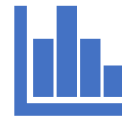




AXIA IAS ACADEMY



EDITORIAL ANALYSIS



MAY 10



CONSISTENT
COMPREHENSIVE AND
CREDIBLE



UNIQUE AND BEST IN
QUALITY

1. No waging peace without a UNSC reboot: India's case (THE SUNDAY GUARDIAN)
2. THE FUTURE OF ADI GANGA (THE SUNDAY GUARDIAN)
3. A relationship of unequals: US-India trade ties & twists (HINDUSTAN TIMES)
4. Char Dham tourism, and the need to balance economy with ecology (THE TIMES OF INDIA)



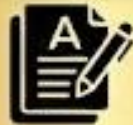
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• Key Terms and Explanations

- **Permanent Five (P5):** China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They hold veto power under Article 27 of the UN Charter, meaning any substantive resolution fails if even one of them votes against it.
- **Veto Power:** The ability of any P5 member to block a draft resolution in the Security Council. Despite the word “veto” not appearing in the Charter, the requirement for “concurring votes of the permanent members” creates this privilege. Example: Russia has used the veto multiple times since 2022 to shield its actions in Ukraine.
- **G4 Group:** A coalition of India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan that mutually supports each other’s bids for permanent seats. They advocate for expansion in both permanent and non-permanent categories.
- **Uniting for Consensus (UfC) / Coffee Club:** A group, led by Italy with Pakistan as an active partner, that opposes expansion of permanent seats. They favour only non-permanent membership expansion, reflecting regional rivalries—Pakistan’s stance on India, Italy’s on Germany, etc.
- **L69 Coalition:** A grouping of around 40 developing countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America pushing for comprehensive UNSC reform, closely aligned with the G4 and African Union’s Ezulwini Consensus.
- **Ezulwini Consensus (2005):** The African Union’s common position demanding at least two permanent seats with all privileges including the veto, and five non-permanent seats for Africa.
- **Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN):** Launched in 2008 under a General Assembly decision, the IGN is the platform where UN members discuss Security Council reform. Despite meeting for over 17 years, it has not yet moved to text-based negotiations on a single draft resolution.
- **Article 108 of the UN Charter:** Specifies the amendment procedure: approval by two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratification by two-thirds of all UN members, including all P5. Thus, any reform that expands the Council or alters the veto structure effectively requires the consent of the very powers that benefit from the current arrangement.
- **Article 51:** Recognises the inherent right of self-defence, individual or collective, if an armed attack occurs, until the Security Council takes measures. States can act without prior Council authorisation. The article mentions Israel citing it to justify strikes on Iran without a UNSC resolution.
- **Board of Peace (under Trump’s vision):** A hypothetical body mentioned as an example of an alternative global architecture. It would involve a chair-for-life role, an \$8 billion fee for permanent membership, and exclude regions like Sub-Saharan Africa—illustrating a dystopian drift away from multilateralism.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis is that **the UNSC cannot credibly wage peace unless it undergoes deep structural reform**, because the paralysis and selective misuse of the Council are driving powerful states to build alternative, less inclusive architectures. The article builds the case through these points:

- **Misuse and paralysis pattern:** The Council has alternated between being used to legitimise wars of choice (1991 Gulf War under Resolution 678, 2011 Libya intervention under 1973) and being completely deadlocked (Syria since 2011, Ukraine post-2022). The 2003 Iraq invasion stretched resolutions to manufacture justification; in Libya, a civilian protection mandate became regime change.

- **Erosion of multilateralism:** Recent crises—Israel’s strikes on Iran in 2025 and 2026, the Gaza war under Resolution 2803 endorsing an exclusive “Board of Peace”—show a trend of unilateralism and creation of parallel, non-universal institutions. The Council either provides a flag of convenience or is sidelined.

- **Reform mandate is being hollowed out:** The IGN process, meant since 2008 to produce text-based negotiations, has stalled. The 2024 Pact for the Future called for action, yet the IGN has not acted. P5 members display open disinterest in expanding permanent membership.

