

Ladakh Digest

January 2026

**Snowfall drives winter
tourism revival in
Kashmir**





**START EVERY DAY
THE TAAZA WAY.**



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Taaza

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Editorial

Crafting Equitable Regulations

Private schools in Jammu and Kashmir are facing various complaints that impact their functioning and hinder their ability to provide quality education. Some schools have been accused of charging fees that exceed the limits set by the Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education. In contrast, others are accused of charging parents for assorted services whether or not a student avails themselves. The board has previously issued a notice to all private schools, advising them to refrain from charging students extra for supplementary, unsorted services. Along with higher tuition fees, private schools were also accused of charging bus fees when students didn't use the service. This unfair approach by schools towards students negatively impacts both their academic performance and their mental well-being. Students who cannot afford certain services are often excluded from the benefits enjoyed by those who can pay for these services. This upsets their emotional health and induces a sense of inferiority in them. Services at the schools should match the students' financial statuses, or never be introduced to the schools. It should be the priority of the schools to care for the mental health of their students. Discrimination cannot be taught in schools by practising it in institutions. All the private schools must revise their fee structure and notify about the additional charges for necessary services at the beginning. Schools may hold parent-teacher conferences to address the impact of supplementary services and their fees. Harassment of students or parents should never be tolerated in educational institutions.



From the Edge of the Map to the Centre of Decision: PRAGATI and Rail Infrastructure in Mizoram



Mr. Varun Adhikari

When I joined the Bairabi-Sairang railway project in 2015, it felt like stepping into a part of the country that rarely entered national focus. The journey itself told the story. National Highway-154, now NH-06, the only access route, was badly damaged and unreliable. Heavy trucks were often stranded for days, and bumpy travel became a routine part of site visits. The surrounding hills were young, deeply weathered, and unstable, shaped by intense rainfall and constant slope movement. On paper, the project was historic, Mizoram's first

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railway connection to the national network cutting through mountains, steep gradients and deep gorges.

On the ground, however, progress was painfully slow. Site idling was common due to material unavailability, labour shortages, delayed transportation, local disturbances, and endlessly deferred decisions. As a tunnel design consultant and geologist, the geology was challenging but understandable. What proved far more difficult was institutional inertia. The project lay at the extreme periphery of the country. Reviews were sporadic. Decision-making authority was scattered across ministries, state departments, and agencies. Gradually, an unsettling realization took shape: it appeared as though no one truly expected the project to be completed in the foreseeable future.

Then, quietly and without announcement, urgency entered the system. There was a noticeable sense of urgency in the project offices. Phones rang more frequently. Senior officers began visiting sites with unusual regularity. Files pending for extended periods were promptly retrieved, reviewed, and circulated. Meetings were scheduled in rapid succession, often involving agencies that previously worked in isolation.

As a private consultant, I was not part of the administrative core, and no one explained the reason for this sudden activity. But long experience on large infrastructure projects had taught me to recognize the signs. This was not routine pressure. It was preparation for scrutiny at the highest level.

Soon, the reason became clear. Soon, the reason became clear: the Bairabi-Sairang railway project was scheduled for review under PRAGATI, the Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation platform chaired by the Prime Minister. For a project long on the margins, this brought authority, accountability, and real-time scrutiny to every pending issue and inter agency bottleneck. After this meeting decisions aligned, and progress followed showing how governance often determines outcomes.

The PRAGATI review meeting of March 2016 fundamentally altered the project's trajectory. Under this framework, problems could no longer be examined in isolation or deferred indefinitely. The severely deteriorated condition of NH-06 was no longer considered external to the railway's mandate. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways was directed to undertake repair and improvement works, with clear timelines and continuous monitoring. Land acquisition delays were no longer treated as routine administrative hurdles, the Government of Mizoram was instructed to expedite resolutions, and progress was tracked. Law and order related issues were formally recognized as critical risks to execution and placed under close observation.

What stood out was not individual decisions, but their synchronization. Under PRAGATI, agencies could no longer work in isolation. Responsibilities were fixed, coordination became mandatory, and follow-up was constant. The effect was immediate, the Katakhal-Bairabi section was commissioned in March 2016, enabling freight movement and improving access, logistics, and planning.

As months passed, it became clear that PRAGATI was changing institutional behaviour in a measurable way. Reviews shifted from explaining delays to resolving them, with photographs, timelines, and site status data replacing narrative reports. Digital monitoring ensured that issues raised once returned to the table until they were closed. This discipline altered responses across the system. Engineers became more decisive, contractors more accountable, and state and central agencies coordinated more closely because fragmentation was no longer tolerated. On the ground, the effect was visible. Tunnel excavation, once sporadic, began advancing steadily despite complex geology, fractured rock mass, shear zones, water ingress, and weak strata. Approvals for support systems and design modifications moved in weeks instead of months. Bridges started rising across deep gorges, some over seventy metres high, translating decisions taken hundreds of kilometres away into concrete and steel on site. Even during the COVID-19 period, the same framework ensured continuity; labour shortages, contractual disputes, and execution challenges were closely monitored, and the project slowed but did not drift. Over time, the scale of achievement became evident: forty-five tunnels covering nearly one-third of the alignment, over 150 bridges, ballast less track through tunnel sections, and a design speed of up to 100 kmph through one of the most demanding terrains in the country. Four new stations Hortoki, Kawnpui, Mualkhang, and Sairang prepared to serve long isolated communities. Beyond engineering, the project underscored a deeper truth. Fragile geology can be managed, monsoons planned for, and logistics strengthened. What ultimately determines outcomes is governance the ability of institutions to align, decide, and act together.

Beyond its impact on projects in the Northeast, the PRAGATI portal has had a measurable influence on nationwide growth, as accelerated decision-making and improved coordination have supported the steady expansion of infrastructure across the country. In a recent press conference, Cabinet Secretary highlighted the impact and effectiveness of the PRAGATI mechanism. He stated that by December 2025, 382 major projects had been reviewed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi under the PRAGATI framework. The PRAGATI ecosystem has significantly accelerated the implementation



of infrastructure projects valued at over ₹85 lakh crore (approximately USD 850 billion). As per government sources, this period has also seen a sharp rise in infrastructure spending, with capital expenditure increasing from Rs. 1.97 lakh crore in 2014-15 to a budget estimate Rs. 11.21 lakh crore in 2025-26 more than a five-fold jump. As a share of the Union Budget, infrastructure capital expenditure doubled from nearly 12 percent to about 22 percent. As per Cabinet Secretary - PRAGATI functions as part of a broader, integrated digital ecosystem that includes PM Gati Shakti, PARIVESH, and

the Project Monitoring Group (PMG).

Viewed in totality, on-ground observations, spatial outcomes, and financial indicators together suggest that infrastructure spending in India has been systematically scaled and effectively managed, reinforcing its role as a stable contributor to national growth.

The author is a Principal Engineering Geologist with over 17 years' experience in complex underground infrastructure projects across India



Pragati Portal: A Game Changer in Accelerating India's Dedicated Freight Corridor Project



Shri R K Jain

Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) Project is one of the most ambitious rail infrastructure initiatives undertaken since

Independence. Designed to provide a high-capacity, technology-enabled rail corridor for freight transportation, the DFC aims to help Indian Railways regain its freight market share by offering faster, safer, more reliable and cost-effective logistics solutions. The project is also expected to catalyse the development of multimodal logistics parks, thereby reducing logistics costs and improving efficiency across the supply chain.

With an estimated cost of over ₹1.2 lakh crore and a total length of 2843 km, the DFC has two major arms:

- **Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC):** 1337 km Stretching from Sahnewal (Ludhiana) in Punjab

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to Sonnagar in Bihar, the corridor passes through Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar

■ **Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC):**

1506 km Stretching from Dadri in Uttar Pradesh to Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) near Mumbai, it traverses Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.

Together, the DFC alignment passes through 7 states and 56 districts, cutting across forest areas, wildlife sanctuaries, mangrove stretches and creek zones — making project execution inherently complex.

■ **Challenges That Threatened Timely Completion**

Although the project was initiated in 2008, progress was hampered for several years due to multiple bottlenecks:

- **Acquisition of about 11,000 hectares of land, including removal of structures and encroachments.**
- **Obtaining statutory clearances for forest land, wildlife sanctuaries, mangroves, tree cutting, creek crossings, etc.**
- **Elimination of over 900 level crossings through construction of Road Over Bridges (ROBs) and Road Under Bridges (RUBs), each requiring joint GAD approvals and land acquisition for approaches.**
- **Shifting of high-tension electric lines, gas and oil pipelines.**
- **Approvals from Defence authorities, NHAI, state highways, irrigation departments for canal crossings, and permissions for earth borrowing.**
- **Post-COVID financial stress on contractors, leading to poor cash flows.**

The absence of encumbrance-free land severely impacted construction schedules and exposed the project to potential claims.

