

# DELHI LEDGER

A RECORD OF COST, CONSEQUENCE, AND CIVILIZATION

COVER STORY

ISSUE-03

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## DELHI LEDGER

Dharmic • Fearless • Constructive

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Hari Om! ✨

Sometimes years pass and reality seems to barely shift; at other times, everything changes all at once within a matter of weeks. When the pandemic hit, for a couple of years, there was massive tragedy, chaos and economic unrest all around. Yet, within that very same window, the ecology quietly recovered. The Gangetic Dolphin was spotted again, the rivers and forests began to breathe and thrive owing to the lack of human intervention and interference.

But then big corp the world over made a comeback. Right wing governments and leaders began surging back to power everywhere in the world. The result: a time of increased conflict, distrust and competition. But a 'burned out' society was barely in a position to participate or protest what *wasn't* quite right. Difficult years had taken a toll and interrupted so many things from how companies worked to how one made their monthly expenses.

And then came AI. The fragile sliver of hope that honest, diligent professionals still held for "the system" *vanished*, bit by bit. That very system is now birthing disruptive change all around the world and will continue to do so.

As I write this note, India marks its 80th Independence Day, though the celebrations across the country feel far more muted than in years past. I remember Independence Day and Republic Day celebrations from my schooling days. That although rightly a different era, reminds me of a different India. Reminds me of a different world.

This issue had to be as transformational, analytical and deep in its orientation to do justice to the changing tide.

The first part of the magazine contains in-depth stories that will push you to reflect & think. The depth in the second article “The Limits Of Power”, is necessary to expand & illustrate a repeated social pattern that demands reflection & recognition.

You will see the Kalki Astro Science section as well carefully attuned to the overall direction of each issue every time. In keeping with the theme of the opening section, we have published select, *potent* pieces on Saadhna, Kaal, and Abundance.

I think when I look back, in the grand scheme of things, this issue will be the point this magazine decided to open the door to deeper, darker, discomfoting ‘Saturnian’ themes that aren’t easy to deal with but necessary to acknowledge & take note of. *True* resolution comes not from chasing change, but from respecting *limits* and avoiding historical pitfalls.

Hari Om! ❖

— Jay Kaushal  
Founding Editor

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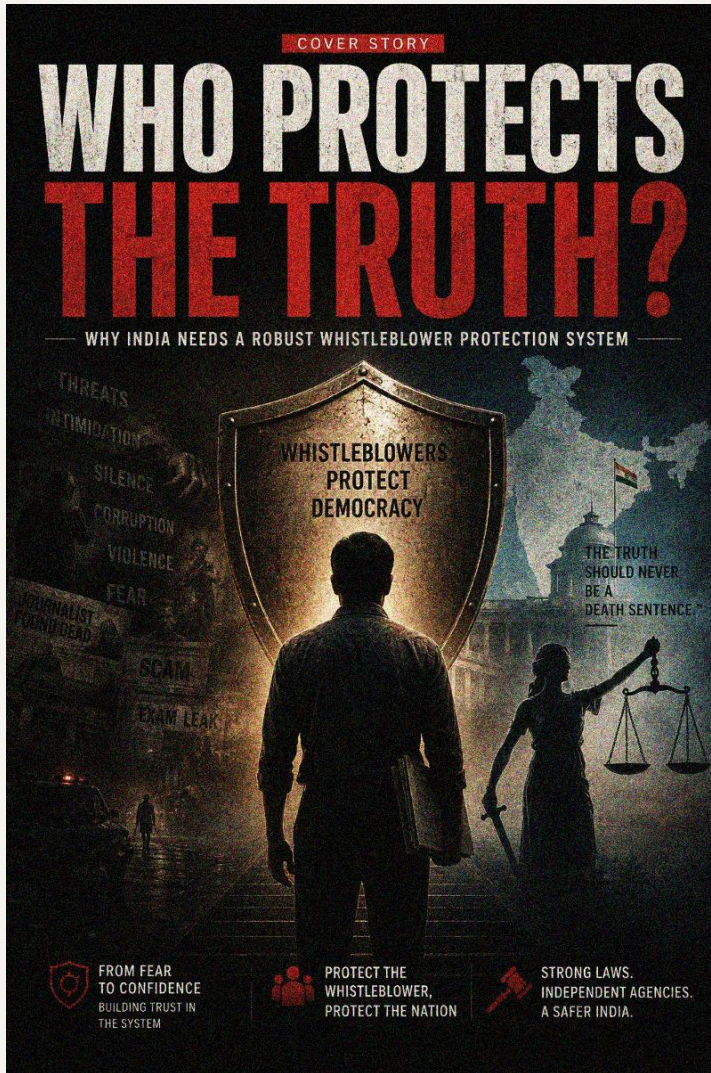
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## C O V E R   S T O R Y



Representative image: In a country of 1.4 billion people, that lack of effective laws *guaranteeing* protection to whistleblowers and witnesses, is a gaping hole perpetrators often utilize to intimidate & blackmail honest citizens into compliance & submission. Image: AI-Generated. (Kaushal Media)

# THE COST OF TRUTH

सत्यमेव जयते नानृतं  
सत्येन पन्था विततो देवयानः।

**“Truth alone triumphs, not falsehood. Through truth is laid out the path to the divine.”**

*-Mundaka Upaniṣad*

सत्यं वद। धर्मं चर।

**“Speak the truth. Walk in dharma.”**

*-Taittirīya Upaniṣad*

सत्यं ब्रूयात् प्रियं ब्रूयान्न ब्रूयात् सत्यमप्रियम्।  
प्रियं च नानृतं ब्रूयादेष धर्मःसनातनः ॥

**“Speak truth; speak what is pleasant. Do not speak unpleasant truth merely to wound; nor speak pleasing falsehood. This is the eternal dharma.”**

*-Manusmṛti*

सत्येनोत्तभिता भूमिः।

**“By truth the earth is upheld.”**

*-Rigveda*

"A society does not become corrupt because wrongdoing exists. It becomes corrupt when those

who expose wrongdoing know they will pay the price for telling the truth."

## The Lessons from Valachi Papers

I have actually been thinking about this since 2002, when I first read the "Valachi Papers".

John Valachi was a member of the American Mafia's Genovese crime family who eventually broke *Omertà*, the code of silence that governed organized crime. His testimony fundamentally changed the American understanding of how the Mafia operated.

He became the first high ranking member of the American Mafia to publicly explain the workings of La Cosa Nostra, 'the secret code' before Congress.

His case also demonstrated something else.

Valachi's case helped demonstrate the need for a formal witness protection system. Within a few years, the United States established the **Witness Protection Program** (WITSEC), giving prosecutors a powerful tool to protect witnesses willing to testify against organized crime.

Since 1971, the United States has operated a federal legal mechanism that protects individuals willing to expose powerful criminal networks.

It is called the **Witness Protection Program** (WITSEC). WITSEC is an acronym for WITness SECurity.

Created to safeguard witnesses and informers whose lives become endangered because of their testimony, the program goes to extraordinary lengths. Individuals can be relocated to entirely different parts of the country, receive new identities, and ‘disappear’ from every aspect of their previous lives.

The United States has many shortcomings, as every superpower does.

But one strength of its legal framework is that it has developed institutions that give citizens confidence that the law can, at least in principle, protect those who choose to cooperate with justice.

That confidence matters.

## **Witnesses and Whistleblowers: Different Roles, Same Principle**

A cooperating witness and a whistleblower are, in many ways, two sides of the same coin.

Sometimes an individual exposes organized crime. Sometimes they expose a corporation.

Sometimes they expose corruption inside government itself.

The target changes. The risk remains mostly the same.

A truly independent witness protection mechanism ensures that when wrongdoing threatens society on a significant scale, the individual who chooses truth over silence does not have to sacrifice their life to do so.

Such systems build institutional trust.

They create a formal institutional capacity required to protect the handful of individuals courageous enough to expose corruption before it grows into something much larger.

## **India's Missing Safety Net**

Now consider India.

A country of more than **1.4 billion people**.

Over the decades, the number of key witnesses who have been attacked, lynched, mysteriously disappeared, intimidated, or found dead, is deeply disturbing.

The list is long and with enormous consequences.

Without genuine protection for witnesses and whistleblowers, holding powerful interests accountable becomes extraordinarily difficult.

And this ultimately harms every taxpayer.

Every citizen, every institution ultimately becomes the one to pay for a lack of accountability.

When entropy grows inside a system, whether through financial fraud, infrastructure corruption, environmental crime, procurement scams, organized criminal syndicates, or administrative failures, the eventual casualties are always ordinary people.

The victims are never just the individuals directly involved.

The victims are citizens who *trusted* the system to work.

## Every 'Scam' Has Silent Witnesses

Take almost any major scandal.

From corporate fraud like the one that happened with Satyam Computers (exposed in 2009) and Sahara Scam (Supreme Court Ruling, 2012), to widespread public procurement and tender rigging in infra & municipal contracts, glaring Highway construction quality gaps,

Environmental violations such as illegal quarrying and sand mining (widespread in the Aravallis), stock market manipulation (Harshad Mehta Scam 1992, Ketan Parekh Scam 2001), public system failures such as oxygen supply crisis at BRD Medical college in Gorakhpur (August, 2017), consistent examination leaks (NEET, SSC)...

The list is endless.

The bottom line consistent.

*Someone knew. Someone always knows.*

**Take the Erin Brockovich/Hinkley case. (1991-1996, USA)**

This case became widely known & was later portrayed in a film starring Julia Roberts.

Erin Brockovich was, at that time, a legal assistant who noticed medical records attached to routine property documents while working on a case. Curious, she investigated further and discovered evidence linking contamination of the groundwater in Hinkley, California, to hexavalent chromium used at Pacific Gas & Electric's (PG&E) nearby compressor station.

Internal company documents later revealed that PG&E had known about the contamination for *years* before the public did.

PG&E ultimately had to pay \$333 million, involving 650 residents. This was an enormous

settlement for its kind in a direct-action lawsuit US history at the time.

### **Take the Harshad Mehta case. (1992, India)**

Another famous case which has had movies and web series made on this topic. Starring popular actors like Abhishek Bachchan and Pratik Gandhi.

The scam was exposed by financial journalist Sucheta Dalal whose reporting in April 1992 revealed a major discrepancy involving State Bank of India 's securities transactions with Harshad Mehta. Her reporting set off a chain of events uncovering a web of irregularities. Mehta had been using fake & unsupported bank receipts (BRs) to divert thousands of crores from the banking system into the stock market.

The investigation revealed that many people within the banks and financial system had known irregularities existed long before the scam became public.

Take environmental disasters.

### **Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984)**

Employees had repeatedly raised concerns about poor maintenance and severe safety deficiencies before the methyl isocyanate leak killed thousands.

### **Ballandur Lake, Bengaluru (2015-present)**

Officials, scientists and residents had warned for years about untreated sewage and industrial effluents before the lake repeatedly *caught fire*!

Take procurement scandals.

**Commonwealth Games (2010), Augusta Westland Helicopter Deal (2013)** and more recent allegations surrounding aspects of the **Ram Mandir in Ayodhya (2026)** have all raised questions about transparency, procurement, or administrative oversight.

Take collapsing bridges.

**Morbi Suspension Bridge, Gujarat (2022)**

Questions about repairs, load management and safety certification surfaced after the collapse. Investigations suggested warning signs had existed before the tragedy.

**Kolkata Vivekananda Flyover Collapse (2016)**

Concerns about construction quality had reportedly been raised before the structure failed.

Now consider highways that cave in months after inauguration.

**Delhi Mumbai Expressway (multiple sections, 2023-2024)**

Reports & videos of damaged stretches triggered questions & investigations into construction quality.

## **Delhi-Dehradun Expressway (2026)**

Reports emerged of pavement failures and repairs within months of inauguration, prompting questions over workmanship and oversight. NHAI itself acknowledged a road surface cave on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2026.

Consider illegal mining now.

## **Bellary Iron Ore Mining Scam, Karnataka (2011)**

The Lokayukta report revealed illegal mining on a massive scale after years of complaints from officials, activists and local communities.

## **Illegal Sand Mining (ongoing)**

Across states such as Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh, officials, villagers and journalists have repeatedly warned about politically protected mining networks.

## **Current floods in Assam (2026)**

Years before the upper Assam floods that took place this year, officials had warned against indiscriminate sand mining & stone mining, along rivers such as Dikhow, resulting in an eventual change of course.

Scientists are now examining whether such excavation & increased sedimentation contributed to the severity of the flooding.

Consider cases of rivers *poisoned* by **industrial discharge**.

### **Patancheru, Telangana (1980s-Present)**

Pharmaceutical waste polluted local water bodies for years despite repeated complaints from residents and environmental groups.

### **Yamuna River, Delhi (1970s-Present)**

Scientists and pollution control authorities have documented untreated sewage and industrial discharge for *decades* before seasonal public attention.

Consider rampant encroachment in ecologically sensitive regions.

### **Aravalli Hills (Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi NCR) (1990s-Present)**

Environmentalists and forest officials have repeatedly warned about illegal construction, quarrying and encroachments.

The ecological stakes extend well beyond the hills themselves: Aravallis function as a natural barrier against Eastward expansion of the Thar desert.

### **Hasdeo Arand Forest, Chattisgarh (2010s-Present)**

Tribal communities and environmental experts have long opposed mining projects, warning of ecological damage before approvals progressed.

Government studies had also recorded Hasdeo Arand's ecological importance. Wildlife experts warned that further mining & forest fragmentation could damage biodiversity & intensify human elephant conflict. Yet mining clearances continued.

In *every* one of these cases, there are documented accounts of individuals *inside* the system who recognised what was happening before it actually unfolded in the unfortunate way it did. In some cases, even despite expert analyses by subject matter experts, harmful actions are still underway. In most cases, no clear compensation to the individuals affected by these disasters & failures has ever been given out or even their plight fairly evaluated.

Yet many people within the system can *surely* see the mistake a *mile* earlier. Many probably disapproved.

Very few spoke.

Why?

## The Cost of Speaking

Because the 'system', the *status-quo*, provides almost no confidence that speaking the truth will be safe.

Even where protection ‘technically’ exists, public confidence in that protection is extremely weak.

The first instinct of an honest citizen is often to fix what they see.

People with integrity naturally want to solve problems.

But experience teaches them something else.

Experience teaches the common honest citizen that speaking out against corruption, speaking out against irregularities and ‘shady dealings’, will most probably end with them dead in a ditch or worse—the brunt borne by their family.

