn't streamline the process of public transit. It is much better, one could argue, for building the kind of city that Delhi envisions to become, for building the kind of country that India envisions to become by having a central, reliable public transit system that staffs, plans, organizes, but also *predicts* public requirements effortlessly. Day after day, month after month, year after year. Instead of tens of different systems that each provide their own set of policing, regulatory and management headaches, Delhi needs to decide if the Delhi Metro is just a vanity or its central nervous system.

Delhi Ledger Counsel:

When you focus on everything, you end up focusing on nothing. That's the harsh reality that emerges when you apply systems thinking. To truly build a sustainable, efficient and high-performance public transit system, the government needs to get into 'elimination' mode rather than needlessly carrying several systems together with each eating away at the advantage of the other.

P U L S E

A curated stream of sharp ideas, voices and signals—handpicked from creators across platforms, each worth your attention for a reason. (Just click on the story you want to view online)

Why has India, a nation of 140 crore people, never qualified for the FIFA World Cup?

In this 3-hr long podcast with famous podcaster Raj Shamani, Ranjit Bajaj strategically breaks down the factors holding back Indian football from becoming a global force. Shocking revelations, grassroot realities, Indian club football truths & his plan to make India qualify for the 2034 FIFA event.

How powerful is oligarchy really? A deep analysis of social wealth distribution and the limits of 'choice'.

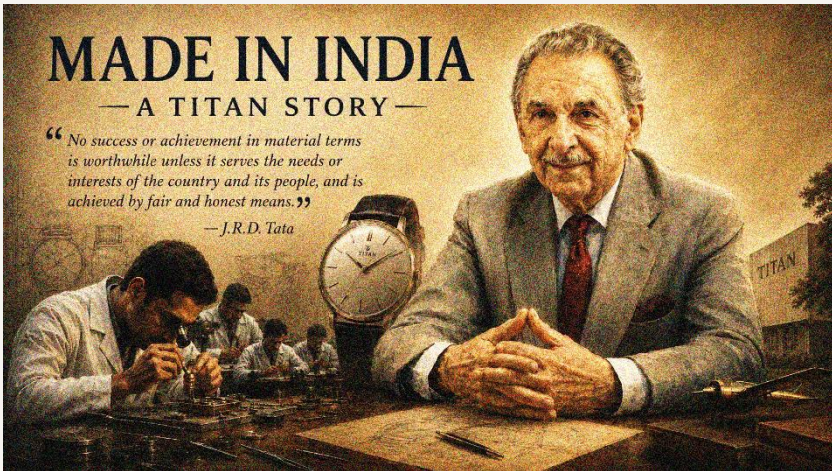
Johnny Harris takes you deep into the world of oligarchy and the limits of 'choice'. You may have often heard 'oligarchy' being mentioned. What is it *really*? How much control does oligarchy really have on our lives?

Infosys Co-Founder Mohan Das Pai expresses angst over “tax terrorism” & its impact on the morale of honest entrepreneurs.

In this short 15-minute conversation, Mohan Das Pai, (Infosys Co-Founder), expresses angst at the unchecked trend of IT, ED and CBI raids. “15000 HNIs have left this country. We live in fear. Cost of capital is much higher than the west. This is not a conducive environment for business to grow.” he says while suggesting policy changes.

How Indira Gandhi’s Emergency accidentally shaped the politics of modern India (and edged out Congress itself.)

Veteran journalist Shekhar Gupta details the fascinating (& unintended) impact of Indira Gandhi’s 1975 Emergency imposition on shaping modern India’s politics and political leaders.



Made In India: A Titan Story, is about building 'dignity' more than a 'product'.
Photo: AI-Generated, (Kaushal Media)

MADE IN INDIA: A TITAN STORY

In times dominated by crony capitalism, obsessive valuation metrics, and the relentless pursuit of profit maximisation, *Made in India: A Titan Story* transports us back to an era when building for India emerged from a far simpler, yet infinitely more demanding place.

This is not merely the story of a watch company. It is the story of conviction.