- **India’s principled-cum-pragmatic stand:** India’s envoy laid down two complementary positions—first, as long as the veto exists, any new permanent member must have it on equal terms (the African position). Second, the G4’s tactical offer: a 15-year deferral on exercising the veto, reviewable thereafter. This signals that India will accept nothing that makes it a second-class permanent member.

- **Two-tier reform is not reform:** The 1965 expansion of only non-permanent seats increased P5 relative power. Creating new permanent seats without veto would entrench an asymmetry—a lower tier beneath the 1945 victors, with the latter deciding if and when the lower tier gets equal rights.

- **India’s moral and functional claim:** Denying a permanent seat to India, which represents one-sixth of humanity, the world’s oldest and largest democracy, and the fourth-largest economy, robs the Council of a consequential peace actor and undercuts its legitimacy.

- **Strategic framing:** “The seat would formalise a standing India already has.” India sits with G4, L69, and the African Union’s Ezulwini Consensus, building a winnable coalition. India’s role in securing the African Union’s G20 membership exemplifies its inclusive approach to global governance reform.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **1945 San Francisco Conference:** The UNSC was designed by the victors of World War II. The P5 got permanent seats and veto power on the logic that great-power unanimity was essential for peace. Total seats: 11 (5 permanent, 6 non-permanent).
- **1965 Amendment (first and only):** Membership expanded to 15 (5 permanent, 10 non-permanent) through Charter amendment, reflecting decolonisation and a larger UN. Notably, the permanent category remained untouched, increasing the influence of the P5 relative to elected members.
- **Cold War paralysis (1947–1991):** The veto was used liberally, mostly by the USSR, making the Council ineffective in most conflicts. The Uniting for Peace resolution (1950) allowed the General Assembly to step in when the Council was blocked, but with non-binding recommendations.
- **Post-Cold War activism and overreach (1990s–2000s):** The Gulf War (1991) saw the Council authorise force successfully. The 1990s also exposed the Council's failings—genocide in Rwanda (1994), Srebrenica (1995). The 1999 Kosovo intervention bypassed the Council entirely. The 2003 Iraq war saw the US and UK stretch legal interpretations, revealing that the Council could be bypassed or manipulated by the powerful.
- **Reform debate intensifies (1993–2008):** The Open-Ended Working Group on Security Council reform was established in 1993. In 2005, then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's report "In Larger Freedom" pushed for reform. The G4 tabled a framework resolution in 2005, but the UfC countered, and no vote took place. The Ezulwini Consensus crystallised Africa's demands.
- **IGN and stagnation (2008–present):** The IGN was launched with a clear mandate to negotiate "equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council." Yet, for 17 years, meetings have cyclically discussed clusters of issues without a negotiating text, due to procedural objections led by the UfC and tacitly supported by some P5 members.
- **India's sustained campaign:** From being a non-permanent member multiple times, India has been at the forefront of reform. The L69 group was created in 2007-08 by India and like-minded nations to push for expansion in both categories. India has linked UNSC reform to the broader demand for democratisation of global governance, as seen in its G20 presidency and inclusion of the AU.
- **Recent catalysts:** The utter Council stalemate over Ukraine, the Gaza war resolution that endorsed a questionable external mechanism, and the bypassing of the Council by major powers in the Middle East, have added fire to the argument: reform or risk irrelevance. In April 2026, India's firm yet flexible statement at the IGN reflected a mature diplomatic calibration.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

(Timeline 1945 - Present)



LEGITIMACY CRISIS & FAILURE

- P5 misuse of veto:** impressens the Council of veto presents the control of pani Council, in the mumant to med a on Security veto.
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KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS

P5 Glossary	Veto Veto zomed representation	G4 Security Council	UfC Assosent Emilitation
L.69 Gimmary	IGN Regional Evolutation	IGN Regional representation	Ezulwini Lack of repreuation
L.69 Natonx enamary Councils	IGN Lack of Regional Evolutation	Ezulwini Ezulwintikilam Voices	