So over time, honest citizens begin assuming that if corruption continues, perhaps those in power are *already* aware of it.

Perhaps they approve. Perhaps they benefit.

And if that is true, exposing it may only endanger the person who speaks.

This learned helplessness becomes institutional. It becomes the culture.

As a result of it, a society is created where often local ‘*bahubalis*’ emerge that bend the system to their will and end up becoming serious threats to the formal power structures in place.

## When Power Behaves Like Narcissism

I often think of authoritarian systems as narcissistic systems.

Like narcissistic personalities, they become deeply invested in preserving their *own* image.

They become increasingly occupied with their *own* ambitions.

‘Criticism’ is no longer interpreted as ‘feedback’. It is classified as betrayal.

Exposing a problem becomes equivalent to challenging authority itself.

And once that happens, the pattern is oh-too-familiar.

Here’s a 5-point formula usually applied:

1. Discredit the critic. (*Smear campaigns*)
2. Attack the messenger. (*Doxxing, Hate-crimes*)
3. Distort reality. (*Misrepresent facts, information, context*)
4. Question motives. (*Gaslight motivations, twist the narrative to brand ‘constructive criticism’ as an attempt to challenge, malign and attack authority*)
5. Mobilize loyal supporters. (*Single out, socially isolate the one asking the question*)

This pattern has appeared repeatedly across history under empires & governments of many ideologies and in many countries.

Whenever democracies drift toward authoritarianism, these dynamics become increasingly visible.

## Empaths Versus Systems

Every society contains people who feel deeply.

People whose instinct is to *defend* those who have been ignored.

To comfort the marginalized.

To point toward problems *before* they become disasters.

These individuals often become **whistleblowers**.

Not because they seek conflict.

Because they cannot comfortably ignore suffering. Especially of others.

Yet systems focused primarily on *preserving authority* frequently interpret these individuals as **threats** rather than **assets**.

Like an average narcissist who refuses to believe he or she can be wrong and continuously scapegoats the most empathic member of the system, an authoritarian regime is basically a 'narcissistic regime' following the same principles.

The regime can do no wrong, the regime doesn't need any feedback, the regime is the victim, and the regime holds the *ultimate* moral authority in the social system. Anyone calling out their inefficiency or oversight is therefore a traitor, liar *and* sinner.

Like a narcissist employs fly-monkeys to do their bidding, authoritarian regimes employ cadres of individuals with polarizing ideologies to 'wear down' these empathetic individuals.

## History Is Filled With Their Stories

History offers many examples.

**Satyendra Dubey (2003)**, an Indian Engineering Service officer working with the National Highways Authority of India, alleged corruption and contracting irregularities in the Golden Quadrilateral highway project to the Prime Minister's Office and requested that his identity remain confidential. His identity somehow still ended up being revealed. Dubey was shot dead in Gaya, Bihar.

**Manjunath Shanmugam (2005)**, an Indian Oil Corporation Officer & IIM Lucknow graduate, acted against petrol pumps selling adulterated fuel in Uttar Pradesh. After taking action against a

petrol station in Lakhimpur Kheri, he was found murdered in November 2005.

Recently (2025), **Mukesh Chandrakar**, a freelance journalist from Bijapur, reported on alleged irregularities in the construction of a government road.

Soon after his report triggered official scrutiny, Chandrakar went missing.

Two days later, his body was found in a septic tank.

**Sandeep Kothari (2015)**, was investigating illegal sand mining and land grabbing.

He had reportedly received several threats before being abducted.

His partially burned body was found later near railway tracks in Maharashtra.

Not only this, an **IPS officer Narendra Kumar (2012)** was killed as a vehicle was run over him.

Kumar was attempting to stop a tractor allegedly involved in illegal stone mining.

Now, world over numerous whistleblowers connected to major scams have faced intimidation, violence, or death.

Internationally, the picture is hardly perfect either.

**Edward Snowden (2013)** ultimately sought asylum after exposing classified NSA surveillance programs.

Julian Assange (2012-2019) spent nearly 7 years inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London before facing prolonged legal battles.

Power does not easily forgive whistleblowers.

The problem is India has witness protection on paper. But unlike America's WITSEC, it lacks the institutional muscle to reliably relocate, rebuild and protect threatened witnesses when powerful interests come hunting.

## The Cases We Never Hear About

The greatest cost cannot be measured by famous cases.

*The greater tragedy lies in the whistleblowers we never hear about.*

The people who chose **silence**.

The engineer who noticed defective construction but kept quiet.

The accountant who saw manipulated books but looked the other way.

The bureaucrat who recognised procurement fraud but ignored it.

The contractor who witnessed corruption but was afraid for his life to even mention it to someone else.

The employee who saw environmental violations but needed his job more than jail. Why? Because people fear that ‘power’ always finds a way to scapegoat the honest guy.

The teacher who *knew* examination papers had leaked but was too afraid to speak out.

The police officer who *saw* evidence disappear but couldn’t risk the lives of his wife, children and parents.

How *many* remained silent because they believed *nobody* could protect them?

That number is unknowable.

But it is almost certainly enormous.

## The NEET Example

Take the recent NEET examination controversy.

Given the sheer scale of India's examination system, it is inconceivable that absolutely nobody within the machinery suspected what was happening.

Someone almost certainly *knew*.

Someone almost certainly wanted to *act*.

Yet systems rarely succeed if individuals believe escalation will destroy their careers or endanger their families.

Professional organisations understand this.

The best organisations create structured escalation mechanisms. This ensures:

- Problems travel upward quickly.
- Leadership hears them early.
- Corrections happen before crises emerge.

Governments should aspire to the same standard.

## Ancient India Understood This Better

द्वारस्थान् कार्यार्थिनो नातिक्रामयेत्।

दुर्दर्शो हि राजा कार्याकार्यविपर्ययासमासन्नैः कार्यते।

**“When in court, the king shall not cause petitioners to wait at the door. For when a king becomes inaccessible, those close to him may cause him to mistake what ought to be done for what ought not to be done.”**

*-Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra,*

Interestingly, this principle is not new.

Ancient Indian kingdoms recognised the importance of allowing ordinary citizens direct access to justice.

Royal courts existed not merely as symbols of authority but as institutions where grievances could reach the highest levels of power.

The ideal of **Ram Rajya** was never centred merely on conquest.

Ram as an archetype was never a 'conqueror'. He was an effective administrator. A **just** authority the people could *trust*.

Even though a monarch, 'Ram Rajya' is described as the *opposite* of what an authoritarian regime represents.

It was centred on nourishment.

On responsiveness, justice.

Kings were *expected* to hear and course correct based on feedback.

## Every Government Has Blind Spots

No government, power-structure, 'system', 'board of directors' or regime sees everything.

Imagine driving an eighteen-wheeler.

The sheer size inevitably creates blind spots.

Imagine a jet, or a locomotive.

The larger the vehicle, the larger those blind spots become.

Governments governing nations as diverse and populous as India possess similar limitations.

No administration can directly observe every district, every department, every contract, every procurement, every institution.

The people who point toward those blind spots should therefore be viewed as the country's **quality assurance team**.

*Not its enemies.*

## Incentivising Accountability

Several countries have experimented with encouraging civic accountability.

Singapore has long employed strong enforcement mechanisms against littering. Trained citizen volunteers can identify littering offenders and obtain their particulars for official enforcement action.

Japan has strict penalties & punishment for illegal waste dumping which can attract imprisonment & fines to the tune of 10 million yen.

Many societies reward civic participation and responsible reporting in different ways.

The larger principle is simple.

Healthy societies encourage citizens to participate in improving public systems.

They don't punish them for trying!

## A Culture of Apathy

When citizens repeatedly observe whistleblowers suffering severe consequences, an entirely different culture develops.

People *stop* intervening. They stop *questioning*. They stop reporting. Bit by bit they become *disengaged* and introverted—choosing the safety of their small world rather than caring for the larger society.

Eventually, apathy becomes normal. *Survival* becomes the primary goal.

Slowly, a perpetually survival-oriented way of life breeds *selfishness*.

People focus only on protecting themselves.

Institutions slowly lose their ability to self-correct.

## Delhi Ledger Counsel:

This discussion is not fundamentally about one government or political party. It is about strengthening the Republic itself.

If India must truly aspire to become a developed country, to become a 'Vishwa Guru', it requires a far more comprehensive, independent framework dedicated *specifically* to protecting whistleblowers and high-risk witnesses.

Such legislation should include specialised protection clauses for different categories of cases.

- It should establish genuinely independent mechanisms.
- It should inspire confidence that individuals who expose systemic wrongdoing will not be abandoned afterward.
- It should study and include systems from successful international models where they exist.
  - The United States' witness protection framework offers one such example from which valuable lessons may be adapted to Indian conditions.
- Strengthening this area of law should become one of the highest institutional priorities for the people elected to parliament.

Ironically, India does not need to invent a whistleblower protection law. Parliament already did that. The Whistle Blowers Protection Act was passed in 2014 under the UPA-2 govt and received presidential assent the same year. Yet more than a decade later, it has still not been brought into force.

Luckily, India doesn't need to invent witness protection *either*. The Supreme Court approved the Witness Protection Scheme in 2018, providing for threat assessment, anonymity, relocation and even new identities. Parliament has since gone further. Section 398 of the BNSS requires every state to notify a witness protection scheme. The machinery therefore exists.

What India needs now is to give witness and whistleblower protection programs more *teeth*: Dedicated funding, specializing protection units, stronger national standards and the institutional capacity to protect and relocate threatened witnesses for as long as danger actually lasts. Even perpetually if so needed.

For context: Since 1971, USA's WITSEC has protected, relocated or given new identities to nearly 19,300 participants. No compliant participant following program guidelines has *ever* been harmed or killed.

## S O C I E T Y



Model and Mumbaikar Rhiya Ahir, daughter of an ITBP officer, became one of the defining faces of the July Gen Z protests after her courageous, viral stand blocking a police van packed with detained student protesters en route to an undisclosed destination. Image: AI-Enhanced Artwork, (Kaushal Media)

# THE LIMITS OF POWER

## *On the Elasticity of Civilization*

As I sit down for the final edit of this issue, PM Modi has delivered his record 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive Independence Day speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort.

His speech and this Independence Day, India's 80<sup>th</sup>; comes at a time that the country is grappling a job crisis, fuel crisis, exam crisis, Gen Z crisis, Gen-Alpha crisis, E-20 crisis and random, growing student protests around the country.

The Jantar Mantar NEET paper leak protests in July 2026, seem to have snowballed into a national students' movement of sorts. Not to mention a disproportionate police reaction to student protestors on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July "Sansad Chalo" march, which has left a huge trust deficit between the government and younger generations.

With the Prime Minister & Home Minister both avoiding a formal statement in the Monsoon session of Parliament on the unfortunate police action on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July with the use of pellet guns & alleged use of shock-batons on peaceful student protestors, the nation was perhaps hoping for more clarity on "What Next?"

But the highlight of PM Modi's Independence Day speech seems to have become his warning to the

nation to stay clear of ‘*Dimaagi-Naxals*’ (*Intellectual-Naxals*). Saying they should be “identified & isolated”.

Within 48 hours of his remarks, the internet is flooding with memes, viral ‘*Dimaagi-Naxal*’ songs, a “*Dimaagi-Naxal-Party*” Instagram account and two former ministers from the opposition, one of them a former CM, another a former HM, proudly claiming to be a ‘*Dimaagi-Naxal*’. This seems oddly reminiscent of BJP’s “*Main Bhi Chowkidar*” public outreach strategy only this time it’s “*Main Bhi Dimaagi-Naxal*” & it’s opposition party members flaunting the slogan!

It’s fascinating how things seem to be developing in this country with more and more students filming the sad plight of their schools on smartphones and sharing it, tagging it, questioning, protesting and *demanding accountability*.

On the one hand, the country’s youth urgently want to do anything possible to fix their situation. One can understand that when there are not enough jobs, college seats, or educational infrastructure, young, restless minds *need* a **meaningful** outlet for their energy. They eagerly welcome any radical policy or administrative move that can anchor them, helping them reclaim their power in a system where they feel unheard and unrecognized. What’s *really* happening though? How did things *suddenly* get **this far**?

Settle down. This is going to be a long read.

## The Rubber Band Theory of Power

Every empire eventually creates the force that challenges it. Every empire believes its greatest challenge lies beyond its borders.

History has interesting things to say for both those points.

First of all, the greatest threat to any expansive system is rarely an invading army. It is the gradual accumulation of contradictions within the very structure that made its rise possible.

Empires seldom collapse because they are too weak. More often, they become too large to hear themselves think.

It was not until **Dadabhai Naoroji** systematically demonstrated how Britain was draining India's wealth, rather than 'enriching it' as imperial propaganda claimed, that public opinion finally began converging around a single central question.

For decades the British had successfully framed their rule as benevolent administration. They had sufficient 'visible proof' in the form of Railways, Courts, Law & Order, Schools & Colleges, Modern clothes, machines and Telegraph, Telephone, Electricity.

The British narrative was always oriented at demonstrating to the people that it was a more developed civilization doing Indians a favour by building their country in the modern way.

But Naoroji did something remarkably simple.

He separated emotion from economics.

He gave Indians a language with which to describe what they instinctively knew but had struggled to articulate.

The famous **Wealth Drain Theory** transformed scattered frustrations into a unified political argument.

People began waking up and realizing that all the 'visible' markers of progress and British benevolence on an 'inferior' race of people was in fact.. solely to meet *British* interests.

The railways and railway lines were designed and functioned only to take raw materials from the hinterland to the ports.

The telegraph and telephone were only to ensure communication within the workers of the British administration.

The education was good enough only to train clerks that could serve under the British and modern machines, factories etc. were meant only to aid British businesses, serving British interests.

The net wealth, was draining *out* of India. Naoroji illustrated through facts, figures and math.

Suddenly the British Empire found itself confronting not isolated rebellions, but a coherent intellectual challenge.

And that changed everything.

## The Pressure Valve

The formation of the Indian National Congress under **Allan Octavian Hume** was, ironically, intended to function almost like a constitutional pressure valve.

The assumption was simple.

Allow educated Indians to *complain*. Permit debate. Channel grievances into controlled institutions. Release social pressure *before* it accumulates into a full-blown revolt or revolution.

Instead, history produced exactly the opposite outcome.

The institution designed to absorb pressure slowly became the institution around which an entire nation eventually united.