Jim Sarbh, portraying Xerxes Desai, the man who led the audacious mission to build India's first

world-class homegrown watch brand, continues to cement his reputation as the actor of choice for portraying visionary builders of modern India. Audiences who admired his charismatic performance as Dr. Homi Jehangir Bhabha in *Rocket Boys* will find equal delight in his transformation here. Gone is the youthful scientific prodigy. In his place stands a middle-aged, balding, relentlessly driven industrial leader whose quiet determination becomes the emotional centre of the series.

Equally compelling is Naseeruddin Shah as J.R.D. Tata.

Shah's portrayal captures neither mythology nor corporate iconography. Instead, he presents J.R.D. as the statesman-industrialist he truly was: calm, visionary, deeply humane, yet quietly uncompromising. It is a performance built not on dramatic flourishes but on remarkable restraint.

It is worth noting that Naseeruddin Shah has displayed exceptional judgment in the roles he has chosen over the past decade. Whether portraying the ageing musical maestro slowly losing his hearing in *Bandish Bandits* or embodying J.R.D. Tata here, he continues to demonstrate why he remains one of India's finest actors. Interestingly, the casting feels historically appropriate as well. When the events depicted in this series unfolded, J.R.D. Tata was around eighty-one years old. Shah, now in his mid-seventies, brings a natural gravitas

that only enhances the authenticity of the performance.

The story itself is as inspiring as it is nostalgic.

When Swiss manufacturers dismiss India's capability and refuse meaningful cooperation in the creation of a world-class Indian watch brand, Xerxes Desai refuses to retreat. Backed unwaveringly by J.R.D. Tata, he chooses instead to compete. Here was J.R.D., India's first licensed pilot, the architect of its first commercial airline, a man who continued building even after the nationalisation of Air India. Faced with scepticism, he responded not with outrage, but with resolve.

If Xerxes Desai serves as the commander leading the expedition on the ground, then J.R.D. Tata becomes the king under whose standard that expedition marches into unknown territory.

Episode by episode, the series takes viewers deeper into the *why* behind Titan. It reveals the painstaking precision, repetitive craftsmanship, engineering discipline, and countless setbacks involved in creating something as deceptively simple as a wristwatch. What could easily have become a corporate success story instead evolves into a meditation on patience, excellence, and institutional courage.

The greatest strength of *Made in India* lies in what it chooses to celebrate.

It is a story about building something *beyond* survival.

In a nation wrestling with widespread poverty while simultaneously nurturing extraordinary scientists, engineers, businessmen, traders, bureaucrats, writers, and innovators, Titan represented something larger than a consumer product. It became a symbol of dignity. Of competence. Of hope. Of national self-belief.

Perhaps Titan's greatest achievement was not about manufacturing watches at all, but changing how Indians perceived them. What had long been viewed as a functional instrument gradually became an expression of taste, aspiration, and design. The eventual creation of the Titan Edge, then recognised as the world's thinnest analogue quartz watch, feels less like a natural consequence but a commitment to excellence.

There is also something quietly poetic about J.R.D. Tata himself. Born in France to a French mother and an Indian Parsi father, he became one of the strongest champions of India's industrial self-belief. It is a reminder that patriotism is measured by the institutions one chooses to build. The *people* one chooses to *serve*.

That irony lends the series an unexpected emotional depth.

In many ways, *Made in India* serves as a reminder of what responsible, patriotic, and genuinely classy

entrepreneurship looks like. It evokes the same spirit that later drove Ratan Tata to create Indica, India's first indigenously developed passenger car, despite overwhelming scepticism.

Ultimately, this isn't a series about how a homegrown watch brand was made.

It is about craftsmanship.

Painstaking institution building.

In fact, it is more about choosing national confidence over imported validation.

At a time when vanity dominates the landscape, *Made in India: A Titan Story* offers something refreshingly unfashionable: sincere optimism. It reminds us that meaningful institutions are built not by chasing valuations, but by committing one's entire intellect, heart, and spirit to a worthy idea.

For anyone who still believes that building for India is an act of service rather than merely an act of business, this series is essential viewing.