■ **Pragati Portal – The Turning Point**

The launch of the Pragati Portal by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) proved to be a watershed moment for the DFC Project.

Through the portal, unresolved issues were uploaded with detailed documentation by DFC officials. What made Pragati truly powerful was the visibility and accountability it created: concerned ministries, state governments and authorities

knew that progress was being monitored at the highest level, including by the Hon'ble Prime Minister himself.

Issues that had remained pending for years despite relentless follow-ups were resolved within weeks — sometimes even days. In cases where immediate compliance was not feasible, authorities committed to firm target dates, which were then rigorously adhered to.

■ **A New Culture of Governance and Accountability**

The Pragati Portal emerged as a highly effective platform for:

- **Real-time project monitoring**
- **Escalation of issues across multiple tiers simultaneously**
- **Inter-ministerial and inter-state coordination through a single window**

Within DFC, a similar internal monitoring framework was institutionalised. Weekly reviews of major contracts, intensive site visits and continuous tracking of committed milestones became the norm. Since all timelines placed on the portal were on record, it also instilled a sense of responsibility within the project team to honour its commitments.

■ **Tangible Impact on Project Execution**

The faster resolution of complex issues significantly boosted construction progress and safeguarded the organisation from potential claims arising out of delays in providing encumbrance-free land. More importantly, Pragati transformed the overall governance culture by embedding transparency, responsiveness and accountability into day-to-day project management.

■ **Conclusion**

The Pragati Portal stands today as a live example of effective digital governance in action. For a mega project like the Dedicated Freight Corridor — cutting across multiple states, departments and regulatory jurisdictions — Pragati proved to be not just a monitoring tool, but a catalyst for change.

By ensuring faster decision-making, reducing inter-departmental friction, and enforcing accountability at every level, Pragati has played a decisive role in steering the DFC Project towards successful and timely completion, while setting a benchmark for future infrastructure programmes in India.

(The author is Former MD, DFCCIL)



Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue: Unlocking Youth Leadership for Viksit Bharat



Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya

India's growth story will be written by those who are shaping its ideas today. Across the country, young Indians are thinking deeply about how India can grow faster, govern better and become developed by 2047. Their ideas are emerging from campuses and communities, start-ups and sports fields, classrooms and village meetings. The real question is no longer whether the youth have something to contribute, but whether their ideas are given a credible platform to influence the nation's direction. The Viksit

Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue (VBYLD) is designed to provide that very platform.

India today is home to the largest youth population in the world. It is therefore but natural that the direction of the nation's future will be shaped not merely by policies or institutions, but by the imagination, conviction and courage of its young citizens. This vast reservoir of Yuva Shakti is far more than a demographic advantage; it is India's greatest national asset, capable of driving innovation, strengthening democracy and propelling the country towards inclusive and sustainable development.

The aspirations of India's young generation are guided by a strong sense of purpose and possibility. Today's youth are not driven solely by personal advancement; they are equally motivated by a desire to shoulder responsibility and make a meaningful impact. They seek avenues where their creativity can translate into solutions, their energy into leadership and their ambition into service.

During my time as Youth Affairs and Sports Minister, I have had the opportunity to engage with young Indians in varied settings, on university campuses, in rural districts, at sports arenas and during youth-led community initiatives. What consistently stands out is the seriousness with

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which young people think about the nation's future. I recall meeting a group of rural youth volunteers who had organised informal learning centres in their villages. With limited resources but strong conviction, they were addressing gaps in education and skill development through locally designed solutions. Their ideas were practical, rooted in ground realities and driven by a clear sense of responsibility. Experiences like these reaffirm a simple truth: when young people are trusted and given space, they do not merely participate, they lead.

Inspired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's call from the Red Fort to bring one lakh youth without political backgrounds into public life, the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue was launched in January 2025 reimagining the National Youth Festival in an entirely new format. The response was unprecedented. Over 30 lakh young people engaged through the Viksit Bharat Challenge, more than two lakh essays were submitted, and thousands of youth presented their ideas at the state level. The journey culminated at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, where 3,000 youth leaders interacted in a free-flowing dialogue with the Prime Minister, who spent several hours listening to their ideas and inspiring them to lead.

Beyond the numbers, it was the nature of engagement that made the Dialogue truly historic. It recognised, both in letter and spirit, that the voices of India's youth matter in shaping the India of 2047. Young participants were encouraged to think critically about national challenges, propose solutions and align personal ambition with collective purpose, bridging the gap between aspiration and action.

The strength of the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue lies not only in its scale, but in its design. Diversity of thought, language, culture and lived experience is embedded into the very structure of the initiative. Youth from urban and rural India, students and professionals, innovators and grassroots leaders come together on a common platform. Multiple stages of engagement ensure that ideas are refined through dialogue and exchange, not filtered out by geography, language or background. In doing so, the Dialogue ensures that every young person who participates has both a voice and a platform to amplify it.

India's youth have always been at the heart of the nation's defining moments, from the freedom struggle to the building of the institutions of an independent India. At every turning point, young Indians have stepped forward with courage, conviction and a willingness to lead. Today, the nation once again looks to its youth not just for participation, but for leadership and dynamism in co-creat-

ing India's growth story. The vision of Viksit Bharat at 2047 goes beyond economic progress alone; it calls for social harmony, environmental responsibility, technological stewardship and inclusive growth. These complex challenges require fresh thinking, adaptability and an ability to embrace the new: qualities that reside strongly in India's Yuva Shakti.

Building on the resounding success of a landmark first edition, VBYLD 2026, scheduled from 9-12 January 2026, signals a decisive leap from a national youth convening to a platform with global resonance. With new initiatives such as Design for Bharat and Tech for Viksit Bharat, and the inclusion of the international Indian youth diaspora, the dialogue expands beyond borders. Yet, at its heart, the mission remains unchanged: to empower young Indians to think boldly, create fearlessly, and lead with conviction.

The scale of this edition underscores the depth of that ambition. More than 50 lakh young people participated in the Viksit Bharat Quiz, the first stage of selection for VBYLD 2026, making it one of the largest youth engagement exercises of its kind. Over four intensive days, participants from every corner of the country will engage with leading national and global voices, drawing upon practical insights, ideas, and visions that transcend disciplines and geographies.

What truly sets VBYLD 2026 apart, however, is that it gives our Yuva Shakti an opportunity not only to speak, but to be heard. The platform enables young Indians to articulate their ideas, aspirations, and solutions directly to the Prime Minister of India. On 12 January, observed nationwide as National Youth Day in commemoration of Swami Vivekananda, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will personally interact with the youth at Bharat Mandapam, listening to how they imagine, and intend to shape, the future of Bharat.

As India advances towards the centenary of its independence, it demands the engagement of young individuals who possess the courage to imagine boldly and the resolve to translate ideas into meaningful action. More than a platform for dialogue, the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue is a movement that calls upon young Indians to lead from the front, confront national challenges, and channel their ambitions towards building a Viksit Bharat.

A Viksit Bharat will be built by those who have the confidence to lead and the commitment to serve. India's youth are ready. The nation must be ready to walk with them.

The author is Union Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports and Labour & Employment

Philosophising with a false conscience



Shri Hardeep S Puri

As we step into 2026, public debate in India should begin with a little New Year discipline. We should welcome scrutiny, even sharp criticism, but we should also

insist that argument carries responsibility. A republic of over 1.4 billion people cannot be reformed by cynicism. Jobs, productivity, exports, and inclusion are not easy at the best of times, and progress comes through the unglamorous grind of design, implementation, correction, and scale. A New Year is also a moment to separate skepticism from pessimism.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* (§211), Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, in substance: “The philosopher must be a creator of values, not a mere critic or spectator. He must philosophise from the standpoint of life, not against it.” Public policy needs the same temper. Critique is welcome, but it must be tethered to evidence and to the lived constraints of governing a complex, diverse democracy. When scepticism becomes a posture, it corrodes confidence in the institutions that make reform possible.

In recent years, a genre of commentary has emerged that markets doubt as sophistication. It reduces the work of reform to caricature, treats every imperfect transition as proof of permanent failure, and offers a familiar consolation: India is supposedly doomed by its own policy-





makers. That posture has consequences. It weakens trust in statistics and markets, it encourages fatalism among entrepreneurs and investors, and it hands outside actors a ready-made script for pressuring India in negotiations. Expertise must remain answerable to facts.