That is the paradox of power.

Once enough independent grievances discover a common vocabulary, suppression often *accelerates* consolidation instead of preventing it. Every large political system eventually encounters the same structural problem.

And the *larger* the empire becomes, the *slower* it responds.

Communication becomes uptight and bureaucratic. Institutions become layered and opaque. Decision-making grows distant from lived reality and detached from grassroot needs of the masses.

By the time complaints arrive at the designated mechanisms created to address them, the situation on the ground has often deteriorated far beyond administrative repair.

The ‘pressure valve’ at this point, no longer releases *pressure*. It merely records its existence. If anything, it ends up amplifying it by giving people a common platform.

At the lowest strata of society, every attempt to force reunification through coercion often resembles compressing a spring. Or stretching a rubber band.

Initially the system appears stronger. Control becomes tighter. Resistance seems smaller. Up to a point, it seems *pointless* to even try to change the *status quo*.

Yet the force being accumulated beneath the surface quietly grows. The system cannot clock the change yet because it considers itself too 'stable' to move or be moved into sudden actions or reactions.

Eventually the question is no longer *whether* the spring will release. Only **when**.

History repeatedly demonstrates that societies possess remarkable capacities for accommodation. People can apparently, tolerate extraordinary hardship. People initially adapt. Then they 'compromise'. They wait. They observe. They *keep* waiting while complaining under their breath. But every civilisation possesses an elasticity beyond which further compression *ceases* to create stability and instead creates **recoil**.

That recoil rarely begins with a single event.

It emerges when countless unrelated grievances suddenly discover one another.

In essence, it is society that is a slow moving, somewhat unwieldy organism which is too big to be discounted or ignored. Power simply sits atop society.

'Power' is the driver. 'Society' is the locomotive. So, if the driver stops paying heed to the feedback from the brakes, the engine, chassis, the machinery of society, order collapses. Status-Quo collapses. Once a *social direction* acquires critical

mass, it begins installing a new normal that can manifest society's inner truth. Think of it like an overloaded 18-wheeler skidding on a frozen road. Social momentum, momentum of the overall 'machinery' is best gauged from time to time & worked with rather than *managed* later. Of course, in large regimes, systems & power structures, it becomes harder & harder to gauge this shifting momentum in time.

## **Expansion Contains the Seeds of Resistance**

This pattern appears repeatedly across history.

One finds echoes of it in vastly different civilizations separated by geography, language and time.

Countless examples exist: the Persian, Mauryan & British empires; Napoleonic France; the Mughal Empire and in the modern age, the Soviet Union. Different centuries & ideologies but remarkably similar dilemmas.

Each believed expansion represented security. Yet expansion often produces the opposite.

Napoleon conquered much of Europe only to find French domination producing resistance across it. The Soviet Union extended its influence across Eastern Europe and eventually into Afghanistan,

only to confront nationalism, insurgency and mounting economic and political costs. Persian expansion too repeatedly provoked revolts, particularly in Egypt & Ionia, multiplying the empire's military and administrative burdens.

The more territory an empire controls, the greater the number of contradictions it must *continuously reconcile*. Every newly absorbed province brings new customs, languages, priorities, religious traditions and economic interests. Every successful 'conquest' increases administrative complexity *faster* than administrative **capability**.

Expansion therefore carries an invisible cost. It multiplies the number of identities requiring accommodation.

Consider the overthrow of the Nanda dynasty and the legends surrounding Chanakya, a political mastermind mythologized even to this day.

The Nandas possessed immense wealth and military power. It is said that at their peak, sometime in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, they ruled over vast parts of northern India. Yet Chanakya recognised something more fundamental. No regime survives indefinitely through fear and 'control'. Power requires legitimacy. It requires a 'participation' from those it is placed *atop*, to function **effectively**.

Without social legitimacy, even overwhelming military superiority gradually becomes brittle.

It is said that after his father, a teacher, Acharya Chanak, was imprisoned and executed by the Nandas, Vishnugupta resolved to overthrow the existing order. But he realized the ‘system’ could be changed only with a *new* order that challenged the premise of power.

Vishnugupta then became *Kautilya*. Which basically means “Shrewd/Cunning”. A young boy named Chandragupta became his protégé. Step by step, through Chandragupta, Chanakya demonstrated what a **just** system and king *should* be like, with popular support.

The talented young child from humble beginnings under the astute statesmanship of Chanakya, overthrew the corrupt Nandas and established a new imperial order: the **Mauryan** Empire.

Yet history rarely stops where founders intend.

Two generations later, the same imperial machinery had evolved into something *very* different.

Ashoka's conquest of Kalinga remains one of the defining turning points of Indian civilisation.

This is one of the most researched & dramatized transformations of a king. It is also one of the

goriest chapters in Indian history that speaks of the perils of ambition and expansionism.

Kalinga (roughly corresponding to parts of present-day Odisha), to the East of the Mauryan Empire, had remained an independent polity. Ashoka was not the first choice for the throne after the passing of his father Bindusara. Ashoka was the strongest and hungriest to prove himself however. After a bitter struggle for succession, Ashoka prevailed over his elder brother Sushima, and ascended the throne.

The bloodshed that Ashoka's conquest of Kalinga created however, profoundly transformed his conception of power and conquest.

Legends say the river Daya turned red as a result of the massive casualties sustained by the Kalinga army in the war.

Ashoka's own inscriptions record that 100,000 people were killed and 150,000 deported/carried away captive, with many more dying subsequently. The devastation extended beyond the battlefield, tearing families and communities apart.

Ashoka won Kalinga but was never the same person again.

His inscriptions of '*Dhamma*' and Peace, across the subcontinent stand today not as celebrations of conquest, but almost as public confessions of the cost incurred.

Ironically, one of India's greatest emperors became one of history's strongest arguments against limitless expansion.

If one travels through present-day Odisha, reminders of its rich civilisation remain everywhere.

Its Shaivite traditions continue to flourish.

Its temple architecture ranks among the finest anywhere in the world.

Among them stands the magnificent **Konark Sun Temple**, constructed in the thirteenth century by King Narasimhadeva I.

Designed as a colossal stone chariot carrying Surya across the heavens, the monument represents an extraordinary synthesis of astronomy, architecture, sculpture and sacred geometry. Its wheels are said to have functioned as sophisticated sundials. Its proportions reveal astonishing mathematical precision for the time.

Even in partial ruin, Konark continues to testify to the cultural confidence that eastern India once possessed.

Civilisations are remembered not merely through the kingdoms they built, but through the *ideas* they carved into stone—literally and metaphorically.

The irony therefore becomes impossible to ignore.

Chanakya envisioned an **ordered** state capable of *replacing* corruption with effective governance.

His political philosophy produced one of the greatest empires Bharat had ever seen.

Yet within only two generations, that same machinery of expansion inflicted immense suffering upon the very lands it had sought to unify.

The contradiction here was not Chanakya. Nor Chandragupta.

It was expansion itself.

History repeats the lesson elsewhere.

Aurangzeb spent decades attempting to extend Mughal authority deeper into the Deccan.

His territorial successes even though immense and hard fought, placed crippling pressure upon the Mughal treasury.

The treasury was depleted. Almost simultaneously, regional resistance intensified. Administrative cohesion deteriorated. Widespread discontent over extremist state policies and a growing resistance to Mughal authority created massive rifts in society.

By the time expansion stopped, imperial decline had already begun.

But the Marathas later confronted an *equally* difficult reality.

Their military brilliance alone could not indefinitely hold together a civilisation as vast, diverse and internally dynamic as India.

In the grand scheme of things, expansion remains easier than consolidation. Consolidation, although difficult, proves still easier than building **enduring legitimacy**.

From the British Empire to the Soviet Union, history repeatedly suggests that power rarely collapses because enemies become stronger overnight. It collapses because complexity quietly outpaces coherence.

The empire continues expanding even after its institutions have ceased expanding with it. Eventually the distance between ruler and reality becomes too great. And when that happens, the spring beneath the surface begins tightening once again.

## **India: The Civilization That Refuses Uniformity**

If there is one lesson that every popular ruler of Bharat eventually learns, it is this: India is not merely a 'nation'. It is a composite civilization. In fact, '*Sanatana Dharma*' itself encompasses

numerous systems of belief, philosophy & worship.

And composite civilizations such as Bharat behave very differently from nation-states. Many modern nation-states historically sought cohesion through a common language, dominant ethnicity or broadly shared historical memory.

India has never possessed that luxury. Nor has it *needed* to.

Compare India with almost any major power.

China, despite its enormous population, derives much of its political cohesion from a dominant Han identity, a standardized written language, and a long tradition of centralized bureaucracy.

Russia, despite enormous ethnic and geographical diversity, developed around a powerful central state & dominant Russian linguistic core.

Brazil developed under a Portuguese colonial system that produced a dominant national language and a more unified linguistic landscape despite immense racial, cultural & regional diversity.

The United States, despite its diversity today, was institutionally constructed around a common constitutional framework and a dominant political culture rooted largely in Anglo-European traditions.

India is **radically** different.

To an outside observer, India almost appears '*impossible*'.

Hundreds of languages. Thousands of dialects.  
Countless communities. Distinct cuisines.  
Different scripts. Separate literary traditions.  
Entirely different *systems* of worship, quite often  
even within the same religion. Just '*Sanatana*' itself  
encompasses Vedanta, Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya,  
Mimamsa, different devotional traditions, Shaiva,  
Shakta, Vaishnava traditions and much more.

The same scripture can produce entirely different traditions depending upon the *region* in which it is interpreted.

The same deity may be worshipped through entirely different customs separated only by a few hundred kilometres.

India has spent thousands of years perfecting this extraordinary ability to remain one civilization without ever becoming culturally uniform.

That may be its greatest achievement.

## **When Contradictions Become a Common Cause**

History repeatedly demonstrates that regimes cannot endure indefinitely through fear alone.

Fear can compel obedience but it cannot indefinitely manufacture **legitimacy**. *Influence*, particularly over a civilisation as vast and internally diverse as Bharat, is sustained not by suppressing differences but by aligning them toward a shared **vision**.

Every community, language, tradition, profession, region brings its own perspectives, its own expertise and aspirations into something larger than themselves.

That has always been India's greatest strength. Convergence. Not 'uniformity'.

The danger for any government emerges when different sections of society, who ordinarily disagree with one another, suddenly discover that they share the same grievance. That is precisely what happened under British rule.

There was a time when the expression, 'The sun never sets on the British Empire,' was almost literally true.

The British did not lose India because one community rose against them. They gradually accumulated opposition from almost every direction.

It started first by subjugating the powers that already ruled over the people: *Nawabs*, regional rulers and declining imperial authorities. In some places, sections of the population initially saw the

change as little more than one ruling elite replacing another.

Then came colonial interventions against oppressive social practices such as the *Sati* system. At this stage, several Indian reformers and intellectuals *supported* specific British measures, seeing them as instruments of social reform.

Then came the tribal communities whose lands the British stole and whose people they dispossessed and exploited. Then it was the peasants who worked to death in an oppressive system of taxes. Then the artisans whose livelihoods were *devastated* as Indian manufacturing confronted colonial economic policy and British industrial imports.

Then the 'larger' princely states which were threatened through annexation and the 'Doctrine of Lapse'. As British rule deepened, intellectuals and journalists increasingly encountered censorship and prosecution. Students entering nationalist politics faced expulsions, arrests and police repression. Eventually, even sections of the educated and privileged classes that had once hoped to work *within* the colonial system began recognising the **nature** of the power they were dealing with.

Each initially protested different issues.

Over time those separate concerns merged into one larger question.

Who exactly was the Empire serving?

That question proved impossible to contain.

It is here that Dadabhai Naoroji's contribution becomes historically decisive once again.

He did not invent dissatisfaction. He *unified* it.

His Drain Theory provided a common intellectual language through which entirely different groups could suddenly recognise themselves as participants in the same struggle.

Ideas create coalitions long before politics does.

By the time Gandhi, Patel and Nehru emerged as national leaders, it had already been clear and for a while—the British were a foreign power occupying someone else's home. What remained was an active coordinated struggle to dislodge them.

## BJP & Contemporary Contradictions

Every government accumulates contradictions. That is **inevitable**.

The challenge lies in recognising them *before* they begin speaking to one another.

Over the last decade, the BJP has pursued one of the most ambitious political expansion projects in independent India's history.

Electoral victories multiplied ruthlessly.  
Opposition parties weakened or finished.

Entire political ecosystems reorganised around a single party's growing influence.

Pause to think for a bit. Step into the *mindset*.

They have re-created everything from a new 'triangular' shaped parliament against the previously designed circular structure. Built a reorganized and consolidated secretariat, appointed a Chief of Defence Staff, carried out a sweeping demonetisation of high denomination currency, popularised QR enabled Unified Payments Interface & shifted buying activities 'online'. In fact, it is set to roll out plastic currency bills pretty soon.

The BJP expanded geographically, institutionally, organisationally and psychologically in little more than a decade.

Yet expansion always increases the number of expectations that must simultaneously be satisfied. And expectations rarely move in identical directions.

Consider some of the tensions that have gradually surfaced.

The construction of the Ram Mandir represented a deeply emotional and civilisational milestone for millions of Hindus.

Yet controversies surrounding allegations of financial irregularities relating to donations generated discomfort among precisely those sections that regarded the ‘temple-movement’ as *sacred* rather than political.

The contradiction was not the temple itself. It was the perception that something held sacred had become vulnerable to ordinary institutional failings.

Similarly, the party has consistently projected itself as a guardian of ‘Gau Raksha’ and traditional Hindu values. Yet India continues to remain export carabeef on a substantial scale, while statements by leaders in certain BJP-governed states acknowledged the practical limitations of prohibiting beef consumption in regions where it has formed part of local food culture for generations.

Whether one agrees with those positions or not is secondary.

Politically, such differences create cognitive dissonance within a support base that often expects **ideological consistency**.

Questions have also emerged from religious quarters.

The Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath, Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati, has repeatedly criticised aspects of major redevelopment projects surrounding sacred sites, arguing that ancient temples important to local culture & history, were demolished or altered on a large-scale during redevelopment of the Kashi Vishwanath shrine.

Again, the issue is not simply one of agreement or disagreement. It illustrates how criticism can arise from within communities generally assumed to be aligned with the broader ideological project.