Rating: 3.9/5

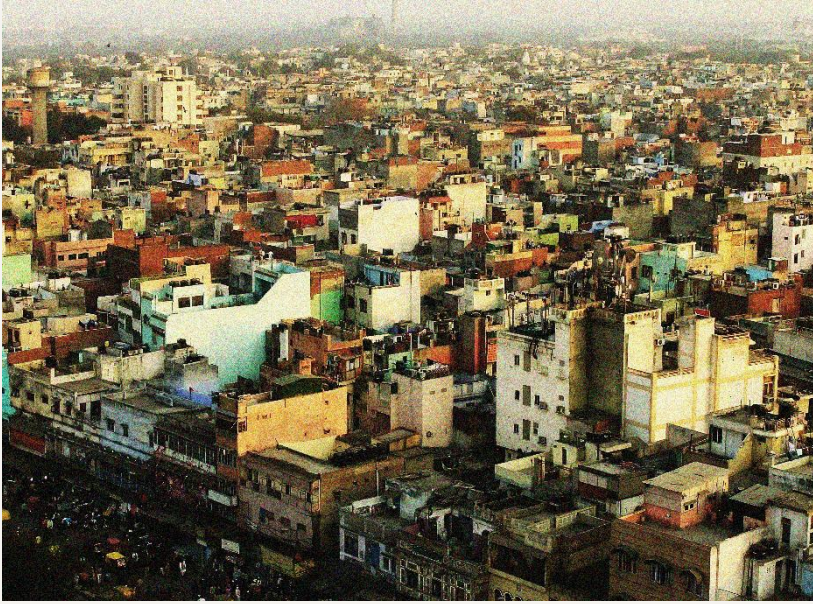
-Aksharaa



What unfolds in the world above is never without
a pattern beneath it.

Kalki Astro Science is an inquiry into that deeper
order. Where time, space, and consciousness
intersect to shape outcomes, tendencies, and
destinies. Rooted in the sciences of Jyotisha,
Vaastu, and lived observation, this section moves
beyond belief into structure, beyond prediction
into understanding.

The following pages don't attempt to convince of
anything in any way. They're designed to *reveal*.



The urban landscape in large cities is increasingly congested and detrimental to the wellness of its inhabitants. Photo: iStock.com/Donyanedomam

VAASTU, SAFETY & THE MODERN CITY

When you think of Vaastu, it is dismissed in the world, as a fancy pseudoscience.

Interestingly however, when you apply Vaastu concepts to modern problems and modern crises, such as the large number of fires that have recently been breaking out in clustered constricted buildings and apartments, you will realize that

such buildings are actually completely against Vaastu principles.

Vaastu principles, for example, almost routinely talk about a '*Mukhya Dwar*', that is, 'the main gate' or the 'main entrance'. But they also talk about '*Upadwaras*' or additional or 'subsidiary gates'.

Multiple Entrances Are a Classical Principle

So Mahadwar is the biggest gate of any building, of any dwelling, of any house. Upadwaras are subsidiary gates. In the '*Samarangan Sutradhara*', written by King Bhoja, one of India's greatest architectural manuals, there are multiple chapters about forts, palaces, mansions, and cities. It describes them with multiple gateways.

The discussion appears in the sections dealing with forts & fortified settlements. The only thing to keep in mind is that the additional gates need to be positioned in the most 'auspicious' way possible.

Ancient Texts and Modern Safety

In fact, '*Arthashastra*' by one of the most astute philosophers of Bharat, Chanakya, discusses multiple gates, secret exits, escape routes, and even

guard passages when talking about fortified cities and important dwellings. The concept of multiple exits therefore, is something which comes across repeatedly.

Flow, Space and Human Well-being

And in fact, the modern improvised concept of apartment buildings built so close to each other that even a perimeter is not left open around the building is squarely against the basic concepts of Vaastu.

Vaastu is about energetic alignment, but it's also about allowing a natural flow of energy. The flow of energy is not contradictory to basic principles of design. That is why a lot of Vaastu concepts overlap principles taught in many design schools.

