

DESTINATION INDIA

CONVERSATIONS



**AI IS AMERICA INDIA
FUTURE IS HERE!**

**AYODHYA:
A DESTINATION IN
THE MAKING**

**DECODING
THE MANY WORLDS
OF AMAN**

ONE THOUSAND WORDS

A PICTURE FROM OUR TIMES



Three trains collided in India's most unfortunate and tragic accident in recent times in Balasore, Odisha. Killing at least 261 and injuring over 1000 passengers, the accident caused total cancellations on the track, with a record restoration in time. PM Modi visited the site and personally took stock of the situation.



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On the Cover

PM Modi greeted by Indian diaspora during his recently concluded US visit.

Last month we had another kind of a 'man and the moment,' centring around 'Make in India'. This issue, we have arrived with the same theme but one of more national and global dimension. The 'Man and the Moment' is none other than our PM, who was in USA for just three days, and clinched what many say, the true culmination of a process that was started some many years ago. Both the parties have in the past hedged, for one reason or the other, yet were willing; now, their time seems to have come, to knit together a partnership that can potentially alter global equations.

Creativity, ingenuity, a lasting impression on times to come. This seems to be the footprint that Aman Nath seems to have captured. We engage with him to discover what true 'passion' dictates, an unhindered flow that blurs between him being a hotelier, entrepreneur, historian, author, architect or gardener!

Air transport is coming to get recognized for its true worth, as just another form of transport, an essential mode to commute, to save time, to access difficult terrain, ensuring ease of travel. Unlike roads and railways, this is essentially private domain where the role of the government is simply to play facilitator. Imagine an order of 470 aircrafts, touted as the world's single biggest order, coming from one airline, Air India! And then to have another, of 500 aircrafts, that outdoes our own other, from Indigo! Between the two we have ordered 1000 aircrafts; it is simply raining aircrafts this monsoon season.

Ayodhya is the flavour of these times, with general elections less than a year away. All eyes are firmly on the Ram Temple that is being fast tracked under the watchful eyes of Nripendra Mishra, former principal secretary to the Prime Minister. It is not just the temple, but so much more; the entire town is being turned upside down to be converted into a small model city. With its own greenfield airport, hospitality offerings and what have you, all to welcome you to experience this new marvel in the country.

Navin Berry
Editor

INDIA-US COMING TOGETHER: WHAT'S NEXT?



ITS TIME HAD COME, GIVEN THE REALITIES OF THE EMERGING GLOBAL ORDER

It is not something simple, but comprises a myriad of national and global events coming together, some historical, others contractual. This summit could well signal a new order in this region.

by NAVIN BERRY

Deliberations and Outcome Decoded and Simplified

There are always some good takeaways and some not so good ones. There are some that depend upon which part of the political spectrum or school of thought you come from, others depend upon how you view the dynamically evolving global equations and where you want to position India in that scenario.

To many, the outcome may be a most natural evolution, for a bonding for which time had come. Two things stand out. One is India and the other is the PM. It is the man and the moment.

It would be prudent to say the honour was India's, it is an honour for 1.4 billion Indians. It is an acknowledgement of the stature of India! It is India's heft, given, at this point in time, when the economy will grow regardless of governments in a country of young people aspiring to make a mark in virtually every sphere of life, from sports to startups, from heavy industry to software. India is on the

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cusps of over whelming growth, in need of heavy investments, technology, green energy, not to forget its status as a major global buyer of military hardware.

But, can we overlook that it is Modi's personal charisma that brought the numerous standing ovations. You had only to witness the confidence, the elan with which he spoke. His consummate artistry over delivery, his frequent use of humour, you can say, or subtle reflections. Like it is time for AI, which he said was America and India. Or, when he said that the samosa caucus was the flavour of the season.

Two times elected PM, looking forward to an unprecedented third term. A person who heads the first single party government with 335 seats, after a lapse of three decades, bidding good bye to coalition governments at the centre. It was the confidence the Americans displayed in the man as well, their understanding of his vision and his future role in carrying India fast forward. So, it is an honour for all Indians, not to forget the formidable Indian diaspora present in the US, both in government and in industry, but just as much to the man himself. It was truly a moment of crowning glory for the PM!

How is the Moment Important?

How about the moment? It is a natural glide into an evolved relationship, given the new geo-political twists on the global scene, which includes the events on our borders in the last few years, most unfortunate years, that have suddenly shifted our sights to defending not one but two and three borders. With all the bonhomie between President Xi and PM Modi, China decided to get aggressive in both Galwan as well as Doklam thereby confirming that it's aggressive strategies for the region included a big threat to India as well. So, with multi fronts with China and one with Pakistan, we have a formidable challenge ahead. We need advanced weapons, we need assurances of support when needed, we need to have more obvious heft in the region. Staying afloat does not give that; peace comes also from others understanding where you stand and who your allies are!

It is also a time when the US has been challenged in this region, and elsewhere, too, as China looks to enlarge its footprint globally. Especially in the South China Seas, but our more pressing concern has been the Indian Ocean region, where the US has an impressive presence; a closer understanding with the US provides that greater assurance for peace in the waters that concern us.

Our agreements signed were in all directions. Not just defence but in technology per se, trade and commerce. PM's wooing of the big industry is also a step in this direction because America's investments come equally from the private sector.

Investments and Technology

There has been a growing understanding among global markets that given India's present positioning, it is probably the only and the safest, apart from being the biggest, market for investing in virtually all spheres. Education, healthcare, roads and airports – we need a rapid building up, for which we need both investment and technology. With much of the required infrastructure in place in the US, in Europe, UK, West Asia, where does an investor go next? As a single biggest market India provides the opportunity. If it is India's time, with that window of opportunity, it is time for others to step in. US has the money, the expertise and now the willingness. It is worthwhile to note that our agreements signed were in all directions. Not just defence but in technology per se, trade and commerce. PM's wooing of the big industry is also a step in this direction because America's investments come equally from the private sector.



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What Happens to our Ropewalk?

We have been doing this tight ropewalk, with an idea of multipolarity, which could be saying we will put our eggs in many baskets. Does that work? How will the new situation change this stance? Have we given assurances to the US, to the contrary. So, should it appear we will continue to buy Russian oil, not denounce the Russians in the Ukraine war, but we will say that war is not a solution in these times. We will continue to hold border talks with the Chinese and hope, sooner than later, they will budge and become more flexible. There is no overlooking that fact that we have a long border with China; America has none. Surely, we do not wish to get entangled into hostility; given the cost of any military engagement, we can scarce have resources for any war. So, do we continue to buy peace, notwithstanding the engagement with the US.

One imagines, we continue to be valuable 'partners' for both China and Russia. Why would India want to upset either, and continue to strongly pursue multipolarity in its global outlook.

Why now, this embrace with the US?

A good question to ask. A simple explanation can be its time had not come! We in actual fact have more in common between our two countries. As was said by both parties, shared values and ideals, no matter if we are some percentage points not perfect. Perhaps a good point to make mention, but not enough not to go ahead. All these years, for one reason or the other, both were in a kind of self-denial. One big reason could be their existing friends were foes of one of the two, there was lack of trust to get closer and lose the comfort of existing support structures. In the last few years, both sides have been seeing a closing in of goals and objectives in our region.

India's Democracy Status: Concerns in the West

Yes, there were protests. Trucks carried messages to remind that there were issues back home in India. President Obama made a rare intervention saying "if you do not protect the rights of ethnic and minority Indians, there is a strong possibility that India at some point starts pulling apart". A timely intervention, which was brushed aside by the US government, though an Indian scribe has suggested this could be at the behest of the government, to say things they did not want to say themselves. The PMs retort was forthright and emphatic. He was addressing a press conference, for a change, his first in nine years. So,

President Biden got PM Modi to do a first of sorts. He asserted no minority has been discriminated in any of the government schemes to help and assist communities, all these have been passed to all without any favour. But he did not go into other accusations made against the government in recent years. That mattered little to the Americans.

Modi's Agenda for the 2024 General Elections?

Is this going to be a major poll plank for the BJP? India's growing standing in the global arena? With so much effort going into the on-going G20 deliberations, with the summit planned for early September, this might well be! Would this work? That is a different question for which we do not have any answer. Only time will tell. In May 2024, or earlier, as many pundits opine the dates may well be announced immediately after the inauguration of the Ayodhya complex, the temple, the airport, and a rejuvenated town! Whatever the coming months will unfold, one thing is certain: exciting times are ahead in the coming year. **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Debates and Travel Trends Today. He is the founder of SATTE, India's first inbound tourism mart, biggest in Asia.

INDIA-US AIR TRAFFIC

A MOST UNDER-PENETRATED MARKET SO FAR, DESTINED TO GROW IN COMING MONTHS

With numerous agreements signed, a notable missing link was connectivity as perhaps our two countries have an open sky policy and airlines business is totally in private hands.

by NAVIN BERRY

We have a graph that shows the distribution heavily skewed towards one stop traffic and little to direct air connectivity. How much does reflect in sheer numbers?

In FY 20, the US was about 9.1% of India's total international traffic. However, it is about 27 percent of India's long and ultra long-haul market.

Is this the biggest country to country traffic?

The US at 5.9 Mn is the second largest OD country market after UAE which is 12.2 Mn, based on FY 20 data and ahead of Saudi's (5.6 Mn), Thailand (3.9 Mn) and UK (3.3 Mn).

How much is the pattern similar to other country traffic - direct and through third parties?

Indian and US carriers combined carried 26.7% of the total India-US traffic, closer to 74% of the market travels via ME and European hubs. ME carriers account for 40 percent, European carriers at 23 percent and Asian carries at 10 percent. Dubai accounts for 22 percent of the total transfer traffic to US.

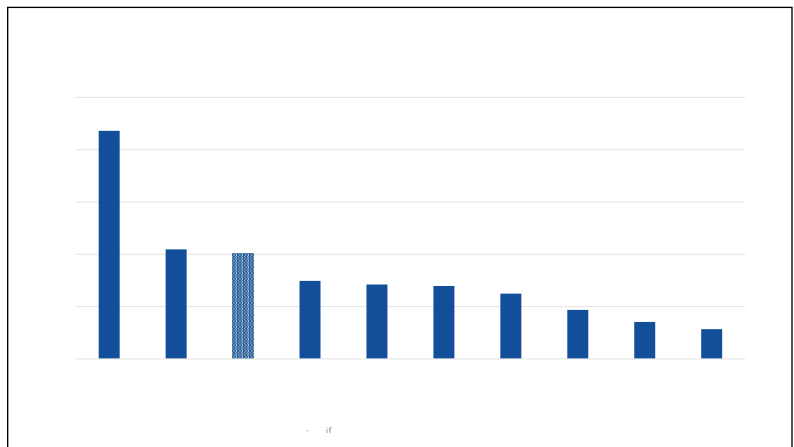
Why has direct traffic not grown despite an open skies between the two?

The India-US market has been significantly under penetrated, largely due to the inability of AI (under Govt ownership) to take advantage of the market. The 5-year CAGR prior to Covid was about 5 percent. The potential of India-US is significantly higher - the Inbound/ Outbound/ Business/ institutional and even VFR market segments have massive long-term potential. Jet Airways could not make non-stop work and hence started feeding traffic via AF-KLM/ Delta/ Virgin over Paris/ Amsterdam and London. US carriers also preferred feeding via UK/ Europe via JVs like Atlantic plus. The near freeze on bilaterals to ME carriers and Turkish also constrained the market.

Is there any tangible shift that you foresee now that AI is planning long haul planes?

Air India under TATAs will completely change

When we are looking at India-US exchange in its totality, one factor missing in the recent conversations has been connectivity. During all the wide coverage, across media, and in the speeches made during the summit, connectivity was a notable absent. This is going to be fundamental in time going forward. Destination India in a rapid-fire exchange, met with Kapil Kaul, Director, CAPA India, the leading consulting agency in aviation matters in the sub-continent.



the dynamics of India-US/ North American market with multiple non-stop frequencies with a world class product and modern fleet. The US network is strategic to AI's long-haul plans, and we will see AI competing with all the major global carriers with the highest confidence. AI's fleet on order which includes B777s/A350-1000 indicates the highest priority to the US and North American Markets.

How is the traffic estimated to grow, now that we have this new strategic partnership with the US?

Expect closer to a double-digit growth in the near to medium term led by Indian carriers. Once the bilaterals are relaxed, there will be a further growth momentum to this market. The recent visit of the PM to US will transform trade and investments structurally, providing a long term and stable growth opportunities. The India-US corridor is one of the most fiercely contested markets in the world and with AI keen to be a dominant player, a new era has just begun. **DI**

THE WASP-BASH TANGO

THE EVOLVING NATURE OF INDIAN ENGAGEMENT GLOBALLY AND IN INDIA

The recently concluded India-US Summit is in a way a culmination of a long process that goes back in time. The embrace of our two nations has been fast forwarded by PM Modi and President Biden in their individual understanding of what the future holds.



by IQBAL CHAND MALHOTRA

The US has long been overwhelmingly dominated demographically, intellectually and financially by the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) community and this constituted the majoritarian core of its founders and their values. However, post WW2, immigration and the ability of the US to attract to its shores the best scientific and creative talent worldwide threw up an interesting reality in the third decade of this century. This was the recognition of the BASH (Brown Anglo-Saxon Sikh-Hindu) community with a smattering of Indian Muslims included in it, as probably the most important and influential immigrant community in the US, apart from numerically being the second largest as well.

And when the US looked north to its Canadian neighbour it discovered that the reality in Canada was even more acute as Canadian politics is now heavily influenced by the BASH community let alone professions and mercantilism. Further east, across “the pond” in the UK, the Prime Minister is a Hindu and the BASH community is heavily influential in all aspects of British life. Even in far-off Australia and New Zealand, the BASH community’s influence is rapidly increasing.

The entire Anglo-Saxon world of these five nations, that constitutes the “Five Eyes” intelligence alliance has now found that it would soon be time to incorporate India into this alliance as a “Sixth Eye”, as the Five Eye nations realised that the BASH community were now as much “insiders” within their societies as the WASP’s were themselves.

The BASH are a melange of both Macaulay’s and Nehru’s legacies in India. Educated in either British styled Indian public schools or convent-church run schools, and those that missed the first bus, benefiting from the Nehruvian bequests of the IIM’s and IIT’s at the university level, this community is “toilet- trained” in Anglo-Saxon values of democracy and fair-play.

But here’s the contradiction and that is that Nehru deliberately de-coupled India from this natural symbiosis with the Anglo-Saxon world because he was hung-up on de-colonisation and non-alignment. He had an unusual ally in this de-coupling in the RSS which also sought to distance Hindu society from the Anglo-Saxon world and its materialistic and absorptive appeal which prevented the emergence of a non-BASH ruling elite in India. The rapid increase in population and two men who emerged out of the BASH community, namely V P Singh who “Mandalised” India and L K Advani who “Kamandalised” India, paved the way for Prime Minister Modi’s ascent to power. The BASH sought refuge in migrating to the west and succeeding over there like never before.

This reality of the Indian diaspora now becoming assertively integrated into the Anglo-Saxon world did not extend in the same measure to the Pakistani diaspora. The Pakistani’s, overwhelmingly dominated by brash Punjabi Muslims blundered around causing mayhem which peaked with their participation in the events of 9/11. This was a direct attack on the Anglo-Saxon power structure and was soon followed by the exposure of the Dr. A. Q. Khan led caravan of nuclear proliferation to both North Korea and the Islamic world, which had by now become the 21st century enemy of the Anglo-Saxons.

President George Bush recognised these socio-political shifts and brought India out of her nuclear winter into a tentative embrace with the Anglo-Saxon world with the execution and implementation of the Indo-US nuclear deal between 2005 to 2008. However, Mrs Sonia Gandhi stuck to her family’s traditional empathy with Russia and her unassertive and status quoist Defence Minister A. K. Anthony prevented



intense and vigorous integration with US military and industrial interests. Whispers of the need for regime change in India began to be heard within Washington D.C. during the early years of UPA-2 and this was kick-started with the US owned Omidyar Network allegedly funding the India Against Corruption movement and the Anna Hazare identified political agitation. The rest is history.

The covid-19 pandemic brought to light the existential threat that China presented and the need for the Anglo-Saxon world to de-couple from the Chinese embrace. Almost simultaneously, the PLA started intruding into eastern Ladakh from February 2020 and Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy faced its first monumental setback. The residual value of the close to 18 trips that he had made to China both as Chief Minister of Gujarat and Prime Minister of India was reduced to zero. India had no choice but to formally join the Quad Dialogue in 2021.

President Biden recognised that it was time to embrace India as a nation state and not only or just the ruling party of the day. To this end it sent a strong message to the Modi govt. when it engineered Rahul Gandhi's visit to the US just weeks before Modi's visit and right after the spectacular Congress victory in the Karnataka elections. There were unsubstantiated reports of Rahul's visit to the White House and mystery remains whether he also met anyone other than Asst. Secretary of State Anthony Lu.

There is a view that despite joining the Quad in response to the Chinese land grab in Ladakh, India was still trying to pull its punches and build bridges with China and continuing her defence purchases with Putin's Russia. Further, when the Govt. of India permitted both Reliance and the Russian Rosneft owned Nayara, the two largest private oil refineries in India, to purchase close to US\$ 43 billion worth of Russian crude despite US sanctions after the start of the war in Ukraine, the US was far from pleased, even though a spin is now being provided to justify this. Also, Modi's attempts to collaborate in creating a BRICS currency and join Chinese attempts to replace the US Dollar in world trade came to nought as both the values of the Yuan and Rouble are fixed by capital controls imposed by their respective central banks and traders and investors cannot freely trade in them. Global trade can be done only in the euro and the dollar with floating transparent exchange rates or with currencies like the UAE's Dhiram that peg their value to

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the euro or the dollar.

Additionally, the bipartisan consensus in the US since May 2020 to ban and block the sale to China and later Russia of semi-conductor technology, manufacturing equipment and semi-conductors themselves has created a new technology led cold war and India has had to reluctantly choose its side.

Further, the Hindenburg report released in January this year crippled the Adani Group and its cash throw ups. This has hampered its ability in theory to freely purchase electoral bonds. Even while Mr. Modi was in the US, news reports came in of probes by the Justice Department and the SEC into the workings of the Adani Group. This led to a drastic fall in its share prices on 23 June. With around US \$ 10 billion in FX borrowings, the Adani Group is highly vulnerable to such moves of the US govt.

India is the world's biggest market for defence purchases and the US and China are the two biggest sellers. India cannot buy arms from China! By selling India MQ-9 Reaper drones, the US is inexorably locking India into joining Five Eyes. There is talk of selling two highly sophisticated i-Star electronic surveillance aircraft as well. By transferring the technology to manufacture F-414 jet engines in India, the US has effectively ensured US centred and assisted indigenous manufacture of the IAF's requirements well into the future. So is the case with local manufacture of the Stryker armoured vehicle for the Indian Army.

A further carrot is the US directive to its business leaders to pursue a "China +1" sourcing policy. The +1 here being India. Micron is already executing a \$2 billion semi-conductor plant in Gujarat.

Therefore, the US has succeeded in co-opting all three parts of the Indian power structure, namely the BASH community, the *Mandalites* and the *Kamandalites* into a tango with it, both separately and collectively. The price it will extract is a synchronised alliance and integration with US policy and a return to free speech and dissidence within the Indian polity. This will ensure it can never be confronted by a single, dominant power centre from within this polity. AI will do the rest! **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Iqbal Chand Malhotra is chairman and producer, AIM Television Pvt. Ltd. He has produced over 500 hours of television programming which have been telecast worldwide. He is a prolific author and appears often on television debates.

'EVEN SKY IS NOT THE LIMIT FOR THIS PARTNERSHIP' A MOST COMPREHENSIVE ENGAGEMENT INTO THE FUTURE



PM Modi's eighth visit to the US in nine years was a landmark in a series of interactions between the two countries. Strong bipartisan support exists in both countries for vibrant relations between the two countries. This has made the India-US partnership one of the most consequential and defining relationships in current times.



by ASHOK SAJJANHAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the United States from 21st to 23rd June, 2023 for the eighth time during his tenure. The visit symbolized the dynamism of US-India partnership and the importance which PM Modi attaches to relations with Washington. In his nine years in office, PM Modi has traveled most often to the US.

PM Modi was invited by President Joe Biden and Dr Jill Biden for his first Official State Visit to the United States. This was a pivotal moment as State visits to the US are infrequent. In addition, PM Modi addressed the joint session of the US Congress on 22nd June. PM Modi last addressed the US Congress in June 2016. He is the only Indian leader, and one of very few world leaders, to have been invited to address the US Congress more than once. The last Indian leader to travel to the US for an Official State Visit was Dr. Manmohan Singh in 2009. Dr. Singh also addressed the US Congress in 2005.

PM Modi's visit and address to the US Congress demonstrate the importance that President Biden attaches to the US partnership with India and PM Modi's contribution in bringing it to this level. The visit strengthened the commitment of the two countries to a free, open, prosperous, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

In India, all prime ministers over the last 23 years have worked to expand India-US bilateral ties. PM Modi's contribution has however been notably pivotal in the growth of India-US relations. Strong bipartisan support exists in both countries for vibrant relations between the two countries. This has made the India-US partnership one of the most consequential and defining relationships in current times.

Current State of Play

The warmth, respect and rapport between PM Modi and President Biden has been palpable during many recent events. These include the G7 and Quad Summits in Hiroshima, the G20 Summit in Bali, the G7 Summit in Germany, the G20 Summit in Italy and many more.