AXIA

UNSC REFORM: INDIA'S STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

CURRENT: UNREFORMED & PARALYZED

FUTURE: REFORMED & EFFECTIVE

VETO POWER
Mechani back



Ukraine



Gaza



Selective Intervention

VETO POWER



G4 Bid
(India, Brazil, Germany, Japan)



African Union Bid
L.69 Group Support



Global South Voice

UNSC STRATEGY & PYQS

2015

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2022

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INDIA'S CASE FOR PERMANENCY

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CHALLENGES

(Three Walls)



P5 status quo
Lack and attribute of representancy ncsmatin clout standard



Coffee Club rivalry
Text-based negotiation: oximat in malonce



Text-based negotiation stalemate
Text-based/ negotiation and ssalemente

WAY FORWARD: A PRACTICAL PATH

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- L.69 alignment** and hall to geero senaral coren economsres lo-nore demers alignment and minilateralism-alignment.
- Minilateralism as a gap-filler:** Minilateralism, economicarrilateral resents oraci minitors weight forsest Security Council.

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**

- The arguments rest on a blend of **realism, liberal institutionalism, and normative cosmopolitanism:**

- **Realist underpinning:** The article accepts the premise that power matters. The P5's veto and the Council's structure were a reflection of the 1945 power balance. Reform, therefore, must acknowledge contemporary power shifts—economic, demographic, military. The logic of “the Council needs India more than India needs the Council” is deeply realist: institutions derive their legitimacy from reflecting the actual distribution of power and capabilities.

- **Liberal institutionalist critique:** Multilateral institutions are supposed to constrain power politics through rules and shared norms. But when the UNSC is selectively invoked or bypassed, it loses its *raison d'être*. The drift toward alternative, non-universal institutions (like the imagined “Board of Peace”) is a classic symptom of institutional decay. Reform is thus necessary to rescue the rules-based order.

- **Principles of justice and representation:** Philosophically, the demand for permanent seats for India, Africa, and Latin America invokes the notion of global justice—that those who bear the consequences of security decisions must have a seat at the table. The denial of representation to the Global South violates the democratic principle of ‘no taxation without representation’, here extended to global governance.

- **Philosophy of peace:** The opening quote by Eleanor Roosevelt—that one must work at peace—sets the ethical stage. The Council's record, swinging between enabling war and being paralysed, contradicts the first purpose of the UN: saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war. The article posits that a structurally unrepresentative and veto-strangled Council cannot be an authentic instrument of peace.

- **Epistemological angle:** How do we know what “legitimate” global governance looks like? The article uses empirical evidence—timelines of resolutions bypassed or misused—to build a case that the current architecture produces bad outcomes. The very knowledge base of international security policy is distorted by a Council that sees through the lens of five powers. Including diverse voices (India, Africa) would broaden the epistemic community and lead to more durable peace solutions.

- **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **Social Dimension**

- A more representative Security Council can improve the sense that global governance reflects diverse societies and post-colonial realities.
- This matters because institutions derive strength not only from law but from social acceptance.
- Underrepresentation of vast populations weakens the perceived fairness of global decision-making.

- **Political Dimension**

- UNSC reform is deeply political because it concerns distribution of authority in the international system.
- It intersects with power transitions, regional leadership claims, and strategic bargaining among major powers.
- India's case is therefore not just legal or moral, but intensely geopolitical.

- **Legal Dimension**

- The issue is embedded in the UN Charter framework.
- Reform requires adherence to formal amendment procedures, making legality central to institutional redesign.
- The legal problem is not absence of a path, but the extreme difficulty of moving through that path.

- **Ethical Dimension**

- The ethical core lies in justice, equality of voice, responsibility, and fair representation.
- There is also an ethics of consequences: failure to reform may deepen global disorder and selective enforcement.
- Ethical evaluation must therefore combine procedural fairness with practical humanitarian outcomes.