And so, you will see that building libraries, offices, and hotels in congested, claustrophobic spaces is actually not considered good even in terms of the general well-being of the inhabitants of such a house. Ideally, Vaastu recommends having multiple entrances and exits that all serve different purposes and is completely against reducing buildings to a single point failure. In fact, if you look at traditional '*havelis*', different members of the household would quite often prefer different pathways in and out of the building for various

purposes. And that makes sense because individuals all have different temperaments. And doorways are essentially utilitarian in their nature, yes. But there is also a lot of ritual and process associated with the gateway being used and the purpose associated with it.

The Importance of the Mahadwar

The Mahadwar or the main entrance, in fact, is advised to be larger than all of the other entrances in the house. In fact, it makes sense to have it decorated and somewhat ‘grand’ compared to all the other entrances. If you were to invite an important person to your home or a guest, they would all come in through the main entrance. However, if you wanted to just go off without attracting attention to yourself for let’s say an evening walk or just to run a small errand, then one of the alternate doors would not be a bad idea. Do you understand? It’s about how energy works. The main entrance has a powerful energy associated with it that need not be upset all the time as you move in and out of the dwelling.

Modern Apartments and the Single Point of Failure

Everything today has been squarely reduced to the minimum viable operational utility. Vaastu is actually against that. Building so many buildings close to each other in an important economic zone such as near a hospital or a metro station or important bus stands, etc., does serve commercial utility. But according to Vaastu principles, it is detrimental to the well-being of the individuals living in such dwellings.

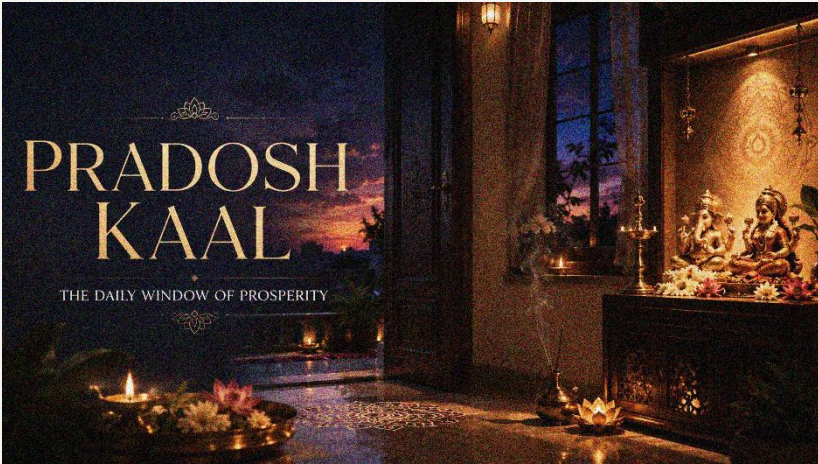
A Practical Perspective

One could ask then, are all modern apartments therefore against Vaastu principles? And the simple answer to that would be to imagine whether you have alternate exits, whether optimal or suboptimal, but *exits* nevertheless in case of an emergency.

Look at the building first from this perspective, at least if you cannot immediately look at your own unit within that building. But, if possible, architect, any space that you occupy so that it provides sufficient room for entering and exiting should the situation demand it.

Apartments should compulsorily have secondary means of emergency evacuation. Not many people understand that fire safety is incorporated within one of the basic recommendations of Vaastu.

K A A L



Pradosh Kaal, the time window occurring within 90 minutes of sunset, is auspicious of inviting wealth & prosperity into your home. Image: AI-generated (Kaushal Media)

PRADOSH KAAL: THE DAILY WINDOW OF PROSPERITY

When we talk of Kaal, we are basically talking about time. We are talking about time from the perspective of the spiritual relevance. Kaal is technically just time, but practically Kaal is about the concept that there is a good time for everything. This is where this concept emerges from Vedic philosophy, that there is the right time

to do something. There is a right time for everything.

So, in the previous issues, we talked about Brahma Muhurat and Abhijit Muhurat as two important time periods for new beginnings, *initiating* new beginnings. Even if you don't have any deep understanding of Jyotisha or '*Kaal Nirnaya*', you can use these two time periods as a general benefic time period that exists during the day.

Today we talk about "*Pradosh Kaal*".