Additionally, Biden's engagement with the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has not diluted his commitment to the Indo-Pacific. Five summit-level interactions between the leaders of the Quad (Australia, India, Japan, USA) have taken place over the last 25 months. This extraordinary attention to the Quad demonstrates the resolve of the leaders inter alia of USA and India to strengthen their partnership and effectively push back against China's growing expansionism.

Today, there is a convergence of values and interests between India and the US. Some of these emerging areas of common interest include, the fight against terrorism, push-back against China's expansionism, attraction for the US of India's huge and expanding domestic market, presence of a large and influential Indian diaspora in the US, India's need for infusion of capital and technology for its rapid economic growth etc.

The US and India have over 60 bilateral dialogue mechanisms. These include platforms for cooperation in renewable energy, climate change, information technology, healthcare, agriculture, cyber security and many others. The US has emerged as one of the top three suppliers of defense equipment to India. India also conducts more defense exercises with the US than with any other partner.

The Visit

21st June, the first day of the visit to Washington DC, saw a private engagement between President Biden and PM Modi, as well as a Skilling Event in the Montgomery Community College attended by PM Modi and Dr Jill Biden.

The next day witnessed an extremely hectic and packed schedule with the ceremonial welcome at the White House which was attended by several thousand members of the Indian diaspora, followed by bilateral meetings between the two leaders and the delegations. After the Statements by the two leaders to the media at which PM Modi gave a spirited response to a question from the Wall Street Journal about the alleged discrimination of minorities in India, PM Modi delivered his Address to the Joint Session of the US Congress. He received several standing ovations and regular thunderous applause by members of the Congress. The Address to the US Congress presented a brief over-view of the progress India has registered over the last 9 years and the huge untapped potential for expansion of relations between India and USA. The day concluded with the State dinner hosted by President Biden in PM Modi's honor.

On 23rd June, the final day in Washington DC, PM Modi was hosted to a luncheon by the US Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken. PM then interacted with prominent professional personalities at the Kennedy Center. His last engagement was an interaction with an enthusiastic Indian diaspora at the Ronald Reagan Centre.

The Outcomes

A decisive impetus to high technology collaboration between the two democracies was the most significant outcome of the visit. It is clear that the US has made the strategic decision to catapult India into the ranks of highly technologically advanced countries. In the past, the



The extraordinary attention to the Quad demonstrates the resolve of the leaders inter alia of USA and India to strengthen their partnership and effectively push back against China's growing expansionism.

US has been reluctant in sharing its cutting edge technologies with India. That situation appears to have changed radically. This is evidence of the growing trust and confidence between the two leaders and the countries.

The visit emphasized the shared resolve of the two leaders to elevate their strategic technology partnership, including in defense, critical and emerging technologies, clean energy, telecommunications, resilient supply chains, Open RAN, 5G/6G technologies, AI, Quantum Computing, space, semiconductor chips and many more. In addition, investments of several billions of dollars were announced by many US firms like Google Alphabet, Applied Materials, LAM and others into India. An MoU on Semiconductor Supply Chain and Innovation Partnership was signed to promote commercial opportunities, research, talent, and skill development. Micron Technology, Inc., announced it will invest up to \$825 million to build a new semiconductor assembly and test facility in India. The combined investment valued at \$2.75 billion in this enterprise will create several thousand jobs. 35 innovative joint research collaborations in emerging technologies were identified which would be funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Indian Department of Science and Technology (DST).

The two leaders committed their administrations to promoting policies and procedures for greater technology sharing, co-development, and co-production opportunities between U.S. and Indian industry, government, and academic institutions.

NASA declared that it will provide advanced training to Indian astronauts with a goal of mounting a joint effort to the International Space Station in 2024. NASA and ISRO signed an agreement to develop a strategic framework for human spaceflight cooperation by the end of 2023.

In the area of defence, the two sides adopted a Defense Industrial Cooperation Roadmap, to provide policy direction to defense industries and enable co-production of advanced defense systems and collaborative research, testing, and prototyping of projects. The highlight in this sector was the signing of an MOU between General Electric of USA and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited of India for Transfer of Technology and joint production of GE-F414 jet engines for India's indigenous Tejas light combat aircraft. In addition, USA will supply MQ-3B predator drones to India which India has been demanding for quite some time.

Far-reaching decisions in several other areas like opening of new consulates, both by India and USA; launch of a pilot project for extension of H1B and L visas to Indian nationals in the US without the requirement of leaving the country; launch of the India-US Defense Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X); countering global terrorism and taking concerted action against all UN-listed terrorist groups including Al-Qa'ida, ISIS/Daesh, Lashkar e-Tayyiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen etc. were also taken;

Some Wrinkles

When relations between two countries are as comprehensive and complex as those between the US and India, there will always be a few areas of disagreement. Some of these areas between India and USA include India's steadfast, balanced position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict including India's increasing imports of Russian oil, America's continued support to Pakistan for servicing and upgradation of its F-16 fleet etc. It appears that the US has made its peace with India's position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. On India's position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the US National Security Advisor said that one issue cannot be allowed to determine the contours of the whole relationship, and that the US is in a long game with India. Moreover, recent reports on back-sliding of India's democracy and alleged discrimination of minorities in India have sought to create stress between the two governments but without any success.

Both countries however recognize that the areas of bilateral convergence are far greater than the issues that separate them. The challenge before the leadership of India and the US is to focus and build upon the areas of convergence while continuing to have honest conversations on their differences.

Conclusion

India-US relations are poised at a take-off stage today.

The geo-political uncertainty and flux has played an important role in this development. India's impressive economic and military growth in recent years, the competent manner in which India has dealt with the two black swan events of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, its confident and self-assured conduct of its foreign policy etc. have also contributed significantly to this outcome. India has emerged as a partner of choice for seeking solutions to some major challenges like climate change, terrorism, economic growth, health etc. confronting the world today.

The US continues to be the pre-eminent power in the world economically, militarily, technologically and in global influence. However, the gap between the US and China, particularly in the economic field, has diminished considerably in recent years. China (and Russia) are convinced that the US is in terminal decline and it is only a matter of time before the Chinese economy overtakes the US economy. This has made China increasingly assertive in the South China Sea, East China Sea, the Taiwan Straits and on the LAC with India ever since Xi Jinping assumed power in 2012.

To balance China and to maintain its pre-dominant position in the world, the US needs allies and partners. Although it has many allies and partners in Asia, none can equal India in area, population, size of economy, military strength etc. The US would also like to wean

away India from its dependence on Russia as the principal defence supplier.

India wants to emerge as a stronger, more confident, self-assured power to safeguard its sovereignty and provide a better life to its people. For this it needs capital, technology and large

markets which the US can provide. India also needs real time intelligence to respond effectively to any threats from its northern and western neighbours.

PM Modi in his Address to the Indian diaspora on 23rd June, 2023 said: "This partnership is not one of convenience, but of conviction."

With strong and visionary leadership in the two countries, US-India bilateral ties can be expected to scale even greater heights in the years to come. PM Modi's momentous visit to the US will play a vital and decisive role in achieving this objective. **DI**

On India's position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the US National Security Advisor said that one issue cannot be allowed to determine the contours of the whole relationship, and that the US is in a long game with India.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ambassador Ashok Sajjanhar is Executive Council Member, Mahohar Parrikar Institute of Defence Studies and

Analyses; President, Institute of Global Studies; Distinguished Fellow, Ananta Aspen Centre, and former Ambassador of India to Kazakhstan, Sweden and Latvia.

THE US ECONOMY AND MARKET CYCLES: HOW INDIA IS FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE

by NAMRATA MITTAL

Since the start of Fed tightening in the first quarter of 2022, the most frequently asked question about the global economy has been whether the FOMC's fight to tame inflation inevitably means the US economy is heading for recession.

If the price of reigning in inflation is a recession, the follow-on question is, how deep and till when? And how do we think about financial market outcomes in such times?

As things stand today, US activity data is mixed. Retail sales and industrial production had contracted. Job data is mixed where non-farm payroll continues to be positive, but job openings moderate and initial jobless claims moved up. Earnings outcomes for Q1 2023 have also been decent.

Clearly, data doesn't point to recession yet, but during inflationary periods, it is not unusual for employment downturns to begin months after the start of a recession. We saw this in the 1973 and the 1980 recession. Higher inflation leads to a delayed onset of profitability loss which in turn delays the layoffs. Presently, corporate profit should act as a leading indicator of wage growth and inflation moderation.

Interestingly, the 1973 and 1980 recession saw rate hikes (instead of a cut) as inflation was high and job market data was strong. While we do not call out for an exact repeat of those times, given that inflation, corporate profits and job market data rhymes closer to the decades of the 1970s-80s, the market continues to be surprised by Fed's aggression.

Looking ahead, synchronized and aggressive rate hikes thus far make a case for deeper problems in the real economy, going ahead. Interest rate matters and there is a tremendous value in the yield curve which points to a strong probability of recession in the next 12 months.

Coming to the market, equity markets start to correct prior to the onset of recession and bottom out into the recession. During the 1973, 2001 and 2008 recession, the S&P500 fell ~50%. On other occasions, there has been ~20% corrections (the 1981, 1990 and 2020 recession). As we speak (or write!), the S&P500 has fallen 13% from its peak. Mapping the past today, we fear material growth slowdown in the US which will drive earnings correction.

The template for fixed income assets was very different during the 1970s and 80s compared to the last three decades when duration assets performed at the mature stage of the rate hike cycle. The high inflationary periods of the 1970-80s were different though; the 10-year UST rose into the 1973 and 1980 recession. That is perhaps explained by high inflation leading markets to doubt the longevity of rate cuts.

Mapping this history in the current context, sharp monetary tightening in the last one year should drive cyclical disinflation - though




Data doesn't point to recession yet, but during inflationary periods, it is not unusual for employment downturns to begin months after the start of a recession.

one could argue that a 2% inflation target is far-fetched. On top of that, issues around financial stability may provide some breather to rate hikes. But for a sustained bond market rally, it is imperative that Fed kills inflation expectation once and for all.

To sum, 2022 was one of the worst years for stocks and bonds in the US. Into 2023, the global equity market prospects are still grim unless we see a significant dovish tilt by the Fed and greater clarity on the depth and breadth of the recession.

The outlook for US duration assets is improving at the margin. That said, the longevity of the duration rally will be challenged unless inflation is brought under complete control.

Similar story applies for India. FY24 earnings expectations could be tested depending on the global growth trajectory. While valuations have corrected, some downward adjustment may still be due. We continue to think of 2023 as a year of adjustment in Indian equities even as longer-term trends favor an investment led earnings cycle in India.

However, we are positive on Indian fixed income assets – gaining support from an end to monetary tightening, moderating inflation, reduced external account concerns, and an outlook for appreciation in rupee. 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Namrata Mittal is Chief Economist, SBI Funds Management Limited.

A PM'S STATE VISIT TO US BOTH SYMBOLIC AND SUBSTANTIVE

Deterrence is always preferred to conflict, say the authors. Through this State visit deterrence has been achieved, an effective one that casts the dark clouds away from over the Indo-Pacific region. The visit has concluded providing more stability in our region.

by MAJ GEN VK SINGH, VSM (Retd) and
MAJ GEN JAGATBIR SINGH, VSM (Retd)

Background

Over the last two decades, India and the United States have grown increasingly aligned, starting with President Clinton's visit to India and followed up by subsequent Presidents in numerous spheres, with the US providing greater military assistance to India to enhance its military capabilities. President Donald Trump raised India to Strategic Trade Level 1, a level that USA reserves for its closest allies including NATO. The present June 22-24 invitation by President Joe Biden to Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a State guest to

In a run up to the visit, the US Secretary of Defence, General Lloyd Austin came to India on 04 & 05 June 2023, with the aim of reinforcing defence partnerships, and advancing cooperation in critical domains. He met the Defence Minister and the NSA.



USA, undoubtedly ushered a new era to Indo-US relations.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has visited United States five times for bi-lateral and multi-lateral meetings since 2014. But his visit on 22nd of June 2023, assumed greater significance because none of his earlier visits were classified as a 'State Visit'. It is evident that the state visit, which is the most elevated form of American diplomacy was carefully crafted and choreographed in line with the strategic relationship between the two countries.

In a run up to the visit, the US Secretary of Defence, General Lloyd Austin came to India on 04 & 05 June 2023, with the aim of reinforcing defence partnerships, and advancing cooperation in critical domains. He met the Defence Minister and the National Security Advisor. The US committed to closely collaborating with India in support of the shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific. India and the US also concluded a roadmap for defence cooperation, a landmark move expected to bolster India's indigenous defence manufacturing.

The roadmap was significant as Washington maintains strict controls over what military technology can be shared or sold to other countries. The new roadmap on defence cooperation stressed on easing regulatory hurdles on supply chain security and the Reciprocal Defense Procurement agreement. It also set up mechanisms like Advanced



Domains Defence dialogue and the India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) to promote the partnership between India and US.

Following the footsteps of General Lloyd Austin, the American NSA, Jake Sullivan, accompanied by Indo-Pacific Coordinator at the National Security Council, Kurt Campbell, visited India on 13-14 June. Amongst his engagements was the second round of Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) talks.

Prior to that, on 06 June the Indian Foreign Secretary, Vinay Kwatra, visited Washington and attended the launch of the Strategic Trade Dialogue, which was one of the first outcomes of iCET.

iCET is a framework, a mechanism, to build strategic trade and technology partnership between the two countries. Many similar assurances have been made in the past too, however, actual transfer of assets or ToT has been comparatively slow. This was because the approval procedures required both the US Department of Defence and the Private manufacturer to agree to the specifics of the deal. Somehow, if one agreed the other did not, which led to time delays. Notwithstanding that, India has gained a lot in the past decade in the form of C-130, C-17 Aircrafts, the Chinook and Apache helicopters, the M-777 Howitzers and so on. In the present proposal(s), there is much hope and expectation that projects will fructify at a faster pace.

The Deliverables

During his visit to India, Jake Sullivan had said "As we look ahead to the State visit Prime Minister Modi will be embarking upon in Washington next week... the number of the deliverables at the visit are not just bullet points on a page. They are fundamentally designed to remove those obstacles in defence trade, in investment in each of our countries, by taking away obstacles that have stood in the way of our scientists and researchers". And that is exactly what happened.

The two countries announced Agreements on Semiconductors, Critical Minerals, Technology, Space Cooperation and Defence Cooperation including joint manufacturing and sales.

Some were aimed at diversifying supply chains to reduce dependence on China. Others aimed at helping in advanced technologies. They also ended disputes at the World Trade Organization, and India removed some tariffs on US goods. Specifics are discussed below.

GE-F414 Fighter Aircraft Engine

The landmark agreement was to allow General Electric to co-produce the GE-F414 fighter aircraft engine with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited in India. It will power the LCA 'Tejas' Mk II and other future fighters. The 80 percent ToT for the manufacturing of the F-414 engine will be an

The State Visit

Prime Minister Modi has had a personal chemistry with three US Presidents, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden. In 2015 President Barack Obama was the Chief Guest for the Republic Day Parade, the first by an American President.

While welcoming the Prime Minister to the White House, President Biden said "The challenges and opportunities facing the world in this century require that India and the United States work and lead together, and we are".

President Biden and Prime Minister Modi hailed a new era in their countries' relationship after the White House rolled out the red carpet for the Indian Prime Minister.

India has gained a lot in the past decade in the form of C-130, C-17 Aircrafts, the Chinook and Apache helicopters, the M-777 Howitzers and so on. In the present proposal(s), there is much hope and expectation that projects will fructify at a faster pace.

unprecedented step. The F-414 powering the Tejas Mk II, a 4.5-generation medium-weight fighter aircraft will be an upgrade on the existing F-404 engine which powers the Tejas Mk I. As per The Economist, Americans see it as their most generous proposal since 2005, the Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative.

The technology of the F-414 may not be the latest but it is a huge step towards trust, faith, and friendship. It will provide employment for Indians and an opportunity to export surplus engines. Availability of the cutting-edge technology like the crystal turbine blade technology used in this engine, would expose India to the best technologies in the world.

MQ-9B Predator Armed Drones

The case for procuring 31 Armed Drones (16 Sky Guardian and 15 Sea Guardian) and associated equipment was cleared by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) on 15 Jun 2023. The deal involves setting up Maintenance Repair and Overhaul facilities in India. Under the deal, the Navy will get 15 MQ-9B drones in maritime and anti-submarine warfare kits, while the Army and the Indian Air Force (IAF) will get 8 each of the land version.

This deal culminates the Indian military's long-standing desire to have the latest surveillance and attack capability. The Sea Guardian can enable real-time search and patrol above and below the ocean's surface. Due to its open architecture system, Sea Guardian operators can integrate sonobuoy management and control system and sonobuoy dispenser system that helps in tracking submarines. Only few NATO countries and close allies of the US have Predator Drones.

Maritime Agreement

The Master Ship Repair Agreement with Indian shipyards will allow the US Navy to expedite the contracting process for mid-voyage and emergent repairs for US Naval ships in the region. They can stop in Indian shipyards for rest and refit. The agreement legalises an American footprint in the Indian Ocean.

The dark clouds of coercion and confrontation are casting their shadow in the Indo Pacific. The stability of the region has become one of the central concerns of our partnership, said PM Modi.

M-777 Lightweight Howitzers

Another agreement that will be firming up in the coming months is the extended range version of the M-777 lightweight howitzers. The proposed version would need some changes to the existing system along with a new barrel.

Stryker Armoured Personnel Carrier

India and the USA are exploring the possibility of joint production of wheeled Stryker APC in India. The APC will come handy for the Indian Army in all types of terrain. Besides being capable of carrying nine soldiers, Strykers are air portable.

Space

India also agreed to join the Artemis Project on space exploration. ISRO will work with NASA on a joint mission to the International Space Station in 2024.

Semi-Conductors

During and post Covid, USA realized along with the rest of the world, the need to be self-reliant in microchips. Several facilities are coming up in the US, but in line with the slogan of "Friend shoring" US chip-maker Micron plans to set up a semiconductor testing and packaging unit, in Gujarat.

Others

There are many other areas of Defence and Technology that India and the USA are looking at partnerships.

(a) Cooperation on hypersonic technology, advanced materials to help India build on cutting edge technology.

(b) USA is also keen on a fighter jet programme for the Indian Defence Forces. This would include the F/A 18 Super Hornets and the F-21s.

(c) The two countries are also likely to sign off on certain clauses of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement, which will make it easier for Americans to supply India with specific intelligence in the borders.

(d) The two leaders appreciated the strong military-to-military ties, mutual logistics support, and efforts to streamline implementation of foundational agreements. Information sharing and placement of Liaison Officers in each other's military organizations will spur joint service cooperation. They also reiterated their resolve to strengthen maritime security cooperation, through enhanced underwater domain awareness.

(e) There are many other clauses discussed before and during the visit including Quantum Computing, Telecom, transfer of critical technology and so on.





China Factor

India's foremost security challenge is clearly China. The clash in Galwan exposed China to the rest of the world.

To counter this in the immediate context, India needs intelligence, equipment, logistical support, and weapon systems to deter China. Hence, with the US being a leading provider of these requirements it is imperative for India to have closer collaboration with them and in turn to be willing to be part of a wider US deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

The US believes that India is one of the most important partners in its Indo-Pacific policy, to prevent China from dominating future Geo Politics and Geo Economy. However, this is not stated openly but is subtly implied. While India actively counters China on its Northern border where no doubt it will fight alone, but moral and material support from the US will help in countering China's assertiveness and aggression.

There is no doubt that India, with its robust economy and military capability is the only counterweight to China in the region.

Conclusion

The visit brought about agreements in Space, Land, Sea, Air, Science and Technology, Telecom, Biotech and more. If this is not the mother of all bilateral agreements then what is?

Possibly, America wants India to reduce its dependency on Russia. Possibly, with China raising its head, USA wants a strong ally in this region. Of course, the Indian markets have also shown huge potential. No doubt, USA will have a major role in ensuring India's security concerns. It is a subtle but very clear message to the region at large that America has arrived.

From the security perspective India's most immediate concern is along the LAC, where China has made vast investments in military infrastructure. US defence collaborations and sales will help fill capability gaps including improving border surveillance. The Indian Armed Forces have time and again proved that they are the best fighting force. With initiatives as evident from this landmark visit, now the "best will fight with the best".

Both India and USA are benefitting from this friendship. India has placed an order for 220 Boeing aircraft, which will create jobs across the US. 163 Indian companies have invested \$40 billion, creating nearly 4,25,000 jobs in the US. It is a win-win for both.

The Prime Minister mentioned in his speech at Congress; "The dark clouds of coercion and confrontation are casting their shadow

The two countries announced Agreements on Semiconductors, Critical Minerals, Technology, Space Cooperation and Defence Cooperation including joint manufacturing and sales.

in the Indo Pacific. The stability of the region has become one of the central concerns of our partnership." One can derive that with the Indo-US partnership, the shadow is fast fading. With the entry of Predator Drones and port facilities offered to the American Navy, the security interests of the Indo-Pacific have been secured. Campbell Bay in Nicobar, at the very mouth of Malacca Straits, can be developed thus extending the US power into the very center of the Indo-Pacific.