Universities, too, have increasingly become sites of ideological contestation. Opposition leaders have repeatedly alleged that appointments including at the Vice Chancellor level, across important educational institutions disproportionately favour individuals associated with organisations such as the RSS, which is ideologically close to the ruling establishment.

Such controversies contribute to the perception, among critics, that institutions are becoming **ideologically homogenised**.

*Perception* often shapes politics as much as reality. Beyond ideological debates lie questions of governance.

Motorists & sections of the automobile industry have raised concerns regarding the economic &

mechanical implications of higher ethanol blending mandates, particularly for older vehicles.

Environmental groups have mobilised against deforestation linked to major infrastructure projects.

Farmers remain wary following the prolonged farm law protests, during which farmers' organisations reported that nearly 700 agitating farmers lost their lives before the legislation was eventually withdrawn.

Each issue possesses its own logic & underlying crisis. Its own stakeholders and their own history. Taken individually, they remain manageable. Taken together, they begin resembling something *much* larger.

## The Choice Before Every Regime

However, every regime eventually reaches the same crossroads.

One approach leads toward *reform*.

Listening. Adjustment. Accommodation. Recalibration. Reassessment. It requires putting an ear to the ground, using extensive political and social machinery to understand what society actually needs, and then *acting* on them.

The second approach, a more natural instinct of an authoritarian expansionist regime, is to try and reinforce its own ideology upon the people.

Why?

Because expansionist regimes often move with an illusory ideal of ‘unification’ and ‘absorption’ into a singular manageable, manoeuvrable, overarching ‘juggernaut’.

The first approach, although more thorough, may appear to project weakness. The second risks producing precisely the resistance it hopes to prevent.

History suggests that the temptation of strength has usually proven more attractive to rulers than the discipline of restraint. **Power** is most secure not when disagreement disappears. It is most secure when disagreement still *believes* it has a place within the system.

The moment dissent concludes that participation no longer matters, politics begins searching for other languages. History is full of examples where those languages became revolutions.

**The Civilization That Holds Together Without Becoming One**

There is a peculiar resilience in the Indian civilisation. Perhaps the biggest unifying factor at the heart of subcultures and micro civilizations spanning states, tribes and linguistic philosophies is something simpler yet much older.

It isn't *just* about resilience in the face of invasion. Nor is it simply resilience in the face of conquest. But resilience to opposition and disagreement.

That distinction matters enormously.

Most empires demand conformity. India that is Bharat, has historically demanded coexistence. The more we dive deeper into the myth and legend of the land, the more we see it **wired** into the psyche of the people.

For thousands of years India as a civilisation has absorbed invasions, dynastic wars, famines, colonisation, partitions, reform movements, philosophical revolutions and social upheavals and let's face it: social evils.

Yet *somehow* the civilisational thread has remained intact.

Why? Anywhere else in the world this would not make sense. Here, it's strangely the norm that repeats itself cyclically over time.

The answer lies not in political institutions, powers of ideologies, but in something far older.

## The Sacred Geometry of Bharat

Across the subcontinent, sacred sites are not concentrated in one capital.

They are dispersed. Quite remarkably in fact. In a way that cannot be unseen once you've taken the time to analyse it.

From Kedarnath in the North in the Himalayas. To Rameswaram at the southern tip. From Dwarka in the west of the Gujarat peninsula. To Puri in the East on the coast of Kalinga. The Char Dhams, resurrected by Adi Shankracharya.

The 12 Jyotirlingas, The 18 Maha Shakti Peethas. An intricate network of Buddhist viharas, caves and stupas.

Sikh sacred sites that stretch from Takht Shri Patna Sahib in the east to Hemkund Sahib in the Himalayas and Golden Temple & Akal Takht in Amritsar.

Sufi dargahs that stretch from Hazrat Nizammuddin Auliya in Delhi to the dargah of Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Haji Ali in Mumbai.

Jain Tirthas that stretch from the Dilwara temples at Mount Abu to Pawapuri in Bihar, Jain temple complex at Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh.

Buddhist sites that extend from the stupas of Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh to Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya, Amravati in Andhra Pradesh, & the Ajanta caves in Maharashtra.

This is just a snapshot. The full network is quite intricate.

Such a geography itself compels movement. Pilgrimage becomes cultural exchange. Every shrine whether Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh or Jain, has its own unique systems of worship, traditions & interpretations of belief.

Communities that may never share a language still share roads. They share rivers, festivals and stories. A sacred *memory* of what the civilization means to them.

The civilisation quietly teaches unity via circulation rather than centralisation.

Now, the interesting thing is no emperor designed this network. No modern constitution created it. It evolved organically over millennia. The sub-continent is **civilisationally connected** through living nodes of culture and this is just one example.

Alongside this geographical web lies another.

A web of ideas. Epics such as the Ramayana & Mahabharat which have become household stories and are often enacted in the local '*ram leela*' every winter with actors from different faiths

often participating. Popular serials and retellings by people of varying tastes, preferences and presentation styles.

Each generation returns to them. Each generation interprets them differently. Each generation argues with them. And remarkably, disagreement has not historically been treated as ‘corruption of tradition’. It is often treated as *participation* in tradition. Upanishads in particular stress the importance of questioning & discussion.

In many ways, this is perhaps the real heritage of the subcontinent. Woven into the fabric of society are intricate stories presenting both sides of the coin to the masses and encouraging interpretation, understanding and debate.

## A Civilization Comfortable With Contradiction

Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in the Mahabharat.

Modern politics is often obsessed with certainty. Ironically, through seeding uncertainty in the minds of the masses. Yet there is consistent aspiration and fascination with heroes, villains—*absolute* morality.

The Mahabharat *refuses* such comfort.

Bhishma is honourable. Yet he enables injustice. Karna is generous. Yet he stands beside adharma. Duryodhana is courageous. Yet he remains *consumed* by envy. Krishna himself repeatedly bends conventional morality to preserve a deeper conception of Dharma.

Every character carries both greatness and limitation. That's the *beauty* of it.

The epic asks the reader to learn to tolerate *complexity*. There are no straight or easy answers given by Vyasa. For everyone appreciating the camaraderie and respect between Krishna and Arjuna, there will be someone else equally impressed by the friendship of Karna and Duryodhana.

Perhaps that is precisely *why* these epics have survived and *thrived* in the psyche of the people and the land. We are consistently shown that even among those standing on the same side, disagreement is constant.

Bhishma and Karna; both great warriors, formidable and strong—connected by their ability to keep their promises—divided by the ethics of what they would go into battle for.

Krishna and Arjuna; both great strategists and powerful warriors—connected by dharma—divided often by the versions of right and wrong in achieving necessary outcomes.

The list goes on. Yudhishtira and Bhima; both brothers, Pandavas—united by blood, duty and family—divided over questions of dharma and vengeance amid the ugly war of attrition, that forms the climax of the Mahabharat.

Each understands Dharma differently. Each interprets *duty* differently. Each arrives at *different* conclusions. And yet they continue participating within the same larger **civilisational framework**. The beauty is that unity is never mistaken for uniformity. You can pick any literary masterpiece by Banabhatta or Kalidasa. You can pick any of the greatest epics or puranas of all time.

The pattern is consistently in favour of cultivating diverse perspectives rather than painting everyone in a single colour.

The Ramayana teaches something similar.

Rama and Lakshman disagree. Lakshman is often impulsive and Rama observantly measured. Yet their affection never demands intellectual conformity. Even if they may have opposing views at key moments. Such as in the immediate aftermath of being exiled from Ayodhya by King Dashrath.

Lakshman vehemently rejected Rama's decision to accept exile. He argued that Dashrath's command is unjust and urges Rama to *take* the kingdom instead. He even says that he is prepared to restrain or fight those who oppose Rama.

Rama refuses, insisting that **Dharma** and his father's word must prevail. Why? Because Kaikeyi had invoked two boons granted to her by Dashrath, many years ago for saving his life on the battlefield. When time came for her to ask for them, she demanded Rama's exile for fourteen years and Bharat's coronation in his place. Dashrath loved Rama dearly and so did the people of Ayodhya. But Dashrath had been forced to grant Kaikeyi these boons to uphold the value and **honour** of his words.

The conversations surrounding such events are enlightening as you read them including the now famous *chaupai* from Tulsi's Ramayana:

बिनय न मानत जलधि जड़, गए तीन दिन बीति।  
बोले राम सकोप तब, भय बिनु होइ न प्रीति॥

**“The obstinate ocean heeded no humble request, though three days had passed. Then Rama, angered, said: ‘Without fear, there can be no regard.’”**

- *Ramcharitmanas*

This is the *same* Rama, who accepted 14 years of exile as if it were nothing, now standing at the edge of the ocean that must be traversed to get to Lanka, defeat Ravana, and rescue his abducted wife.

The shift in strategy is striking.

The threat carries weight precisely because Rama is fully capable of following through on his words and that is what causes the forces to shift around him.

Furthermore, Bharat presents perhaps the most extraordinary example of what '*protest*' is meant to be like.

In Ayodhya kanda of the Ramayana, Bharat, Rama's younger half-brother, accepts the responsibility of governing Ayodhya. Yet refuses to legitimise the *manner* in which the throne came to him. Why? Because Bharat's mother Kaikeyi had gotten Rama banished to the forest for 14 years in order to have Bharat crowned as the King of Ayodhya.

What does he do?

He ensures that he shows up to perform the **duty** he must fulfil while ensuring the manner of it is *never* forgotten.

He places Rama's sandals upon the throne.

He governs in his brother's name.

And, according to tradition, sleeps not upon a royal bed but in a pit *dug into* the earth.

His reasoning is profoundly Indian.

"If Rama sleeps upon the forest floor, then I cannot elevate myself above him."

My duty requires me to govern. But *conscience* requires me to remember. To protest against the *injustice* of it all. Such tension can never be resolved. It *must* be lived. It is '*tapa*'.

## United Through Shared Sacrifice

Perhaps this is India's deepest paradox.

The Indian imagination has rarely associated unity with unquestioning obedience. Instead, it has associated unity with shared sacrifice.

The willingness to bear hardship together. To disagree without dissolving. To argue without severing the civilisational thread. To cooperate not comply.

**Suffering** occupies a central place in almost every major Indian epic. Perhaps that also explains the cultural bridges India built with eastern societies such as Japan which India could perhaps never have 'conquered' with a confrontational or expansionist strategy.

Note that suffering is not glorified. But recognised as *inevitable*

"Every choice extracts a cost" is the lesson again and again.

In my perspective, there is a discrete sociological fact being consistently hinted at: A natural result of *every* choice is the coiling of an imaginary spring, the stretching of an imaginary rubber band. You can only go so far in leveraging your position to enforce your overarching ideology and opinion on others until a point where opposition equalizes it.

Sometimes, as the Mahabharat tells us, this ‘recoil’ comes with cataclysmic consequences.

In the Mahabharat, Duryodhana *understands* the consequences of his actions.

*Everyone* from grand sire and maharathi Bhishma, to minister Vidhura, Dwarkadhish Sri Krishna, Duryodhana’s own mother Gandhari, and his guru Dronacharya, tries to reason with Duryodhana and make him understand that the war he was obsessed about would make the country he was fighting for burn.

*Everyone* tried to make Duryodhana understand that the end Duryodhana was pursuing would end his ‘kula’(lineage) itself.

He *chooses* that path **nonetheless**.

He is the Yuvaraj, he has the support of his father, his uncle, and every other vindictive person in the court. He has the royal seal and the force of its army. He has the power to enforce his will, the

legal legitimacy to do so even if without the moral legitimacy.

In the end, his end is brutal.

Every single one of his 100 brothers perish.

His kingdom disappears. His best friend, grand sire, guru, uncle, everyone dies.

His ambition consumes *everything* he hoped to preserve. Even as he was surrounded by voices warning him of the ultimate, inevitable consequence of it all

Yet victory proves no less painful for the Pandavas. Draupadi is humiliated before the war. Disrobed in open court. All her sons are murdered afterwards by Ashwathama. Upon losing all her 100 sons, Gandhari curses Krishna himself. Even Krishna witnesses the destruction of the Yadava clan in the end. No one emerges untouched.

And that is the lesson of the Mahabharat.

It offers victory without celebration. Justice without joy. Perhaps because civilisation itself is preserved not through perfect outcomes, but through difficult choices.

The epics tell us that when faced with difficult choices, consensus beats individual-will more often. The irony however lies in powerful individuals consistently disregarding good advice

and *arranging* voices around them that advise them only from selfish interests.

## The Politics of Dharma

This may also explain why Indian politics repeatedly returns to moral vocabulary.

Dharma. Maryada. Tyaga. Seva.

These are not ‘religious’ words. They are *social expectations*.

The public does not merely judge whether leaders succeed. It judges *how* they succeed.

Means, Conduct, Character *matters*.

The language may evolve. The expectation remains because it is hardwired into a collective consciousness shaped by a common thread of belief that is Sanatana.

Perhaps this is why Gandhi and his **Satyagraha** had the support of the masses. It *appealed* to a higher consciousness of balance. It understood that the ethos of the nation even if distributed by language, region and religion, is rooted in a common philosophy that unites by prioritizing moral ascendancy over the oppressor.

Any regime seeking to govern Bharat therefore faces an unusually difficult task.

1. It must exercise authority without appearing authoritarian.
2. Project confidence without appearing arrogant.
3. Lead without demanding intellectual surrender.

That balance has defeated empires far stronger than any elected government.

### **Fear Builds Empires. Alignment Builds Civilizations.**

There is an important distinction between an empire and a civilisation.

Empires accumulate territory. Civilisations accumulate meaning. Empires expand through administration. Civilisations expand through participation. Empires require obedience. Civilisations require belonging.

India has survived because it has repeatedly chosen **civilisation** over *empire*.

Even when political empires collapsed, the civilisation beneath them endured.

The Mauryas, Guptas, Delhi Sultanate, Mughals, British et al *eventually* departed. All empires must eventually depart. What remains is their legacy added as a chapter to the civilizational ledger.

## Delhi Ledger Counsel:

Instead of being worried that shortfalls in service delivery to the public are making them ‘*look bad*’, governments should genuinely consider incorporating a two-way feedback-oriented process of reporting shortfalls and deficiencies in schools, colleges and mid-day meals.

Why should the illusion of perfection be so vehemently maintained before each election cycle?

The opposition may politicize it but that’s exactly what oppositions are for. The **public** fundamentally understands that in a country as big as India there *will* be shortfalls. There *will* be service gaps. That’s okay. What is *not* acceptable is disregarding the mood for change that a young, energetic, and **aspirational** demographic—comprising more than a quarter of the country’s population—has almost independently mobilised.