Why Pradosh Kaal Matters

"*Pradosh Kaal*" is that ~1.5-hour (2 *muhurats*) time period right after sunset. It occurs every day. Diwali is the time for Lakshmi Pujan, and Lakshmi Pujan usually happens during Pradosh Kaal, right after dusk. This time period is considered very auspicious from the perspective of inviting prosperity into the home.

The Natal Chart Perspective

If you look at the transit chart, it makes a lot of sense as well because during this time period, the sun is at the descendant. The sun is in what you

would normally call the seventh and the eighth house position if you were to cast a chart for that particular moment. In the same way that the sun is at the ascendant in the morning at dawn, and in the tenth house at noon, it's at the descendant during Pradosh Kaal. Pradosh Kaal is a time period that is connected with the use of incense, fragrance, mantra chanting, affirmations, group prayers, '*aarti*', '*pujan*', or just a general time of consciously inviting prosperity into the home.

Creating an Auspicious Environment

Dusting, sweeping, and other ordinary chores are usually avoided during this time period and should be done before.

This is advised to be a time period, (especially when you're going through a slump or when you're going through a general difficulty associated with liquidity or relationships) for 'lighting up' your space, creating a positive environment.

Music can be a part of it. Fragrance, lighting can be a part of it. Keeping your windows open is also advised. Do note that you can obviously use screening windows so that insects or pests don't come in, especially if you live in a tropical region. Similarly, keeping the front door open slightly for

Pradosh Kaal is a very good idea for inviting abundance and prosperity into the home.

This can be a great time period for any auspicious meetings such as to discuss marriage, partnership, relationships, buying of auspicious items or machinery, celebrations, social events, hosting events, etc. While the specific '*muhurta*' can be found out with some expert guidance depending on one's individual chart, the Pradosh Kaal as a rule is a great time period for the activities listed above.

Activities Favored During Pradosh Kaal

A simple ritual needs to be followed, and that is lighting a lamp in front of Lakshmi and Ganesh, folding your hands, and just making a general prayer seeking prosperity and divine assistance for completion of auspicious activities is good practice.

You could also simply light incense in your altar irrespective of your faith because the principles of Vedic philosophy are rooted in Sanatana, as in they are applicable to anybody and all of mankind as general principles or guidance. 'Kaal' in itself is less about a specific deity, more about 'alignment' with general energy. The Sun, in its movement across the sky, shapes our mood, shapes the day, and shapes the experiences throughout the day.

Kaal is basically tapping into that.

Lakshmi, Kubera and the North Direction

Pradosh Kaal is connected with Goddess Lakshmi and Kubera. Goddess Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth and prosperity. She is the consort of Lord Vishnu. Kubera is the keeper of wealth and is connected with the north direction. So, the north direction especially becomes important when associated with Pradosh Kaal. There are many other '*saadhnas*' and '*pujans*' that are actually connected with Pradosh Kaal, but almost all of them are focused at the central theme of cultivating prosperity, ease, happiness, joy, and harmonious relationships and partnerships.

A Daily Window for Prosperity

Now that you know about Pradosh Kaal, the next time you have to initiate any important activities belonging to the theme outlined here, Pradosh Kaal can be a very benefic and supportive window of action and initiation for the same.



Trataka is one of the oldest yogic techniques for honing one's concentration powers and strengthening the Ajna Chakra. Photo: [iStock.com/ jorgeantonio](https://iStock.com/jorgeantonio)

TRATAKA: RECLAIMING FOCUS IN THE AGE OF DISTRACTION

The previous editions of this magazine have focused quite a bit on wellness in terms of grounding oneself surrounded by the chaos of city life, demands of the age of AI, and widespread global economic uncertainty and competition. We've also talked about wellness from the perspective of cultivating calm as a ritual through fragrance, utilizing the workings of the

parasympathetic system and firing it up in just the right way to ease your senses into a sense of stability.