It is worrying to note that a few commentators, who boast of a strong professional and academic background, have resorted to such posturing. Some, whom I have known personally and who have anchored their identity and credibility on India are now trying to make a career out of badmouthing the country possibly for gaining attention or seeking relevance since they are no longer part of government.

Their charge that India's datasets are uniquely unreli-

able sits uneasily with the direction of travel. The Goods and Services Tax created a national invoice trail and a compliance culture that simply did not exist a decade ago. In 2024-25, gross GST collections crossed ₹22 lakh crore, averaging about ₹1.8 lakh crore a month. Digital payments created another audit footprint. In November 2025, UPI recorded 20 billion transactions worth over ₹26 lakh crore. These are large, verifiable systems, and they expand the space for measurement, cross checks, and course correction.

Measured outcomes in welfare and inclusion further puncture this fatalism. NITI Aayog's National Multidimensional Poverty Index shows almost 24 crore Indians moved out of multidimensional poverty between 2013-

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14 and 2022-23, with the incidence falling from nearly 30% to about 11%. Direct Benefit Transfer tightened delivery, with cumulative DBT transfers crossing ₹45 lakh crore in 2025 and savings of more than ₹3.5 lakh crore through leakage reduction over the DBT period. Financial inclusion is now mass infrastructure, with over 56 crore Jan Dhan accounts.

Reforms to financial discipline have had visible effects. The gross nonperforming asset ratio of scheduled commercial banks fell to 2.1% in 2025, down from about 11.2% in 2018. This did not happen by wishful thinking. It reflects a sustained cleanup of balance sheets, stronger supervision, and a system that has progressively reduced the space for evergreen lending and hidden losses. When critics say the state cannot reform, this quiet turnaround is the first answer.

The jibe that India cannot build at scale ignores what has changed in manufacturing ecosystems. Under the Production Linked Incentive programmes, realised investment crossed ₹2 lakh crore across 14 sectors, translating into incremental production and sales of over ₹18 lakh crore and employment generation of over 12 lakh jobs. Electronics is the sharpest illustration: electronics production crossed ₹11 lakh crore in 2024-25, mobile phone production ₹5.5 lakh crore, and mobile exports about ₹2 lakh crore. These are market tests in the toughest arena, and they are being passed.

Trade leverage is built by performance and consistency, not by performative despair. Total exports of goods and services hit an all-time high of over US\$ 825 billion in 2024-25. In a world of tariffs and protectionist reflexes, partners respond to capability. India's posture strengthens when it is seen as a market that produces, trades, and absorbs at scale, and when it can credibly offer diversified supply in sectors that matter. The combination of domestic reform and external engagement produces resilience, and resilience produces leverage.

Competitiveness is not secured by a single scheme or a single ministry. It is the cumulative effect of infrastructure, logistics, and administrative reform. The gains are visible in the spread of industrial corridors, improved freight connectivity, better port linkages, and integrated planning platforms that reduce the cost of time. The point is not that every bottleneck has vanished. The point is that the state has demonstrated the capability to build systems, shorten processes, and scale delivery, which is exactly how productivity improvements compound over years rather than weeks.

On agriculture and rural resilience, it is easy to list distortions and conclude that nothing can be fixed. The policy direction has moved toward targeted support and asset creation, while building basic services that raise productivity and dignity. Jal Jeevan Mission has, as per official updates, provided tap water connections to more than 12.5 crore rural households, improving public health and reducing the time burden on families.

The story of inclusion is also visible in health, housing, and energy access. Ayushman Bharat has issued more than 42 crore cards under PM-JAY, expanding financial protection against catastrophic health costs. Under PM Awas, almost 3 crore houses have been completed, giving families a formal asset and a foundation for mobility. Under PM Ujjwala Yojana, more than 10 crore LPG connections have brought cleaner cooking energy to households that were once trapped in smoke and drudgery. These outcomes are not abstractions. They are the practical foundation on which aspiration and productivity can rest.

The most sweeping pessimism is often reserved for states, as if a billion people must be governed through a single template. India's federalism is noisy, but it is also adaptive. Several states, especially Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, have shown that better law and order, faster clearances, and sustained infrastructure delivery can draw investment and formal jobs. The centre has reinforced this competitive federalism by building national platforms that states can plug into, by creating funding that rewards delivery, and by making reform data transparent enough for citizens to judge performance.

India's story is far from finished and it will always invite argument. The question is the quality of argument we choose as we begin a new year. When eminent professionals treat insinuation as analysis, they weaken the very institutions that make reform possible. Nietzsche's reminder is useful here. A serious thinker creates values that help societies live and improve. India has chosen the harder path of execution, and it is the results, audited in numbers and felt in households, that will outlast any brief for despair. In 2026, India should demand criticism that improves policy, not commentary that undermines confidence for applause. That standard protects reform, investment, and democratic choice at home.

The author is the Union Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India

Delivering Infrastructure at Scale: India's Path to a Viksit Bharat



Sumita Dawra

Recognising the critical importance of infrastructure spending to boost GDP, create jobs and have a multiplier impact on the economy, Central government dramatically increased spending on infrastructure capital expenditure over the last decade - more than quintupling it from around Rs 2 trillion in 2014-15 to Rs 11.1 trillion in 2024-25. Recent trends indicate infrastructure capital spending has been growing at an annual rate of more than 38 percent, with a clear focus on developing both physical and digital infrastructure networks.

To fully reap the benefits of these large allocations, it is essential that infrastructure projects progress at an efficient pace, without time and cost over-runs. Given their long gestation periods, such projects not only require significant and sustained financing, but also depend on timely clearances related to land acquisition, environmental approvals, and socio-economic considerations. Many of these approvals involve multiple regulatory authorities, local bodies, district-level administration - making coordination and time-bound decision-making critical to successful project execution.

To ensure effective coordination and timely clearances for infrastructure projects, the Government of India launched the PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation) portal in 2015. PRAGATI is a digitized platform for real-time monitoring of big-ticket infrastructure projects, receiving electronic updates from executing agencies, Ministries, States and UTs. The Prime Minister chairs high-level coordination meetings on a monthly basis - selecting projects facing implementation delays, engaging directly with Ministries, States, and other authorities to identify bottlenecks, and issuing clear directions for resolution.

PRAGATI thus serves as a mechanism to accelerate pending projects facing time and cost over-runs - for instance a metro-rail project delayed for years for want of land clearances from the Municipal authority, or a major gas pipeline project facing land hurdle across multiple states, or projects awaiting a long-awaited environmental clearance, etc. On 31 December 2025, the Prime Minister chaired the 50th PRAGATI meeting, during which five critical infrastructure projects with a cumulative investment of Rs 40,000 crore were reviewed in a single sitting. Overall, the PRAGATI mechanism has facilitated the fast-tracking of stalled projects worth a cumulative Rs 85 trillion so far.

Drawing on insights from the PRAGATI experience - particularly the recurring hurdles that delay project completion and often result in cost over-runs - the Government of India launched the PM Gati Shakti (PMGS) National Master Plan (NMP) in October 2021. PMGS provides a GIS-based framework for integrated infrastructure planning by bringing together data layers from infrastructure, economic and social sector Ministries, and from the 36 States and UTs in the country. This digitised, data-based interface enables planners to visualise

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infrastructure assets, resources, cables and grids, besides other assets holistically – thus scientifically planning infrastructure connectivity in the country.

Enabling a convergence approach to planning by providing easy visibility of data, PMGS allows early identification of required clearances at planning stage itself – thus facilitating a collaborative planning of infrastructure projects and saving months that would otherwise be lost in obtaining approvals. This transformative planning approach not only enhances speed and efficiency, but also prevents duplication of existing infrastructure assets, ensures complementarity of assets across various modes of transportation – thereby embedding multimodality into infrastructure planning. As a result, projects are designed to connect India's growth clusters more effectively to markets, leading to reduced logistics costs. Consequently, infrastructure planning is made more efficient, while also delivering outcomes that enhance logistics performance – supporting both ease of living and ease of doing business.

When the Jagdishpur - Haldia & Bokaro - Dhamra Pipeline Project was being planned on the PMGS portal for instance, the two major issues identified at planning stage included the clearance required from Forest Department for a small extent of the spur line, and also pending disbursement of compensation for a length of 83 kms – enabling the planning authorities to easily identify and address these issues before taking up the project for sanction.