Suffice to say, that deterrence is always better than conflict. Through this State visit deterrence has been achieved. **D**

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Maj Gen VK Singh, VSM was commissioned into The Scinde Horse in Dec 1983. The officer has commanded an Independent Recce Sqn in the desert sector, and has the distinction of being the first Armoured

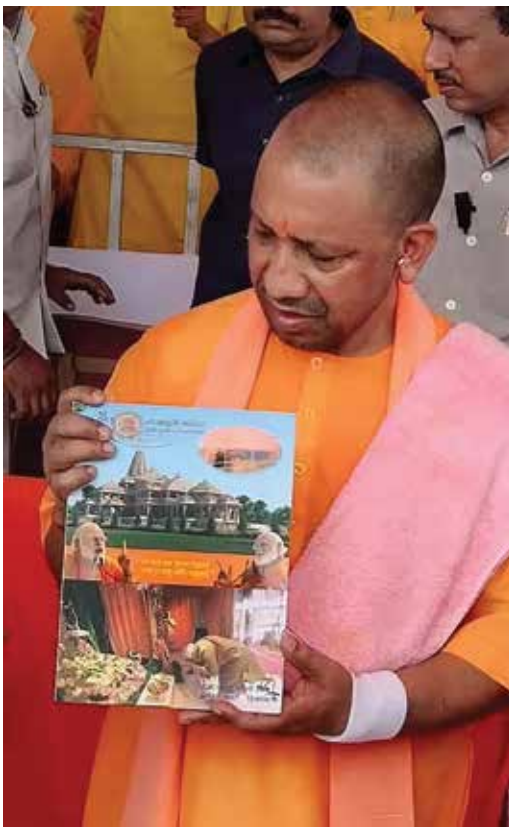
Corps Officer to command an Assam Rifles Battalion in Counter Insurgency Operations in Manipur and Nagaland, as well as the first General Cadre Officer to command a Strategic Forces Brigade. He then commanded 12 Infantry Division (RAPID) in Western Sector. The General is a fourth generation army officer.



Major General Jagatbir Singh was commissioned into 18 Cavalry in December 1981. During his 38 years of service in the Army he has held various command, staff and instructional appointments and served in varied

terrains in the country. He has served in a United Nations Peace Keeping Mission as a Military Observer in Iraq and Kuwait. He has been an instructor to Indian Military Academy and the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington. He is a prolific writer in defence & national security and adept at public speaking.

THE WHAT, WHY AND HOW OF AYODHYA'S REJUVENATION!



“The people of the country and the world are eager to see a ‘Divya, Bhavya, Navya Ayodhya’. We have to ensure that every devotee and tourist visiting Ayodhya goes back with a special sense of peace, contentment and joy.”

**Uttar Pradesh Chief
Minister Yogi Adityanath**

A Disneyland-type theme park named ‘Ramaland’, A grand temple, an international airport and a slew of projects by the central and state governments are lifting Ayodhya to an entirely new pantheon of cities. The ‘double-engine sarkar’ is in the fifth gear to propel the ancient city into an exclusive list of holiest cities with truly world-class infrastructure and facilities. Read on to discover more!

BY SHASHANK SHEKHAR

The Vatican, Jerusalem, Mecca and Madina are some of the holiest cities in the world and attract hundreds of millions if not billions of faithful every year. The ancient city of Ayodhya, despite being the oldest religious site in the world, has never been able to attain such levels of footfalls and infrastructural development due to continued neglect by successive governments and long-drawn litigations. Now, the road is clear for the construction of the once-demolished temple at Ayodhya. With this, the city of Rama is poised to reclaim its stature on the world map as one of the holiest and grandest cities. The soon-to-be inaugurated grand Ram Mandir will be the fulcrum around which the government has envisaged the ‘Ayodhya Vision 2047.’

There is limited information in the public domain about the specifics of the ‘Ayodhya Vision 2047,’ but media reports indicate that the PM himself is keen on establishing Ayodhya as a world-class city, while keeping its spiritual, religious and historical flavours intact when the country celebrates its 100 years of independence. Ayodhya’s rejuvenation plan encompasses more than 250 projects to improve air, rail and road infrastructure, solid and liquid waste management, and the beautification of ghats and cultural sites, which would help transform the city into a global tourism destination.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has recently apprised the PM about the vision document, which has been created by LEA Associates South Asia Private Limited, along with the Ayodhya Development Authority (ADA). The plan was conceptualized after extensive deliberations with local communities, including priests, seers and prominent citizenry. Calling the rejuvenation of Ayodhya one of his top priorities, the CM said, “The people of the country and the world are eager to see a ‘Divya, Bhavya, Navya Ayodhya’. We have to ensure that every devotee and tourist visiting Ayodhya goes back with a special sense of peace, contentment and joy.”

Here is a rundown of some of the key transformational projects that are either already underway or are expected to come up in the future.





“We are trying to complete the temple in three phases. The first phase will be over by December 2023. The second phase by December 2024 and the third and final phase when the entire complex of 71 acres is completed in 2025.”

Nripendra Misra

Chairman of the construction committee of the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust

A Disneyland-type theme park called ‘Ramaland’

It is difficult to imagine a theme park on Ramayana – one that would rival the Disneylands of the world. That, too, is in the offing. Officially called the ‘Ayodhya Imaginative and Prescient 2047’, the Ramaland, is an ultra-modern theme park and a part of the Ayodhya Rejuvenation Plan. The proposed theme park is speculated to be completed by the end of next year and will attract children and adults alike. “In the spiritual city of Ayodhya, we always wanted to come up with something that caters to people of all age groups. Theme parks were the most viable solution. The move is not only expected to be a major attraction among tourists but will also make Ayodhya a global tourism hotspot,” Mukesh Meshram, Uttar Pradesh’s Principal Secretary, said.

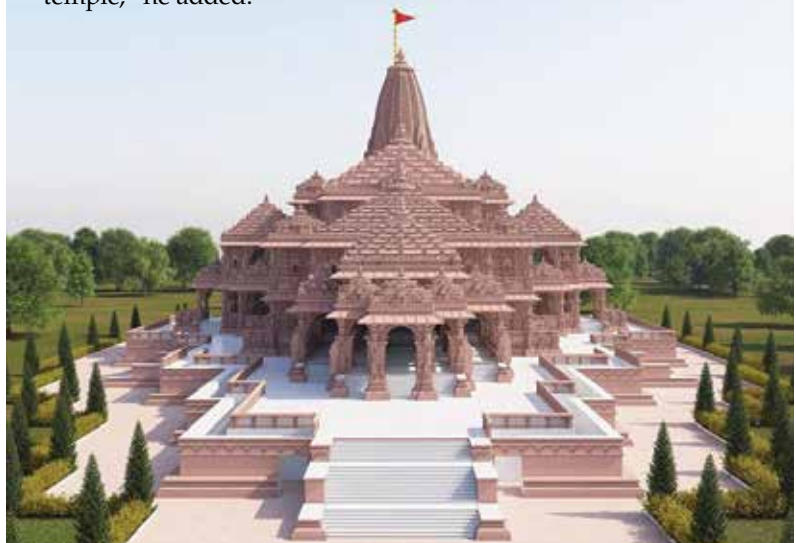
Media reports suggest that the ‘one-of-its-kind’ theme park will be equipped with several entertainment facilities and rides, and also a dedicated section for religious tourists.

The grand Shree Ram Mandir Project

Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, the body responsible for overseeing the construction of the temple, expects the Garbha Griha (the Sanctum Sanctorum) to be completed by September this year, three months prior to the target date of December 2023. Media reports suggest that 70 per cent of the construction is already completed. Chairman of the construction committee of the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust, Nripendra Misra shared crucial details about the temple in a recent interview in a leading English daily. He said, “We are trying to complete the temple in three phases. The first phase will be over by December 2023 when the ground floor will be complete, but not iconography. The second phase by December 2024 when the temple — first and second floors – will be completed. The third and final phase when the entire complex of 71 acres is completed in 2025. I am trying to make the seven temples (around Ram) in the first phase. Perkota (outer perimeter of the temple), pilgrimage facilitation centre, over 2000 toilets are to be completed by December 2023.”

Sharing some insights into the temple’s unique features, Misra said that “the sanctum sanctorum is on the ground floor. This is where the Lord will be in standing pose, 51 inches, roughly 4-5 years in age, on a lotus, with something in a manner that attains the height of 8 feet. Why that is necessary to predict is because work is being done to bring the light being funnelled such that it falls on the Lord’s forehead on the Ram Navmi day. So, experts are (working out the parameters) factoring in the movement of the earth around the sun for 19 years. This will ensure that we can modulate, manually, so that on Ram Navmi day, the sunlight actually falls on the Lord’s forehead at 12 noon. This is being worked out by experts at Central Building Research Institute and the astronomical institute in Pune.”

One of the trustees Dr Anil Mishra said that they were confident that the “sanctum sanctorum will be completed three months before the due date. That’s why we have advanced the deadline from December 2023 to September 2023.” He further shared that a majority of the work for the first phase of the temple was complete. “Only 167 pillars are left to be installed in the temple,” he added.



How these developments will impact regional growth

Eastern Uttar Pradesh, and the larger Purvanchal, is expected to benefit from these large-scale infrastructural developments. The construction of the Ram Mandir is expected to significantly boost religious tourism in Ayodhya. The world's tallest statue of Lord Ram at INR 2,500 crore, a proposed luxury cruise and many other such developments are likely to propel Ayodhya into a league of its own. This will lead to an influx of tourists, creating a ripple effect, driving economic growth and generating new opportunities for various sectors. To accommodate the anticipated surge in tourism, the Ayodhya rejuvenation plan includes extensive infrastructure development. This includes boosting the transportation networks to ensure seamless connectivity.

The hospitality industry, too, stands to gain immensely from the increased number of visitors to Ayodhya. Several leading hotel chains like the IHCL have already expressed interest in opening multiple hotels in the city in the coming years. Speaking to a leading newspaper, Puneet Chhatwal, MD & CEO of IHCL, said: "We have signed for two properties, one under Vivanta and the other under Ginger brands, these would take some 24-36 months to complete." With a few others taking the lead, it is expected that others will follow suit and the city will witness the construction of new hotels, resorts, guesthouses, and other accommodation options to cater to the growing demand for lodging. Existing hotels and eateries are likely to expand and upgrade their facilities to provide enhanced services to tourists. This growth will create employment opportunities and drive economic activities in Ayodhya and its surrounding areas.

Ajay Bakaya, Director, Sarovar Hotels has said his group will be the first to have a branded hotel in the city, expected to open later this year. Branded accommodation is expected to instil greater confidence in the travelling public, especially from the well-heeled pilgrims.



An international brownfield airport

The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has begun the construction of the Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram International Airport in Faizabad. The airstrip at Faizabad is being upgraded, and the airport will be spread across 821 acres. AAI has planned the extension of the runway, taxiway and domestic terminal building, among other upgrades. The domestic terminal building will be developed to cater to 300 passengers per hour. We understand that the international airport will be developed in a staggered manner and will be designed to accommodate large aircraft like Boeing 777s. The airport, too, will reflect the local cultural ethos, and the terminals will reportedly feature shikharas, pictorially displaying key events of the epic tale Ramayana. The domestic airport will start operations by the end of 2023.



Sarovar Portico Ayodhya, scheduled to open in Q4 2023, is the only branded hotel to enjoy close proximity to Ram Mandir.

The surge in tourism will also benefit local businesses and artisans. The demand for religious and cultural artefacts, souvenirs, and handicrafts is expected to increase, creating a market for local artisans and craftsmen. Small-scale businesses such as restaurants, shops, and tour operators will witness a boost in their customer base, thereby contributing to the local economy.

These developments are likely to have a direct bearing on the employment generation, across various sectors, including construction, tourism, hospitality, transportation, and retail. The need for skilled professionals in these industries will increase, leading to the development of skill training programs and employment opportunities for the local population. This will not only contribute to the economic growth of Ayodhya but also improve the standard of living for its residents.

Why Ayodhya matters!

Since the beginning of human civilization, religious centres have been the cradle of cultures and societies. From ancient Egypt to Babylon, these centres have played a critical role in shaping societies and ensuring civilizational continuity. Ayodhya is a part of India's collective conscience. It is part of India's ancient history and that alone should be reason enough to protect and nurture it for future generations. No country can look ahead without embracing and cherishing its past. Add to that, the economic opportunities that lie untapped, Ayodhya's resurrection makes all the more sense! **Di**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shashank Shekhar is a freelance journalist, a regular contributor to Destination India.

WE NEED TO CREATE A TRANSPARENT ROAD MAP FOR MANAGING OUR CURRENCY

After the withdrawal of ₹1000 and ₹500 notes, we introduced the 2000 rupee note; even then there was speculation that this new big note may not last long enough. We need a more transparent and reliable mechanism in line with our aspiration of being a 5 trillion economy.



by VIPIN MALIK

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in a Press Release (19 May 2023) has declared that 2000 denomination banknotes will be withdrawn from circulation, citing the reasons as “89% of the ₹2000 denomination banknotes were issued prior to March 2017 and are at the end of their estimated lifespan of 4-5 years. The total value of these banknotes in circulation has declined from ₹6.73 lakh crore at its peak as on March 31, 2018 (37.3% of notes in circulation) to ₹3.62

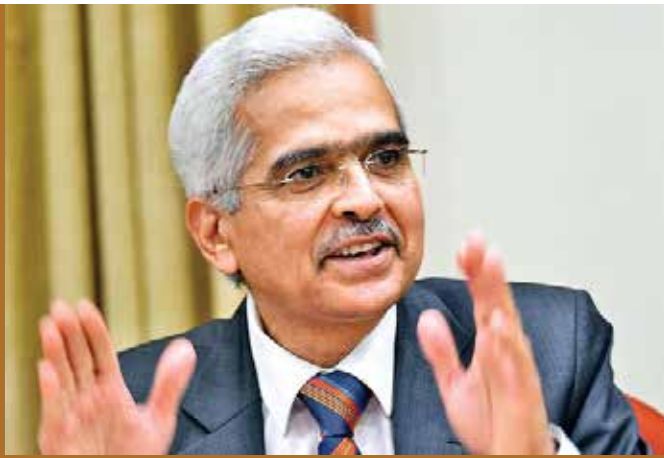
lakh crore constituting only 10.8% of notes in circulation on March 31, 2023. It has also been observed that this denomination is not commonly used for transactions.” Additionally, the RBI referred to the “Clean Note Policy” that was introduced in 1999, according to which banks and financial institutions are required to withdraw unfit/damaged notes from circulation and replace them with new ones.

The introduction of the ₹2000 notes after the demonetization exercise that took place in November 2016, and the subsequent ban of ₹500 and ₹1000 notes and now the repeal of the ₹2000 notes seems to impose more cost than gains. At that time, too, the logic of introducing even higher denomination notes (₹2000) than ₹1000 was not understood properly, since the objective was to abolish higher denomination notes only which are susceptible for parallel economy.

Some retail outlets, petrol stations, medical shops were hesitant to accept ₹2000 notes after the RBI declaration according to media reports (especially petrol pumps). For instance, according to the All-India Petroleum Dealers Association, “The digital payments, which used to be 40 per cent of our daily sales, have suddenly gone down to 10 per cent of daily sales, and our cash sales have increased dramatically, as customers are desperately trying to use ₹2,000, which will again create trouble for us with income tax authorities.”

Addressing concerns about the specifics of note exchange and deposit figures, even the RBI Governor has stated that reconciling the data was challenging due to overlap in reporting.

The withdrawal of the ₹2000 may have certain impact on cash-based businesses like high-value real estate transactions, gems and jewellery, MSME and other informal sectors. These businesses are likely to face cash shortages and could also face problems in accepting cash payments.



“ ₹2000 notes fulfilled its purpose five years ago, was time to take it out. In our surveys we found out that ₹2,000 notes were not being used at all... It was being used, but not commonly used. Any high-denomination currency remaining in the system could have led to other collateral issues. Therefore, we took this decision.”

Shaktikanta Das, RBI Governor


Despite the assurance and explanation by the RBI that the withdrawal of ₹2000 note is a move towards the “clean note policy”, such recurring repeal of banknotes might pose certain uncertainty in banking systems and particularly in currencies of higher denominations. A better policy option might be to come out towards a future roadmap in a clear manner to maintain confidence on currencies and the banking system, that will also be consistent with India’s objective of obtaining \$5 trillion economy.

For instance, Japan is a \$4.4 trillion economy, at the same time, Japan is heavily-cash based economy. With digital payments accounting for around 36 percent of the private consumption expenditure in 2022, cash is still considered king in the country. Nevertheless, a Nikkei report indicates citing data from the Bank of Japan, the Japan Consumer Credit Association, and the Payments Japan Association, that cashless purchases hit 111 trillion yen (\$838 billion U.S.) in 2022. There are many countries exploring Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) and India has also started on a pilot basis. With an objective of \$5 trillion economy, at the same time with a substantial MSME sector heavily dependent on cash transactions we need a balancing act, hence a need for sequential movement, with a clarity of approaching the path towards \$5 trillion economy.

According to a column by Amit Kapoor, in ET (27 April 2022) “In India, 99.7% of the enterprises are in the unorganized sector, of which two-thirds do not have registration anywhere. A significant fraction of these unorganized firms falls in the “micro” category of the MSME sector comprising owner-managed firms, most of which operate with less than five workers.” Despite witnessing rapid economic growth over the last two decades, 90% of workers in India have remained informally employed, producing about half of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Further, according to an analysis by the Azim Premji University



titled “State Of Working India 2021 – One Year of Covid-19”, highlighted that 34.1% of those who were permanently salaried employees in 2019 were self-employed in 2020 owing to the pandemic and 9.8% of permanently salaried employees became casual or daily wage workers. This article has also provided details about that actually means as unorganised sectors, and their contribution to the GDP. Also, an article New Indian Express titled as “What is it that ails our informal sector?”(May 2020) has highlighted that “Let us dissect the problems of the informal sector. They effectively constitute 90% of the workforce and about 50% of the national product. As per Government of India statistics, the unorganised sector contributes almost 50% of the total GDP.” 

The need of the hour is clearly towards understanding that cash will continue to dominate, or at least drive a considerable part of the economy. And, that giving greater credibility and reliability to currency notes is sacrosanct. The more transparent a roadmap we create, better we build a resilient eco-system as we move towards our goal of a 5 trillion economy.

– Editor.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vipin Malik, Chairman, Infometrics Ratings, served on Boards of Reserve Bank of India and Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran

Private Limited, Canara Bank, J&K Bank, etc. Author of several well-received books and several articles. He appears often on television debates on economy issues.

INDIGO UPS THE ANTE WITH 500 AIRBUS ORDER

INDIA ON HIGH GROWTH PATH TOWARDS INCREASING ITS AIR TRANSPORT BANDWIDTH



Signing the agreement for 500 additional aircraft at the Paris Air Show.

It is that crucial time when air transport needs to be recognised as essential mode of travel, just as roads and railways. We quote extensively from an exclusive report shared by CAPA India, and build the larger narrative for air transport growth in the country.

by NAVIN BERRY

At a joint press conference at the Paris Air Show, along with Airbus, IndiGo announced a firm order for 500 A320 family aircraft. In terms of volume, this is the largest order for commercial aircraft ever placed in global aviation. Coming as it does just four months after Air India set the previous record, with an order for 470 aircraft, it has clearly cemented India's position as the next growth engine of global aviation. Between these orders and IndiGo's existing backlog, these two carriers alone have over 1450 aircraft on order, strengthening the growing optimism about the Indian market.

Indigo's massive order placement was in stark contrast with the one placed recently by Air India. While the latter became a star-studded PR event, with PM Macron and President Biden joining in the celebration, along with PM Modi, welcoming the Air India order with both Boeing and Airbus, the Indigo affair was totally subdued. Perhaps, because this is how the Indigo promoter Rahul Bhatia prefers it to be. Known to be reticent and publicity shy, this is how Indigo owner has grown over the last decade and half; a quiet and unassuming demeanour, for all his success and growth!

Indigo's order will position the airline to create routes as far as Eastern Europe. But not beyond. And here is where the big question remains. Will Indigo remain a one aircraft fleet, and if so, for how long? Sooner than later, it will need to go wide body, and also go for the truly long haul. But in the meanwhile, it has preferred a code share with Turkish, with one stop flights across selected Turkish destinations. Opinion is divided and Rahul Bhatia will need to take a call!

According to CAPA India, overall, there are good reasons for this positive outlook. Because as of today, the market remains highly under-penetrated. The total commercial Indian fleet of fewer than 700 aircraft is smaller than some of the world's largest individual airlines.

"Meanwhile, traffic recovery in India post-COVID has been amongst the strongest in the world; the airline market is now 100% privately-operated following the divestment of Air India; the development of airport infrastructure is continuing and apace; and economic regulation is maturing. India has long shown promise, but has struggled to realise its potential. It may finally be set to take its place as the global aviation market of the 21st century", said a CAPA report exclusively shared with Destination India.

"The aircraft order book for Indian carriers now stands at around 1520 (excluding for now the SpiceJet and Go First orders, which are assumed to be in suspense). The number of aircraft on order is now more than double the fleet count as at 31-Mar-2023, the highest ratio of aircraft on-order to aircraft in-service of any major market in the world. And there will be more to come. Akasa is reportedly expected to place an order in the coming months for 200 aircraft, or possibly higher," says the CAPA report.

With around half of Air India's order expected to be consumed by replacement of existing aircraft, the carrier will need to start preparing for its growth requirements beyond 2030. As a result, a further



significant order could be expected from Air India in around FY2026. And while IndiGo may have its fleet plan in place till 2035, it too will likely need to place another mega-order within the next five years or so. Should Go First and SpiceJet be successful in achieving financial stability, their existing orders (and possibly new ones) will also need to be considered.