This edition seeks to focus on wellness through cultivating one of the most difficult and probably rare qualities—we can even say commodities—of the modern era of shorts, reels, and chats, **"attention."**

So many of us, so many children today, in fact, struggle to maintain focus, struggle to maintain their concentration on any topic for more than a few minutes. And in many cases, not even a few minutes, *a few seconds*. One could argue that it's the big tech companies and capitalism that is behind this alleged conspiracy to make the masses dumb, gullible, and dependent.

However, you will see that there is also a lot of top-quality long-form content on social media; in Telegram groups, YouTube OTT platforms, and AI chat tools.

Attention as a Competitive Advantage

The most capable, intelligent, and competent individuals are not cutting out technology completely from their lives but using it and utilizing it to get ahead. One of the biggest differentiating factors when it comes to how the

"gullible masses" consume content and conscious, competent, capable individuals consume content is deliberation, conscious attention, and the single most important quality associated with learning for millennia—**concentration**.

If you think that a lack of concentration is a modern problem, you're mistaken. Yes, levels of concentration have come down. Cortisol levels have gone up. Lives have become faster. People have many different things to take care of. Attention spans have been dropping. But keep in mind, the algorithm is only designed to show you more and more of what you see already.

That's, fairly speaking, not very different from how the world works. What you give energy to grows. What you give attention to grows. What you focus on grows.

Arjuna's distinction

Even in the Mahabharata, written by Ved Vyas, thousands of years ago, what separated Arjuna from other archers of his time was his ability to direct his attention with pinpoint focus on the target and zone out everything else. In the legend the Pandava and Kaurava princes learnt archery under the tutelage of Guru Drona. During a regular archery coaching session one day, they were given

the exercise of shooting down a parrot sitting in a tree.

Guru Drona called each one of his disciples to illustrate what focus truly is about.

One of the princes, upon being asked what he saw, said that, "I see the trees, and I see the sky, and I see the branches, and I see the leaves, and I see the parrot." Drona nodded and turned to ask another one of the princes the same question: "What do you see?" "I see the parrot. I see the leaves. I see the branches" the prince replied. Drona nodded again and then turned to ask yet another one of the princes "What do you see?" The prince replied "But of Couse! I see a parrot." Guru Drona smiled.

And then, as if to illustrate how a distinguished, capable archer thinks, he turned to ask his favorite student Arjuna the same question. "Arjuna, what do you see?" And Arjuna replied, "I see *only* the eye of the parrot. *Nothing else.*"

So even thousands of years ago, a legend such as the Mahabharata talks about attention in the same breath as 'effectiveness of focus'.

'Capability' of a warrior is very closely tied up in Ved Vyasa's perspective of the world with the *overall capability* to train one's mind to focus on the *right* things.

Focus Across History

The interesting thing is that this is not an isolated connection. A very similar thing comes up in a beautiful movie, “The Greatest Game Ever Played”. This is the true story of the 1913 U.S. Open, where a 20-year-old American amateur named Francis Ouimet shocked the world by defeating the legendary British champion, Harry Vardon.

The protagonist played by Shia LeBouf is a young golfer with exceptional talent. As the movie progresses, the director shows us in key moments just what makes him exceptional. It’s his ability to enter tunnel-vision mode and blur out everything else around him as he lines up to take critical shots.

Another great example is “Enemy at the Gates”, a dramatic retelling of the legendary sniper duel during the Battle of Stalingrad in World War II, focusing on Soviet hero Vassili Zaitsev and legendary German master sniper Major Erwin König.

Vasily played by Jude Law is first introduced in the movie in the hellish circumstances of the siege of Stalingrad in the Second World War, with just four bullets and a rifle, trying to hide among a pile of dead bodies, gathering up his mental faculties to make every bullet count and get himself out of that situation as German soldiers approach their position.

No matter what you think about Jude Law or the movie, that 3-4 minute sequence is probably one of the most inspirational sequences in war epics of all time. The loading, aiming, target picking and prioritizing under difficult, filthy circumstances lying amongst rotting corpses tells you what a mind capable of *focusing* itself has the capability of achieving.

Your capability to concentrate and *hold* your concentration is what gives you a massive advantage over everybody else who may be as capable as you are, maybe even more, who may have more resources than you do, or even more practice.