In fact, one can even *gamify* reporting irregularities to a channel designated for reviewing tweets, tags and videos. Almost like a ‘sprint’ before elections, to get a constituency ‘in order’. There is a need for power and people to work **together**.

In a vast country like India, exposing gaps is not a cause for embarrassment; tolerating them consistently is. Over time, it simply lowers **public standards** and **dents collective self-esteem**. The core, unifying issue in society right now is *not* **AI**, the **economy**, **E-20**, or even **exam leaks**. It is the complete absence of an employment roadmap for a massive youth demographic that increasingly fears for its future.

## C A P I T A L



Delhi's urban fabric reveals a stark contrast between tightly packed neighbourhoods and more spacious, planned sectors, reflecting the uneven housing patterns that define the capital. Image: [istock.com/lasagnaforone](https://www.istock.com/lasagnaforone) | Original map data: © OpenStreetMap contributors

# THE BURNOUT GENERATION AND

# DELHI'S HOUSING TRAP

When a city cannot anchor its young, it slowly begins to lose them.

यार्णवेऽधि सलिलमग्र आसीद्यां मायाभिरन्वचरन्मनीषिणः।

यस्या हृदयं परमे व्योमन्सत्येनावृतममृतं पृथिव्याः।

सा नो भूमिस्त्विषिं बलं राष्ट्रे दधातूत्तमे॥

**“She who in the beginning was amidst the waters of the ocean, whose immortal heart is enveloped in Truth in the highest heaven: may that Earth place splendour and strength in our supreme realm (*rāṣṭra*).”**

*- Atharvaveda, Bhūmi Sūkta.*

Almost 28% of the population of India is between the age of 14 and 29. This is India's Gen-Z population currently making waves over students' protests surrounding lack of adequate education and job opportunities.

There is another age group “The Millennials”, aged 30-45, that make up 24% of the population. Together that's more than half the population of the country. Both these generations have grown up in a world dominated by technology, mobile devices, the internet, globalisation, the creator

economy, apps and artificial intelligence. With the mobile data revolution brought forth by Reliance Jio, a huge segment of the population today is more connected, more informed and more aware than ever before.

While education and employment remain two of the biggest issues that demand urgent attention if India is to fully harness what Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often described as the country's 'demographic dividend', there is another crisis that receives far less attention despite quietly growing worse under the carpet.

It is the **housing crisis**.

Call it poor planning, bureaucratic red tape, inadequate urban expansion or simply the failure to build enough large, well-planned cities. Whatever the explanation, the consequences are now visible across Delhi NCR.

One of the biggest issues faced by the youth of this country, particularly what is now increasingly being described as the 'burnout generation', the millennials, is access to affordable and dignified housing.

An interesting comparison frequently circulates online.

In countries such as the **United States**, an average individual can reasonably aspire to purchase a home valued at roughly *five* times their annual

income. In **India**, depending on the city, that multiple can stretch to anywhere between twelve to thirty times. In some cases, that multiple can easily be more than 40-50 times. In fact, apartment prices in posh Gurgaon & Mumbai societies are *insane*, running into hundreds of crores sometimes!

Now whether every comparison is perfectly accurate is beside the point. The perception *itself* reflects a growing frustration.

There is an acute shortage of authorised housing, planned societies and legally compliant residential developments capable of accommodating a rapidly growing urban population.

Delhi today has a massive ecosystem of unauthorised colonies, 'builder floors', illegal extensions and semi-regularised neighbourhoods.

These properties often provide very little legal certainty should governments decide to begin sealing or demolition drives, as witnessed recently in parts of the National Capital Region.

The recent crackdown across Gurgaon's upscale DLF colonies illustrates the risk. Recently, authorities began sealing and demolishing unauthorised portions of properties across DLF Phases I-V after *thousands* of properties were **flagged** for alleged building and land-use violations. In **DLF Phase III** alone, residents and

tenants were sometimes forced to vacate at extremely short notice (reportedly within 2-3 hrs sometimes) as buildings were sealed or illegal portions demolished.

This is still shockingly, only the tip of the iceberg of the real problem. The real problem is that even available houses are routinely misused for commercial purposes. The real problem is that even after shelling out a fortune for the house you want, there are still tens of problems resulting from unplanned architecture that continue to break the buyer's back.

- Many buildings contain unauthorised structural extensions.
- Fire safety measures are frequently inadequate.
- Emergency exits are missing.
- Parking is insufficient.
- Residential lanes often become battlegrounds over parking disputes, sometimes escalating into violence.
- Small businesses routinely operate out of residential buildings, placing additional stress upon infrastructure that was never designed for commercial activity.

Recent fire incidents witnessed in places such as Palam, Saket-Hauz-Rani and other neighbourhoods demonstrate that these are not merely planning issues.

They are public safety issues.

More than anything else, however, such an ad hoc urban arrangement creates something far more dangerous.

It creates instability.

That instability compounds several global pressures *already* affecting today's youth.

1. The economic & social after-effects of COVID-19.
2. Wars in Europe and the Middle East.
3. Rapid technological disruption driven by artificial intelligence.
4. Growing income inequality.
5. Persistent uncertainty regarding future employment.

Housing insecurity quietly amplifies *all* of them.

What then does such a population do?

Many adopt a step-by-step strategy.

They begin wherever they can afford.

They purchase whatever housing is available, authorised or otherwise, hoping eventually to upgrade into better neighbourhoods through successive property transactions.

It is this unmet aspiration of home ownership coupled with a sluggish per capita income that continues to fuel an enormous disorganised

housing market that has expanded aggressively over the past decade.

Another coping mechanism has emerged.

Many young professionals have gradually *abandoned* the dream of home ownership altogether.

Instead, status has increasingly become associated with experiences, expensive vehicles, luxury vacations, the newest electronic devices and other visible markers of success. Sometimes even digital assets become substitutes for long-term ownership.

The psychological shift here deserves close attention.

One of the biggest frustrations is that available housing *rarely* matches the **quality of life** that individuals earning respectable salaries reasonably expect.

Consider someone earning ₹1.5 lakh per month while working ten to twelve hours every day, 6 days a week.

Such an individual would reasonably expect a secure residential society with uninterrupted electricity and water, parks for exercise, nearby markets and a comfortable apartment with carpet area measuring roughly 90 to 100 square metres.

Yet apartments meeting these expectations in most of Delhi NCR's preferred localities routinely cost between ₹1.5 crore and ₹3 crore or even more.

The difficulties do not end there.

The housing market remains volatile and insufficiently regulated.

Forget about adequate rent-control. Many sellers remain unwilling to transact unless a significant percentage of the payment is made in **cash**.

Despite demonetisation and subsequent reforms, this remains a recurring concern reported by buyers.

Many purchasers simply do not possess enough savings even for the conventional down payment of 20% required to finance such properties. So, when sellers demand 30-40% in cash, there is no solution for the average buyer who simply doesn't have that kind of savings.

Cheaper housing *does* exist.

But it is frequently located in underdeveloped or poorly connected areas where long commutes significantly reduce overall quality of life.

Even then, the 'affordability' exists only on paper. From property taxes, maintenance charges, & longer commutes to fuel costs, vehicle expenses and, in some cases, highway tolls, *still* puts a lot of

strain on the owner through spending blind spots you only realize later.

According to government statistics, a substantial proportion of Delhi's urban footprint consists of unauthorised colonies that collectively house millions of residents.

That should concern everyone.

Because when an overwhelmingly young, ambitious and hardworking population cannot access stable, legally secure and dignified housing, dissatisfaction begins accumulating at one of the deepest layers of the human psyche.

This becomes even more significant in a city where:

- Air quality remains hazardous for large parts of the year. *(investment in buying and maintaining good air filters therefore becomes important)*
- Water tables continue declining. *(investment and maintenance of water pumps therefore becomes important)*
- Environmental buffers have steadily weakened. *(hardly any place for the average individual to recharge and relax without paying money out of their pocket)*
- Public safety remains challenged by policing constraints. *(necessitating investment*

*in good camera and security systems, private security)*

- Infrastructure struggles to keep pace with population growth. *(roads, sidewalks, highways, flyovers and bridges prone to accidents. Stray menace caused by dogs, monkeys and cattle)*

The result is not merely ‘financial stress’.

It is psychological uprootedness.

A persistent feeling that one is never fully settled.

Never fully anchored.

Never fully ‘home’.

It’s like an entire generation aspiring for a goalpost that shifts as soon as you come near it. What do they do finally?

They *stop* trying. They just ‘want out’ of a system rigged against them.

Perhaps this also explains why an increasing number of young Indians aspire to settle abroad, even if doing so requires rebuilding their lives almost from scratch.

Many simply conclude that long-term stability may be easier to achieve elsewhere.

Interestingly, some of Delhi's most recognisable public personalities spend relatively little time

living in Delhi itself. Many have permanently moved abroad.

Virat Kohli, for instance, has increasingly based himself in London with his family. Several other prominent Delhi-origin artists & entrepreneurs such as Sindhu Vee & Ashish Vijay, similarly maintain residences elsewhere. Famous actor Kunal Nayyar grew up and studied in Delhi before moving to the United States at 18 and subsequently building his career there.

One may argue that such mobility is natural among the wealthy.

And that is true.

But the more revealing comparison lies elsewhere.

The world's most successful global cities continuously attract talent from across the world that *willingly* settles there **permanently**.

Delhi, meanwhile, largely attracts internal migration from across India.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with that.

Indeed, Delhi's diversity has always been one of its greatest strengths.

But the concern is different.

The city is increasingly struggling to provide adequate housing and quality urban life *even* to

those individuals who already contribute substantially to its economy.

Consequently, migrants arriving in search of better opportunities often enter informal labour markets driving autos, taxis, buses, working in eateries or taking up other low-income occupations while facing extremely high housing costs.

At the very same time, Delhi continues investing in ambitious infrastructure projects, metro expansion, Central Vista redevelopment and numerous large-scale construction initiatives.

These projects are undoubtedly important.

Yet one cannot help wondering whether the current strategy (or lack thereof) for urban development risks leaping several floors upward before sufficiently strengthening the foundation beneath.

One wonders who exactly does Delhi serve?

Is it its people, its residents, or is it the ones playing the market for its profits?

When vast numbers of residents remain attached to the city primarily because it provides income rather than belonging, the city gradually transforms. And not for the better.

It becomes less a *home*. More a transit junction.

People begin running constantly. Chasing a stability that never arrives. Searching for permanence inside a system that appears rigged against it. This has *profound* sociological consequences.

Citizens slowly **disengage**.

- First from neighbourhoods.
- Then from civic participation.
- Then from demanding higher standards.
- Finally, from intervening when public systems begin deteriorating.

Because at a deeply emotional level, even if every official document identifies Delhi as home, many never truly experience ownership of the city.

And without ownership, participation inevitably weakens.

This opens up the systems to be exploited by those who see the profits and power in them not the welfare for themselves or others. This makes the social fabric vulnerable for abuse by anti-social elements. Ultimately this leads to a collapse of the social order itself—propagating chaos.

History repeatedly demonstrates this principle.

One of the fundamental criticisms often directed at centrally planned communist systems was precisely this: when ownership diminishes, responsibility also diminishes.

As responsibility declines, increasingly larger burdens become concentrated in the hands of central authorities who are often far removed from local realities.

Strong cities are not built from the top down. They are built from the ground up. And the only *durable* way to build a city from the ground up is to provide stable foundations for the families, entrepreneurs, workers and communities that sustain it every single day.

Empowering, funding and decentralising municipal institutions certainly forms an important part of that process.

But genuine decentralisation only succeeds when citizens themselves become stakeholders. When they possess something worth protecting. When they feel ownership. When they grow roots. When they finally discover a foundation in the *karma-bhoomi* they have chosen.

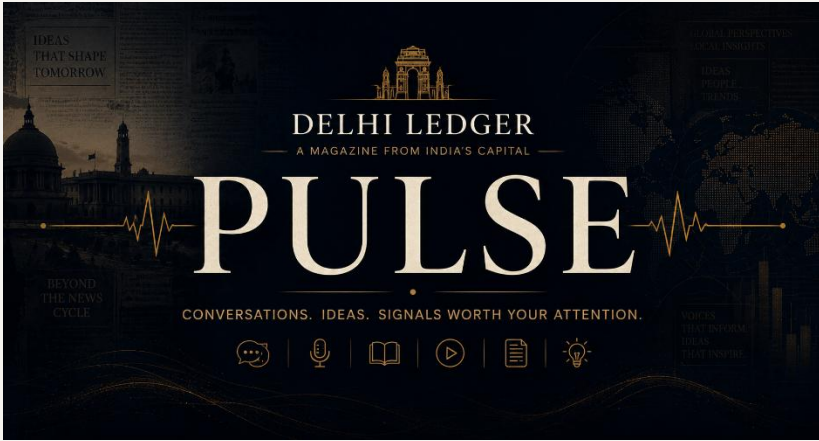
"संगच्छध्वं संवदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम्"

**"Walk together. Speak together. Let your minds be united."**

*-Rig Veda*

Cities ultimately derive their strength not from their skylines, but from the **confidence** of the people who call them *home*.

# 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)

**Editor's Note:** *Pulse* is a curated selection of independently produced conversations, reports and commentary that we believe are worth your attention. All linked content remains the intellectual property of its respective creators and publishers. Delhi Ledger neither owns nor claims rights over such content. Links are provided to the original sources for further viewing or reading, and inclusion does not imply endorsement of every view expressed.

From youth icon of the July Gen Z protests to being hunted as an “anti-national” by zealots online. A special interview of Rhiya Ahir by veteran journo Faye D’Souza.

In this LIVE candid conversation with veteran journalist Faye D’Souza, Rhiya Ahir shares what made her put her safety and well-being on line to stand in front of the police van allegedly detaining and transporting 21 students in Mumbai. Rhiya shares the aftermath of that action on her personal life; from being given rape threats to being targeted & harassed as anti-national by political workers and extremist groups.

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“Lawyer up! Show some spine.” says award winning journalist Sreenivasan Jain in conversation on ‘Mehdi Unfiltered’

Enlightening, intense, short, crisp. Veteran journalists Sreenivasan Jain and Mehdi Hasan share notes on a variety of topics; from the rise of digital reporting to declining viewership on mainstream media & notes for budding journalists and media websites.