Similarly, in planning of Four-laning of NH from Goa-Karnataka Border to Kundapur section on the GIS-portal, a road encroachment was identified as a potential issue, due to the visibility of habitations along with the data-attributes on ownership of land through which the road had to cross. While planning the Mumbai Urban Transport Project [MUTP] – Phase 2 on PMGS portal, the Ministry of Railways could view the pending land acquisition of small extents of land that had the potential to delay the project later once it commenced.

In this manner, planning agencies are making use of the PMGS mechanism to bring greater efficiency and speed in project planning and execution – on the lines of the principles of PRAGATI. Indian Railways has planned its ambitious energy corridor on PMGS portal, with a dedicated rail network connecting areas of coal production to consumption points at thermal plants and thus ensuring energy security of the country. Congestion of these routes were identified through the GIS-portal and strengthening of the route for seamless movement of en-

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ergy material planned.

The Gati Shakti National Master Plan also helped plan the green energy corridor between Ladakh and Haryana, enabling transmission of solar energy production in the high-altitude region of Ladakh to the northern plains, navigating topographical challenges, minimising interface of the transmission lines with forest and wildlife habitats – thus preventing issues that could potentially delay projects.

Whether it involves large expressway projects with investments running into thousands of crore rupees, urban logistics initiatives in major cities of Varanasi and Kanpur, or improving connectivity between major ports and their hinterland – the Gati Shakti principles are fostering a 'whole-of-government' approach at the project planning stage. Enhanced visibility across multiple data-layers is improving planning efficiency, minimising disruption to ecologically sensitive areas, avoiding land acquisition likely to result in litigation, and enabling infrastructure to be planned with future requirements in mind.

Building on the success of the PRAGATI mechanism in coordinated review, monitoring and acceleration of infrastructure projects, and with PM Gati Shakti demonstrating a more integrated and planned approach to infrastructure execution, India is now well-positioned to share its learnings at the global level, as part of its economic diplomacy – offering a model for more efficient and coordinated infrastructure planning that is data-driven, coordinated and results in timely implementation.

The author is the former Union Labour Secretary and Special Secretary (Logistics), Govt of India

Snowfall drives winter tourism revival in Kashmir

“This is our first time seeing snowfall,” said a tourist from southern India while visiting Agharwat Peak. “The views are breathtaking, and the experience feels unreal.”





Fresh snowfall across Kashmir's higher reaches has triggered a surge in winter tourism, bringing renewed activity to popular destinations such as Gulmarg, Sonamarg and Apharwat Peak after a year marked by uncertainty and tragedy.

Tourists bundled in winter gear crowded the slopes of Gulmarg and lined up for gondola rides to Apharwat Peak, where thick snow blanketed meadows and mountain ridges. Many visitors said they were experiencing snow for the first time, drawn by images of white landscapes and winter sports.

Hotel occupancy in Gulmarg and nearby areas has risen sharply in recent weeks, while Sonamarg, known for its alpine scenery and frozen vistas during winter, has also seen a steady

flow of visitors despite cold temperatures and intermittent road closures.

"This is our first time seeing snowfall," said a tourist from southern India while visiting Apharwat Peak. "The views are breathtaking, and the experience feels unreal."

The rebound follows a difficult period for Kashmir's tourism industry after a deadly attack last year briefly dampened travel to the region. Since then, authorities have increased security measures at key tourist hubs, while local businesses have worked to rebuild confidence among travelers.

Winter sports remain a major attraction, with skiing, snowboarding and sledging drawing visitors to Gulmarg, home to one of Asia's highest cable car systems. In Sonamarg,



tourists have been seen walking across snow covered valleys and taking short treks where conditions permit.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said the return of tourists reflects growing confidence in the region.

“Tourism is showing clear signs of recovery this winter,” Abdullah said. “Snowfall has helped revive interest, and our focus remains on ensuring safety and improving facilities for visitors.”

Local hotel owners and tour operators say the current season has brought much needed relief after months of subdued

business.

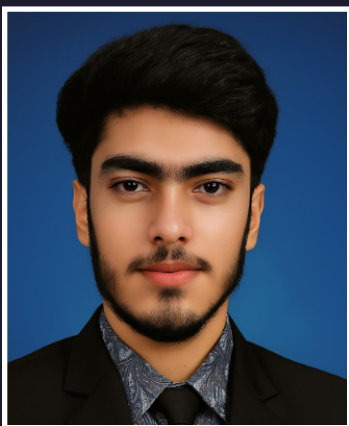
“Bookings have improved significantly after the snowfall,” said a hotel operator in Gulmarg. “Compared to last winter, there is a clear increase in footfall.”

Officials say they are continuing efforts to promote winter tourism beyond traditional destinations, highlighting areas such as Sonamarg, Gurez and parts of south Kashmir as potential attractions, weather permitting.

As snow continues to fall across the valley, Kashmir’s winter resorts are once again emerging as a major draw, signaling a cautious but visible revival of tourism in the region.



When Time Loses Its Blessing, the Sweetness of Life Vanishes



Waris Nissar

In an age of speed and progress, humanity has gained convenience but lost calm. Life now moves fast, loud, and restless — leaving hearts searching for peace once known to generations before us. Time once felt gentle. Days carried peace, and even simple living held meaning.

Our elders often spoke of that sweetness of time — a calmness that gave life depth and value. Today, despite all progress and connection, peace feels distant, and moments slip away unnoticed.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ foretold this loss long ago: “A time will come when years will pass like months, months like weeks, weeks like days, and days like hours.” (Jami’ at-Tirmidhi, 2332)

This Hadith is not merely about time moving quickly — it speaks of barakah (divine blessing) fading from our lives.

■ The Signs Around Us:

The world now mirrors many of the signs described in Islamic teachings. Immorality spreads openly, dishonesty weakens trust, and family bonds are breaking. Modesty fades while arrogance grows. Violence has become ordinary — even a daily news headline — and compassion rare. Leadership often serves power, not responsibility, leaving the deserving unheard.

The Prophet ﷺ also warned: “When immorality appears among a people to such an extent that they openly commit it, plagues and diseases will spread among them which were never known to their ancestors.” (Sunan Ibn Majah, 4019)

We see this today — new illnesses and emotional struggles unknown to earlier generations. We build grand houses as if we’ll live forever, yet our hearts grow emptier. Mosques stand beautifully built but often half-filled. These are not random changes but signs of weakened faith and rising materialism. And greater trials still await.

■ When Marriage Loses Its Simplicity:

One of the clearest reflections of this age is how Nikah — once simple and blessed — has become heavy with extravagance. What Islam made easy, society made difficult. Lavish customs, dowries, and social show have replaced sincerity.

The Prophet ﷺ said: “The most blessed marriage is the one with the least expenses.” (Musnad Ahmad, 24529)

Religious clerics and community elders bear great responsibility. They must refuse to perform or attend marriages that violate the Sunnah and guide people toward modest, faith-based unions. If communities boycott extravagant ceremonies, it will restore ease and purity — helping youth who fear financial and social barriers to marriage.

■ When Words Fail to Change Hearts:

We read the Qur’an and listen to scholars, clerics, and speakers — yet our hearts remain unmoved. We all know what’s right and wrong, but the message seldom reaches within.

In every sermon, we hear reminders of what to do and avoid. Still, people ask why it doesn’t work. The answer lies with us — the listeners. Hearing alone changes nothing unless we act. Our

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hearts are like glasses filled with dirty water; if we pour clean water without emptying the old, it stays impure. When hearts are full of ego and greed, divine wisdom finds no space. Change begins with cleansing from within.

■ **A Fleeting World:**

We chase wealth, success, and fame — forgetting how short this journey truly is. Just as spring's flowers fade into autumn's dust, life too will end, leaving only our deeds behind.

The Prophet ﷺ said: "The value of this world compared to the Hereafter is like when one of you dips his finger into the sea; let him see what it returns with." (Sahih Muslim, 2858)

■ **Returning to Meaning:**

The fading sweetness of time is not the end — it is a divine re-

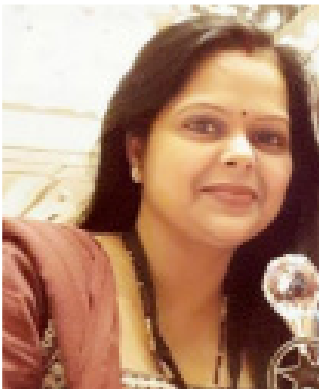
minder to pause and return to what truly matters: faith, gratitude, and compassion. When we remember Allah, live honestly, and treat others with humility, life regains its lost warmth. Because peace never comes from speed or success — it comes from sincerity and self-correction.

"Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves." (Surah Ar-Ra'd, 13:11)

As Shams Tabrizi beautifully said: "All of us are selective sinners. We choose the sins we are comfortable with, and judge others that commit the ones we're not comfortable with."

If we begin by correcting ourselves instead of condemning others, perhaps the blessing of time — and the sweetness of life — will return once again.

Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee's Our Time Revisited: Focusing on Diversity of Literary Creativity



Prof. Mallika Tripathi

Our Time Revisited by Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee is an expansive and intellectually rigorous critical work that undertakes the formidable task of mapping literary, cultural, political, and socio-ethical discourses of the contemporary world. The volume stands at the intersection of literary criticism, cultural studies, and social commentary, offering a panoramic view of global literature while simultaneously grounding its analyses in the specificities of historical moments and lived realities. As such, the book positions itself as a significant contribution to contemporary literary studies and interdisciplinary humanities scholarship.

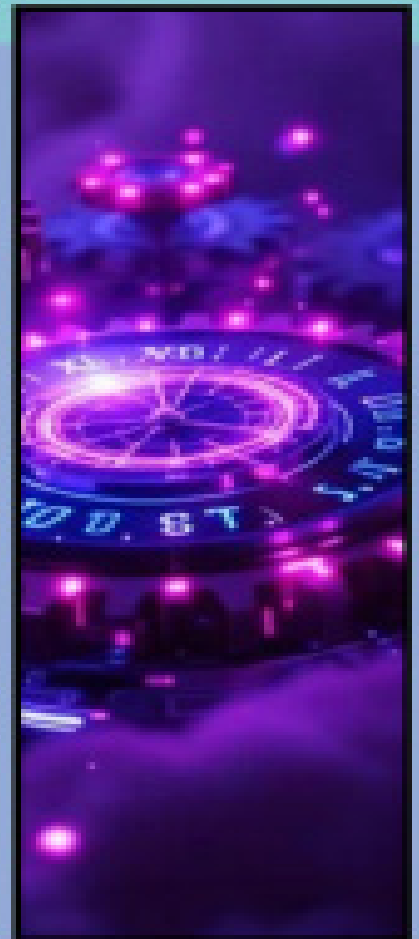
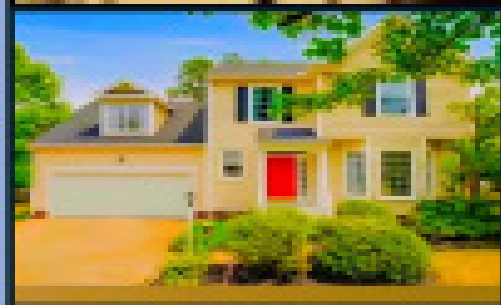
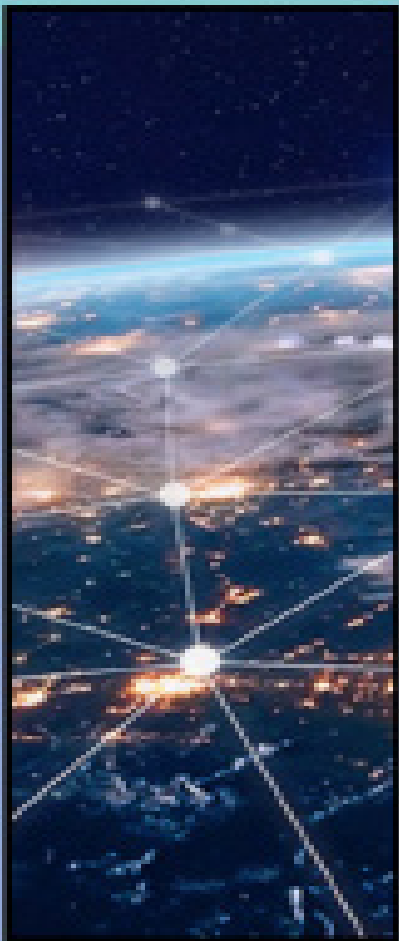
At the core of this volume lies Dr. Bhattacharjee's conviction that literature is not an autonomous aesthetic construct but a dynamic, historically situated practice that both reflects and interrogates social consciousness. The book revisits "our time" not merely in a chronological sense but as a conceptual space where literature engages with urgent questions of identity, pow-

er, ethics, marginalization, resistance, and human dignity. This theoretical orientation aligns the work with humanistic and socially engaged criticism, moving beyond formalist readings to embrace contextual and ideological analysis. One of the most striking features of *Our Time Revisited* is its remarkable scope and inclusivity. The volume engages with a wide range of literary figures—spanning classical, modern, and contemporary traditions—across geographical, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. Canonical writers such as Shakespeare, Rabindranath Tagore, Charles Dickens, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, T. S. Eliot, Alexander Pushkin, and Emily Dickinson are read alongside Nobel laureates and globally recognized authors such as Toni Morrison, Kazuo Ishiguro, Louise Glück, Annie Ernaux, and Han Kang. These engagements are neither perfunctory nor reverential; rather, they are analytical re-readings that situate canonical texts within evolving socio-cultural frameworks.

Equally significant is the book's sustained engagement with contemporary writers and thinkers, many of whom are still actively shaping present literary discourse. Dr. Bhattacharjee's criticism here performs an archival function—documenting and critically evaluating voices of our time that might otherwise remain marginal in mainstream academic discourse. His analytical approach foregrounds thematic concerns, ideological positions, and stylistic strategies, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of contemporary literary production. The inclusion of critical essays on living writers enhances the immediacy and relevance of the volume while underscoring its role as a chronicle of contemporary literary response. Dr. Ayyappa Raja Satyanathan, Associate Professor of Anna-malai University in his Introduction to the book wrote: "The brilliant research arti-

Our Time Revisited

Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee Ph. D., D. Litt.



cles written on different premises focus on different continents and con-texts. Their research articles reveal to the readers the richness and diversity of literary creativity. These research essays have a social bearing and con-temporary relevance” The writers have focused upon issues such as Diasporic Sensibility, Dalit

Consciousness, Eco-logical Concerns and Religion. Dr. Chetan Trivedi ,Vice Chancellor of Bhak-ta Kavi Narasinh Mehta University Guja-rat also wrote a Foreword in which he described the book ‘an exquisite collec-tion of articles “.He wrote, The articles in the book evoke in us a desire to rethink on the subjects in a

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new light in an original and unconventional way as Dr. Bhat-tacharjee usually does it in his prose and poetic writings on diverse subjects, talking from gender discriminations and fourth world literature to film and music." The book review section in the book is really impressive where he encourages a lot of new young writers along with the well-known poets and novelists of India and abroad.

As an International Visiting Faculty in the American Universities, Dr. Bhat-tacharjee has gained wider experiences of men and writers and as a multilingual poet and columnist, he deals with an infinite variety of issues, which are accommodated partially in this precious book. "His articles are all a record of our contemporary times, but they gain a timelessness in the presentation of ideas, providing us scope for fresh thinking and enabling us to reframe our vision with clearer ideas, reexamining those previously formulated on them." said Dr. Chetan Trivedi. In his essay on Amitav Ghosh Dr. Bhat-tacharjee mused deeply on postmodern elements in Indian English literature – a preoccupation with insecurities in the existence of humanity. The picture of life delineated by them accommodates meaninglessness, purposelessness and absurdity of human existence through the employment of devices such as Contradiction, Permutation, Discontinuity, Randomness, Excess, Short Circuit and so on. Amitav Ghosh as a practitioner of post modernism in novels focuses entirely on the colonialism's impoverished and usually non-white victims. They are given the central position not the white masters. The book has a wonderful discussion on Mahasweta Devi's Mother of 1084. Dr. Bhattacharjee wrote; "Mahasweta Devi's Mother of 1084 concentrates on the issues of exploitation and marginalization as a continuing socio-historical process embedded in social and cultural practices, a focus on the interlocking structures of oppression, the criss-cross of multiple hierarchies of class, caste and gender.