Given the immense potential that exists, these current and expected orders are not unreasonable. And in time to come, we expect to see an increasing and much-needed focus on widebody equipment. The market has the potential to support rapid demand growth on short, medium and long-haul routes for decades to come, said Kapil Kaul, CEO and director, CAPA India.

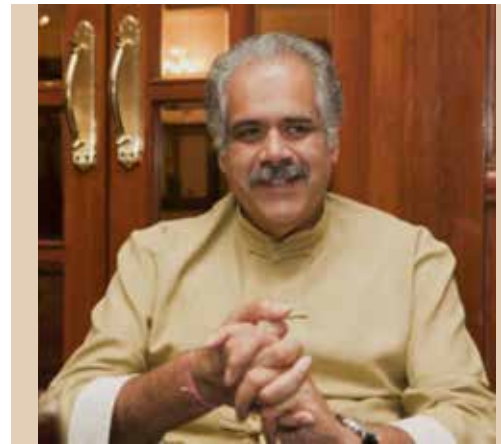
The fact that India now has two well-capitalised carriers that have the ability and willingness to take significant bets on the potential of this market, augurs well for the stable, long-term growth of Indian aviation.

Managing growth at this rate will come with its own challenges, for individual airlines, for the ecosystem and for the government. But the orders placed by Indian carriers in 2023 have certainly drawn the world's attention to what is happening in Indian aviation. And we have as yet barely scratched the surface of what is possible. There have been some foreign carriers who have evinced keen interest in investing in the Indian market, such as Qatar Airways, which has repeatedly expressed confidence in the growth and potential of India. Perhaps, the time has come, even more strongly, for such an expression of Interest.


There is also the potential of India creating hubs in air transport, becoming a bridge between East and the West. We have very successful hubs on both sides, namely Bangkok and Singapore in the East and Dubai and ME in the West. India can make a kick start with the growing infrastructure coming up at Delhi's IGIA, not to mention the Greater Noida airport that is said to be mulling on a strategy to create hubs.

But all this may not be enough. Are we going for a duopoly in the Indian skies, meaning just two major carriers. Is that a healthy trend into the future? For a size of India, would we need some five or six carriers, of varying descriptions. How will this come around? For one, some of the existing 'other' carriers that are not doing too well, may find new suitors, giving rise to some long-term sustainability. Go First is said to be in a revival mode, with a new tranche of Rs. 425 crores from its existing lenders. Spicejet will not just go down, Ajay Singh has strong survival instincts and will look around for partners, if he not doing so already. Evaluations can always hinder progress in such situations.

Having said this, it is big time for air transport. Please note we prefer not to call it civil aviation. And, that is for a good reason. It is time the country planners not only realised but also put into place



Indigo's massive order placement was in stark contrast with the one placed recently by Air India. The Indigo affair was totally subdued. Perhaps, because this is how the Indigo promoter Rahul Bhatia prefers it to be. Known to be reticent and publicity shy, this is how Indigo owner has grown over the last decade and half; a quiet and unassuming demeanour, for all his success and growth!

a better recognition of 'civil aviation' as essential air transport, just as essential as railways and roads. For this, a name change can possibly be a first step. We have renamed a few ministries keeping in mind our growing understanding of how these would work? Like our ministry of corporate affairs, for instance. To shed the elitist tag, we need a new outlook, best ushered in its name change. 

AT HOME WITH HIMSELF AND HIS MANY WORLDS: AMAN NATH

IN CONVERSATION WITH NAVIN BERRY



For friends of over 40 years, to meet formally is a challenge: where does one draw the fine line between structuring a story and meandering into recollections of growing up in our respective fields over the last many decades. Where does the buck stop? Sifting through more than an hour and half of conversation, putting together an enigmatic personality such as Aman Nath, here is a condensed version of what we were able to discover is happening to Indian hospitality and tourism, among his other passions. Read on.

To begin our conversation, I am afraid I must resort to a cliché: You are surely a man of many parts, but how do you see yourself primarily – a business man, a hotelier, an author, a poet, an architect, or a traveller, or simply as a detached faqir? How do you shift gears from one role to another and seem equally passionate under whichever hat you wear?

I believe that whatever one does one must do it passionately, or just not do it. I am saying this to you, because I know you follow the same instinct and persuasion. When you got into the business of travel-trade exhibitions, you

◀ (Left) I enjoy anonymity, so I went disguised as a Patel to do farming near Jodhpur. But their daughter Googled and the incognito look was exposed! They took me to their temple and treated me more special, says Aman Nath.



(Clockwise) At his book presentation to PM Modi with Cyrus and Shapoor Pallonji Mistry and Feroze Khan of Mughal-e-Azam.

After the presentation of the Legion d'Honneur with French Ambassador Emmanuel Lenain.

Working topless with masons at Tijara to also get Vitamin D!



did it to the hilt, and there was nobody better than you, because you were driven by passion. When other people came in, you just walked out of it and never looked back.

We are all many many things rolled into one, and if every part of us can slide into the other, with an effortless ease, then we have integrated our interests with our need for a livelihood. Creativity is all one and the same thing when it is driven by someone who believes in this renaissance way of living a life.

But Neemrana was surely a very daunting pathbreaker which needed guts

Yes, the first time I saw Neemrana, I knew it was going to be utterly magical. Nobody else believed this to be true, but to me it did not matter. Today if you ask me, did I evaluate it in terms of returns – no, I never did. The thought didn't even remotely occur to me, when it was purchased. Honestly, I didn't even have a concept of what would become of it. But I knew it wouldn't be run of the mill.

I was born into hardworking, entrepreneurial business family who were refugees from Lahore. So I must have an intuitive survival and business sense. But as a child I would never count the coins. Our parents made the home seem bounteous even when they were setting up industry from a zero – or actually a minus, because they paid back their pre-Partition loans. As an adult too, I have never looked at the bottom line. With persistent hard work, it naturally all keeps adding up, instinctively – but with an alert sixth sense, I must add.

Also, I live totally in the present. I am not a dreamer of past grandeur

“ I guess I must have a very strong, intuitive business sense. I have never sought advice from consultants who haven't done what I am about to do. Why put more blind faith into other people than yourself who can clearly see the road? ”

and lost opportunities. If you have an idea you must mould it into reality right away. I'd wanted to do a place where I could write books and that was it. This was the time everybody was doing farmhouses because they had funds for a second home. You also did one, remember? I never thought I had the money to do a

farmhouse because it would be just wasteful for me. I was not going to do agriculture and I was not going to make a fancy house to call people to party because I had 'arrived'! I still haven't arrived in that sense. But my forward direction was always very clear Whatever I would do, would be on my own steam and within my own means, never forsaking passion. I guess I am a bit different from those corporates who like to lean on consultants and

loans and are lazy on their original thinking, inventiveness and drive.

So, whatever you did with the first Neemrana, how many more times were you able to evoke the same feeling of the joy of waking up the ruins like fairytale romances?

For me, it is totally exhilarating to see a gorgeous ruin and imagine how it must have been. Or how it will be with today's advances in materials and technology. We can make mediaeval ruins much better than they ever were. For me, a ruin is perhaps like an unopened carton of the best labels for an alcoholic. Ha ha.

Neemrana has done some 32 projects all over India, but the core of this feeling was actually pre-Neemrana. The idea of the hotel was still to be born, two years later in 1986.

What is this sensibility that you have brought to hospitality?

It is you who should tell me because you have experienced it from the outside! You see my house where we are sitting and you see the hotels – you can spot that there is a thread, a continuity. I did not ever begin with the idea to make a hotel. I saw the splendid Neemrana ruins, out of which I saw very clearly that I could build something romantic, a sort of fairytale thing when you see a light on the hill and go in to be welcomed with a hot soup. My fantasy, was to only do up a part of the ruin, with perhaps a room for myself where I needed to stay and wake up while the restoration of Neemrana was ongoing. Malabar Mahal was created. Then we made one for OP and Lekha

as they came infrequently and almost never stayed overnight. I have a bad sense of time – since I have a heightened sense of space and my mind never sleeps, one thought or action just leads to another, and there could be no stopping in the waking up of the entire Neemrana Fort-Palace.

But you had never had a hotel background. And it never done a hotel before?

I don't think that a pioneer gets to do something, even before it's been done! The Tatas had not done steel and you hadn't published a magazine, but one learns the ropes more willingly on the job than when they are taught to us. Certainly, nobody had done a hotel in my family. And even now I don't think of myself as a hotelier, perhaps an accidental one! For which reason, I had called Neemrana a 'non-hotel' hotel, when we began. Because it was never built to be a hotel. Its original purpose was to keep people out and now we were to welcome them in. Of course, I did not realise how complicated it would be to run the kind of hotels that Neemrana went on to create. But our young team headed by our CEO Sonavi Kaicker, have contemporised many of the hotel operations which makes us a heritage hotel chain with one of the most modern and systematic ways of working behind the scene. Today when we employ people, they are completely lost and say "Oh God, this is a city", but then they get their bearings eventually, as do our guests.

At least to my larger understanding, there would be exceptions, but heritage hotels, the palace or the fort, already existed. These came out of some tangible assets that already existed. In your case, the opposite is true! Most times, there was nothing to behold...

The heritage hotels you are talking about and the people that you and I know, were born into those palaces. Whether they got the idea to



“ I felt this joy for the first time at the Khohar Haveli in Haryana, just an hour's drive from Delhi, towards Sohna. That was the first ruin that I acquired for Rs.30,000, which was considered some sort of money in 1984. Even then, people just labelled me crazy. ‘What are you going to do with this?’ they all asked. And so I set to work and made it a very simple and stylish dwelling which appeared in Architectural Digest and where the jet-set of India and the world came, but only as friends.”

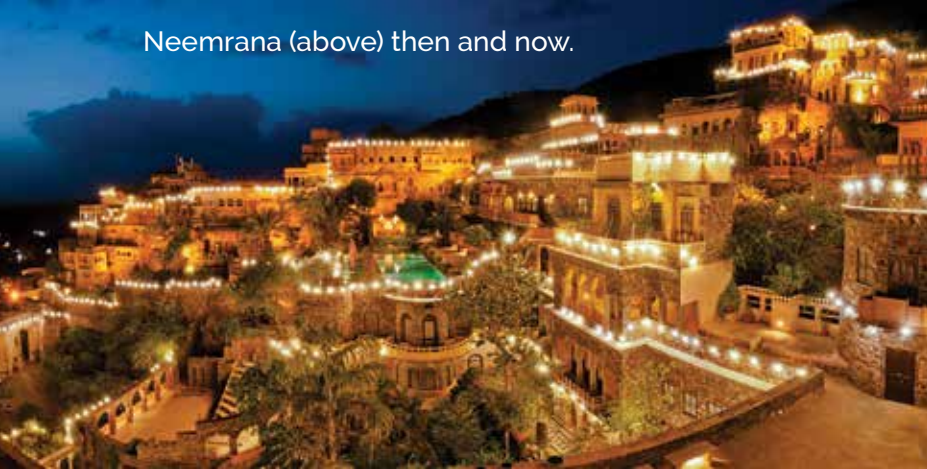


Tijara Fort (above) then and now.



14th century Hill Fort
Kesroli, 10 kms from Alwar.

Neemrana (above) then and now.



commercialise them into hotels early or late, or after seeing Neemrana, which gave them the courage, I can't say. But they were to the manor born. I may have woken many ruins but none is my home. I live on the road, so to say – between places!

They were 'to the manor born', yes, so?

You and I are refugees, I am not re-creating any past, because, our past was in Lahore. But I am touching a broader, grander history.

Most of heritage hotels, as far as I know, were not in ruins when they were picked up to become hotels.

No, they were not. Because they were lived in. But the royalty and nobility converted and extended them for this changed end-use for hospitality. Some were converted on scanty budgets but big on taste, and many of them with big money but overdone.

The thing that alarms people the most about Neemrana Hotels is their taste and simplicity. Not one loan was ever taken. Nobody believes this. Money is not a substitute for perseverance. Many people wrongly think it is all about money but that is a *nouveau riche* idea. So, we have often met big business people saying, we will give you 500 crores. Together, we will build this and that. But why would anybody take 500 crores if they do not want to get buried under heavy loans and incumbrances? Not to mention all the kind of scandals we continue hearing about big money. So, the real story about Neemrana is that it is a very hands on. I have enjoyed doing the architecture, the gardens, finding novel solutions for the plumbing and carpentry. I enjoy everything, you know, and I am still free to do what I want to really do and to produce all the books I managed to do.

Tell us about Aman the author!

I have written some 18 books – some for bread and butter – but some seminal ones too. I was asked to do the centenary book of the Tatas. I later gathered that they had interviewed nine people for the book. Many

“ **Neemrana was built in 14 tiers across a hill, over 560 years. How many hotels are that old or so sprawling? It is sheer madness. But rooted in a country like India, which is a continuously alive civilisation, we need to offer a product which defies an easy description. The advantage of working in India is that we can work in the same traditions where the language of architecture and the idiom, the materials and design traditions are still alive.** ”

of them were big time editors of business magazines. But Tatas found they were just looking into facts, figures of industry. They did not have the vision or the bandwidth to see the Tatas, 360 degrees.

Would this Tata book be another case study of passion carried forward. So maybe, that is what inspired you and inspired them.

They insisted and called me to Mumbai when I had no intention or time to do the book. We talked, and I just said to them, you are so fabulous that you do not see yourself from a distance. I am going to do two pages of how I see it for you, then you can get someone to do it.

And some of your other books?

After that, I did one for Cyrus Mistry and 150



Aman :

Apart from the admiration for this wonderful book, I have immensely enjoyed knowing you and interacting with you in the course of your authoring this lovely piece of history.

Ratan Tata
April 25, 2005

years of Shapoorji Pallonji. They wanted the same size and feel. It is also a history of their group. Before this I had done the book that the President of India gives to every visiting head of state.

What is the title?

Dome Over India. That is a substantial book reversing many notions of colonial history. When President Narayanan was the incumbent, his daughter Chitra called me to a family lunch – her father’s birthday in October. After an intimate meal with only about eight people, the President walked me into the garden, put his arm around my shoulder and said, ‘I want to ask you a favour’. I said, you are the President of India and you want to ask me a favour? He smiled, “Yes, I want you to do a book for me.” Because he had seen the Jaipur book, which is considered a legend among large format books because it has sold 35,000 copies and Christie’s picked it up to distribute it among their first Indian books. And it still goes on. So, I said, but aren’t you retiring now? He said, yes. Then I was commissioned in January 2002 when he was to retire in September. There were eight months left. It was crazy to research, write, design and produce a book in six months – to then print it in two! The President said he would support me on everything, which he did. So, if I wanted a photograph from Karnataka, they would ring up from Rashtrapati Bhawan and the next day the collector asked the Superintendent of Police to get it shot and it would arrive magically, because it was the President who was asking. Of all my books that I have done, the most amazing reviews that I got were for that book.

For the Dome over India?

Yes. From the Mackintosh Institute of Architects and the British Journal

◀ (Left) Aman Nath signing the book and Ratan Tata’s note to him.

“ I felt that the India and the Tata stories are intermingled, like the first locomotive, the first cosmetic company, the first hotel, the first in so many things for India – so it should be a parallel story. When I sent the two pages, the Tatas said to me, no, no, you must do the book, because nobody else can do justice to it. And it became the best corporate book anyone had seen!”

of Architects saying that a book like this could no longer be produced in England...that my Indian viewpoint was truly justified. And when I went there to talk about the book, the Lutyens Trust was excited that a book of this scope and dimension had come out. But little did the English realize that much of it was not favourable to Lutyens or to them. Lutyens was more of an imperialist, which he was allowed to be, but he was talking down to the Indians, the craftspeople and everyone. I have no particular like or dislike for any Englishman, but the great hero of what we refer to as New Delhi was Lord Hardinge, not Lutyens.

So, all this talk of a Lutyens’ Bungalow Zone?

Absolute rubbish! The concept didn’t exist then, he has not even made one bungalow in what we wrongly call The Lutyens Bungalow Zone. How silly is that? When Emperor George V and Queen Mary were asked if their new capital could be called Georgegarh or Marybad, they humbly suggested New Delhi. They would be horrified how we’ve called it now. Robert Torr Russell made some 4,000 bungalows, Connaught Place, Eastern and Western Court, Safdarjung Airport – but no one has heard of him.

How did this aberration come about?

We just do not know our own history. A man who neither chose the site where Rashtrapati Bhawan is built, nor the materials, neither the Indianised designs in which it was raised. He didn’t want to evoke the Mughal gardens but a natural British one nor plant Indian trees – so everything he said, it got a solid, no, no from Hardinge who pushed him to agree to an ‘Indian’ brief, because he said he was the client, as Hardinge represented the King. And he made Lutyens change his views on everything. So, who should claim the credit? The designer who did not have his say, or the client who had insisted with a detailed brief that his was the last word?



◀ (Left) President K R Narayanan releasing Aman Nath's book on the Rashtrapati Bhawan.

But more on the books' side, tell us about the legendary Jaipur one.

The Jaipur book, which I did it for India Book House. They had wanted a quick book, a selling book for Rs. 400. I met with them, but I said you have got something so fabulous as a subject with a captive tourist city audience and beyond, I want to do it my way. I like others not to spoil my vision once they have commissioned me. It is no point getting bullied into mediocrity. But Padmini Mirchandani of India Book House and Meera Ahuja became the best support that Indian publishing could find in our times.

Where does your obsessive restoration fit into your scheme of things?

My work is with unlisted buildings, not with State or National treasures. In India, there was zero consciousness of that. Now since Neemrana have done more restoration than any other private sector entity in heritage tourism, then at least this change is something that has happened in my life.

Look at the difference Neemrana made – and to how many lives; I mean, how many masons, how many carpenters, how many people in how many parts of India? That for me is the joy of actually doing something. My understanding or lesson is that history is also that which lasts with its physical architectural symbols into posterity.

So, you are seeing yourself in this sense as a historian?

I suppose. But the thing is that one will at least have left behind something concrete to remember, that will last and outlive us. If one wants a study of tourism in India, they can look at all your back issues of Destination India. They are a whole physical body of work in themselves. I am talking of posterity now. I think the study of history gave me a very heightened consciousness of posterity – of doing things which survive beyond us.

So, what exactly are you doing when you interpret this history?

When I do a book, I guess it is my co-mingling of a new perspective in words and pictures from my unique vantage point in history, my education, my exposure to correct that which had been falsely recorded.

Even the House of Tatas is documentation of a serious kind!

Certainly, I mean, we can laugh and chat together, but when you read such books, it is like what Ratan Tata wrote: it is considered the best corporate book in the world. Few can imagine that a book like this can

be written. And even the Tatas, when the book came out, it was done in Singapore, they got the first copy. I was in Delhi. Dr. Irani called me and said, Mr. Aman Nath, what have you done? So, I thought to myself, oh dear, I hope the cover isn't printed upside down. I thought maybe I have blundered somewhere. I said, Sir, I haven't seen the book yet. I have no idea, is something the matter? He said, no, what have you made of the Tatas? We just stood around the book in silence, bewildered by what you have produced. So, I said, well, you must be very modest to not know what you are.

Tell me about Aman the poet, the faqir?

In school I was only known as an artist academic, athelete. In college, I became even better known as a poet. I won the annual literary prize in St. Stephen's for three out of five years. But I was stuck with studying in history: in life also, I suppose I chose to remain stuck with history! now I don't mind that the Principal could not transfer me to study English Honours.

I still write whenever I want. I have got hundreds of my poems. When people look at them and tell me how competent they are, I say: Why should they be incompetent? I mean, poetry has been my first thing, but it remains private. Poets understand subconsciously what passes their times. Poetry teaches submission to the ways of the cosmos, surrender to love. It is about detachment and arrival into another space – a void which is a plenitude. I was privileged to feel this as an adolescent.

“Lutyens was not important in the England of that time. It is only more recently that his family and descendants made something out of him with books and exhibitions. He had no sensible idea about what he was supposed to do and if Hardinge was not telling him what he should do, he would have replicated the Church of Rome on Raisina Hill. He had even made drawings!”

And, Aman the Mentor

I am a learner, more than a guru! There are many, many people, who are managing the operations of our hotels. But the dedicated team that does restoration/construction, or their successors, have been with us from some 43 years. Now I can instruct them on the phone and things happen – and there is also WhatsApp video for support. I have been asked to lecture in more than 50 architecture colleges and I find it amusing when they insist please come and talk, come and talk. I keep telling them, I am not even an architect but they, they still introduce me with: We are very honoured to have architect Aman!



View from one of the rooms at Neemrana's Three Waters.



Dive into blissful beaths at Neemrana's Three Waters.

Is there an architect in you also?

Well, if you build continuously for some 40 plus years now, you are better off than the five years of education that students get. But building a shelter for survival must be an instinctive act too.

Is this not daunting, somehow?

People do ask, but how do you have the courage to do these projects? I think that it is about one's aptitude and the active volition. It's about changing the mindsets of people around you. Not just about ruins but altering the mindset of the travellers too which Neemrana has done. People used to go to Thailand and Singapore for weddings. We had 90 weddings across our hotels last year; the best and the most extraordinary weddings. Who would have thought that you could buy a property for a few lakhs and earn more than 40 lakhs a day from it! This has given me the joy of a lot of spontaneous effort, but it also needed an undaunting vision. You either have it or you don't have it. There are people who are ready to chicken out of every situation.

And, the Indian tourism scene, what's trending?