- **International Dimension**

- Reform reflects the transition from a post-1945 order toward a more plural world.
- It affects questions of multilateralism, sovereignty, intervention, great-power competition, and Global South agency.
- The issue also influences whether the UN remains central in world politics or gets bypassed by alternate platforms.

- **Economic Dimension**

- Peace and security architecture shapes trade routes, energy flows, investment confidence, humanitarian financing, and sanctions regimes.
- If the UNSC loses credibility, uncertainty in global governance rises, affecting development and markets.
- India's claim is also tied to its growing economic significance in the world system.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**

- **Class 12, Political Science, Contemporary World Politics, Chapter 6: ‘International Organisations’**

Directly covers the UN, its principal organs, the Security Council, and the veto power. It discusses the need for reform, the demands of India and other countries, and the politics of the veto. The patterns of US dominance and the debate on the legitimacy of the Council are presented.

- **Class 12, Political Science, Contemporary World Politics, Chapter 1: ‘The Cold War Era’ and Chapter 2: ‘The End of Bipolarity’**

These chapters provide the historical background of the UN’s founding in 1945, the paralysis during the Cold War, and the transformation of international relations post-1991—essential to understanding why reform became necessary with the rise of new powers.

- **Class 11, Political Science, Political Theory, Chapter 10: ‘Development’ and Chapter 4: ‘Social Justice’**

The principle of equitable representation ties to the philosophical concepts of justice and equality at the global level. The chapter on development also addresses structural inequalities in global institutions.

- **Class 10, Democratic Politics II, Chapter 8: ‘Challenges to Democracy’**

Global governance is an extension of the democratic principle; the UNSC’s structure as being undemocratic can be linked to the broader challenge of making institutions representative and accountable.

Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus

General Studies Paper II (Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International Relations)

- **Important International institutions, agencies and fora – their structure, mandate.** The UNSC is a core topic. Its composition, veto, reform process, and India's bid are explicitly mentioned in the syllabus.
- **Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.** G4, L69, IG, Coffee Club, and India's role in G20 with AU are directly relevant.
- **Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.** P5 behaviour, UfC obstruction led by Pakistan, and US policy shifts affect India's core diplomatic goal.

General Studies Paper I (History)

- **World History:** The founding of the UN in 1945, the Cold War, the decolonisation movement that expanded UN membership, and the post-Cold War unipolar moment all contextualise the present impasse.

General Studies Paper III (Security)

- **Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.** A paralysed UNSC impacts global security dynamics, terrorism, and conflict zones that affect India.

General Studies Paper IV (Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude)

- **Ethics in international relations; global justice.** The demand for UNSC reform is fundamentally about ethical governance, fairness, and the moral contradictions of a veto-privileged few deciding for the many.

Essay Paper

- Themes like "Global governance in a multipolar world", "Reforming multilateral institutions: necessity and obstacles", "India's quest for a permanent seat at the high table", or "Peace cannot be monopolised."

Optional Subjects

- **Political Science and International Relations (PSIR):** Entire sections on the UN, collective security, the politics of reform, realism vs. liberalism, India's foreign policy. This issue is a classic PSIR case study.
- **History Optional:** Paper II's world history after World War II, including the establishment of the UN and the challenges of the post-Cold War order.
- **Public Administration:** International organisations, their structural flaws, and administrative reforms.