The article on Mulk Raj Anand, the Charles Dickens of India focuses on the peculiar question raised by him through the most important character Bakha in "The Untouchable" "How queer the Hindus don't feed their cows although they call her cow 'mother'!". Mulk Raj Anand was a master in depicting the social consciousness and he analysed adroitly the feelings of Bakha in a poignant manner "His feelings would rise like spurts of smoke from a half-smothered fire in fitful, unbalanced jerks when the recollection of some abuse or rebuke he had suffered kindled a spark in the ashes of remorse inside him." Side by side the book gives us details of Alexander Pushkin's contribution as the founder of Russian fiction. His contribution to Russian literature was described by Maxim Gorky as 'the beginning of beginnings'. Pushkin rejects Byron's subjective, romanticized treatment in favour of objective description and shows his hero

Equally significant is the book's sustained engagement with contemporary writers and thinkers, many of whom are still actively shaping present literary discourse. Dr. Bhattacharjee's criticism here performs an archival function—documenting and critically evaluating voices of our time that might otherwise remain marginal in mainstream academic discourse. His analytical approach foregrounds thematic concerns, ideological positions, and stylistic.....

not in exotic surroundings but at the heart of a Russian way of life. Yevgeny Onegin written in 1833 unfolded a panoramic picture of Russian life. Onegin is the disencharmed skeptic. Dr. Bhattacharjee took a special care to write on Pushkin's use of the Russian language formed on the basis of Ivan Turgenev and Leo Tolstoy. His novel pointed the way to the Russian realistic novel. T.S. Eliot's poetic vision is analysed in the book. Dr. Bhattacharjee rightly says, "The Waste Land is often read as a representation of the disillusionment of the post-war generation and a poetic counterpart to James Joyce's Ulysses. Side by side we get the contemporary masters of literature such as Nobel Laureate 2020, Louise Glück the first American woman since Toni Morrison took the prize in 1993. Ratiner wrote: 'Glück's poems 1962-2012' is weighted with the dark matter of the human universe, invisible in our everyday interactions but at the core of our conscious experience. Dr. Bhattacharjee rightly says, Though Glück lays bare the most intimate moments of longing and loss, these

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poems are not what we think of as confessional. They are more like the record of a shipwreck survivor trying to come to terms with the strain of isolation and the stark horizon of her island. Language is the castaway's only refuge." We get in the book a heart engaging discussion on Makam in the context of Sino-Indian Conflict Dr. Rita Choudhury who had her doctoral thesis on Society and Women Psychology Depicted in Nirupama Borgohain and Ashapura Devi's Novels, took interest in Chinese Diaspora and 1962 Sino-Indian War in this novel. The public history is interspersed with the private history of the protagonists from both the Chinese and the Assamese Communities whose lives are transformed in the social assimilation. Dr. Bhattacharjee brilliantly wrote in this book on Derek Walcott and said, He had no Nation but Imagi- Nation."Derek was a natural poet in the Keatsian sense. Keats wrote in a letter to his friend, John Taylor, "If Poetry comes not as naturally as Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all. " Derek too naturally wrote about the landscape flora and fauna which is unforced and fluent since the very first poem that he wrote at the age of 14. As a postcolonial writer he had both white and black ancestry because his birth-place was a British Colony as he asked in a 1962 poem, 'A Far Cry from Africa' "I who am poisoned with the blood of both /Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?"

The structural organization of the book further reinforces its interdisciplinary ambition. Divided into sections encompassing literature, politics, society, environment, pandemic reflections, film, music, and book reviews, *Our Time Revisited* reflects a holistic understanding of culture as an interconnected system of meanings and practices. Such an organization resonates with the methodologies of cultural studies, where literature is examined in dialogue with socio-political events, media, and ideological formations. The essays addressing political movements, governance, citizenship, gender justice, environmental crises, and educational policy reveal Dr. Bhattacharjee's commitment to examining literature as a site of ethical inquiry and social critique. Particularly noteworthy is the section on Pandemic Musings, which captures literary and cultural responses to the COVID-19 crisis. These essays document how global literature grappled with themes of isolation, fear, loss, resilience, and collective vulnerability during an unprecedented historical moment. From a scholarly perspective, this section holds archival value, preserving literary interpretations of a global catastrophe that reshaped human relationships, institutional structures, and creative expression. Dr. Bhattacharjee's analyses here move beyond surface-level commentary to explore how crisis literature reconfigures notions of selfhood, community, and survival.

Stylistically, the prose of *Our Time Revisited* is characterized

by clarity, coherence, and argumentative precision. While the author draws upon a wide range of literary and cultural references, he avoids excessive theoretical jargon, thereby maintaining accessibility without compromising intellectual depth. This balance makes the volume particularly useful for a diverse readership, including researchers, teachers, post-graduate students, and serious readers of literature. The essays are informed by critical awareness and scholarly discipline, reflecting the author's extensive engagement with literary history, criticism, and contemporary debates. Another important dimension of the book is its ethical and humanistic orientation. Across the volume, literature is consistently framed as a moral force—capable of questioning hegemonic power structures, articulating marginalized voices, and fostering empathy across cultural and ideological divides. Whether addressing feminist discourse, postcolonial identities, regional literatures, or global humanitarian concerns, Dr. Bhattacharjee foregrounds the transformative potential of literary expression. His criticism is thus not detached or purely academic; it is deeply invested in literature's capacity to influence social consciousness and ethical reflection. In evaluative terms, *Our Time Revisited* may be seen as both a critical compendium and a cultural archive. It documents literary engagements across time and space while offering interpretative frameworks that invite further scholarly inquiry. The volume's strength lies in its breadth, interdisciplinary vision, and commitment to contemporaneity, making it a valuable reference for ongoing research in literature, cultural studies, and the humanities at large.

In conclusion, *Our Time Revisited* emerges as a significant scholarly contribution that reaffirms the relevance of literary criticism in an era marked by rapid social change, political uncertainty, and cultural fragmentation. Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee establishes himself as a perceptive critic and cultural commentator who understands literature as an evolving dialogue between text and context, past and present, aesthetics and ethics. The book not only revisits our time but also invites readers to critically engage with it, ensuring its lasting relevance within academic and intellectual discourse.

About the Reviewer

Dr. Mallika Tripathi Professor of English and Director Humanities Firoze Gandhi Institute of Engg and Technology Rai Berili is an award winning poet and academician known for her introspective, socially conscious, and emotionally resonant writing. She is the Founder and President of Anjani Welfare Society, reflecting her commitment to social responsibility and humanitarian work. She won 'Best Pensmith Award' and the 'International Brooklyn Award' for literary excellence.



Chillai Kalan: Kashmir's Harsheset Winter Spell And The Reality Of Survival

AHMAD AYAZ

Chillai Kalan, the most severe phase of winter in Kashmir, begins every year around December 21 and lasts for forty days. Derived from the Persian words Chilla (forty) and Kalan (major), it marks the harsheset period of cold in the Valley. During this time, Kashmir experiences plummeting temperatures, freezing nights, heavy snowfall, and icy winds that test not just daily life but also the resilience of people, infrastructure, and governance.

More than a meteorological phenomenon, Chillai Kalan is deeply embedded in Kashmir's culture, traditions, and collective memory, symbolising endurance in the face of adversity. For centuries, Kashmiris have lived with and adapted to extreme winters, with Chillai Kalan shaping housing patterns, clothing, food habits, work routines, and even social behaviour.

While modern technology and infrastructure have eased some hardships, the core challenges remain largely unchanged. Every year, as Chillai Kalan sets in, the Valley braces itself for dis-

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ruptions, shortages, and isolation, alongside a hauntingly beautiful transformation of the landscape.

■ THE NATURE OF CHILLAI KAKAN

Chillai Kalan is characterised by sustained sub-zero temperatures, particularly during the night. Mercury often drops well below freezing, especially in central and south Kashmir and in the higher reaches. Water bodies freeze, including parts of the iconic Dal Lake, while water supply lines are frequently choked due to frozen pipes.

Snowfall during this period is common and often heavy, disrupting road connectivity and air travel. This forty-day spell is followed by two shorter phases: Chillai Khurd (20 days of milder cold) and Chillai Bacha (10 days of waning winter).

However, Chillai Kalan remains the most dreaded phase, as it determines the severity of the entire winter season. A harsh Chillai Kalan often signals prolonged cold spells well into February.

■ DAILY LIFE UNDER FREEZE

Life during Chillai Kalan slows down significantly. Early mornings are bitterly cold, forcing people to delay daily routines. Schools often witness low attendance, and in extreme conditions, authorities announce winter vacations or suspend classes.

Offices operate with reduced efficiency as transport disruptions and frequent power outages affect attendance. Routine work is often adjusted to daylight hours to minimise exposure to extreme cold.

In rural Kashmir, the challenges are even greater. Villages in higher altitudes often remain cut off for days or weeks due to snow-blocked roads. Access to healthcare becomes difficult, and essential supplies such as food, fuel, and medicines must be stocked well in advance.