When it comes down to it, when it comes down to your ability, when it comes down to the actual moments that matter in your career and in your life, it's your ability to zone out everything else and focus on what's important that defines the success of your endeavors.

Introducing Trataka

‘*Trataka*’ (Pronounced *Traatak*) is one very simple, very effective yogic technique of training your mind. This exercise has been around for a long time, and a lot of prominent spiritual gurus have referred to it with varied applications.

If you struggle with concentration and maintaining focus, this exercise can train your mind to concentrate better.

How to Practise Trataka

How do you perform this?

It's very simple.

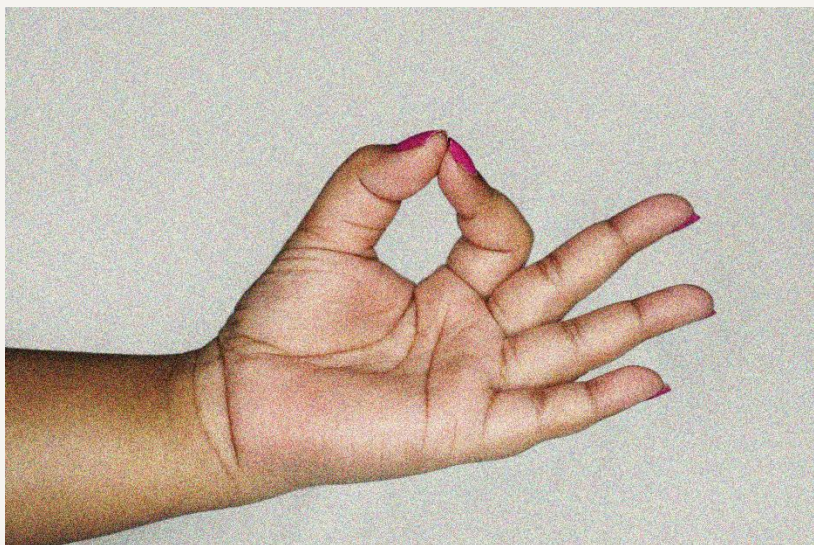
Place a candle approximately 10-12 feet away from yourself. Sit down on a chair, or you can sit down on an asana, back straight, shoulders open, hands in your lap.

Ideally, keeping your hands in '*Gyana Mudra*' (Pg. 79), which is the tip of the thumb touching the tip of the index finger, rest of the fingers outstretched, palms facing upwards, and your hands placed on your knees. This is probably one of the easiest mudras to sit in, as you practice this.

You can also sit in '*Dhyana Mudra*' (Pg. 79), which is right hand on top of your left, resting in your lap, the tip of your thumbs touching each other.

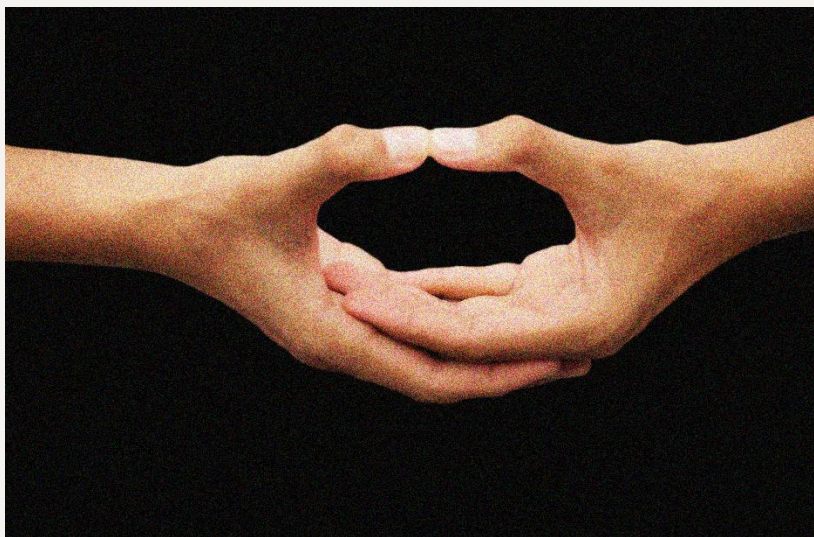
Now, you can have the rest of the room darkened if you want, but that is not necessary. You can do so to heighten this exercise if you have serious difficulty in focusing on one thing. Once you've made yourself comfortable, just sit down, breathe,

and focus on looking at the tip of the flame, the very top of the flame of the candle (or its center).