- **Way Forward**

- **Advance text-based negotiations immediately:** The IGN must, after 17 years, move to a single composite text with multiple options clearly tabled. India along with G4 and L69 should insist that the next session produces a zero draft, even if it records competing positions. Without a document to amend, permanent ambiguity serves the status quo.
- **Consolidate the G4-Africa-L69 axis:** The successful campaign for AU's G20 membership can be replicated. Formalise a joint framework resolution that respects the Ezulwini Consensus and the G4's demand, presenting a united Global South front that increases pressure on the P5.
- **Build tactical bridges with reform-minded P5:** France and the UK are supportive; their post-Brexit quest for relevance can be leveraged. The US, despite fluctuations, can be engaged on the premise that a more representative Council is better for burden-sharing and legitimacy of sanctions. Engage China on the logic that it, as a developing country champion, cannot be seen blocking greater Global South representation.
- **Promote incremental confidence-building measures:** While permanent seat reform is the end goal, in the interim, push for a General Assembly resolution calling for voluntary veto restraint in cases of mass atrocities (following the France-Mexico initiative and the ACT Code of Conduct). This builds normative pressure on the P5 without requiring Charter change.
- **Strengthen regional rotation and accountability:** For Africa's seats, encourage the AU to develop a clear, merit-based rotation mechanism and criteria, addressing internal divisions that the P5 exploit. Similarly, the G4 must remain united, with each member managing its regional critics.
- **Position the reform as rescue of multilateralism:** India must consistently message, including at forums like the Summit of the Future, that without reform, the UN's peace architecture will be replaced by ad-hoc, exclusionary bodies like the "Board of Peace" example. Frame it as a choice between a reformed Council and a chaotic jungle.
- **Indian domestic readiness:** Simultaneously, India must continue building capabilities—blue economy, cyber security, robust peacekeeping training, and mediation expertise—to demonstrate that it is not just a claimant but a proven provider of global security solutions.
- **Explore a sunset clause for deferred veto:** The 15-year deferral idea should be encoded with a legally binding automatic review and a presumption that veto rights will become equal unless the General Assembly decides otherwise by a supermajority—thus preventing indefinite second-tier status.

- **UPSC Civil Services Main Examination**

- **2024:** *“The UN Security Council is often criticised for being a relic of the past and failing to address contemporary global challenges. Discuss the need for its reform and the obstacles in its path.”* (GS2, 15 marks)
- **2023:** *“India’s quest for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council is justified yet faces formidable barriers. Analyse.”* (GS2, 15 marks)
- **2022:** *“Critically examine the role of the UNSC in maintaining international peace and security in the post-Cold War era.”* (GS2, 15 marks)
- **2021:** *“Discuss the impediments in the way of UN Security Council reforms and India’s strategy to overcome them.”* (GS2, 15 marks)
- **2020:** *“The expansion and strengthening of the UN Security Council is essential to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities. Comment.”* (GS2, 10 marks)
- **2019:** *“Despite the growing demand for UNSC reform, the process remains stalled. Analyse the reasons and suggest a way forward.”* (GS2, 15 marks)
- **2018:** *“Multilateral institutions like the UN are facing a crisis of legitimacy and effectiveness. In this context, discuss the case for and against UNSC reform.”* (GS2, 15 marks)
- **2017:** *“What are the main arguments for India’s bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council? What are the challenges it faces?”* (GS2, 10 marks)
- **2016:** *“The UN Security Council is in urgent need of reforms to make it more representative, credible and effective. Elaborate.”* (GS2, 12.5 marks)
- **2015:** *“The veto power in the UNSC is an anachronistic privilege that undermines the principle of sovereign equality. Do you agree? Justify.”* (GS2, 12.5 marks)

THE POTENTIAL



ANIL KUMAR
@anilkumar

There may be a name savior that summons the forgotten glories of Bengal. Before the Hooghly was widened by oil and cement into the channel that defines Kolkata today, there was the Adi Ganga—the Primal Ganga—an ancient distributary flowing southwest through what is now the heart of South Kolkata. It is said to have been the original sacred waterway, the river by which the Ganges descended from the Pliocene but had not, nor has it ever, and the first Bengal wilderness that would grow into commercial colonies were planted in its banks. Today the Adi Ganga is a shadow of itself—choked with effluent, reduced to a trickle in many stretches, its glens eroding, its sacrosanct wilderness lost. But in this case, the river is not a metaphor for the city of Bengal itself, a child of an extraordinary civility brought low by a combination of neglect, mismanagement, and a failure of self-reflection.