Traditional wisdom dictates winter preparedness long before Chillai Kalan begins—a practice that remains relevant even today.

■ POWER, WATER, AND INFRASTRUCTURE STRESS

One of the most pressing issues during Chillai Kalan is the strain on basic infrastructure, particularly power and water supply. Electricity demand peaks during winter due to heating requirements, yet local power generation declines as rivers freeze and hydropower output drops.

This imbalance results in frequent power cuts, even in urban areas. Despite years of promises and investments, uninterrupted power supply during Chillai Kalan remains elusive.

The introduction of smart meters and tariff revisions has added to public resentment, especially when consumers face prolonged outages during the coldest nights. The irony of paying higher bills while enduring freezing homes is not lost on the people.

Water supply systems also suffer. Frozen pipelines, damaged

distribution lines, and reduced flow lead to shortages across the Valley. Many households resort to storing water in advance or melting snow, a stark reminder that even basic amenities cannot be taken for granted.

Road connectivity, particularly the Srinagar–Jammu National Highway, becomes highly vulnerable. Snowfall, landslides, and avalanches frequently disrupt movement, affecting the supply of essential commodities and causing price fluctuations.

■ TRADITIONAL ADAPTATION AND WINTER PRACTICES

Despite these hardships, Kashmiris have developed unique ways to survive and adapt. Traditional clothing like the pheran, often accompanied by the kangri—an earthen fire pot—remains an effective defence against the cold.

Though modern heating devices are increasingly common, the kangri continues to hold deep cultural significance. Dietary habits also change during winter, with high-calorie foods such as dried vegetables (hokh syun), turnips, nadru (lotus stem), and meat-based dishes dominating meals.

The famed harissa, slow-cooked overnight and consumed on cold mornings, is both a delicacy and a source of warmth and nourishment.

Homes are winterised well in advance. Thick curtains, carpets, wooden ceilings, and traditional heating arrangements help retain warmth. In older houses, architectural designs themselves reflect centuries of adaptation to harsh winters.

■ CHILLIAI KALAN AND CULTURAL MEMORY

Chillai Kalan is deeply woven into Kashmiri folklore, poetry, and oral traditions. It is often used metaphorically to describe difficult phases in life—periods that demand patience and resilience.

Elders recount winters of the past when snowfall was heavier, resources were fewer, and survival depended entirely on community support.

Social interactions also change during this period. People stay indoors more, gatherings become intimate, and evenings are spent around heating sources, sharing stories and conversations.

In many ways, Chillai Kalan fosters a sense of closeness and collective endurance.

■ THE SILENT BEAUTY OF WINTER

Amid the hardships, Chillai Kalan transforms Kashmir into a landscape of breathtaking beauty. Snow-covered mountains, frozen lakes, white meadows, and quiet streets create a surreal charm.

The Valley acquires a stark silence, broken only by the crunch of snow underfoot or the distant call of birds.

For photographers, artists, and writers, Chillai Kalan offers endless inspiration. The contrast between human struggle and



natural beauty is striking.

While residents endure the cold, the Valley's winter aesthetics attract tourists—provided connectivity remains intact. Snow tourism, skiing, and winter festivals have gained prominence in recent years, though they depend heavily on weather conditions and infrastructure readiness.

■ GOVERNANCE AND PREPAREDNESS: A RECURRING TEST

Every Chillai Kalan acts as a test of governance and administrative preparedness. Authorities routinely issue advisories, review winter preparedness, and assure adequate supplies of essentials.

Yet gaps persist—delayed snow clearance, unreliable power supply, and weak grievance redressal. The absence of long-term planning becomes evident when temporary measures fail to address systemic issues.

Investment in winter-resilient infrastructure, decentralised power generation, improved storage facilities, and all-weather connectivity remains critical. Chillai Kalan exposes not only climatic vulnerability but also policy and planning shortcomings.

■ CLIMATE CHANGE AND CHANGING WINTERS

Chillai Kalan itself is undergoing change. Climate variability has altered snowfall patterns, sometimes bringing delayed but intense snow events or unusually dry winters.

While some years witness reduced snowfall, sudden extreme weather events create new challenges. These shifts have serious implications for agriculture, water resources, and long-term ecological balance.

Traditional assumptions about winter are no longer fully reliable, making preparedness increasingly complex. Chillai Kalan,

once predictable in its severity, now carries an element of uncertainty.

■ RESILIENCE BEYOND COLD

Ultimately, Chillai Kalan is not just about cold temperatures; it is about how a society copes with prolonged adversity. For Kashmiris, resilience is a lived reality.

From stocking essentials to helping neighbours, from enduring power cuts to navigating snowbound roads, everyday survival becomes an act of quiet strength.

Despite political uncertainty, economic challenges, and infrastructural limitations, the people of Kashmir continue to adapt. Chillai Kalan reinforces a collective spirit rooted in patience, mutual support, and endurance.

■ CONCLUSION

As Chillai Kalan begins each year, Kashmir enters a phase that is as demanding as it is defining. The forty days of intense cold test infrastructure, governance, and daily life, while also reaffirming centuries-old traditions of resilience and adaptation.

Amid frozen nights and snow-laden days, the Valley reveals both its vulnerabilities and its enduring strength. Chillai Kalan reminds us that winter in Kashmir is not merely a season—it is an experience that shapes identity, culture, and community.

And as the cold tightens its grip, the Valley stands still yet strong, enduring once again, waiting patiently for warmth to return.

The author is a National TV debater and columnist. Views expressed are personal. He can be reached at ahmadayaz08@gmail.com.

Falling Youth Savings and the Uncertain Future of India's Saving Culture



Lalit Gargg

The post-pandemic world has undergone a profound transition—not only in terms of public health, but also in economic thinking and behavior. Instability in global supply chains, rising geopolitical tensions, persistent inflation, technology-driven markets, and the rapid spread of consumerist culture have collectively pushed people toward unprecedented levels of spending. The deepest impact of this shift has been felt in household savings. In India, as in many other countries, domestic savings rates have fallen to historically low levels. Consumption is rising, but the savings essential for future security are steadily declining. This is not merely an economic concern; it has become a serious social and cultural issue as well.

For an emerging economy like India, domestic savings have always been the backbone of growth. From infrastructure development to industrial investment, household savings have played a decisive role in India's development story. Today, however, the situation is worrying. Especially among the younger generation, savings rates have shrunk to around 10–15 percent—an unsatisfactory figure for any aspiring economy. At a time when India is moving toward becoming the world's third-largest economy, the growing imbalance between savings and expenditure stands out

as a stark warning.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently emphasized the decisive role of youth in strengthening India's economy. He has repeatedly conveyed that saving is not merely a matter of personal security, but a foundation of nation-building. According to him, a culture of saving before consumption nurtures self-reliance, discipline, and long-term thinking among young people. Through initiatives such as the Jan Dhan Yojana, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana, Atal Pension Yojana, and the promotion of digital savings and investment platforms, he has underlined that small, regular investments can evolve into great economic strength over time. Modi believes that only when the youth curb unnecessary expenditure and move toward savings and productive investment will India's economy become stable, inclusive, and globally competitive—because a self-reliant youth is the greatest asset of a strong India.

In Indian tradition, saving has never been viewed as a mere financial activity; it has been regarded as a virtue. Proverbs like “today's savings are tomorrow's support” have long shaped social behavior. Balance, restraint, and accumulation were accepted as core values of household life. Children's piggy banks, granaries stocked for difficult times, wealth secured in the form of gold, and modest spending during festivals were integral to the Indian way of life. In times of crisis, Indian families relied on their own reserves rather than seeking external help. This spirit of self-reliance was a defining strength of Indian society. However, changing lifestyles and a market-driven culture have weakened this tradition. Today, the “live for today” mindset, easy credit, EMI culture, credit cards, online shopping, and the competitive display encouraged by social media have turned spending into a marker of identity. Consumption is now driven more by aspiration than by necessity. The prioritization of experiences, brands, and instant gratification is pushing long-term financial security into the background. For Gen Z and young millennials in partic-

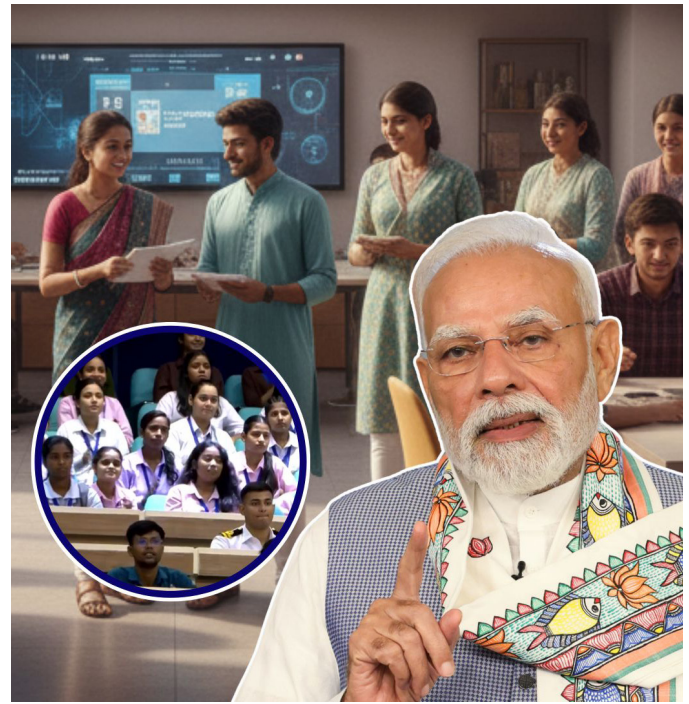
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ular, saving increasingly appears to be a burden or a vague concern about an uncertain future. This trend runs counter to the core spirit of Indian philosophy.