What happened that in the early years when India opened to tourism, we were trying to present a sort of manicured – pedicured India where people can come and put their foot on a place and eat with silver forks and knives. Because people were terrified of India as the country where you would get malaria, or other epidemics. We were out to tell the world that, oh, we are almost like you, so that they could come, could travel, see, eat food here, fly our airlines and not think of death. You could not drink here easily – water or alcohol. I am talking of the sixties! So, that mindset stayed too long, which India and the world eventually changed with time. Tourism today



The facade of Neemrana's Three Waters.

“ Consultants and executives who study the subject academically in fancy institutions and know not what tourism is about, can take a break. Because they are not alive or sensitive to being Indian. They are still in the colonial psyche mode. Why are we priding ourselves in serving some exotic French pudding, or croissants when the real thing is available in every bistro of France – where it is so much better. Let us stick to our lachha parantha and malpuas.”

is all about people wanting to see the difference. Today we are promoting rickshaw rides and street food.

I don't want to take any brand names here but many of them build what their brands abroad demands of them. When you wake up in many such hotels, you don't know where you are. You could be anywhere. It is the same off-white bed and off-white walls with just any painting on the wall. All that is pleasant and efficient, the bathroom too looks the same. It is that aseptic and

sanitized India that is presented.

And tourism was also so busy hiding the real India from the world for too long. People wanted to see the real thing. Neemrana came at that juncture. I have had people come from the fanciest hotels and say, they had been promised we would never see poverty anywhere. I asked, why are you travelling? I mean, why would an American come to India and hope to never see poverty? So, they would come with blinkers on, to see an artificial India?

But soon they realised that India is a very happy place. It is not miserable. Like they could be rich and equally miserable. As Dominique Lapierre used to say: If you want to see real happiness go to the City of



Doing yoga at Neemrana.

Joy, where in a slum, there is more joy than there is in Beverly Hills.

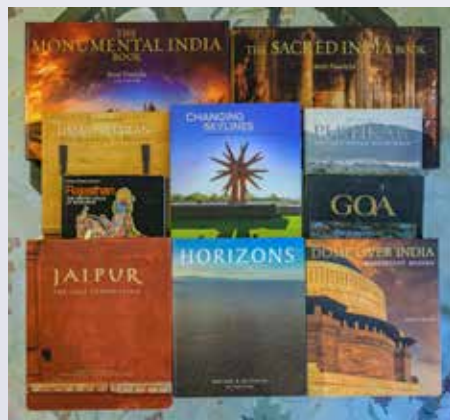
I think Neemrana has broken that barrier to the third degree of tourism where you could go into real India in an unashamed way. And we cannot put blinkers on travelling people's eyes anyway, so that they see only selectively. They must see all and then chose to retain what was memorable for them. Some 300 people work for us in Neemrana. Guests now go and see their houses with joy. Our people's lifestyles have changed. They have double storeyed places which they rent. Their kids have gone to colleges. That for me is the real joy that you formed the people who carried your brand to enviable heights! We kept all our team through Covid.

So, how do you see the Indian narrative going forward?

Now that we have understood that all of India can be a carnival, a continuous circus, where any Fellini can randomly place his camera and shoot living magic, our innocence in the field of tourism, is gone. Indian tourism needs to work intuitively from the heart. Consultants and executives who study the subject academically in fancy institutions but know not what tourism is about, can take a break. Because they are not alive or sensitive to being Indian. They are still in the colonial psyche mode.

Why are we priding ourselves in serving some exotic French pudding, or *croissants* when the real thing is available in every bistro of France – where it is so much better. Let us stick to our *lachha parantha* and *malpuas*, our *romali roti* and *puris*.

So, I think the pride in being Indian is now manifest even in things such as our food - people are pulling out, like the recent menus of millets and choicest Indian cuisines that one had never heard about before. You have seen how much we have swung the Indian way. Although my daughter Aadya Nath is studying hoteliering in Switzerland, I hope



“ I think the real story is that the historians of the past, whoever wrote our textbooks, knew a certain amount. They could only manufacture their story from that raw material. Now we have got so much more research and so much more knowledge. So, if there is a new narrative coming out of it, it is fantastic! India's highways are now flying us and our growing air connectivity will bring the world to hitherto unknown destinations within India.”




Walking the ramp for Khushii's charity with Rekha Purie.

it gives her new eyes on India, not just more complexes like the students who come back only to replicate the West.

What would be the one or two factors you think, which are making India swing the other way now?

The India of today is already being seen as bold and brave. It needs guts to do the kind of things this government has done today. When you travel anywhere in the world, you are so much better received as an Indian than you ever were. And within India, the pride of being Indian, this act of digging up the names of all the freedom fighters – think of all the Amrit Mahotsav families, how proud they are that they had an ancestor who fought for the country and is valued for by the citizens.

Those millions of innocent smiles frozen in private discoveries, is where our future is headed. 

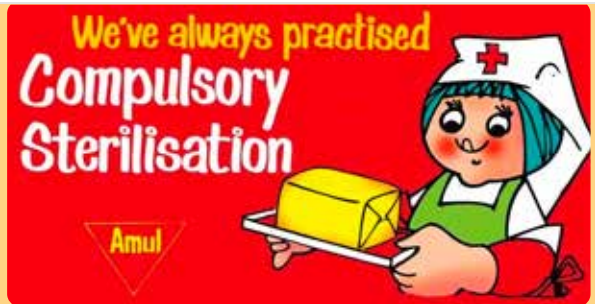
ADVERTISING THAT RECORDS A HISTORY OF OUR TIMES



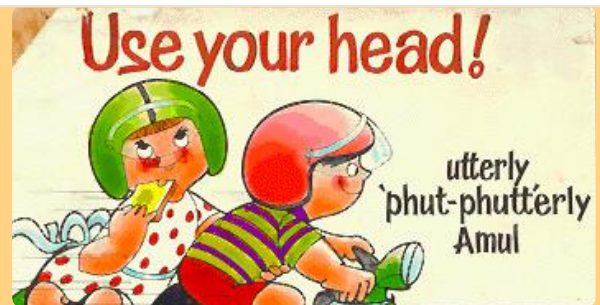
Sylvester daCunha, the creator of the Amul brand campaign featuring its iconic 'Amul girl' mascot, passed away in Mumbai. "Along with the legendary Verghese Kurien, it was Sylvester daCunha who had initiated our iconic topical campaign in 1966, which is one of the longest continuously running advertising campaigns in the world," Pavan Singh, General Manager - Marketing at Amul India, said.



1970s



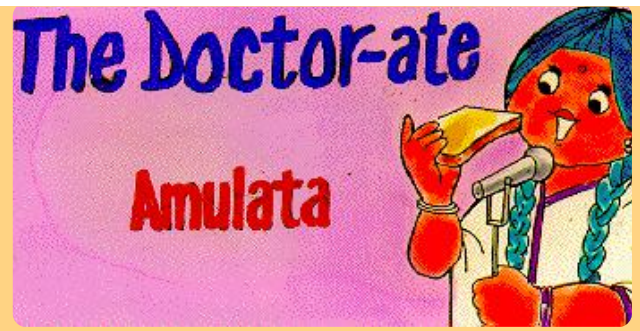
1976: Amul pokes fun at the sterilisation drives conducted during the national Emergency



1976: Helmets are made compulsory in Bombay



1978: Dr. Subhash Mukhopadhyay becomes the first physician in India (and second in the world) to perform in-vitro fertilization resulting in a test tube baby "Durga"



1979: Lata Mangeskar is awarded an honorary doctorate for her contribution to music

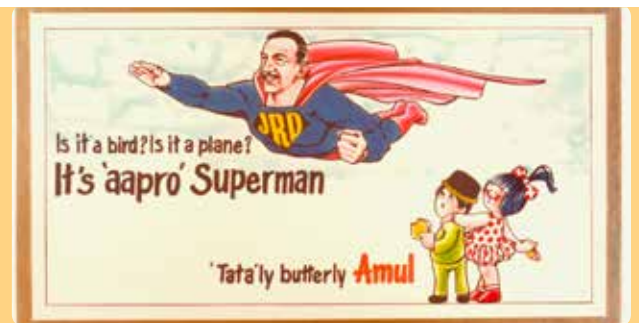
1980s



1980: Americans boycott Moscow Olympics during cold war period



1982: Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of Iran following the Iranian revolution, during the height of the Iran-Iraq War



1982: On the 50th anniversary of Tata Airlines' first flight, JRD Tata takes to the skies as Superman



1983: India wins Cricket World Cup for the first time



1989: BJP comes into national prominence as elections give rise to coalition politics for the first time with no majority

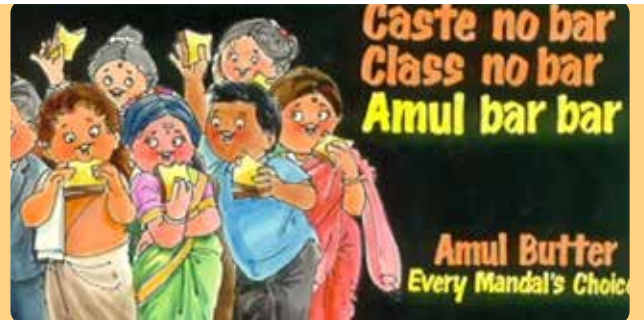
1990s



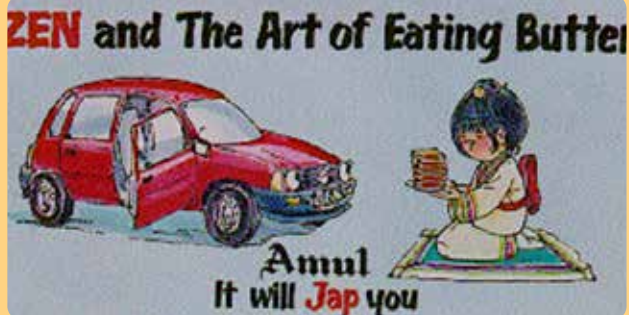
1991: Russians are queueing up for bread as the Soviet Union collapses. Boris Yeltsin becomes President of Russia



1991: India liberalises ushering in decades of economic progress



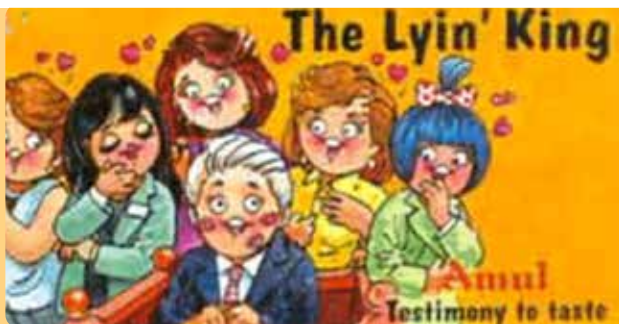
1992: Recommendations of Mandal Commission on reservations are implemented after the Supreme Court upholds the government order and states caste is an "acceptable indicator of backwardness"



1993: Maruti Udyog in collaboration with Japan's Suzuki, introduces the iconic Zen hatchback on Indian roads



1998: India conducts the second Pokhran nuclear test, 24 years after the first one and declares itself a Nuclear Power



1998: Bill Clinton lies in his testimony about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky, leading to his impeachment



1999: The Military led by Gen Pervez Musharraf stages a coup in Pakistan as Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is placed under house arrest

2000s



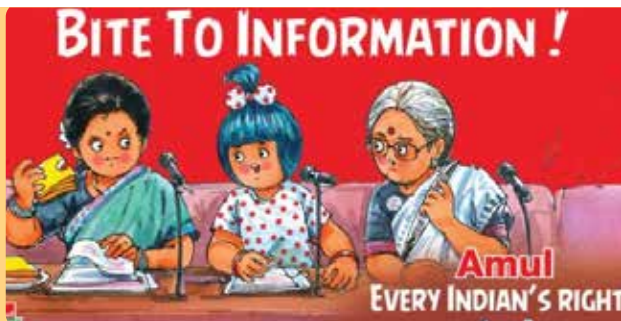
Popular TV quiz show Kaun Banega Crorepati launches, a clone of the iconic British series 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?'



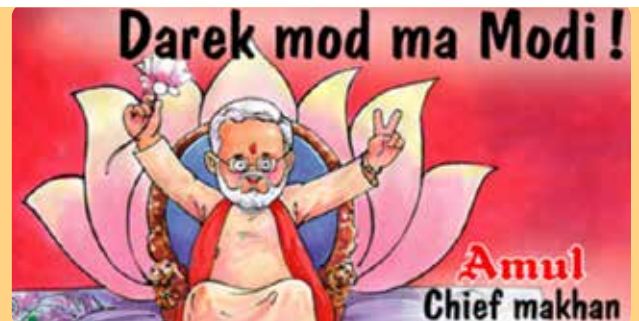
2001: An appeal against terrorism in the post 9/11 world



2003: Three women Chief Ministerial candidates are victorious: Sheila Dikshit - Delhi, Vasudhara Raje Scindia - Rajasthan and Uma Bharati - Madhya Pradesh



2005: India enacts RTI in a landmark decision that brings accountability and transparency to the forefront of the Indian democracy



2007: Narendra Modi leads the BJP to victory in the Gujarat Assembly Election to become Chief Minister of the State for his second straight tenure

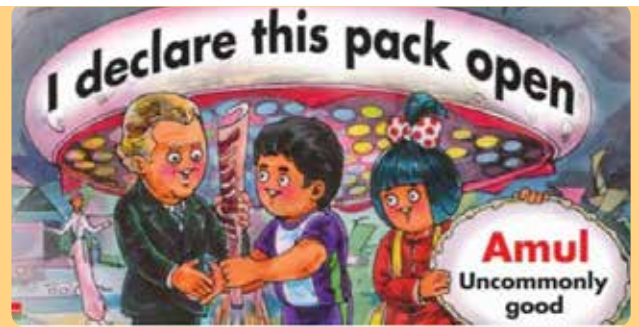


2008: India successfully launches Chandrayaan, the country's first lunar probe



The Taj reopens its Tower Wing, just three weeks after the devastating Mumbai terror attack

2010s



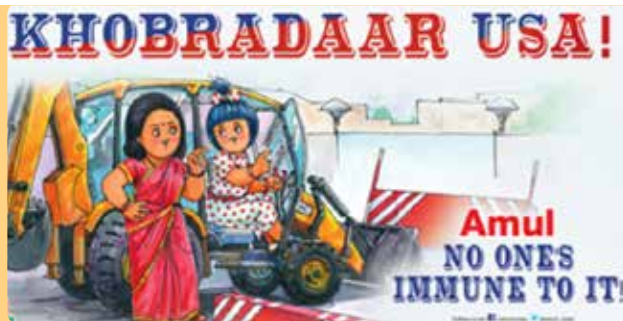
2010: India hosts the Commonwealth Games



2011: India wins the Cricket World Cup for the second time



2012: Nationwide protests erupt on women's safety after the Nirbhaya tragedy



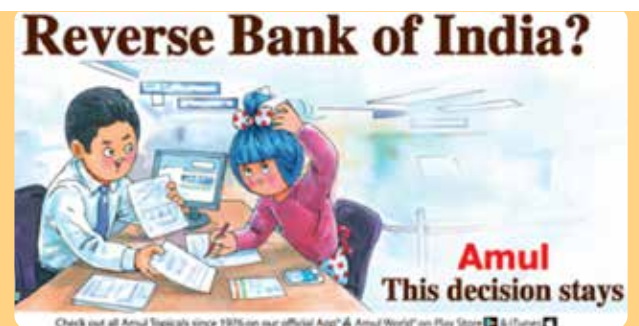
2013: Arrest of an Indian diplomat in New York sparks diplomatic spat between India and U.S.



2014: Mangalyaan or MOM is put into Mars orbit, making India the fourth country in the world with an inter-planetary mission



2014: Narendra Modi wins the Indian General Elections with a historic mandate



2016: India demonetises in an unprecedented move, withdrawing all ₹500 and ₹1,000 banknotes from circulation



2019: The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) imposes a 4 year ban on Russia from top sporting events for tampering with doping tests



2020: Movie icon Rajnikanth turns 70



2021: Leena Nair is appointed as new global CEO of French luxury fashion house Chanel



2022: Elon Musk buys Twitter



2022: Argentina wins World Cup



2023: Gold hits all time high



2023: RRR's Naatu Naatu wins Oscar

SOUL TO SOLE: RECYCLING FOOTWEAR FOR THE UNSHOD

Two dynamic, young entrepreneurs, both from totally diverse backgrounds, have pioneered an eco-friendly enterprise, **GreenSole**, by recycling old shoes to provide footwear for the unshod in India. Their common link was that both were joggers at Mumbai's Priyadarshini Park along Peddar Road.

Text by AMITA SARWAL

Photograph courtesy GREENSOLE, MUMBAI

The running mates met in 2012. A decade later GreenSole has “donated 580,000 pairs of footwear till date in 18 states pan-India, our beneficiaries are primarily India’s rural school children. A great positive for GreenSole will be when we touch the 10 lakhs footwear mark by next year, which would have saved roughly 50 lacs CO2 Emissions (lbs). (Calculated using software GaBi 2.0). GreenSole has also ventured into sustainable materials made from waste like EVA, rubber, foam, coffee and much more, fitting in with the life cycle of many footwear and apparel products,” Shriyans affirms.

Meet Shriyans Bhandari, 29, CEO GreenSole, Mumbai & Director Heritage Girls School (HGS), Udaipur and Co-founder Ramesh Dhami. The former from Udaipur, schooled at Mayo College, Ajmer, and graduated from USA’s Babson’s College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, with a Management of Entrepreneurial Leadership program. Shriyans authored ‘Birds of Aravalli’ and has spoken at the Wharton World Economic Forum, Mumbai 2016, MIT and Harvard Kennedy School, to name a few.

The latter, Ramesh, now 30, ran away from home in Uttarkhand when eight years old. Ramesh survived in Mumbai aided by the Sathi Foundation. He aspired to be an actor but instead became a fitness coach and a national level marathoner.

“We found an estimated 20 billion pairs of shoes are produced globally each year, and nearly 350 million pairs are discarded annually in the USA alone. Yet according to World Bank statistics there are over 1.5 billion people worldwide without footwear who are infected by diseases,” details Shriyans.

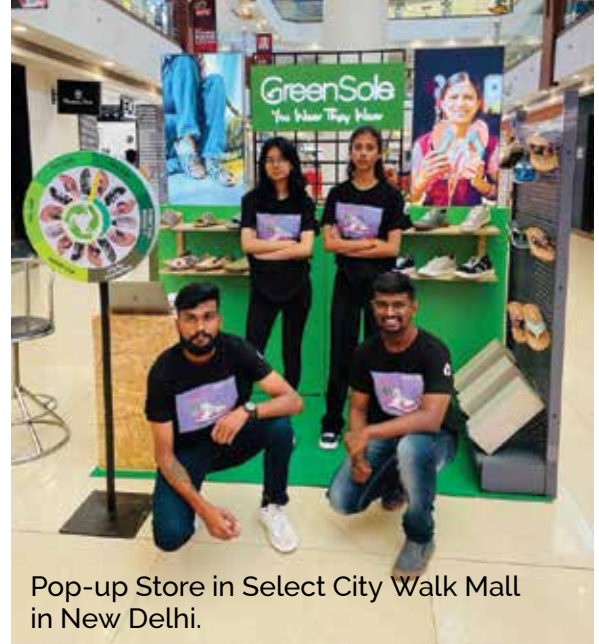


▲ Co-founders Shriyans Bhandari (left) and Ramesh Dhami at GreenSole factory in Navi Mumbai

◀ Shriyans Bhandari with the Lexus Design Award India 2018 for GreenSole



Massive shoe collection drive of old footwear before transformation into brand new ones at the GreenSole Factory with Ram Fashion Exports.



Pop-up Store in Select City Walk Mall in New Delhi.

Ramesh recalls how the idea ‘sprouted’, “I couldn’t throw away my old running shoes. They were too expensive. Instead, I modified them into slippers.”

“We were too young when we started GreenSole in December 2013. I was 19 and Ramesh, 20. Not having any prior knowledge of footwear manufacturing or designing, it was not easy to run a factory or negotiate deals, especially in this labour-intensive sector,” the CEO continues.

The company’s graph started looking upwards after 2014 when Shriyans participated in a competition at the Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII), Ahmedabad. “They asked us to write about our target market, potential customers, and the impact we could make. We were selected among the top 30 innovators in India. That is when we realised there was a commercial potential that could be turned into a business venture,” says the then a third-year student at Jai Hind College, Mumbai.

Shriyans initially pumped in Rs.1.5 lakhs of his family money, and simultaneously he and Ramesh won, first, the business competition at Jai Hind College followed by the Technology and Sustainability Award at Eureka; Asia’s largest B-plan competition at IIT-Bombay; and the second position at Ridea National B-plan. These victories have since been GreenSole’s main funders. GreenSole has also received two industrial design patents (D262161 and D262162).

The head office and flagship Mahape factory in Navi Mumbai is in partnership with Ram Fashion Exports. The small team behind this success story comprises Shriyans at the helm and Ramesh overseeing field research and distribution. Others involved in the venture are Rishi Bhasin, overseeing design and manufacturing which ensure minimum carbon footprint. Rishi has worked on GreenSole’s R&D and standardised its manufacturing process. Nitesh Bhasin of Ram Fashion Exports helps in policy making and looks after the retail segment of GreenSole. Marketing is Karan Bhasin’s domain while finance is under Kunal Kapadia.