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Ukraine just upped the ante in the Russia Ukraine conflict. It seems to be pulling off the impossible by making gains in unlikely territories.

Veteran journalist Max Fisher analyses an unlikely, almost shocking comeback. After losing Crimea to Russia 12 years ago, Ukraine seems to be making a massive play to get it back. What's interesting is *how* they're going about it. A masterclass in strategy and warfare.

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Is the 'AI Bubble' bursting? A short, sharp take on the *real* value of AI stocks with the backdrop of a South Korea chip crash.

Krystal and Saagar from popular channel "Breaking Points" discusses the latest news and analysis on AI stocks as markets crash.

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How a Chinese toy manufacturer rose to dizzying heights from mediocre beginnings to losing \$33 billion in value—all inside 2 years!

Two years ago, no one even knew what a "*Labubu*" is. Then one day, it exploded on the scene as a high value collectible; turning a \$30 toy to a \$300 'asset'. Today, the company *seems* to have killed its own golden goose. Interesting case study in a time of NFTs and digital assets.

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Jan Suraaj Founder & Famous Political Strategist Prashant Kishor talks about a variety of topics

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## from Gen Z student protests to winning a historic by-election in Bankipur, Bihar

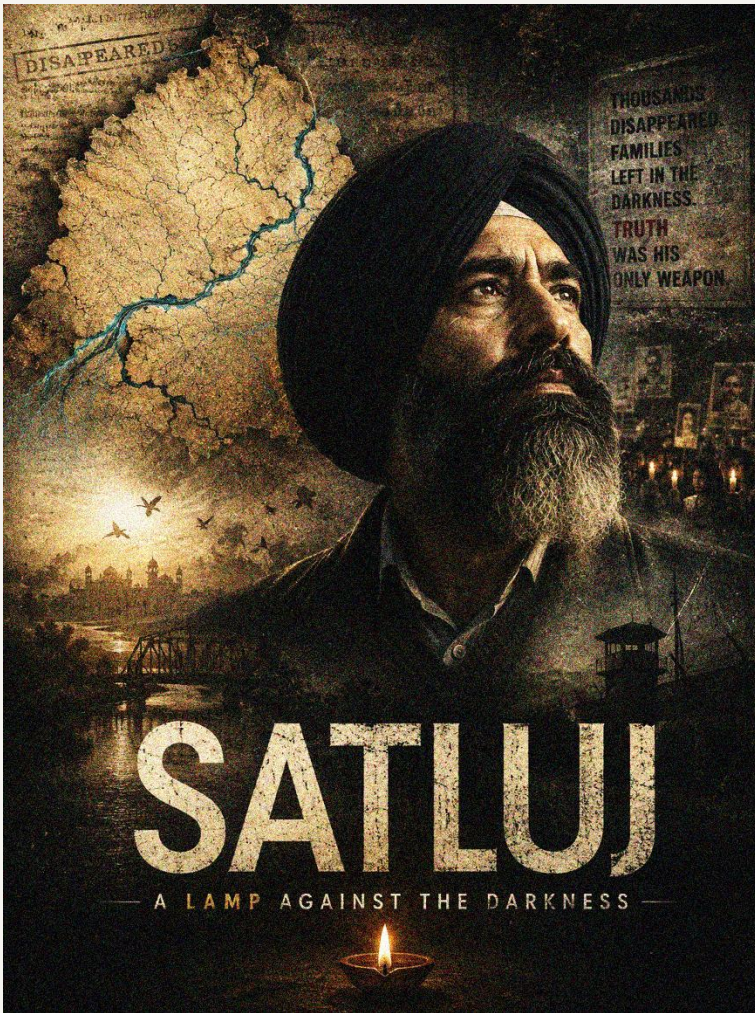
After failing to open his account in Bihar Assembly elections 2025, Prashant Kishor won a high profile by-election on BJP stronghold Bankipur, a seat held by the party for 30+ years. He analyses the reasons for his victory.

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## Prof Mukesh Kumar and Journalist Afrida Ali discuss the massive damage caused by floods in Assam and how the state could have better prepared for them

The 2026 floods in Assam have claimed 95 human lives and continue to impact over 1.6 lakh people across 14 districts. Almost 1 lakh livestock have been affected or displaced across the state. Could the scale of this disaster have been averted? What caused it, what needs to change?

## R E V I E W



Punjab takes its name from the Persian *panj-ab*: the land of five rivers, whose waters have nourished one of the subcontinent's richest cultural landscapes.

Yet those rivers also flow through memories of extraordinary violence.

Partition tore Punjab apart in 1947; decades later, Khalistani separatism, militancy and counterinsurgency brought another season of bloodshed, disappearances, police brutality and pervasive fear across towns and villages.

Photo: AI-Generated, (Kaushal Media)

# SATLUJ: A LAMP AGAINST THE DARKNESS

“When the sun set for the first time, it seemed as though darkness would reign forever. Then a lone lamp gathered the courage to illuminate the world around it and *challenge* the dark. Soon, inspired by its light, lamps in other homes began to do the same. Together, they overcame the darkness.”

“But it all began with the first lamp.”

Diljit Dosanjh, portraying human-rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra, speaks these words to a sympathetic jailer who has been urging him to cooperate with the police. Abandon the investigation, Khalra is told. Stop asking questions about the thousands of custodial deaths and disappearances. Think of your family. What will your death even change?

The metaphor of the lamp does not merely explain Khalra’s courage. It contains the entire moral architecture of *Satluj*.

They say that when one wishes to discover which books and films are truly worth engaging with, one should occasionally follow what an establishment attempts to prohibit. What is suppressed often

contains a truth that someone fears may survive, travel, and be communicated.

Within days of appearing on ZEE5, *Satluj* was removed from the platform in India without any meaningful public explanation. Briefly available internationally, it is now officially inaccessible for viewing.

Diljit Dosanjh later expressed relief that, during the brief period in which the film was available in India, people had managed to watch it. Whoever needed to download it had downloaded it, he suggested, and that was enough.

One might reasonably wonder why this film should provoke such anxiety.

Honestly, there is little in *Satluj* that audiences have not previously encountered in films or streaming series about police brutality, insurgency, political violence, or custodial abuse. The difference lies not in the nature of what it shows, but in the directness with which it shows it. The film does not hide behind a fictional state, an invented conflict, or a conveniently anonymous political era. Its characters, circumstances, and allegations point towards a history that remains painfully **recognisable**.

That *directness* is perhaps what makes it intimidating.

The film begins with Jaswant Singh Khalra attempting to discover the whereabouts of the mother of one of his friends, who has disappeared. He is warned almost immediately not to enter this dangerous terrain. He has a wife and children. He has responsibilities. He must consider what may happen to them.

“The person who disappeared was also my friend,” Khalra responds. “And the woman I am searching for is my friend’s mother. She is like my own mother.”

The exchange establishes the moral simplicity at the heart of his struggle.

Khalra does not initially set out to become a heroic dissident or a historical figure. He begins with a relationship. Someone he knows has disappeared. Someone’s mother is missing.

Within minutes, *Satluj* confronts the viewer with deeply disturbing images. Bodies lie unidentified on the floor. The dead are labelled militants or terrorists and prepared for cremation without being returned to their families. Human beings are converted into administrative inconveniences, their identities erased before their remains are disposed of.

Set against the years of militancy in Punjab, from the 1980s into the mid-1990s, the film asks questions that the system perhaps remains unable even today, to answer completely.

How does violence become procedure?

At what point does detention without trial cease to appear exceptional?

How many unidentified bodies must accumulate before atrocity begins to resemble paperwork?

Suvinder Vicky portrays DSP Sugga, a corrupt and trigger-happy police officer, with extraordinary effectiveness. He is convincing, loathsome, and disturbingly natural. Vicky has previously demonstrated an uncanny ability to inhabit characters who combine official authority with moral decay, notably in *CAT* and *Kohrra*. Here, once again, he appears almost frighteningly suited to the role of a sociopathic policeman.

Sugga does not behave like a cinematic villain announcing his wickedness to the audience. His violence is casual. His cruelty, almost occupational. He appears to have internalised the belief that whatever he does is justified because he occupies the correct side of the uniform.

Vicky steals nearly every scene in which he appears.

The rare exception is when he shares the screen with Kanwaljit Singh, whose measured, vintage

gravitas gives the film another kind of authority. Singh portrays IPS officer Bitta, the disciplined, stone-cold and emotionally impenetrable man charged with ending militancy in Punjab.

Bitta is not impulsive like Sugga. He is more dangerous precisely because he appears controlled. Sugga represents brutality at the level of action; Bitta represents the administrative philosophy that enables such brutality to become a system.

Kanwaljit Singh's performance is built upon stillness. His character does not need to rage, threaten, or explain himself. His confidence comes from knowing that power and institutions move behind him.

Arjun Rampal appears in a pivotal but deliberately restrained role as the CBI officer investigating Khalra's disappearance.

Rampal avoids turning the investigating officer into a conventional saviour. He is not presented as a heroic counterweight who arrives to cleanse the system. Instead, he appears as an official operating within another part of the same vast machinery, attempting to recover evidence after the worst has already occurred. His restraint suits the film.

*Satluj* does not seek to excite the audience with the mechanics of investigation. Nor does it attempt to deliver the emotional satisfaction of justice arriving with cinematic punctuality. It remains interested in something more disturbing: the *ease* with which a person can be reduced to a number, a file, an unidentified body, or an 'entry' in a cremation register.

The film does not attempt to move the viewer. It simply observes. It shows how killings, disappearances, custodial torture, and detention without hearings can gradually become normalised. It demonstrates how such a system is not sustained only by a handful of monstrous individuals. It is managed, defended, recorded, and propagated by ordinary people working within institutions, often with the cooperation or silence of people outside them.

This is where *Satluj* becomes particularly unsettling.

The world it depicts is not an alien dictatorship populated entirely by villains. It is a familiar society in which grave violence has been absorbed into routine. Policemen continue reporting for duty. Officials sign documents. Bodies are transported. Records are maintained or altered. Families wait outside offices.

*Life continues.*

One cannot watch the film without confronting the questions it repeatedly leaves hanging in the air.

Who protects you when those responsible for your protection begin to prey upon you?

Who investigates the institution entrusted with investigating everyone else?

And who dares to speak the truth when truth itself can be branded anti-national?

Diljit Dosanjh gives a measured and convincing performance as Jaswant Singh Khaira. It is admittedly difficult to forget completely that one is watching Diljit, the larger-than-life singer and global pop star. His public persona is too expansive to disappear immediately behind any character.

Yet in the film's most important moments, something remarkable happens.

You can see Khaira's fear.

More importantly, you can see him choose to continue despite it.

That distinction is crucial. Courage is frequently portrayed in cinema as the absence of fear, usually accompanied by swelling music and emphatic dialogue. Dosanjh plays it differently. Khaira appears aware that the path he has chosen is unlikely to end well. He recognises the danger. He

understands what may be done to him and what his family may be forced to endure.

He proceeds *anyway*.

This is exceptionally difficult to portray convincingly, even for formally trained method actors. Dosanjh has always been candid about never receiving conventional acting training, but the simplicity and authenticity of his performance suggest that this was a story with which he felt naturally aligned.

He does not over-play Khalra's 'goodness'.

He portrays a determined Sikh whose conscience has carried him beyond the point which affords a retreat.

Produced by Ronnie Screwvala and directed by Honey Trehan, *Satluj* benefits from Trehan's long association with some of Hindi cinema's most memorable casting. His work on films such as *Delhi Belly*, *Talvar*, and *Uda Punjab* demonstrated his instinct for finding actors who do not merely perform characters, but seem to arrive carrying entire worlds with them.

That instinct is visible throughout *Satluj*.

Even relatively brief appearances by veteran performers leave a distinct impression. The film includes several delightful cameos and important supporting roles, though they are best discovered without spoilers.

Trehan's direction tries to remain loyal to the lonely struggle of a determined man to uncover the truth. He does not convert the material into a thriller merely to sustain pace. Nor does he decorate the suffering with excessive cinematic beauty.

The result is that one often stops feeling as though one is watching a film.

Instead, *Satluj* begins to resemble an alternate reality into which the viewer has been quietly admitted. It is a world where grave sins and grave violence have become so ordinary that no one appears surprised by them anymore.

Eventually, the viewer also stops being surprised.

More than anger, more than grief, and even more than shock, the dominant sensation produced by the film is numbness. That *numbness* is not a weakness in the storytelling. It is the **point**.

A society does not arrive at organised brutality only because certain people become exceptionally cruel. It arrives there because enough people have become accustomed to cruelty.

*Satluj* is not an easy film to recommend because it is not designed to provide comfort. It leaves the viewer with no triumphant illusion that the past

has been fully understood, that justice has been completed, or that such systems belong safely to another era.

However, it deserves to be watched. Not because it offers a complete answer, but because it preserves the question. How far must you go, *can* you go to seek the truth, *speak* the truth?

**Rating: 4/5**

**-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 iconic Lord Shiva statue in Rishikesh near Parmarth Ashram clicked during sunset. Photo: iStock.com/Prashant Dubey

## SHRAVAN: THE MONTH OF SHIVA

Every month in the traditional Vedic calendar carries a distinct quality and derives its name from the nakshatra near which the Purnima (Full Moon) occurs. These months represent recurring energetic themes that have guided observances and spiritual practice for millennia.

According to the traditional understanding, at the conclusion of Ashadh, on Devshayani Ekadashi,

Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the universe, enters a state of cosmic rest. During this period, the responsibilities of preservation are said to pass to **Shiva and Shakti**, who guide the universe through the month of **Shravan**.

This transition is one of the reasons why Shravan occupies such an important place in the Shaivite tradition.

What is approaching on the **28<sup>th</sup> of August 2026**, is **Shravan Purnima**, the culmination of the month of Shravan with the Purnima representing spiritually a crescendo of its energy.

This is a highly auspicious date in the year if someone wishes to go deeper into ‘Shiva’ saadhna or is seeking domestic, emotional abundance. Let’s go deeper into the energy of Shravan nakshatra and month before we unfold the abundance rituals to be practiced for this spiritual event.

## **The Meaning of Shravan**

The nakshatra of **Shravan** is symbolized by **three footsteps**. These three footsteps have been interpreted in many ways. They may represent the **three gunas**, the **Trimurti**, or the presence of a higher guiding intelligence leading an individual forward through life.