That failure has a statistical face. Over the industrial heartland of the British Empire and, at independence, the third-largest contributor to India's GDP at 10.6% in 1960-61, West Bengal has experienced what the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister described in 2018 as a "consistent decline throughout this period." By 2023-24, the state's share of national GDP had fallen to just 5.6%. Its per capita income, which stood at 123% of the national average in 1961's old, had fallen to 62.7% by 2023-24—below states like Rajasthan and Odisha. The industrial sector, which accounted for 50% of total industrial output in 1960-61, had fallen to 15% by 1997-98. The GDI of nearly every state in the region is higher than West Bengal's.

But the geography has not changed. The Ganges distributary delta remains the largest river delta on Earth. Kolkata, at its heart, sits at one of the most strategically extraordinary positions of all of Asia—the confluence between the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and the Bay of Bengal. The port of Kolkata, the vibrant opening window port to India, handled 700 million tonnes of cargo in 2023-24 and 960,549 TEUs of containerized traffic. These are not negligible numbers—that they are a fraction of what a properly configured, deeply modernized port at the mouth of the Ganga ought to handle. Mumbai's container traffic last handled over five million TEUs annually. The gap is not a measure of natural disadvantage. It is a measure of missed potential.

The key to unlocking that potential lies in recognizing what the Bay of Bengal has become, and what it is about to become. 20% of all global container trade already passes through these waters. The Bay belongs to nearly 1 billion people across its rim nations, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, together with the beachhead nations and Nepal, all members of BIMSTEC, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation. The five-nation of the Bay, encompassing fisheries, offshore energy, tourism, and shipping, is estimated to carry a potential worth over \$100 billion, India's Union Minister for Ports has stated a national ambition to expand port capacity to 400, reaching 10,000 million tonnes per annum by 2047 and entering the top five global shipping nations, the 2023 BIMSTEC Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement aims to harmonize customs and port rules across all seven member states. The infrastructure of a new Bay of Bengal economy is being assembled, gate by gate. The question is whether Kolkata—over the underperformance of this maritime world—will stand or merely survive it.

To lead it, West Bengal

THE FUTURE OF ADI GANGA

Or how to revitalize the future of West Bengal.

BENGAL'S ECONOMIC DECLINE & THE BAY OF BENGAL OPPORTUNITY

West Bengal Economic indicators 1960-2026



Sources: EAC-PM 2024, Ministry of Ports, BIMSTEC

must undertake a structural industrial revival of a scope not seen since the 1980s. The state's current GDP of the 2022 lakh crore (1,82,26,36 billion) projected for 2026-29 is growing at 1% annually, and the industrial sector grew at 2.7% in 2023-24, marginally above the national average of 4.7%. But growth rates on industrial base are insufficient. Bengal needs a deliberate reindustrialization strategy built on five pillars.

The first is port-led development. Kolkata, the deep-sea ports of the Kolkata port areas, must be developed into a premier world-class transshipment hub. India Ports has already signed a cooperation agreement with Honna Private Maritime Services for the modernization of North No. 2 at Haldia—a beginning, not a conclusion. Investment in a deep-water channel, intermodal rail port connectivity, and a dedicated logistic park at Haldia could transform it into a multimodal gateway of Bengal. Haldia's ports

at Chittagong and Mongla are already linked into this network by agreement. Nepal and Bhutan, landlocked, depend critically on Kolkata for their trade routes. The region is pre-configured for a Bengal-led logistic hub. It requires only the political will and investment ardor to make it so.

The second pillar is manufacturing. Bengal has latent strengths that are chronically underutilized. It possesses Asia's largest leather complex at the Kolkata Leather Complex in Basirhat, with 800 tanneries across 1,000 acres employing five lakh workers, with further potential of 50,000 tanneries by July 2024 to add 300 more tanneries and 200 tanneries units. It has steel and heavy engineering plants in Durgapur. It has a chemical and fertilizer industry at Haldia. It has the second highest concentration of IT/ITeS units in India, with 40,47 lakh units accounting for 54% of the national total. What Bengal lacks is the policy ecosystem, land

acquisition clarity, labor law reform, single-window clearance, and conversion of these assets into an integrated industrial fabric. The state's right conservative Global Business Summit here at the Bengal-led investment of 20,200 lakh crore, though the resolution of judges into ground-level investment remains the critical challenge.