Further, thanks to Ratan Tata’s interest in GreenSole – after he responded to Shriyans’ letter (2015) and email on separate occasions – in 2018 Tata Steel sponsored the facilities and machinery in their No-amundi, Jharkhand plant. Six people are employed and are upcycling about 1500 units every month and creating jobs for the tribal community. Along with that, more than 100 people are being skilled in footwear manufacturing every year with potential to get jobs in other footwear companies. Two more skill centers in Maharashtra near Mumbai, and in Rajasthan, Eklingi, Udaipur, are doing similar work.

Acknowledgment has come in the form of former President Obama’s letter. “I had written to the President while I was at Babson and gifted him a copy of ‘Birds of Aravallis’. He and First Lady Michelle

Obama sent a thank you letter in response,” affirms the author.

GreenSole’s publicity is mainly via media coverage in numerous newspapers and magazines, participation in talk shows including TEDx Youth WASO, talks at MIT, Harvard Kennedy and various environmental forums. In the pipeline are plans to get celebrities to donate their shoes which will then be refurbished and auctioned online.

“GreenSole shoes and slippers are available to individual buyers online from our website. We were exploring export opportunities to retail our brands in the USA and Europe, as well as co-branding with established companies for our upcycled footwear range. But CoVid has put a halt on this for now,” rues Shriyans.

“For donating GreenSole shoes to support those still unshod, we are updating our online channels and websites so users can buy shoes as well. GreenSole also invites established shoes brands for tie-ups in order to put to good use the 0.5% (7.5 million) shoe wastage, which are primarily due to defects,” says the CEO.

Looking back, he admits, “Life hasn’t been all smooth. We have overcome hurdles – including convincing family, friends, college authorities and other backers of our serious intent!”

A novel platform which garnered media attention was GreenSole’s participation in both Lakme Fashion Week Summer and Winter 2019, in partnership with Tilla and A&T respectively.

In 2023 GreenSole won Dun & Bradstreet Top 50 Trailblazing Startups of India Award – adding another feather to their cap.

In retrospect, what are the complexities and big challenges faced recently and overcome? Shriyans answers: “There are a lot of established footwear brands in the market, thus we need to take small, careful steps to



900 rural children beneficiaries in Mokhada, Maharashtra

All about GreenSole

MANUFACTURING: At the factory in Mahape, Navi Mumbai, the manual process involves removing the soles and shoe uppers. The latter are reused for patching torn shoes. The lower part is washed and cleaned with chemicals to make it pesticide-free and environment-friendly. It is then die cut to standard sizes. The upper portion is made separately using parts of shoe uppers and materials sourced from manufacturers.

The two are joined together. The straps are made from recycled trekking ropes. Result? Bright coloured smart footwear — from a once worthless sports shoe!

FUNDING: To become a self-sustaining social enterprise, venture capitalists have shown interest in funding GreenSole, Shriyans is keen to raise money from the traditional route — business competitions. A crowdfunding campaign via Indiegogo reaches out to the community. Additionally, they also have a retail range made of used soles repurchased by GreenSole to self-sustain and grow the venture.

COLLECTION BOXES: Discarded shoes and all kinds of apparel including denim, sports and even formal wear can be donated. About 10,000 pieces per month are collected from educational institutions such as Heritage Girls School, Udaipur, Jai Hind College, Mumbai and Mayo College, Ajmer. Local sports clubs pitch in and also from public parks like Priyadarshini Park, Mumbai, and corporations such as AXIS Bank, India Bulls, JLL, Just Dial, Mastek, Goqii, Rolls-Royce, the Tata Group; the Siliguri Army Camp and EICASA Institute in West Bengal and NGOs.

Prime supporter Axis Bank, through its Project Udaan 2.0, sponsored 10,000 footwear through GreenSole to children in Lucknow district, Uttar Pradesh. Soon, a GreenSole App will allow one to search for the nearest green collection box near one's vicinity.

Contact: Mobile: +91-8879982045, Email: care@greensole.com
www.greensole.com

become mainstream with lesser resources – but, critically, in lesser time. We are using these brands as platforms by co-branding and entering multiple stores. Looking at multi-retail outlets instead of our own stores, which is presently not feasible. We also have to work towards creating something unique constantly, and in educating the customer to prefer our footwear than a brand not supporting social or environmental good. Currently, all brands have started moving towards sustainability, and thus the availability of sustainability material is also increasing. We are working on new technology which would make use of 15 percent waste leftover after upcycling. This will be reused as


footwear soles, floor mats and other varied products.”

“GreenSole has evolved and bounced back stronger post-Covid 19. We are now into sustainable materials and solutions for footwear and apparel. We are now into vegan fashion retail which means mainly choosing alternatives which are good for the environment, such as PET bottle mesh, wood cork, and plant-based materials in lieu of leather and synthetic. We are noticing more people shifting to vegan products and lifestyle not only in western countries, but in India as well,” he says.

Looking forward – after GreenSole, what next? Shriyans promptly replies, “GreenSole is forever, as the planet will need more recyclers, more sustainable materials and solutions. We are constantly upgrading our recycling reach from footwear to apparel, tyres and even flex – and making our own sustainable material.”

Another commendable mention is that GreenSole has become a replicable model and an inspiration to many other youngsters. There have been startups of GreenSole for spectacles, denim and other fashion items. Shriyans is happy that they are propagating social and environmental changes through their ventures.

Finally, the founding CEO's concluding appeal to Destination India readers is: “Next time you – or your friends and family – are discarding your shoes, do think of donating them to someone who could use them instead. Or send them to GreenSole – a project very close to our hearts.”

And GreenSole continues to move forward, hitting a lot of targets through a single concept - sustainable recycling. 



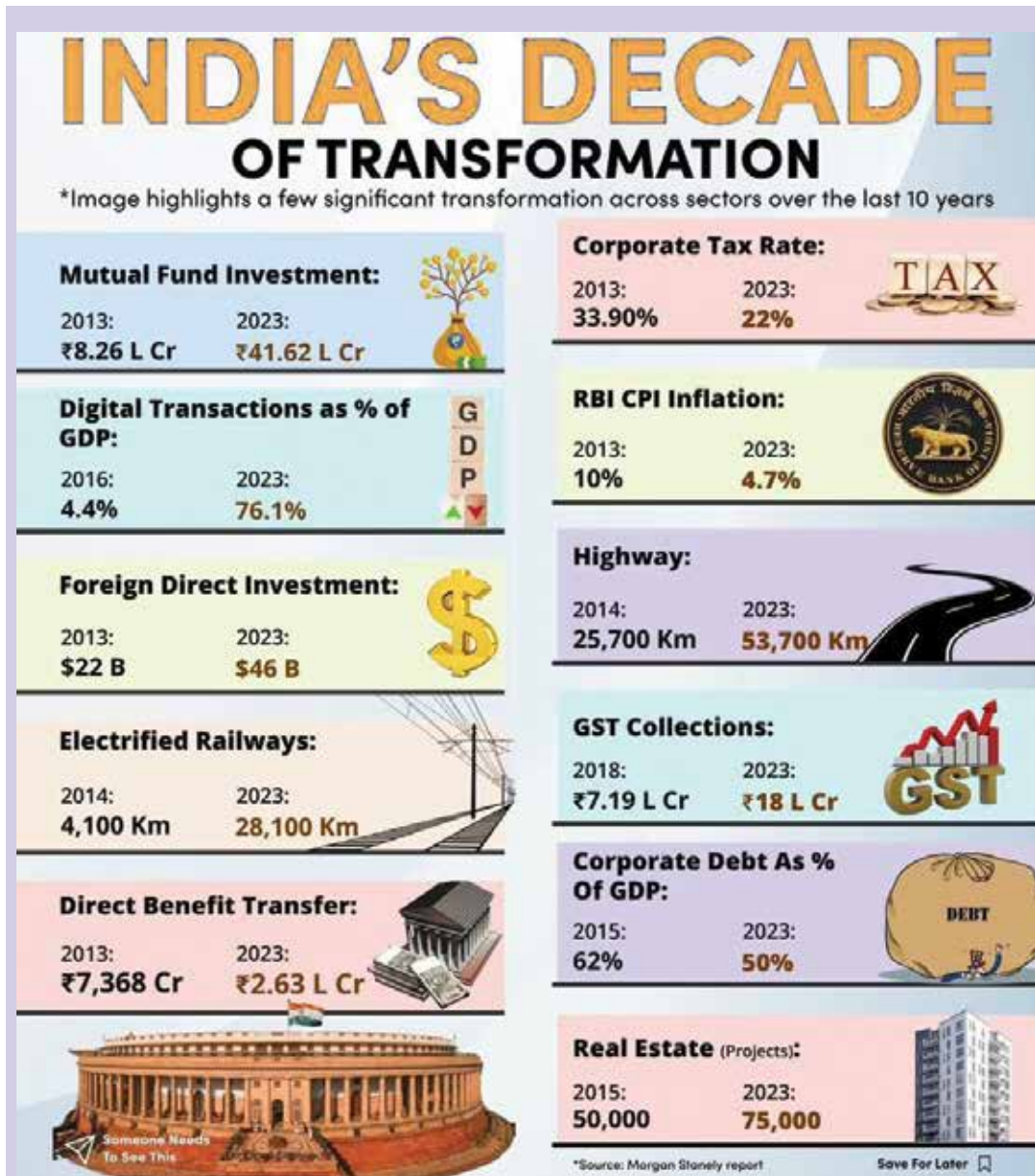
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amita Sarwal is a freelance journalist

who has contributed to numerous publications over a career spanning over four decades. She is a regular columnist for our group, including Destination India magazine.

ONE THOUSAND WORDS

A PICTURE FROM OUR TIMES



Key Takeaways from a recent Morgan Stanley Report on India: India is on track to become the world's third largest economy by 2027, surpassing Japan and Germany, and have the third largest stock market by 2030, thanks to global trends and key investments the country has made in technology and energy. All told, India's GDP could more than double from \$3.5 trillion today to surpass \$7.5 trillion by 2031. Its share of global exports could also double over that period, while the Bombay Stock Exchange could deliver 11% annual growth, reaching a market capitalization of \$10 trillion in the coming decade.

RAMGARH SHEKHAWATI:

AN ALMOST FORGOTTEN HERITAGE, NOW COME ALIVE WITH A SPIRITED DETERMINATION

Ramgarh Shekhawati, an enchanting heritage town of wall frescoes, often known as the Open Art Gallery of Rajasthan, has gifted the world with a Heritage that is the epitome of the Creative Indian Spirit, set amidst a culturally and historically inviting landscape.

by DR. SHRUTI PODDAR

Fascinating that it is believed that Ramgarh Shekhawati in 1900 had the richest per capita income in the world!

A town with eight centres of Sanskrit learning, patronage of the arts, architecture, building technologies, Vastu and Ayurveda, and great Vedic knowledge. It was also known as the 'Doosra Kashi'! Kashi is another name for Varanasi, implying that this was one of the greatest learning centres of the world.

In fact, Ramgarh Shekhawati has the only temple of the Veda in India! Built by Seth Jainarayan Poddar, a temple with no deities, dedicated only to the wisdom of this great land of India! The Shani Mandir has stunning mirror work and frescoes. Its unique Poddar *chhatris* boast of the greatest infusions of fresco painting. Its people were renowned for their Ayurvedic knowledge and creative skills, and it was a manufacturing hub of historically inspired Shekhawati furniture.

All its historical wonders largely remained hidden for a century.

The wealthy merchant families, who created Ramgarh - the Poddars, along with the Khemkas, Ganeriwals, Khaitans, Goenkas and then the Ruias, have never returned for almost a century now, to inhabit their home town, Ramgarh!



▲ Poddar Cluster of Chhatris at Ramgarh Shekhawati.

◀ Rocking chair in blue bedroom.



◀ Baithak – open lounge in the first floor open terrace at vedaaranya haveli ramgarh shekhawati.



Shringar kaksh

“Ramgarh Sethan” it was then called.

“Sethan” because it was ruled by the Seths, not by the king! A town which would singly provide huge funding to the kings. And unlimited loans to the East India company as well?

How did this happen? All the other regions, towns in cities in India and perhaps in the world were ruled by kings or tribes at that time in the 1700s and 1800s.

So how did this little town, in the middle of this great Rajputana which is now called Rajasthan, become a such a rich and prosperous town, ruled by the Seths and NOT by the king?

There’s a story behind it!

In the late 1700s, the Poddars were the richest Seths of Rajasthan living in Churu, and they were very angry with the Churu king for levying hefty taxes on the Seths.

Meanwhile, its neighbouring Sikar kingdom was poor.

The Queen of Sikar once went across to Churu, with her brother and sister-in-law, the King and Queen of Churu for a holiday. During a conversation, the Churu Queen scoffed at her sister in-law, saying that her Sikar kingdom was nothing in comparison to the Churu Kingdom. The Sikar Queen, hurt and insulted, returned to her kingdom and retreated into isolation without food or water. When her anxious husband, the Sikar King, asked her what was the matter, she replied to this effect; “I will not touch even a drop of water, until you pledge to me, that you will create the most beautiful and the richest city in the world!”

The poor Sikar king in this desperate situation strategized - he made his soldiers ride across to Churu in the dead of the night, and steal the Seths’ “Bahi Khatas” (their large accounting manuscripts) and got them in his possession.

The next morning, the distraught Seths hurried to Sikar to enquire the reason for this abduction of their key documents. The king explained to the Poddar Seths, that only they could help them resolve his situation with his Queen, if they, along with seven families migrated across to Sikar kingdom and created the most prosperous and beautiful town ever witnessed by anyone. The Seths saw this as a great opportunity and expressed their approval, subject to the following conditions:

First condition! We will choose the land we want - Nasa ki Dhani (an Opium Growing land) for maximum cash earnings.

Second condition: we will pay zero tax!

Third Condition: we will rule the town! Our law and order, our administration, our Police!

Fourth condition: since we will rule this town, we or our wives will never sit below you, the King and Queen, we will sit equal to you!

If you agree to all our conditions, only then shall we move across to Sikar kingdom, and build the most prosperous and beautiful city of

havelis, temples, chhatris and Johads.

The King agreed to all conditions to save his wife’s condition!!

And so it is said that the Poddars, along with 7 families, migrated to the kingdom of Sikar, and created ... the Unforgettable Land!!

The Seths of Shekhawati migrated between 1900 and the 1950s to seek their fortune in the Indian port towns and other British business cities, and the rest is history, unearthed through the remaining papers, objects and artefacts, and recorded on the picturesque walls of Ramgarh Shekhawati, a history of wealth, trade, education, spirituality, vibrant cultural talent and a lively and highly artistic lifestyle and architecture, of its Intensely Painted Havelies with Courtyards, its Fort, its Water *Johads*, a forest with the second largest population of Chinkara deer in the country and today a permanent and migratory home of two hundred and forty-six species of birds in this region!

Today, if we travel along and inside these Havelies we witness a fusion of world influences, Indian, British, Portuguese and Chinese – in building design, in paintings and their depictions, in costumes, hairstyles, objects, furniture, textiles and eclectic expressions of historical people, deities, trains and carriage scenes, lifestyles, folklore, religious narratives, showcased on the doors, walls, ceilings, pillars and domes with stunning wall Frescoes, Arish lime plaster artwork and intricate mirror work, of the walls of Ramgarh Shekhawati’s heritage buildings.

When I came here, on an intuition, a decade ago in 2013, I was absolutely stunned by the beauty of this place!

I was also heartbroken at the destruction and the decay I witnesses in this great land of heritage.

The tangible and intangible heritage and creative genius of the almost extinct artist and artisans was yearning for Resurgence,



calling out to us to help them thrive and flower once again - to shine and contribute to the economic and cultural prosperity of India from their deep and rich cultural roots.

So, I took upon myself to revive, and make the world aware, once again of this wonderland of heritage now called Ramgarh Shekhawati! To make it lead with its brilliance and be a Light and Creative heritage destination for the World!

To revive in women and children with its knowledge systems, arts and craft sciences along with modern technologies along with Indigenous Knowledge Systems, forgotten healing sciences and more, propelled by innovative healing systems, Heritage hospitality and multi-faceted tourism.

The following steps were undertaken in the immediate time from then on.

• **Introducing the Potential** - A Nine-Day exhibition "Ramgarh Shekhawati-Past Present and Future" at Jaipur to bring Ramgarh Shekhawati's Tourism potential into sharp focus.

• **Creating a Heritage walk** - by the Shruti Foundation and Govt. Of Rajasthan Collaboration (2015-16). I personally guided and supervised development of new roads, signage, heritage lights, fences, benches, *Johad* restoration.

• **Restoration of Ramgarh Fort** by our Foundation with lime technology (2014-15) - made it usable for festivals and events, particularly Shruti Foundation's Vedaaranya Heritage and Healing Festival (VHAH FEST) annually since December 2016.

• **Creation of Vedaaranya Haveli in 2016** - a small uniquely frescoed heritage hotel with 10 rooms and fabulous heritage cuisine.

• **Launch of our annual Vedaaranya Heritage and Healing Festival (VHAH FEST)** which has been drawing the world to Ramgarh Shekhawati for the last 8 years since 2016 with world renowned artists, institutions, scholars, thought leaders and heritage enthusiasts in collaboration with Rajasthan Government.

• **MOHAR (Museum of Heritage and Art at Ramgarh)** - Since 2021, Shruti Foundation has developed a Haveli Museum, on Shekhawati Seths and their Heritage, Treasures, Glory and great Social Ethos. It is also now a Cultural and Healing Residency which hosts people, events and festivals and has 8 beautiful heritage rooms for hospitality and retreats.

• **Restoration of the Veda Temple**, also called Shikhar Bandh is the highest point of Ramgarh Shekhawati. Built by Seth Jainarayan Poddar in the 1800s where there are no deities...only knowledge, the knowledge of the Vedas. This one and a half century old temple was long forgotten and was left to the elements to decay and go into oblivion. Very few people even knew about this even people living in the town. Finally,

after one and a half centuries, we facilitated the restoration of the Vedic temple; with restoration by INTACH supported by Shruti Foundation.

• **Declaration of Ramgarh Shekhawati as Heritage Town:** In 2017, on my intervention, Ramgarh Shekhawati was declared by the Rajasthan Government

• **Launch of Heritage India Cyclothon:** Shruti Foundation launched this Sporting event in collaboration in March 2019 to encourage awareness among the greater community of the heritage of the Shekhawati region and increase sports tourism.

• **Vedaaranya Craft Centre** - Shruti Foundation created a Skilling, Textiles and Home Décor from recycled material and Organic Food Processing Centre by Local women at Ramgarh Shekhawati since April 2019. This has empowered more than 500 poor women and girls and their families since 2019.

• **Student and Educational Tourism** since 2014 in Dance, Heritage Awareness, Theatre, Textiles, Kalaripayat Martial Arts, etc.

• **Tree-planting drives** to help the Ecology and attract-eco tourism.

We have been able to move our own institutions, the Government and other individuals and organisations to evolve Ramgarh Shekhawati, created as the most beautiful town of Rajasthan in the 18th and 19th centuries, to become a resurgent local economy, and a cultural, experimental, celebratory and holiday "Heritage Habitat" for a resurgent India, for an enriched world!

The ever-growing Vedaaranya Habitat, with its hotels and residences, its learning events and festivals at its Heritage Havelis, the Fort, and the Chhatris and Johads and painted building facades through enchanting lanes of Ramgarh Shekhawati beckon you to unforgettable and soul fulfilling experiences. Of personal care and deep healing, and as the most coveted Heritage tourism destination for the World!

To a place of History that feels like Home from a forgotten era. ☑



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Shruti Nada Poddar is Founder, Nada Vibronics - The Vibrational Healing Ecosystem; Founder & Managing Trustee, Shruti Foundation and Founder,

Vedaaranya Healing. She is the Convener of INTACH Shekhawati Chapter; Member, INTACH Advisory Board for Intangible Heritage and President, National Culture and Heritage Council of Women's Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

TOURISM NEEDS ITS OWN SPECIFIC EPC; TOURISM HAS THE ABILITY TO EARN US\$110 BILLION IN EXPORTS

India's Foreign Trade Policy for the year was unveiled on 31st Mar 2023, by Piyush Goyal, Minister Commerce and Industry, wherein the government announced an export target of \$2 Tn for the year 2030.

The pandemic hit tourism exports very hard which is clearly visible from the comparison in the foreign exchange earnings of US \$30.6 bn during pre-Covid year 2019 and US \$16.5 bn during 2022. There was a decline in exports during the years 2019 & 2020, while a sharp increase is visible in 2021. Whereas, tourism exports declined drastically from a share of 5.5% in 2019 to 2.17% in 2022.

Given a best year share 5.5%, contribution of tourism exports should be \$110 bn of the export target of \$2 Tn set for the year 2030.

Ministry of Tourism has always been responsible for promoting & marketing Indian tourism across the globe. Due to Pandemic, there have been no marketing and promotional activities by Ministry of Tourism. With the remaining 8 overseas tourism offices closed in March this year, effectively speaking, the Ministry is not presently engaged in any major exercise in the promotion of tourism exports.

The government has now entrusted the responsibility to promote India as tourism destination to Indian missions abroad. Ministry of Commerce and Indian missions are already working together to promote international trade for past several decades. It may be worthwhile at this stage to consider Tourism exports to be brought under Ministry of Commerce, thereby making tourism a part and parcel of entire export basket.