Shravan is also associated with peace, attentive listening, and deep inner enquiry. Its inherent power, known as **Samhanana Shakti** is the power to bring people together, to 'connect' or 'unify'.

When one speaks of Shiva and Shakti, one is ultimately speaking of union: the synthesis of opposing forces, the reconciliation of Purusha & Prakriti, Yang & Yin, '*jada*' & '*chetan*'. It is the integration of the entire universe into a single harmonious whole. It isn't surprising therefore, that Shravan has traditionally become a month devoted to Shiva worship, mantra, meditation, austerity, and *inward* reflection.

It is believed that Shiva blesses sincere seekers with the strength to transcend the cycles that continue to keep them trapped. The month of Shravan is considered to be the most auspicious month for Shiva rituals, sadhana and austerities.

## **When the Destroyer becomes the Preserver**

An interesting paradox lies at the heart of Shravan. During this month, it is not Vishnu but Shiva who assumes the role of preservation. Why? Because it is believed that with Deva Shayani Ekadashi, Vishnu retires to 'rest' for a while, handing the reins of the cosmic order to Shiva.

Yet Shiva preserves in his own unique way. Rather than preserving comfort, he preserves *evolution*. Rather than protecting attachment, he protects truth. Across the Puranas and countless legends, Shiva appears as the refuge of those who find no justice elsewhere. He is '*Bhootnath*' (The Lord of Ghosts). He is '*Pashupati*' (The Lord of all animals). And yet he is also '*Rameswaram*' (Ishwara to Lord Rama). He grants boons with extraordinary impartiality, without discrimination between deva, human, or asura.

It is true, that it is precisely this boundless compassion that has often been exploited by powerful beings. Many asuras obtained tremendous powers through severe austerities performed to impress Shiva. Yet these stories repeatedly remind us that while Shiva grants what is sincerely sought, he also allows every being to experience the **consequences** of those desires. There is a simplicity in Shiva's rules of governance. He allows the natural consequences to play out as they inevitably must even after the *saadhak* has received everything he or she worked so hard to receive.

Why? It's simple really. Shiva is the 'God of death'. He is '*Mahesh*'. He is '*Kaal*'. He is '*Mahakaal*' himself. He sees no harm in giving impartially because he knows nothing is permanent no matter how much it may seem so in the moment.

## A Month of Transformation

For anyone seeking meaningful *change*, Shravan & Shravan Purnima in particular, offers a symbolic doorway.

It is a period for turning one's attention toward the archetype of “**ArdhaNarIshwara**”, inviting the constructive severing of old patterns, limiting habits, and deeply ingrained karmic cycles. The external rituals performed throughout the month are ultimately meant to reflect an internal transformation.

Among the most well-known observances is the **Rudra-Abhishekam** of the Shivling, which is traditionally believed to help devotees dissolve negative tendencies and karmic burdens. This practice is rooted in one of the most sacred legends associated with Shiva. The Rudram Chamakam from Yajur Veda is usually recited as the Rudra Abhishekam is performed. It's an elaborate ritual requiring an elaborate list of ingredients & ritual articles but can even be performed simply using water and *bilva-patra*. With Shiva, the intention matters more than the resources applied to try and ‘buy’ his favor. The Rudra Abhishekam is said to be especially beneficial for individuals with Rahu-Moon/ Ketu-Moon conjunction in their chart.

## The Story Behind the Abhishekam

Shravan is traditionally associated with the episode of **Samudra Manthan**, the Churning of the Cosmic Ocean.

When the deadly poison **Halahal** emerged from the ocean, it threatened the destruction of the entire universe. To protect creation, Shiva instinctively drank the poison. Parvati, his consort quickly held his throat to prevent the poison from descending into his body. Since then, he came to be known as '*NeelKantha*' or the one with the blue throat.

It is said that the immense heat generated by 'containing' this poison became unbearable. Popular tradition associates the practice of Abhishekam with this episode: the devas and devis are said to have poured sacred water, milk and other offerings over Shiva to cool him. Rudra Abhishekam is therefore often understood symbolically as a re-enactment of that act. And this *symbolism* as a whole actually extends far beyond ritual.

Shravan becomes a month dedicated to cooling the '*inner-heat*' generated by unresolved karma, compulsive desires, emotional agitation, and repetitive patterns that keep one chasing peace without ever truly finding it.

The Abhishekam performed upon the Shivling is an outward expression of the transformation that must ultimately occur *within*.

## Listening Within

The very name **Shravan** is closely associated with listening.

This month invites a simple yet profound enquiry:

What do you *truly* desire?

What do you *truly* need to let go of?

Who are you genuinely *meant* to become?

Shravan is a time for listening to the inner voice rather than the noise of the outer world. It encourages silence, contemplation, and a return to inner peace. Its arrival also coincides with the Indian monsoon.

Within traditional agrarian societies, the monsoon was a time associated with *allowing* the rains to nourish the seeds already planted.

In the same way, Shravan invites us to become *conscious* of the mental and emotional seeds we continue to nourish each day. For it is these thoughts, repeated over time, that eventually become destiny.

## Shiva Grants Desire, Not Freedom From Consequences

A recurring lesson throughout Shaivite mythology is that Shiva readily rewards sincere devotion. In fact, he is sometimes considered 'naïve' in granting of boons even to those who are sure to misuse them. From this nature, '*Bhole Naath*' ('*The naïve Lord*') is the name that emerges for him. Yet what he does, is not the removal of *consequences* of what is requested. That's the genius of his strategy in fact.

And this lesson appears repeatedly.

The story of **Bhasmasura** illustrates it perfectly.

After intense penance, Bhasmasura obtained the terrifying boon that anyone upon whose head he placed his hand would instantly perish. For a time, he used this power to terrorize creation. Ultimately, he became the victim of his own boon, placing his hand upon his own head and destroying himself.

Another example is **Ravana**.

Through extraordinary *tapas*, Ravana became nearly invincible. He secured protection from gods, celestial beings, and countless powerful entities. Yet he never imagined that a 'mere' human

being could challenge him. So, in his boon, he simply omitted protection from human beings.

That single omission became the opening through which **Lord Rama**, embodying Narayana in human form, fulfilled his dharma. Supported by an army of '*vanaras*' (apes) and bears, Rama crossed the ocean, reached Lanka, defeated Ravana, and ultimately liberated him from the shadow-side (arrogance) of his own immense power.

These stories remind us that power without wisdom eventually consumes itself. And without humility, perhaps even more so. It is that *humility* embodied in Shiva's being. Shiva simply blesses on the basis of effort. He rewards effort with the fruit it deserves and leaves the '*saadhak*' to act freely to his betterment *or* detriment. Because either way, in the end we are all going to die.

## Observing Shravan

Shravan is traditionally observed through '*sathvic*' (*abstaining from alcohol & meat*) living, meditation, mantra, and regular contemplation.

Don't worry if you're reading this when already few days of this auspicious month have passed, that's the beauty of Shiva and his rhythms. Now that you know, you can start now. The Purnima which is also the last day of Shravan, is the real abundance

window for connecting with this energy. You can take advantage of that. For next time, make a note in your calendar. Although be informed that Shravan dates vary based on the lunar calendar each year so stay on top of that.

Now, here's an abundance ritual to be performed during Shravan and especially on Shravan Purnima. There is a particularly significant period each day called "**Pradosh Kaal**", the sacred window occurring approximately **90 minutes immediately after sunset**. *(Discussed in detail in the previous issue)*

- You can utilize any duration of this time window for this practice.
- In this period, just focus your attention on the meditating form of Shiva. You can even use the cover image of this article. You can memorize it as well and meditate on it with eyes closed. Now, by meditation I simply mean: 1.) Try to sit, 2.) Breathe 3.) Simply allow your spine to be erect.
- Just do this. Your body & mind together do the rest. If your eyes keep opening close them again. If your mind keeps wandering, simply focus on your breath. If you feel itchy or twitchy, simply *refocus* on your **breath** again.
- In time you will settle into a rhythm of effortless breathing and balance.

- Once settled, simply begin chanting any Shiva Mantra close to your heart. Slowly & mindfully. Any thought, fear, idea, grief or emotion that comes up—let it. Observe. Breathe & *allow* yourself to **listen** to how you truly feel underneath every pretence the world asks you to keep up.
- For those seeking a deeper understanding of themselves, their recurring patterns, hidden strengths, weaknesses, and karmic tendencies, this simple practice can become one of the most transformative observances of the entire year.
  - If done with devotion, this is *all* that is required. Staying sattvic throughout the month and just practicing mindfulness, *stillness* every evening in Pradosh Kaal. On the Purnima especially, you can set a larger part of or the entire Pradosh Kaal period aside for this practice or an Abhishekam.
- You can also listen to or recite the Shiva Tandava Stotram, during, before or after the meditation.
- You may choose to read the Shiva Purana daily in this time window and/or perform a simple '*abhisehkam*' of a Shiva Lingam using water and '*bilva-patra*' as well, while chanting any Shiva Mantra that is close to your heart.

Shravan ultimately reminds us that true abundance is not merely the accumulation of external success.

It is the ability to consciously choose which desires we nourish, which patterns we release, and which version of ourselves we allow to emerge.

*Har Har Mahadeva!*

# K A A L



Rahu Kaal, is a daily occurring time window corresponding to the North Node of the Moon, Rahu. It is generally believed that all new beginnings must be avoided in this time window. The truth is however a little different. Image: AI-generated (Kaushal Media)

## UNDERSTANDING RAHU KAALAM: THE TIME WINDOW OF UNPREDICTABILITY

This is the fourth edition of **KAAL** as part of the *Delhi Ledger* magazine. In every issue, we have

explored a different aspect of **Kaal**, or time, through the lens of the Vedic tradition.

According to Vedic philosophy, time is not homogeneous. Certain windows of time recur on a regular basis, each carrying its own symbolic and energetic quality.

In previous editions, we discussed **Brahma Muhurat**, **Abhijit Muhurat**, and **Pradosh Kaal**.

Brahma Muhurat is associated with **Brahma**, the Creator. It is regarded as one of the finest periods for study, contemplation, meditation, and spiritual practice.

Abhijit Muhurat is connected with **Vishnu**, the Preserver, and occurs once every day around midday (with certain traditional exceptions, such as Wednesdays in some schools of practice). It is widely regarded as a supportive period for beginning important activities.

Pradosh Kaal is primarily associated with **Lakshmi**, while also holding a deep connection with **Shiva**. It is another highly respected window within the Vedic understanding of time.

*‘Rahu Kaalam’*, however, is different.

It is a daily time window associated with **Rahu**, the North Node of the Moon. And as with most things associated with the shadow planet Rahu, this is a highly unusual and somewhat ‘taboo’ time window.

Rahu occupies a unique place within Jyotish. It governs desire, ambition, illusion (Maya), worldly hunger, unconventional paths, technological progress, foreign influences, and the futuristic forces that human beings do not yet fully understand. Traditionally, Rahu is also connected with **Bhairava**, the fierce and protective manifestation of Shiva.

Unlike the calmer sustaining energies associated with Vishnu or the creative energies of Brahma, Rahu represents movement that is intense, aggressive, disruptive, and transformative.

Philosophically speaking, Rahu is generally not considered an inherently auspicious force because it has a tendency to distort the true nature of things. It magnifies, exaggerates, obscures, and often pulls consciousness toward extremes. For this reason, Rahu Kaalam has traditionally been advised against for beginning important or auspicious activities.

It is important to delve deeper into the ‘why’ here.

You see, the recommendation is **not** based on the assumption that Rahu Kaalam is always bad. Rather, it is because Rahu is highly unpredictable. It tends to work through extremes. Therefore, for activities that carry significant long-term consequences, such as:

- signing important agreements,

- applying for licenses,
- inaugurations,
- negotiations,
- major financial commitments,
- exhibitions,
- ceremonies,
- or any carefully planned new beginnings,

traditional Jyotish recommends avoiding Rahu Kaalam as much as possible.

The primary intention is to allow important beginnings with far reaching or permanent consequences on your life, to unfold under steadier and more predictable influences.

However, modern life rarely operates under ideal circumstances. We work across different countries, different cultures, multiple time zones, and demanding schedules using AI, remote assistants and tons of futuristic goals, systems and processes. We are living, for all practical purposes—in the *age* of Rahu.

Also, Rahu Kaalam occurs every single day. It is calculated by dividing the period between local sunrise and sunset into eight equal segments. Now there's a *predetermined* segment assigned to Rahu on each weekday, making its exact timing dependent on both the day and location.

Just as a reference, the sequence is something like: Monday-2nd, Tuesday-7th, Wednesday-5th, Thursday-6<sup>th</sup> etc. So essentially, think of it like 1/8<sup>th</sup> of daylight, assigned to Rahu's 'randomness' each day.

It's therefore neither practical nor necessary to become *obsessed* with avoiding it at all costs. Understanding its occurrence is useful however but complete avoidance can be bad for your mental health.

Seriously!

Suppose a high-profile client who has been difficult to reach suddenly calls and says:

*"Let's finish the agreement right now. This is the only hour I have before I board my flight and become occupied with other commitments."*

Should you refuse simply because it happens to be Rahu Kaalam?

The answer is **No**.

Why not? Because you must perform your *Karma* without attachment to consequence. That is your primary duty before anything else. All of Vedic philosophy should be taken holistically. But it is also true that once you know what to do, *not* acting on that knowledge is 'Akarma'.

So, Rahu Kaalam is not avoided because it is universally negative. It is avoided because it is less predictable.

In fact, in practical observation, I have often noticed something interesting.

Individuals who are undergoing **Rahu Mahadasha**, or those who are consistently engaged in Bhairava Sadhana, whether through **Bhairava** mantra, **Kaal-Bhairava-Ashtakam**, or other traditional practices, frequently report that many of the major turning points of their lives began during Rahu Kaalam itself.

There are even specific forms of **Kaal Bhairava Sadhana** that are traditionally performed *only* during Rahu Kaalam.

Furthermore, if Rahu is functioning favourably in an individual's birth chart, supported by benefic placements or favourable '*Taara*' influences during transit, Rahu Kaalam can sometimes become the very period through which extraordinary breakthroughs enter one's life.

Some of the most life-altering opportunities can emerge through beginnings made during this window. Naturally, practical observations in applied Jyotish will always display some variation across different charts, traditions, and data sets.

Yet one conclusion remains remarkably consistent. Rahu Kaalam is not necessarily a bad time. It behaves differently for different people.