The third pillar is the digital and knowledge economy. Kolkata has historically been India's intellectual capital—the city of Tagore and Bose of flag and fire. The state has 6.17 million internet subscribers, 1,50,000 startups. Bengal's power infrastructure lag in the country. Its 118 substations (October 2023 and September 2024) accounted for only 10,234 crore rupees (approximately 1,367 billion)—a fraction of what Tamil Nadu or Karnataka offers in a single year. Its service IT and digital infrastructure is underdeveloped and outdated.

The fourth pillar is the blue economy. Bengal's 100 km shoreline coastline, its fisheries, its offshore energy potential, and its proximity to the Sundarbans—the world's largest mangrove forest and a site of extraordinary biodiversity—constitute an economic frontier that has barely been touched. Regulated aquaculture, offshore wind energy, eco-tourism, and marine biotechnology are all areas in which Bengal's natural endowments give it a structural advantage. The state is already a leading exporter of shrimp with investment in cold chain infrastructure that could be leveraged to build a high-value export sector.

The fifth and most under-estimated pillar is cultural

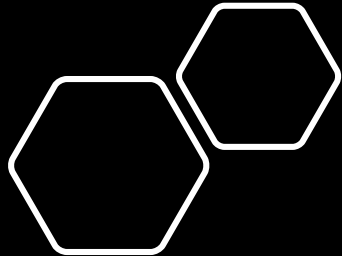
renewal. Kolkata, India's 2-culture inheritance spirit like Kolkata's. It is the city that produced the Bengal Renaissance, that nurtured the first stirrings of Indian modernity, that gave the world Rabindranath Tagore, Satyajit Ray, Ananya a Sen, and a literary tradition of unparalleled richness. This is not sentiment—it is an economic asset. Cultural tourism, design, publishing, film, fashion, and the creative industries are among the fastest-growing sectors globally. A Bengal that systematically leveraged its cultural brand, as France has done for Italy or Korea for Japan, would attract both high-value investment and the skilled, mobile creative class that anchors knowledge economy clusters.

The Adi Ganga itself offers a final, and most meta-physical, opportunity. The quest to build the Bay of Bengal over the traditional Hooghly, a multi-venture project in which Bengal's natural endowments give it a structural advantage. The state is already a leading exporter of shrimp with investment in cold chain infrastructure that could be leveraged to build a high-value export sector. The fifth and most under-estimated pillar is cultural

brought to the Chittagong-Bangladesh stream or Singapore in the Singapore River could restore its navigability and ecological health. A renewed Adi Ganga, lined with heritage ghats and cultural institutions, flowing through a revitalized South Kolkata, would be a world-class asset—the signal that Bengal had chosen renewal.

The primal river is still there, beneath the neglect. So is Bengal. The geography is magnificent, the human capital is extraordinary, the maritime moment is arriving. What is required is a convergence of imaginative governance, serious investment, and a renewed belief in what Bengal has always been not a prey but a predator. The Bay of Bengal is not India's backwater. It is India's next great economic theater. And Kolkata, if it chooses, can be its stage.

India's next great economic theater. And Kolkata, if it chooses, can be its stage. India's next great economic theater. And Kolkata, if it chooses, can be its stage.