All international and Indian tourism studies agree that India has enormous potential for international tourism, as we have everything that any tourist may be looking forward to; from snow-clad Himalayas to the golden sand beaches of Goa, thousands of years of civilisation, culture, historical monuments, wildlife, religious / spiritual places, wellness and Ayurvedic treatment centres etc etc. You name it, and India has it! Unfortunately, India has never achieved the potential that our tourism offers; it is possible we require a new and different approach!

It is time that India holistically views its promotions, marketing and development strategy, while recognising that it is essentially a private sector driven industry. Tourism exports can achieve \$ 110 bn target in the year 2030, given the will of the government. It is possible that our existing resources can give better results, given a more concentrated and revised approach.




Year	Exports from India	Change in Comparison year	Tourism Exports	Share of Tourism Exports in percentage
2019	\$ 529.24 bn	-1.74 %	\$ 30.06 bn	5.50 %
2020	\$ 499.10 bn	-5.70 %	\$ 6.96 bn	1.40 %
2021	\$ 670.68 bn	+36.18 %	\$ 8.80 bn	1.29 %
2022	\$ 760.00 bn	+11.80 %	\$ 16.5 bn	2.17 %

The time has come for us to extend the importance of tourism with setting up of a tourism specific 'Exports Promotion Council' (EPC) to give a boost to tourism export, just like other EPCs for merchandise & services exports, that are promoted by Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

Tourism EPC should promote and market Indian tourism products worldwide, by exhibiting in international tourism exhibitions, roadshows as well as collaborate with Foreign Tour Operators and meetings & conferences professionals. Organising a mega tourism exhibition annually should be part of the agenda where large number of foreign tour operators, travel writers, journalists, TV crews from across the globe are invited to showcase India's prowess in its full glory.

Like all other exports, taxes levied on tourism exports should be refunded to make Indian tourism products competitive in the international market.

We in the tourism industry fully believe that given India's tourism potential we can achieve \$ 110 bn in foreign exchange in the year 2030. 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MD of KTC Travels, India's oldest car hire company, former and founder vice-chairman of FAITH, an organisation of 11 leading travel and tourism associations, Sarabjit Singh is an active force to push for a tourism based agenda.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

ZANSKAR

THE UNCHARTED ADVENTURE
PLAYGROUND OF INDIA



Gateway to Adventure : Motorcyclists atop Shinku La (16,580 feet) connecting Lahaul (Himachal Pradesh) to Zaskar. 'La' means 'mountain pass' in the local Ladakhi language.

Increased accessibility makes the destination within reach through both summer and winter. Make the most of it, this mesmerising harsh landscape mixed with the hospitality of the locals.



by AJEET BAJAJ

As I stand mesmerised, staring at the glorious sunset on the rugged snow-capped peaks of Zanskar, the stillness of the moment is awakened by the clashing of cymbals in Karsha Gompa, the largest monastery of Zanskar. There is an aura of eternal peace about this place, having been blessed by His Holiness, the fourteenth Dalai Lama. The Zanskar river hums a rhythmic symphony, the mountains stand tall as the wind whispers tales of ancient explorers in this untouched Shangri La. Zanskar is a land of contrasts with the harsh, rugged, barren landscape juxtaposed with the warmth, hospitality and infectious smiles of the hardy Zanskaris. It is during 'Zen' moments like this that my senses are heightened and I feel truly alive, blessed at having chosen the path of an explorer and adventurer on a 'road less travelled'.

Until recently this land, a part of the Union Territory of Ladakh, was cut off from the rest of the world during winter months, with the only passage to the outside world through the gorge of the frozen Zanskar river, a seven-day journey even for hardy Zanskaris. With a new road across Shingo La and improved access, Zanskar and Kargil are becoming a trekking, mountaineering, river rafting, motorcycling and adventure hub of the country. There are a plethora of world class adventure opportunities in the region from climbing 7000 meter plus Nun, Kun peaks, to the 'Chadar' trek along the frozen Zanskar river in the winter months and rafting expeditions on the Zanskar with a backdrop of the spectacular Zanskar gorge, the 'grand Canyon of Asia'.

As an adventurer, I have explored many corners of the world, but Zanskar holds a special place in my adventure repertoire. My first visit to Zanskar was in 1990, as leader of a rafting expedition for the Indian Special Forces. After the first easy day of rafting from

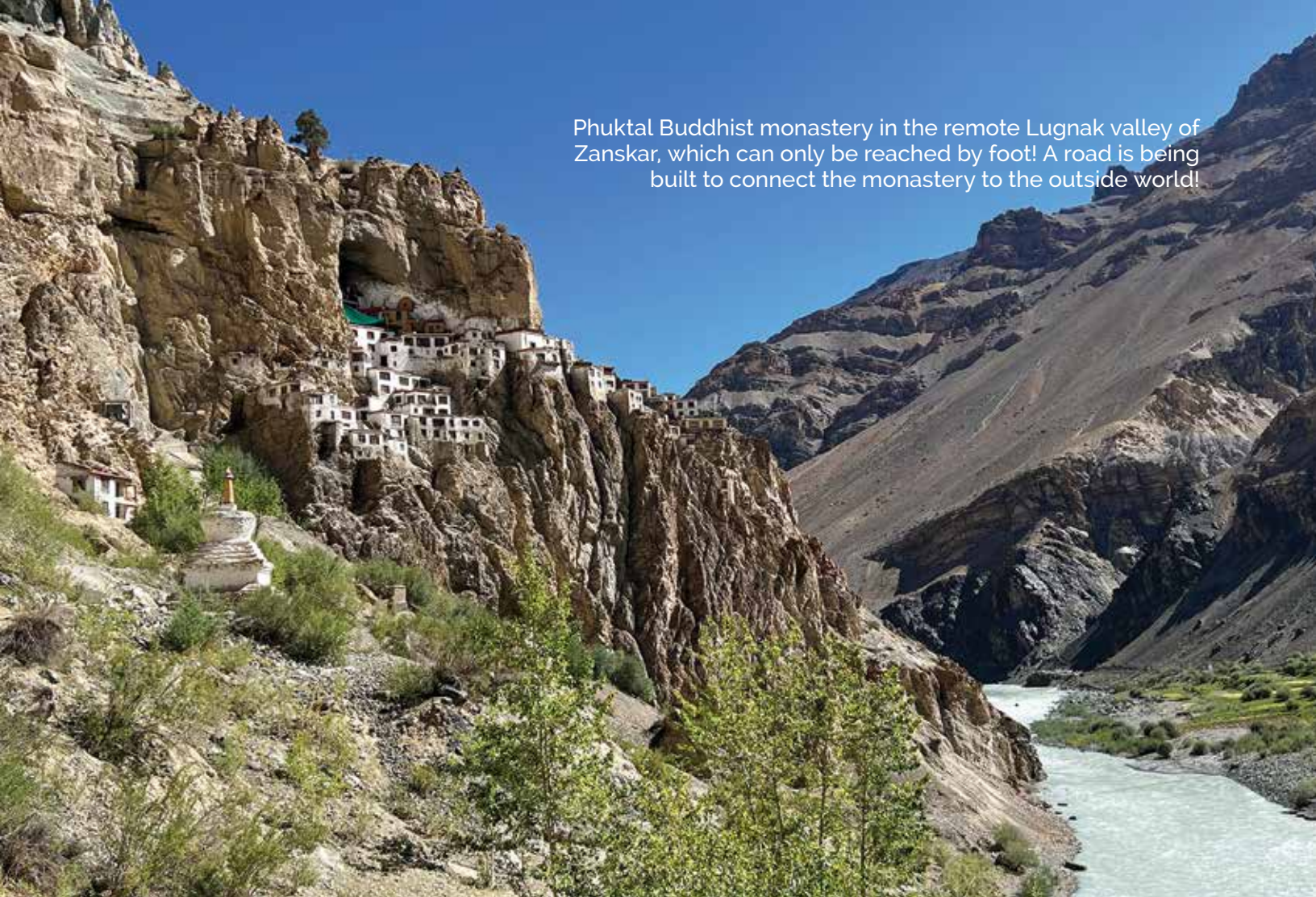


Zanskar lady with her yak : Zanskar is a land of contrasts with the harsh, rugged, barren landscape juxtaposed with the warmth, hospitality and infectious smiles of the hardy Zanskaris.



A leap of faith! A "flying" Bharal (Himalayan Blue Sheep) in Zanskar.

Phuktal Buddhist monastery in the remote Lagna valley of Zaskar, which can only be reached by foot! A road is being built to connect the monastery to the outside world!



Padum, the river picks up in intensity and enters a spectacular gorge, perhaps more picturesque than even the Grand Canyon. The Zaskar River, with its fast-flowing rapids, offers one of the best white-water rafting experiences in India. The river's course through deep gorges and expansive valleys adds to the thrill of the expedition. A new road blasted through this magnificent gorge will be completed this year and will shorten the commute from Padum, the capital of Zaskar to Leh considerably.

Zaskar is a paradise for trekking. For centuries the only means for the local Zaskaris to commute to Leh and the outside world during winter months was on the frozen Zaskar river, called the 'Chadar'. The Chadar Trek has promoted winter tourism to a frozen Ladakh, a winter trail over the frozen Zaskar River. It is a challenging trek, requiring careful navigation of the icy path, but the experience is unparalleled. The landscape transforms into a winter wonderland, with frozen waterfalls and icy caves. In summer, there are many treks that take you through remote villages, high mountain passes, and ancient monasteries, offering a glimpse into the region's rich culture and history. The Zaskar range is home to numerous peaks, providing ample opportunities for mountaineering. Climbing these peaks is a test of endurance and skill, but the panoramic views from the top are worth every bit of the effort. Zaskar's diverse landscapes are home to a variety of wildlife. Snow leopards, Himalayan brown bears, and numerous bird species inhabit the region. Guided wildlife tours offer a chance to spot these elusive creatures in their natural habitat.

Zaskar is more than just a destination; it is an experience, a journey into the heart of the Himalayas. It is a place that challenges you, changes you, and leaves you with memories that last a lifetime. As I

stand atop a peak, looking down at the valley below, I am reminded of why I became an adventure seeker, an explorer. For the thrill, for the adventure, but most importantly, for moments like these and a strong yearning to preserve our wilderness areas like the Zaskar forever. The Zaskar is a natural wonder of the world, a gift, a heritage we must handover to our next generation in a pristine condition. In the words of Antarctic Explorer Robert Swan, "The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it." **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ajeet is the founder and Managing Director of Snow Leopard Adventures Pvt. Ltd., four times National Tourism

Award winning organization. He is President, Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) and served two terms in the past! Ajeet Bajaj was conferred the Padma Shri in 2012 by the President of India.

OF SHRAVAN, SNAKES, NAGS, AND SARPAS

It is in these two holy months of Shravan that we worship snakes. It is the time when you see the mass movement of Kanwariyas, worshipping Lord Shiva.

by DR H N BAJAJ

It is so common in India to see the ancient stand adjacent to the new! Nothing bears this out more than the month of Shravan in the Indian calendar. It corresponds to July-August in the Gregorian calendar and is possibly one of the amazingly auspicious occasions in the subcontinent. This year, the month of Shravan will last for two months, beginning from the 4th of July till the end of August. The reason for this is the interlude of an inauspicious period called Adhik Maas from July 18 to August 16. Adhik Maas comes every 3 years, and is a period when marriages and celebrations are postponed. However, the arrival of the southwest monsoon during this month is greeted with joy, as it displaces the fiery heat of the summer. Nowhere on the entire planet is rain so welcomed!

On an esoteric plane, Lord Shiva was reunited with his wife Sati, who after her self-immolation, incarnated as Mata Parvati, again in the month of Shravan. Lord Shiva and Mata Parvati, with their children, leave their celestial abode of Mount Kailash and travel to Earth to reside in Bhū Loka. Krishna Janmashtami or the birth of Krishna falls on the eighth day of the full moon. The annual Kanwar Yatra takes place during the Shravan. Nag Panchami is celebrated on the fifth day after Shravana Amavasya. We worship snakes on that day and put out bowls of milk for them to imbibe, yet we do not hesitate to kill, even when the snake is not a threat. This entirely irrational behavior is born out of the fear of being harmed.

Why are snakes worshipped? What is the mythology behind it? It is so rich and fascinating!

There are two kinds of serpents - Sarpa and Naga. In Sanskrit, sarpum or sarpa means



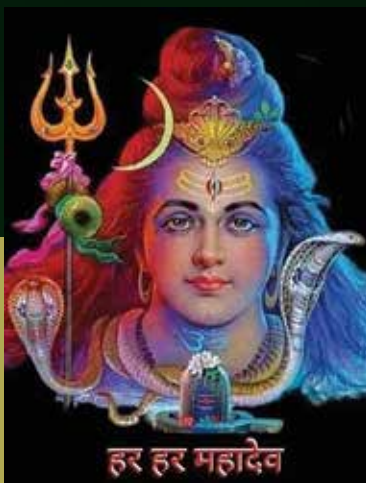
a snake. Naga or nagam too means a snake, and both terms are used as synonyms. In mythology, Nagas are semi-divine, can assume any form, and inhabit a world of their own. Other semi-divine beings are Kinnaras, Gandharvas, and Yakshas. Nagas are wealthy and live in palatial houses in an underground region called Patala. They are associated with the devas or gods. Nagas can have a form that is half man and half snake. Vasuki, a Naga and in fact the king of the Nagas and is known as Nagraja, is wrapped around the neck of Shiva. Sarpas are not divine, cannot change their form, are associated with demons, and live on earth as they do not have a world of their own. Takshaka is the king of the Sarpas.

Naga worship is the worship of the cobra. There are idols devoted to Nagas in temples. The snake sheds its skin and thus remains youthful. It has inherent qualities of immortality, knowledge, and strength.

Sheshnaga or Adishesha (the foremost among snakes) or Ananta (meaning endless as he remains in existence even at the end of the Kalpa, when the whole universe is destroyed) is the king of all nagas. The Mahabharata says that Sheshnaga was the eldest child of Rishi Kashyap and his wife Kadru, the daughter of Daksha. Kadru is the mother of thousands of snakes, a large number of which are vindictive and harmful. Sheshnaga had a different temperament, and disgusted by the barbaric attacks of his brothers, left his family and began penances and austerities. Brahma, who is the father of Daksha was impressed with his austerities and told him to ask for a boon. Sheshnag asked that he be allowed to find joy and solace in dharma, his austerities, and in tranquillity. Brahma recognized the sterling qualities of Sheshnag and made a request. He asked Sheshnag to hold the earth so it remained stable. Sheshnag then entered the earth which made a path for him, and began to live underground, holding the earth on his hoods. The Puranas say that it is on the many hoods of Sheshnaga that the universe rests. It is he who holds the planets in their position in it. Lord Vishnu rests on the coils of Sheshnaga. Resting on Sheshnaga is Kurma, the tortoise form of Vishnu. Movements of Kurma cause Sheshnaga to move and that's



The month of Shravan is special for the devotees of Lord Shiva. This exquisite statue of the Shiva Parivaar shows the Lord with Mata Parvati, and their two children. The snake coiled around the neck of Lord Shiva is Vasuki.



Calendar Art. Shiva is seen with his serpents coiled around his neck. The artist has used his artistic license to depict more than one snake, though it is always considered to be Vasuki, the King of Nagas.



Vishnu reclines on the coils of Sheshnaga. Note Brahma is seated on a lotus that arises from his navel. This brass statue has an unusual twist – the inclusion of a Shivling on which the right hand of Vishnu rests.

when earthquakes happen. When he uncoils, time moves forwards, and creation takes place. When he coils back, the universe ceases to exist.

Vasuki is known as Nagraja and it is Vasuki who is coiled around the neck of Shiva. Being the King of all Nagas allows Vasuki to wear the Nagamani jewel on his head. When the devas and asuras banded together to churn the Ocean of Milk a churning post and a churning rope were needed. Garuda was sent to bring Mount Meru which he did easily. This was placed on Kurma. Vasuki volunteered to be the churning rope. Garuda was sent by Vishnu to bring Vasuki, and both are sworn enemies. This was put aside temporarily and Vasuki allowed Garuda to hold him in his beak. When Garuda thus took flight, the unending length of Vasuki prevented him from taking to the air. Garuda dropped Vasuki and flew back to Vishnu, admitting his failure. Vishnu then extended his hand, and Vasuki coiled himself around the Lord's wrist as a bracelet!

Mansa Devi is the sister of Vasuki and the wife of Rishi Jaratkaru. She is seen sitting on a lotus and has snakes around and on her. She holds a child in her lap. She is worshipped to prevent snake bites and to cure snakebites. She is the goddess of fertility as signified by the child on her lap. Her son is Astika.

Rishi Jaratkaru, as yet unmarried, came across the souls of his ancestors who were hanging precariously over a precipice and were prevented from falling by blades of grass. His inquiries revealed that they were his ancestors and their route to heaven was blocked by the absence of his heir as he was still unmarried. Jaratkaru decided that he must marry, but his bride must have the same name as his! He encountered Vasuki who offered him a bride - his sister Mansa who also bore the name Jaratkaru. And so the marriage was solemnized.

One day Rishi Jaratkaru fell asleep resting his head in the lap of Mansa Devi. Dusk was falling, and the prayers of the Rishi were due. Mansa was in a dilemma - if she did not wake her husband he would miss his prayers, and if she shook him awake, almost certainly she would be the object of his wrath. She felt prayers were more in accordance with the life of a Rishi and she woke him. Rishi Jaratkaru was so full of wrath that he declared he was leaving her! When she pleaded with him, he informed her that she was pregnant, but her son would be a genius, devoted to dharma and prayers. She should name him Astika.

A snake called Takshaka bit Parikshit, the son of Arjuna, when he had inherited the kingdom of the latter. The son of Parikshit, Janamejaya was incensed. He decided that all snakes were to be exterminated. The mass killing of all snakes, called Sarpa Satra was in the form of a yagna, including Takshaka. The power of the yagna was so strong that all snakes would be drawn to the sacred fire and be devoured in its flames. The world would be free of snakes! It was Astika, who was

still a boy; he appeared during the yagna and persuaded him to cease his gruesome mass execution and thus saved the life of Takshaka. That day is Shukla Paksha Panchami in the month of Shravan and is celebrated as Nag Panchami. Women offer flowers and pour milk into ant hills or snake holes. Incense sticks are placed around these.

Kaliya is well known! A poisonous snake, who was afraid of Garuda, was forced to move to the Yamuna River in Vrindavan from his native Ramanaka Dwipa. Vrindavan because Garuda could not enter Vrindavan. Kaliya was so poisonous that he had contaminated the river with his poison and nothing survived. Krishna and his friends were playing by the river and the ball fell into it. The Lord waded into the river to retrieve it and Kaliya appeared with his many hoods and spewing poison. The Lord fought the snake and emerged from the river dancing on the hoods of Kaliya.

In India, Nagas are honored. Nagraj and Nagamani are names that are still used. Nagpur is of course well known, possibly for the snakes that were once prevalent there. Another place is Nagapattinam which is an important town in Tamil Nadu. Urban India has driven away its snakes, but in our villages and smaller towns, the traditions of snake worship continue to thrive. **D**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr H N Bajaj is a spine surgeon, an author, an avid gardener, and maintains a keen interest in religious mythology. He heads a foundation called

Bhikteshwar Foundation which is engaged in constructing a medical centre in rural Rajasthan.



INBOUND TOURISM POTENTIAL AND THE WAY FORWARD

SP Jain, CMD, Pride Hotels has been steadily expanding his chain of hotels across the country. Here, he speaks on his vision for inbound, the likely prospects this year and what India can do to increase its stake in global tourism.

Inbound Tourism: where are the Numbers, and where are the Rooms?

India's domestic tourism industry is currently expanding and in high demand. This has resulted in a stockpiling of accommodation, which has subsequently driven up prices. Catering to domestic tourists is financially more rewarding for businesses compared to serving foreign tourists. Domestic tourists tend to book directly and make upfront payments, which is one of the reasons why domestic travel is more appealing. These upfront payments provide businesses with immediate revenue and reduce the risk of cancellations. In contrast, foreign tourism often involves bookings made through travel agents who have a history of delayed payments. Businesses that depend on foreign tourists may face financial difficulties as a result. Furthermore, acquiring domestic tourists is generally less costly for businesses compared

to attracting foreign tourists. Domestic tourists are more likely to plan and organize their trips independently, resulting in reduced marketing and promotional expenses for businesses. On the other hand, attracting foreign tourists often requires extensive marketing efforts and collaborations with international travel agencies, which can be more expensive and time-consuming.

Future of inbound tourism in the near future?

In the near future is uncertain and it is challenging to make definitive predictions. 2022–2023's peak season did not perform as well as it did prior to the pandemic in 2019. The immediate years ahead and the 2023–2024 season are also anticipated to be slow. Factors such as ongoing travel restrictions, changing traveler preferences, and the global economic situation can influence the pace of recovery and the flow of inbound tourists. But there are some positive signs that bring good cheer. The government has taken steps to promote tourism by waiving visa fees for certain countries. This initiative can help attract more visitors from those countries by reducing entry barriers. Such measures demonstrate the government's recognition of the importance of inbound tourism and its efforts to encourage it. Additionally, the growing popularity of Indian cinema and other local cultural products has in-

“To emphasize India's wide range of tourism options, GOI should initiate comprehensive marketing and promotion initiatives in collaboration with industry stakeholders. These campaigns can target key source markets and leverage digital platforms, social media, and travel trade events to reach a wider audience.”