Above: "Gyana Mudra", Photo: [iStock.com/DIPIKA MAHATA](https://www.iStock.com/DIPIKA_MAHATA)

Below: "Dhyana Mudra", Photo: [iStock.com/mirzamlk](https://www.iStock.com/mirzamlk)



Every time you feel like shifting your position, or you feel an intrusive thought entering your mind, or you feel like you want to leave, get up, run, or you imagine any fears coming up or any thoughts, you have to do only one thing: Take a deep breath, inhale, and exhale. Inhale completely and exhale until your stomach contracts and moves towards your spine, then repeat.

You are not to move any other part of your body. Just manipulation of your breath is what is allowed to you. Keep your spine straight and hands resting in whichever mudra you chose to sit in at the beginning of this exercise.

Continue to sit in this position and maintain focus at the tip of the flame. Sit like this for as long as you can. Ideally, you should set an alarm beforehand for a minimum of five minutes. You can also turn on a song or a mantra whose duration you already know in the background. And then all you have to do is focus your attention on the tip of the flame until that song ends or the alarm rings.

Important Precautions

Ideally, you are supposed to not even blink your eyes as you do this exercise. Obviously, if you suffer from any ailments of the eyes or if you wear glasses, it's a good idea to wear your glasses. And it's

a good idea to ensure that your eyes are well hydrated, such as if you suffer from dry eyes or something similar, hydrate your eyes 30 minutes before you do this exercise.

If you've recently had eye surgery or any problem like that, you should consult your doctor before trying this yogic exercise.

Benefits of the Practice

The process of your eyes watering up as you do not blink, or at least blink as less as possible as you focus on that point at the tip of the flame, is supposed to be a process that increases self-control, focus, concentration, and also has a cleansing effect on your eyes.

Prolonged tearing naturally bathes the surface of the eye. Many practitioners feel a sense of refreshment in their eyes, the kind you often feel when you've been sitting on a chair and working all day long, and then you perform a few stretching exercises for your hamstrings or your lower back. Similarly, this exercise is like a catharsis of your ocular muscles. You are exercising and stretching them. You see, your eyes today do a lot of things they just weren't designed for. Such as focusing on screens, focusing on moving images all of the time, spending very less time outdoors. Most of us don't

utilize our ocular faculties engaged in what they were actually designed to do, which is gauging distance so that we could shoot with accuracy, chasing and hunting prey or watching out for predators over large tracts of land, observing nature for signs of changing weather etc.

Our current visual activity, heavy on ‘near-sighted work’, is often associated with an elongation of the eyeball. Such a pattern is often associated with myopia. Trataka, from a yogic perspective, is said to strengthen your third eye chakra, thereby improving your ability to focus, manifest and concentrate. It also has the tangible benefit of introducing ‘far-sighted’ work for our eyes while imposing mental ‘focus’.

Building a Sustainable Practice

How often should you do it?

If you've been feeling unsettled recently, or if you've been feeling that you need to improve your concentration and have difficulty concentrating for a while, this could be a brilliant exercise.

Individuals with ADHD often struggle with sustained attention. While Trataka is not a treatment for ADHD, many people may find it a useful complementary mindfulness practice for cultivating sustained attention.

Once you wrap up this exercise, it is a good idea for you to continue to just sit. But close your eyes and breathe.

Do not perform this practice for more than five minutes per day initially.

Build it up slowly. Start with five minutes for 30 days. Then you can slowly take it up. But you don't need to do it for more than seven minutes at a time.

Advanced yogis are capable of practicing for longer durations. But such attempts should only be made under the guidance of an expert practitioner. Since this article will be read by hundreds perhaps even thousands of people, the rule of thumb should be to focus on practicing this exercise with regularity and in moderation rather than irregular long durations.

CREDITS

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