Indian thought has never advocated excessive indulgence, nor extreme renunciation. The path of moderation, balance, and discernment has always been considered superior—and this principle applies equally to economic life. Consumption is necessary; it keeps the economy dynamic, generates employment, and encourages innovation. But when spending becomes unrestrained and saving is neglected, insecurity sets in not only for individuals, but for society and the nation as a whole. By prioritizing experiences, brands, and instant gratification, long-term financial security is being compromised. In traditional Indian economic thinking, savings are regarded as the foundation of security and growth, with a significant portion of household income—nearly 70 percent—historically channeled into domestic savings through gold, fixed deposits, and schemes like the Public Provident Fund (PPF). However, among the new generation, a “spend more” mindset is gaining ground, leading to declining savings rates. This is why renewed emphasis is being placed on financial literacy and government-backed schemes such as PPF, National Savings Certificates (NSC), and Sukanya Samridhi Yojana—because savings are the seed from which investment and economic development grow.

Current global conditions further intensify this sense of vulnerability. Geopolitical conflicts, wars, climate crises, rapid technological change, and uncertainty in employment all indicate that the future is more unstable than ever before. In such circumstances, the role of savings and investment becomes even more crucial. If Indian society continues to drift away from its savings culture, long-term economic self-reliance may weaken. Dependence on foreign capital will increase, and the role of domestic resources will gradually diminish. Young people must be made aware of the importance of savings and investment through financial literacy. It is also important to recognize that declining savings directly affect family and social security. In India, comprehensive social security systems are still limited. Pensions, health insurance, and unemployment assistance do not cover the entire population. In such a scenario, personal and household savings remain the primary support during times of crisis. If savings continue to decline, economic shocks will have far more devastating consequences.

The problem is not limited to the mindset of the youth alone; lack of financial literacy is also a major factor. Even today, a large number of young people do not fully understand the difference between saving and investing, the impact of inflation, or how small, regular savings can become a powerful support over time. If technology is being used to fuel consumption, the



same technology can—and should—be leveraged to make saving and investing simpler and more attractive. Digital platforms, micro-savings, automated investment plans, and financial education apps can play a transformative role in this direction. The role of the family is equally vital. The habit of prudent spending and saving must be inculcated from childhood. When parents themselves practice balanced financial behavior, its influence naturally passes on to the next generation. The education system, too, should incorporate financial discipline and economic literacy, so that young people learn not only how to earn, but also how to manage and preserve wealth.

It is essential to remember that concern for the future is not fear; it is wisdom. Saving does not mean sacrificing the joy of life—it means securing the joy of the future. A safe, self-reliant, and stable society can be built only through balanced spending and regular saving. If India truly aspires to become an economic superpower, it must move beyond a purely consumption-driven growth model and adopt a savings-augmented development framework. Ultimately, the balance between saving and spending is not just a personal choice; it is a national necessity. By embracing economic discipline, we can lay a strong foundation for future generations. An emerging economy must rise above the allure of immediate consumption and prioritize long-term stability. Only then can India's economic ascent be sustainable, inclusive, and secure.

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MEDI WORLD

THE MEDI CITY

HAIR TRANSPLANT CLINIC



BEFORE

AFTER

PIGMENTATION
TREATMENT



BEFORE

ACNE
TREATMENT



AFTER

DR. SHAYESTA

AESTHETIC COSMOLOGIST

TREATMENTS AVAILABLE

- PRP
- MICRONEEDLING
- COLLAGEN INDUCTION THERAPY
- PIGMENTATION TREATMENT
- ACNE & SCARS
- UNWANTED HAIR GROWTH
- MOLE, WART, TAG & TATTOO REMOVAL
- HAIR FALL TREATMENT
- HYDRA FACIAL
- CARBON FACIAL
- VAMPIRE FACIAL
- ETC

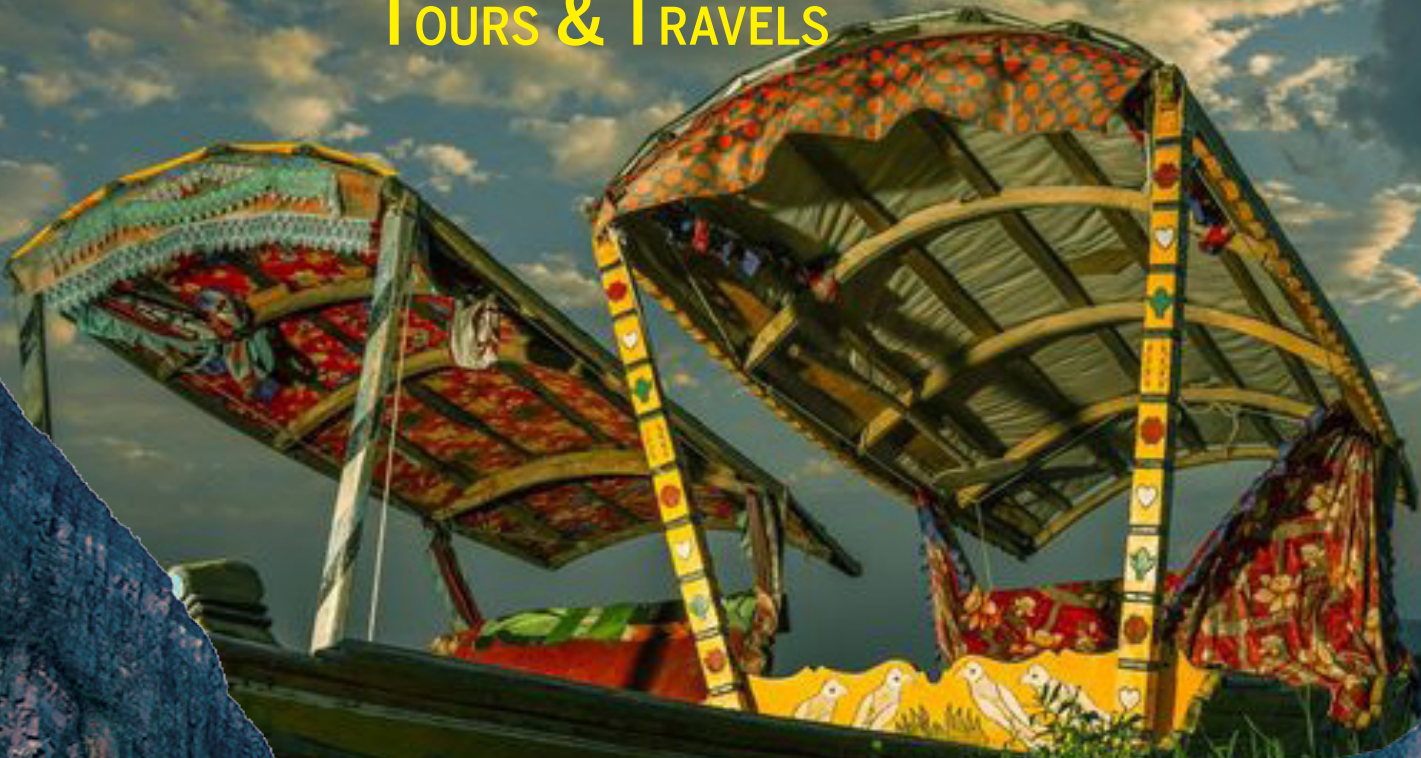
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