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Immediate steps that can enhance inbound tourism in India

■ **Infrastructure Development:** GOI can prioritize infrastructure development in tourist destinations, including improving transportation facilities, creating better connectivity, and upgrading accommodations. This will enhance the overall experience for foreign tourists and make India a more attractive destination. To build and promote tourism infrastructure and services, the GOI and FHRAI can encourage public-private partnerships. This collaboration can help attract investment, leverage expertise, and drive innovation in the tourism sector. Some of it is already underway, major developmental plans are already underway, but more destinations can be taken up for inclusive development. We need to add destinations on offer!

■ **Marketing and Promotion:** To emphasize India’s wide range of tourism options, GOI should initiate comprehensive marketing and promotion initiatives in collaboration with industry stakeholders. These campaigns can target key source markets and leverage digital platforms, social media, and travel trade events to reach a wider audience.

■ **Sustainable Tourism:** GOI and FHRAI can work together to promote sustainable tourism practices across the country. This can include initiatives like promoting eco-friendly accommodation, encouraging responsible tourism, and supporting local communities.

■ **Easy Visa Processes:** GOI can work towards simplifying the visa application processes for foreign tourists. This can involve implementing online visa applications, introducing e-visa facilities for more countries, and reducing processing times.

■ **Skill Development and Research:** Businesses can establish skill development programs for tourism industry professionals. This will ensure that the workforce is equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide high-quality services to international tourists. Businesses can study inbound tourist patterns and tourism trends. This information will help identify growth opportunities, understand visitor preferences, and tailor specific marketing strategies accordingly. ❖

creased awareness of India as a tourist destination. Such exposure can pique the interest of potential foreign tourists. With the expected success of the ongoing progress of the G20 deliberations in our country, improving economic conditions, geopolitical dynamics, and travel trends. These factors can help shape the recovery and growth of the tourism industry, in a positive direction.

Availability of rooms for inbound business? Trends in intake from foreign tourists as compared to 2019?

Offering accommodation to inbound business is not an issue, there are rooms available, for sure. However, we expect the utilization to be much lower than the year 2019. Due to increased domestic hotel competition, we also anticipate lower rates. We don’t expect this to increase significantly the intake of foreign tourists, as the cost of acquiring foreign tourists is still high. **D**

ABOUT

Pride Hotels Group, under the leadership of Mr. S.P. Jain, CMD, has established itself as a successful and determined conglomerate in the fields of Hospitality, Construction, and Finance. With a career spanning over three decades, his contributions to the industry have been significant, including his roles as the former President of the Hotel & Restaurant Association and Vice President of FHRAI. The group’s portfolio consists of several brands that cater to different market segments. The flagship brand, Pride Plaza Hotel, is part of the Indian Luxury Collection and is located in Aerocity - Delhi, Ahmedabad, Kolkata. The Pride Hotel brand represents centrally located business hotels and operates in Bangalore, Chennai, Nagpur, Pune, Udaipur, Bhopal, Indore, Bharuch, Greater Noida, and Kanpur.

TAJ'S 'HOUSE OF MING' DEBUTS IN LONDON AT ST JAMES

AS IHCL LOOKS SET TO EXPAND
UPON ITS BRANDS ACROSS
THE CHAIN





The 'House of Ming' opened in London at Taj's St James Court Hotel, bringing its iconic Chinese offering to the city. We caught up with the hotel's Area Director UK and General Manager, Mehrnavaz Avari, and Sujoy Gupta, Executive Chef, in London.



by NAVIN BERRY in London

With what thought has HOM come to London? It was re-invented in Delhi recently, as it was always an iconic brand for Chinese cuisine in the city. So, what were your thoughts?

With the relaunch of House of Ming in Delhi and the extraordinary success of this iconic restaurant over the years, we saw this great opportunity to bring the HOM brand to the UK. House of Ming is one of the most loved restaurants of ours and has an emotional connect with many Taj guests and diners over decades.

IHCL continues to expand its F&B offerings taking some of its iconic restaurant brands to new geographies. As an example of such brand expansion, you can see that The Bombay Brasserie is in London, in the Taj Hotel in Cape Town, and in Taj Dubai at the same time. House of Ming has also recently launched in Taj Lakefront Bhopal.

How similar or different is it from the Delhi experience?

House of Ming London keeps to 40% of the offerings from its Delhi sister restaurant and the rest of the offerings are based on deep research on the London food scene and Chinese restaurants offering authentic Chinese cuisine. With the speciality on Sichuan and Cantonese food offerings like the flaming duck, Peking tofu, Efu noddle or steamed turbot are specialities that you can find only in HOM London.

As a take-off from the last question, how much have you curated the cuisine, the decor, the overall ambience from Delhi?

House of Ming in London has its own personality and looks, it is a very intimate space with stunning interiors, conceptualised by Atelier Wren, award winning UK interior designers, it has a very sophisticated ambience. The food has an authentic take on Sichuan and Cantonese food.





“House of Ming in London has its own personality and looks, it is a very intimate space with stunning interiors, conceptualised by Atelier Wren, award winning UK interior designers, it has a very sophisticated ambience. The food has an authentic take on Sichuan and Cantonese food.”

Why Chinese, I might want to ask? Is that a much sought after cuisine in the city?

Diners in London love food from all over the world and our hotel already has 3 restaurants - the Quilon, South coastal Indian cuisine with a Michelin star, TH@51 which offers an amalgamation of world foods, and Kona which offers the most imaginative afternoon teas. Having a second speciality restaurant such as HOM makes the F&B offering even more attractive and complete.

Where does HOM figure among Chinese outlets in London? London as a city would have a high standard of stand-alone restaurants as well. Where would you position HOM?

The restaurant position is set on the authenticity of its food and the beautiful settings, with very exciting cocktails and exclusive teas and the most desirable foods from Sichuan and Canton and warm and sincere service.

“Diners in London love food from all over the world and our hotel already has 3 restaurants - the Quilon, South coastal Indian cuisine with a Michelin star, TH@51 which offers an amalgamation of world foods, and Kona which offers the most imaginative afternoon teas. Having a second speciality restaurant such as HOM makes the F&B offering even more attractive and complete.”

We believe we have created a niche in this market in the city.

In the big cities, like London, most often hotel guests do not always eat within the same hotel. In Delhi, they tend to do that. What is your experience at St. James? And are you seeking local clientele as well, apart from the hotel staying guests?

Absolutely, the restaurant is set to welcome an equal number of in-house guests from our two hotels Taj 51 Buckingham Gate Suites and Residences and St James's Court A Taj Hotel and local residences as well as those coming from further afield to experience this unique restaurant offerings.

Now that you are open, what has been the initial response?

The response has been brilliant, and we are super excited to see the feedback from diners complimenting the food, or choice of wines and all the offerings, while mentioning the friendly service and beautiful ambience.

In terms of price points, what would be a standard meal cost? Is it on par with your other outlets or higher, as an experience?

The price has been set at a very comfortable price point and a la par with similar restaurants of its class. Offering great value set menus for lunch, an extensive vegetarian and non-vegetarian a la carte menu and offering the Imperial Menu for an extraordinary feast to the senses with a set 17 course menu. Diners will find the restaurant to be reasonable at London prices, especially when weighing the overall experience. **Di**

COVID 19 LEFT SIDE EFFECTS ON HEALTH

A QUICK GUIDE TO SETTING YOUR BODY RIGHT, IN SHAPE



Getting over the stress and fatigue, fighting the after effects of Covid 19, we bring what has been discovered to cause ill effects on the human system. Read on, to find some quick fix solutions.

by DR. ISHA SEHDEV

Most people who got coronavirus disease COVID-19 recovered within a few weeks. But some people, even those who had mild versions of the disease, might have symptoms that last a long time afterward.

This Post COVID-19 syndrome involves a variety of new, returning or ongoing symptoms that people experienced more than four weeks after getting COVID-19. In some people, post-COVID-19 syndrome lasts for months or years or caused disability.

Research suggests that between one month and one year after having COVID-19, 1 in 5 people age 18 to 64 had at least one medical condition that might be due to COVID-19. Among people age 65 and older, 1 in 4 had at least one medical condition that might be due to COVID-19.

Some individuals may experience lingering symptoms or complications even after recovering from the acute phase of the illness. The most commonly faced issue is fatigue and weakness. Some people reported persistent fatigue and weakness, which impacted their daily activities and lasted for weeks or months. Both children and senior citizens have gone through different intensities and frequencies of weakness.

The second common problem that arose after COVID was respiratory issues. COVID-19 led to respiratory problems such as shortness of breath, coughing, or reduced lung function, which has persisted after the initial infection. Cough and breathlessness has lasted more than 6 months in few cases.

Another issue post-COVID people faced was cognitive difficulties: Some individuals experienced brain fog, difficulty in concentrating, memory issues, or other cognitive challenges after COVID-19.

Due to infection and prolonged inflammation, COVID affected the

joints and muscles. Long-lasting symptoms like muscle aches, joint pain, headaches, loss of taste or smell, sleep disturbances, and mood changes were reported by some people.

HOW COVID LED TO ADVERSE POSTURES, HABITS AND PATTERNS

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people spent increased amounts of time in sitting due to factors such as remote work, online classes, and limited physical activities outside the home. This prolonged sitting contributed to the development of poor posture.

The most obvious and immediate challenge everyone faced were:

• **Ergonomic challenges:** Working or studying from home may not provide access to proper ergonomic setups like adjustable chairs, desks, or computer monitors. Without these, individuals had to adopt uncomfortable positions that strained their posture.

• **Lack of movement:** When sitting for long periods without breaks or physical activity, muscles become weak and tight. The lack of movement reduces the opportunities to stretch and strengthen muscles necessary for maintaining good posture. Consequently, this has led to pains and aches in joints and muscles.

• **Increased screen time especially for children:** Spending more time on digital devices during remote work or leisure activities can lead to “tech neck” or forward head posture. Continuously looking down at screens can strain the neck and upper back muscles.

• **Stress and anxiety:** The pandemic brought about increased stress levels for many individuals. Stress can lead to muscle tension, which may contribute to poor posture, sleep issues, digestive issues and increased discomfort.

WAYS YOUR POSTURE AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH

Bad posture always feels comfortable yet can have a negative impact on organ functioning because it can compress and restrict the movement of organs, impede blood flow, and disrupt the natural alignment of the spine.

Here are a few ways in which bad posture can be detrimental to organ functioning:

• **Reduced lung capacity:** Slouching or hunching forward can compress the chest and restrict expansion of the lungs. This can lead to shallow breathing and reduced oxygen intake, which can impact overall organ function and energy levels. Sitting right instantly increases the energy levels and improves

POSTURE CORRECTION



focus. Bad posture, particularly in the neck and upper back, can strain the muscles and put pressure on the nerves in those areas. This muscle tension and nerve compression can lead to tension headaches, which may trigger migraines in susceptible individuals. Additionally, poor posture can affect blood flow to the brain and increase tension in the neck and shoulder muscles, both of which are associated with migraines.

• **Digestive issues:** Poor posture, especially when sitting or slouching after meals, can compress the abdomen and disrupt the normal functioning of the digestive system. This compression can impede digestion, slow down the movement of food through the intestines, and contribute to problems like acid reflux, bloating, and constipation. Reflux or heart burn is a lifestyle disorder and has become almost like epidemic, even teenagers feel it. Endoscopy does not show anything internally when examined, leading to overdose of antacid medications.

• **Circulatory problems:** Bad posture can interfere with proper blood circulation. For example, sitting with crossed legs or slouching can compress blood vessels and impede the flow of blood to vital organs. Restricted blood flow can lead to decreased oxygen and nutrient delivery, affecting the overall health and function of organs. It may also lead to

HOW ONE CAN IMPROVE POSTURE IN GENERAL

• Be mindful of your posture during everyday activities, like watching television, washing dishes, or walking.

• Stay active. Any kind of exercise may help improve your posture, but certain types of exercises can be especially helpful. They include yoga, tai chi, and other exercises that focuses on body awareness. It is also a good idea to do exercises that strengthen your core (muscles around your back, abdomen, and pelvis).

• Maintain a healthy weight. Extra weight can weaken your abdominal muscles, cause problems for your pelvis and spine, and contribute to low back pain. These can hurt your posture.

• Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes. High heels, for example, can throw off your balance and force you to walk differently. This puts more stress on your muscles and harms your posture.

• Make sure work surfaces are at a comfortable height for you, whether you are sitting in front of a computer, cooking food, or eating a meal.

• If you have concerns about your posture or organ health, consulting with a healthcare professional or physical therapist would be beneficial.

cases of varicose veins, restless leg syndrome and swollen ankles.

• **Spinal misalignment:** Bad posture often involves an unnatural alignment of the spine, which can lead to issues with the nervous system. The spine houses the spinal cord, which connects the brain to the rest of the body. When the spine is misaligned due to poor posture, it can put pressure on the nerves, interfering with the proper functioning of the nervous system and potentially affecting organ function.

• **Muscle imbalances:** Maintaining poor posture over time can lead to muscle imbalances, with certain muscles becoming tight and others becoming weak. These imbalances can affect the support and stability of the organs, potentially leading to issues such as pelvic floor dysfunction or urinary problems, weakness and stiffness in the body.

THE SOLUTION GOING FORWARD

Having good posture is about more than looking good. It helps you to develop strength, flexibility, and balance in your body. These can all lead to less muscle pain and more energy throughout the day. Proper posture also reduces stress on your muscles and ligaments, which can reduce your risk of injury.

Improving your posture also helps you become more aware of your muscles, making it easier to correct your own posture. As you work on your posture and become more aware of your body, you might even notice some imbalances or areas of tightness you weren't previously aware of. **DI**

Dr Isha Sehdev runs a fully equipped clinic EEZ ALIGN on a Golf Course Road in Gurgaon and has experience of 15 years in Physical Therapy. She has a team of manual physiotherapists who believe in detailed assessment and examination and craft a unique treatment plan according to the client. Some of the key issues that she has facilitated people to resolve are Migraines/headaches, back discomfort, poor circulation, poor posture, sciatica, jaw pains, chronic ankle sprains, frozen shoulder, fatigue, herniated discs, Muscle strains, running injuries, scoliosis, Menstrual issues, urinary incontinence, carpal tunnel syndrome, tennis and golfer's elbow, foot and ankle injuries. With a strong commitment to patient care, she was always keen in learning the most advanced techniques and concepts. Besides being a physiotherapist specialised in orthopaedic she is an Osteopath from Ontario University, Canada, a Structural integrator from Global School of SI, Florida and a Chiropractor from Ackerman College, Germany.

SATWIK- CHIRAG

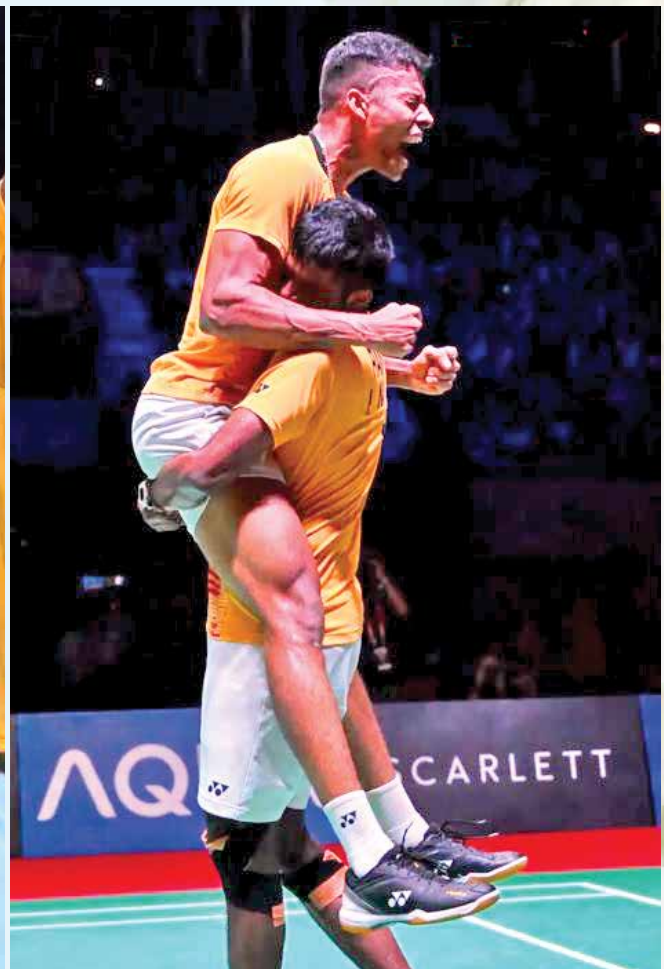
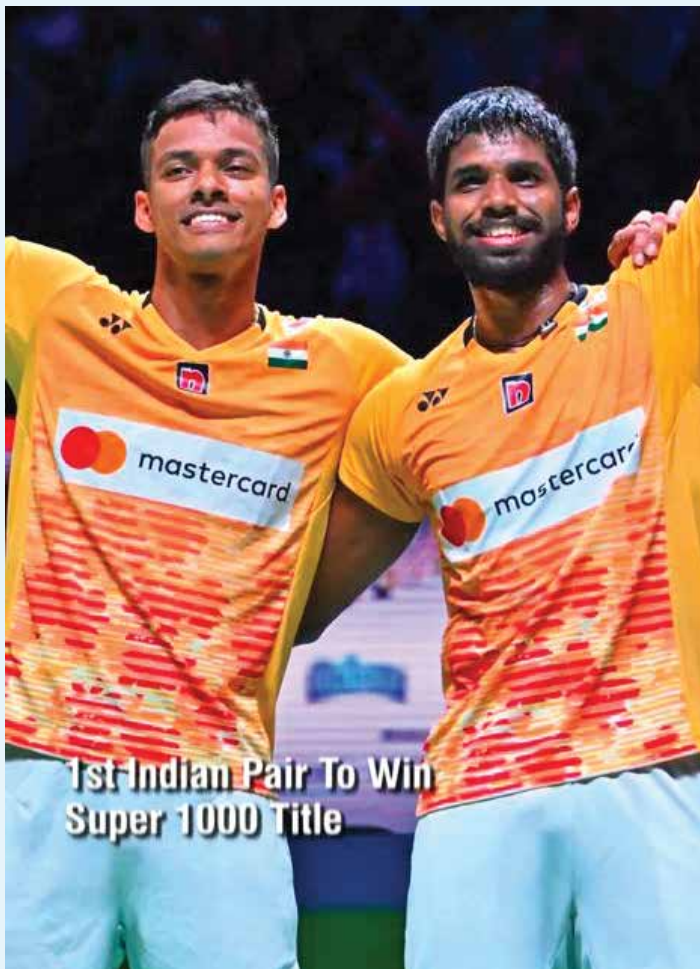
MARK A NEW ERA IN INDIA'S BADMINTON QUEST



The Indian duo win their maiden title in the 1000 series, marking a new chapter as the country looks forward to energise other sports, not just one. Progressively, we are doing better, with badminton being an old sport where we had corned some glory in the past. Is a revival on the cards?

by V. K. VERMA

Satwik-Chirag's gold medal win defeating the world champions Indonesia is a big confidence booster just ahead of the World Championships, scheduled in Denmark later in August this year. They had to settle for a bronze in this same event in 2022 WC. They are India's steadiest high-performance pair in the past several decades. Ranked amongst the top 8 pairs, they present a great chance for a gold in WC as also Olympics 2024. The Men's doubles has always been dominated by Indonesia, Malaysia, China and Denmark. It is their grit and sheer intelligence at play that has taken them to this level, even when they have hardly any sparring partner for their training. Both Indian and foreign coaches have helped them over the past 8 years. BAI deserves credit for this support extended to them.



With Satwik-Chirag coming of age, Indian prospects of picking a badminton medal in Paris Olympic 2024 certainly become brighter. Indian Olympic medal hopes since 2008 Beijing Olympics were limited to women singles. When Saina lost in QF playing against the drift in Beijing, our hearts sank. PV Sindhu had not arrived yet. Eight years later, in the same event came India's first silver. With PV Sindhu, still a force to reckon with, WS remains our top medal hope in Paris. With the blossoming of Satwik-Chirag, we have a potential bigger basket of medals to fight for and MD becomes a good prospect. With China as badminton power house whining down, Men's Singles may also throw up a surprise for India; Kadambi Srikanth and Pronnoy cannot be written off. An exciting year ahead and with coaching in full swing with Gopichand leading the charge, we have much to look forward to.

The structure in Badminton is two-tier with two centres of national excellence. There is one at Hyderabad headed by Gopi and the other in Bengaluru headed by Vimal Kumar, with both working in a most healthy rivalry. They have their own team of coaches. Beyond their efforts is the critical difference that has come around to India's performance is the training provided by foreign coaches - from Indonesia, Malaysia, Korea with sports science support on the lines of cricket.

Cricket is in India's DNA. It has been there for over 60 years from the days of Salim Durrani and Farooq Engineer. DNAs are not altered easily. Badminton or for that matter any sport in India is not likely to come anywhere near cricket as a national sport. Hockey and football with sizeable following, have been swept aside by cricket's awesome challenge. Our nation has shown space for just one mania so far. That

space is already occupied. But there is no saying how the future unfolds.

Admittedly, cricket offers a lot more excitement in viewership. It is truly a spectator sport unlike badminton rallies which have recently crossed the mark of 100 for a single point. Sponsorship in badminton is big money but only for the few who win individual laurels like Sindhu, Saina, Kadambi etc. No corporate body has yet taken up badminton. This is a must for grass root development. Reliance had shown interest in 2010 (I had a one-on-one 44 minute long meeting with Mukesh Ambani in 2010 in Mumbai). It is yet to be finalised. **DI**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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