The purpose of studying **Kaal Nirnay**, the 'discernment of time', is not to become fearful of

certain hours. Rather, it is to understand that Vedic philosophy identifies some periods as naturally flowing with fewer obstacles than others. Rahu Kaalam is one such period where *awareness* is more valuable than fear.

If you have complete control over scheduling an important beginning, choosing another Muhurat is generally advisable. But when circumstances genuinely leave you with no choice, there is no reason to view the event with prejudice simply because it began during Rahu Kaalam.

Time, in the Vedic worldview, is nuanced. Every moment has its own character. Wisdom lies in *understanding* those rhythms well enough to work with them intelligently. That is the true *purpose* of studying Kaal.

**So, what does this mean—practically speaking?**

Well, if an important project, association or beginning has taken place during Rahu Kaal, then you need to become aware that it's not going to unfold 'linearly' so to speak.

Rahu always introduces a foreign, unknown, unanticipated, experimental and pioneering energy into the things that it touches. There will definitely be something unconventional or uncommon about it. That's it. That's what you need to keep at the back of your mind about it. Not prejudiced, simply aware.

This can mean a celebrity client actually ends up becoming a ‘friend’ during the course of that project or association. It could mean the company building a brand-new process just to accommodate that project. It could mean a departure from tradition in how that association or partnership, project etc. proceeds. It could also mean an energy abundant in irregularities, miscommunication and conflicts.

The bottom line is, whenever you see Rahu-Kaal dominating an important beginning, know that your attitude towards that beginning will have to shift to one of curiosity, adaptation and **experimentation**. You are very likely to feel ‘outside your element’ in some way.

That’s it. That’s all the awareness you need. Once you make a note of that and encounter a situation which you haven’t encountered in 99% other cases for the same set of routine instructions, processes or workflows, you know where that’s probably coming from. The answer as well is likely to lie outside the box. *That’s* the mental adjustment that *awareness* will help you create.



The Kalkaji shrine is a '*Swayambhu*' i.e. self-emerging shrine believed to be over 5000 years old with mentions to it in Mahabharat and Markandeya Purana. Photo: AI enhanced artwork, (Kaushal Media)

## KALKAJI: EMBRACING THE ENERGY OF TRANSFORMATION

There is a deity who acquires immense importance in the Tantric tradition: **Goddess Kaali.**

There is a famous lecture by famous philosopher and theologian Alan Watts, in which he explains

the nature of the universe through an archetype that closely resembles Kaali.

The story goes something like this.

An astronaut, after spending a long time in space, is asked what the universe is like.

The astronaut simply replies:

**"She is black."**

This is a remarkable statement.

What does "*She is black*" really mean?

Interestingly, astronauts and astronomers often describe the universe in a surprisingly similar manner. Once you begin studying it, and truly shift your gaze outward in an attempt to understand existence, you encounter something colossal, intimidating, and profoundly *unpredictable*.

The fact that a planet like Earth has continued to survive, support life, and remain in existence despite the countless possibilities of annihilation, whether through an asteroid impact, a gamma-ray burst, or some other cosmic event, is extraordinary.

The universe is not merely beautiful.

It is overwhelming and vast beyond imagination. It is dark and unforgiving. It is what creates & consumes in the same breath.

In many ways, this is precisely the archetype of Kaali. At any given point of time, *Kaali* represents the overwhelmingly powerful forces that one cannot conquer or fully understand. That one can only surrender before. A stark reality, that makes us aware of our limits & how endless yet severely limited our place is in the cosmos. Kaali is both the dark force that may instantly end your identity or radically transform it beyond recognition—either side of the spectrum of good/bad. That's what makes her terrifying.

## The Birth of Kaali

Vedic philosophy explains the emergence of Kaali through a powerful legend found in the **Devi Mahatmyam**, a section of the **Markandeya Purana**.

During an intense battle with the Asura **Raktabija**, (meaning literally '*Rakta*': Blood, '*Bija*': Seed) the Divine Mother encountered an impossible problem. Every drop of Raktabija's blood that touched the ground produced another fully formed Raktabija. The battle had become never ending. Every strike succeeded only in multiplying the enemy.

Exhausted by this seemingly endless cycle, Adi Shakti became intensely wrathful. From that

divine anger emerged a dark, powerful force surrounded by thousands of howling jackals. Her eyes were sunken, her flesh dried and shrivelled. She held a '*khadaga*' in one hand, wore nothing but tiger skin and a garland of skulls. She had dark dishevelled hair, a long tongue lolling side to side and a frightening appearance. This force was **Kaali**.

Kaali is the embodiment of endings. She represents fear, transformation, shock, destruction of obstacles, and every force that appears when ordinary methods fail. She is the dark aspect of Shakti: an aspect of her power that *consumes* rather than create. She is the dark force one calls upon to end dark forces that the light cannot destroy.

Adi Shakti instructs Kaali:

"Open your mouth wide enough to swallow every drop of blood before it reaches the earth."

Kaali does exactly that. She opens her mouth so wide that she engulfs Raktabija in it. In fact, she opens her mouth so wide that she begins to swallow the opponent's army whole as if picking out berries from a bush and carelessly throwing it in one's mouth.

As the remaining Asura armies rush forward, Adi Shakti commands Kaali once more:

"Swallow them all."

Kaali devours the army itself, breaking their morale and paving the way for the final battle against **Shumbha** and **Nishumbha**.

The complete legend remains available today through the Sanskrit text and its translations in **Durga Saptashati**, which is a part of the **Markandeya Purana**. If you thought Hindu philosophy compulsorily emphasizes peaceful, straight forward resolutions, you need to read this text from time to time. It will open your mind to the extent that darkness can sometimes push the light *forcing* a shadow resolution.

But what makes these stories in the puranas remarkable is not merely their mythology, but the extraordinary energetic codification and *symbolism* embedded within them.

### **Sacred Geography: Kalkaji Temple**

One of the most interesting aspects of Bharat's spiritual traditions is that every legend is also connected with sacred geography, a sacred architecture that embodies the legend and its philosophy.

It is said that the location where this battle unfolded is present-day **South Delhi**. Standing there today is the ancient **Kalkaji Temple**, dedicated to Goddess Kaali.

The presiding deity of Kalkaji is believed to be a **Swayambhu**, meaning self-manifested rather than sculpted by human hands. The icon itself is unusual. Only the upper portion of the Goddess, extending to the upper lip, is visible. Her eyes, head, nose and ears can be seen. The remainder of her fierce form is believed to remain beneath the earth itself.

This symbolism beautifully reflects the energetic description of Kaali.

Like the energies that she represents, much of her power remains hidden beneath the surface. It engulfs you more than you can ever hope to fully behold it. Much like the vast darkness that engulfs the entire universe as we know it.

The **shrine** itself is believed to be ancient.

The oldest surviving portions of the present temple structure however, are generally associated with Maratha patronage around 1764. Further additions were made in 1816 by Mirza Raja Kidar Nath, the '*peshkar*' of Mughal emperor Akbar II. Unlike many monumental temples, Kalkaji is relatively compact. Its compact, dodecagonal form evokes, at least visually, certain features associated with India's Yogini temple tradition

Tradition further holds that before the great war of Mahabharat , **Krishna** and **Arjuna** visited this very shrine to seek the blessings of Kaali. She is in fact an important goddess to seek

blessings of when acts of great courage and reckoning need to be taken.

Among the hereditary communities associated with the temple are priests belonging to *Jogi* traditions, usually connected with occult forms of Shiva and Shakti practices. Jogis themselves occupy an intriguing space in the Sanatana landscape: They represents ascetics associated with Yoga, *Tantra* and the Nāth tradition, & have historically been at the porous frontier between temple, wilderness and conventional society. In fact, Kalkaji's evening worship is described as a '*Tantric Aarti*', reflecting the temple's deeper association with hidden Shakt tradition.

This gives Kalkaji a ritual and energetic character quite distinct from shrines such as Chhatarpur or Jhandewalan, whose forms of Devi worship are generally experienced as more conventionally sattvic.

## Kaali as an Energetic Principle

Kaali represents the Tamasic aspect of the Divine Feminine. But Tamasic with a *purpose*. She embodies the '*guna*' or quality of '*Tamas*' as an equalising force. The consumption is not for personal satiation but ending the cycle of karma.

‘*Tamasic*’ as the energy that destroys stagnation so that ‘*Sattva*’ may eventually emerge.

For this reason, Kaali has long been regarded as the breaker of deeply rooted karmic patterns, inherited trauma, and prolonged periods of stagnation. People often turn toward Kaali when they feel trapped. When life feels stuck. When every opportunity appears blocked.

Kalkaji, in particular, has long been associated with resilience, endurance, tenacity and the **strength** required to overcome adversity. It remains one of the most energetically charged shrines in Delhi.

Another interesting fact is that regular visitors aren’t necessarily Hindus. In fact, that is often the norm with Kaali temples. Staunch Hindus can feel a complete disconnect with her energy and Sikhs, Muslims and Christians can be drawn to her inexplicably sometimes *intoxically*. There is a reason for that. Kaali’s energies often function outside the usual barriers of society & tradition. It is said in Tantra tradition that it is the **deity** who chooses *you* not the other way around.

While there are certainly Tantric practitioners who approach the Goddess for questionable purposes, like ‘*vashi-karan*’ & spell-work, the overwhelming atmosphere of the temple remains one of devotion.

On **Saturday evenings**, the temple comes alive.

As devotees wait for the ‘*kapaat*’ (door to the inner shrine) to open post the divine mother’s ‘*sringaar*’, the chants intensify. The elaborate **Shringar** of the Goddess transforms the sanctum. Mantras reverberate continuously. Some people sway to the chants as if uncontrollably so; others clap and sing devotedly. The distinctive *ululation* performed by Bengali women echoes through the temple complex. The atmosphere becomes almost *tangible*. Energizing, calming and sometimes, destabilizing for the uninitiated. The tantric aarti on Saturday evenings feels almost like a festival.

## Kaali and Shani

Within Jyotish, Kaali can be associated with the archetype of **Shani (Saturn)**. The qualities of discipline, responsibility, hard work, resilience and duty; all fall within her domain. The capacity to *endure* hardship while continuing to move forward is said to be granted by her grace.

Kaali may therefore be understood as one of the Mahavidyas governing the deeper lessons of Saturn.

**क्री** Bija (Root) Mantra is:

**Krin(g)**

*(The ‘g’ is a half syllable here. Almost silent)*

This is considered an immensely powerful seed mantra and is connected with the root of her energy. Almost as if it is Kaali summarised inside a single sound.

During periods when one feels unsupported, destabilised, or burdened by inherited family karma, many saadhaks turn towards this mantra as a means of cultivating resilience and inner stability.

The iconography of Kalkaji itself appears deeply connected with this symbolism. The self-emerged 'Swayambhu' form of the deity naturally evokes associations with grounding, survival, and the **Root Chakra**. Kalkaji in particular embodies and represents a form of Kaali that is a nurturing yet wrathful form of mother Gaia herself.

## The Infinite Darkness

Ultimately, Kaali represents something much larger than any idol or temple. She represents the infinite darkness from which the universe itself emerges.

The blank canvas upon which existence is painted.

Kaali is not an energy to be mastered. Nor is she an energy to dominate. It is not possible and should not be tried. Even *tantriks* who set off on the path

to master her energy, often need to sacrifice everyone and everything on their way there—so it is said by learned jogis & yogis.

To approach Kaali is to willingly enter the deepest regions of one's own consciousness. It is where the ego begins to dissolve, making transformation possible. Kaali is where resistance ends and evolution begins.

Because of the sheer *intensity* of this energy, it is neither necessary nor advisable for most individuals to remain immersed in Kaali Saadhna indefinitely.

## A Simple Kaali Saadhna

A practical approach is to dedicate **one day each week** to consciously remembering and connecting with the energy of Goddess Kalka.

Here's a simple ritual that you can follow:

- Keep that day entirely Sattvic.
  - Avoid onion and garlic.
  - Naturally, avoid alcohol and meat as well.

The purpose is simple.

The energy generated through mantra and focused awareness should be utilised to elevate

consciousness, strengthen resilience, and awaken deeper clarity regarding one's circumstances.

You do not want that energy diverted toward digestion or intoxication.

- Saturday, corresponding with the energy of Shani, is particularly suitable for this practice.
- For **four to seven consecutive Saturdays**, visit a Kaali temple, ideally Kalkaji if possible.
- Sit quietly.
- Either contemplate the form and legend of the Goddess, or chant her Bij Mantra internally for **three to five minutes**.
- Sit comfortably in Padmasana or on a chair.
- Face East.
- Rest your hands in Gyan Mudra, resting on your knees, facing upwards or simply resting in your lap.
- Do not become preoccupied with counting repetitions.
- Instead, focus on complete *awareness*.
- Before each chant, inhale fully.
- Then chant slowly while exhaling completely until the abdomen gently contracts toward the spine.
- When the chanting is complete, simply sit in silence for one or two minutes.
- Bring your awareness to the base of the spine.

- Offer gratitude.
  - Gratitude for stability.
  - Gratitude for awareness.
  - Gratitude for resilience.
  - And above all, gratitude for a connection with Mother Gaia.
- **There is only one important guideline.**
  - Restrict this practice to **no more than four to seven consecutive Saturdays**, following the method described above.

It is a simple discipline.

Simple but not 'easy'.

It is extremely powerful and potent. There can sometimes be plenty of distraction and disturbance in executing it like you have planned but you must persevere. It is part of the process of aligning with the energy.

During periods of profound transition, uncertainty, or personal transformation, it can become an unexpectedly powerful source of inner strength.

Like every spiritual discipline, it may also be meaningfully combined with reflective practices such as journaling, meditation, or coaching, allowing external action and internal transformation to progress together.

Remember that when you open the door to the divine to enter your life, it will inevitably ask you

to release and surrender what you can no longer carry or rather, what isn't yours any longer to carry.

Most people seek change but they aren't ready to release the versions of themselves that *they* think they are. Kalkaji *doesn't* work like that. She responds very fast and acts swiftly in your favor but remember with Kalkaji as with Saturn, there is always an uncomfortable (initially) price to pay for that transformation whether through a job, relationship, residence, belief or *version* of your **identity** that has run its course and is now only obstructing your growth and stability. To grow and anchor yourself firmly in the stability that mother Gaia has to offer, you will first be confronted with *releasing attachment* with whatever that is.

May the force be with you.

*"Kalka Mai Ki Jai!"*

## CREDITS

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