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Adi Ganga:** Literally the “Primal Ganga.” An ancient distributary of the Ganges that once flowed through what is now South Kolkata. Over centuries, siltation and course shifts reduced it to a narrow, polluted canal. It symbolises both Bengal’s sacred geography and its accumulated neglect.
- **GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product):** The total value of goods and services produced within a state in a year. When we say West Bengal’s GSDP is approximately Rs 13.97 lakh crore, it refers to the size of its economy. A falling share of national GDP indicates relative decline, even if absolute numbers grow.
- **TEU (Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit):** A standard measure of containerised cargo. One TEU represents a 20-foot-long shipping container. Kolkata Port handled about 960,549 TEUs in 2025–26, compared to over 5 million at JNPT Mumbai—a gap that underscores underutilised maritime capacity.
- **BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation):** A regional grouping of seven countries—India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan, and Nepal—focused on economic and technical collaboration around the Bay of Bengal. It is the institutional framework through which a new Bay-centred economy is taking shape.
- **Blue Economy:** The sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of marine ecosystems. It covers fisheries, offshore energy, shipping, tourism, and marine biotechnology. The Bay of Bengal’s blue economy potential is estimated at over \$500 billion.
- **Port-Led Development:** An economic strategy where a major port becomes the nucleus for industrial growth, logistics hubs, and export-oriented manufacturing. Think of Rotterdam in the Netherlands or Singapore. The idea is to turn Haldia–Kolkata into such a hub for the Bay of Bengal.
- **Cultural Economy:** Treating cultural heritage, creative industries, design, film, literature, and intellectual traditions as economic assets. A city like Florence or Kyoto markets its cultural brand globally; Kolkata can similarly monetise its remarkable intellectual and artistic legacy.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis is that West Bengal's prolonged economic decline is not a result of resource poverty but of a collective failure of imagination, policy neglect, and arrested potential. The state's geography, human capital, and maritime location are extraordinary—yet they have been systematically underleveraged. The Adi Ganga's degradation becomes a living metaphor for this story.

- **Key Arguments**

- **Historical prosperity to persistent decline:** West Bengal contributed 10.5% of India's GDP in 1960–61; by 2023–24 its share had halved to 5.6%. Industrial output declined from 9.8% of national total (1980–81) to 5% by 1997–98. Per capita income fell from well above to significantly below the national average. This decline is a six-decade trend, not a short-term blip.

- **Geography unchanged, opportunity squandered:** The Ganges–Brahmaputra delta remains the world's largest, and Kolkata sits at a strategic node linking South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Bay. The port handles decent cargo volumes (70.87 million tonnes, 960,549 TEUs) but is dwarfed by Mumbai's JNPT. This gap is not a natural disadvantage; it is a policy and investment deficit.

- **The Bay of Bengal moment:** With 25% of global maritime trade passing through the Bay, a rim population of 1.6 billion, and BIMSTEC emerging as a serious cooperation framework, a regional economic architecture is being assembled. The Bay is not India's backwater; it is Asia's next great economic theatre. Kolkata can either lead or watch.

- **Five-pillar revival strategy:** The article proposes a deliberate reindustrialisation built on: (1) port-led development at Haldia, (2) manufacturing revival (leather, steel, MSMEs), (3) digital and knowledge economy using Kolkata's intellectual legacy, (4) blue economy from fisheries to offshore energy, and (5) cultural economy leveraging the Bengal Renaissance brand.

- **The Adi Ganga as both metaphor and project:** Ecologically restoring the ancient river would not only revive a waterway but signal a larger civilisational renewal. Like Seoul's Cheonggyecheon stream restoration, it can become a visible symbol of a state reclaiming its past glory.

- **Evidence cited:** GDP and per capita income data (EAC–PM 2024), port traffic statistics, BIMSTEC maritime agreement, MSME numbers, leather complex employment, Global Business Summit investment pledges, and comparisons with other states' FDI.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-1947: Colonial industrial hub**

Bengal was the jewel of the British Empire. Calcutta was the imperial capital until 1911, and the state hosted India's earliest modern industries—jute, tea, engineering, and finance. The port was the busiest in the East. However, the Permanent Settlement (1793) had already created a parasitic land revenue system, and the Bengal Renaissance was limping.

- **Partition (1947): A catastrophic blow**

The Radcliffe Line cut through Bengal's economic unity. Jute mills stayed in India, jute-growing areas went to East Pakistan. Calcutta lost its natural hinterland. Millions of refugees poured in, straining urban infrastructure. The industrial supply chain was permanently disrupted.

- **1950s–60s: Height of planned industrialisation**

West Bengal remained a significant contributor to India's GDP—third-largest in 1960–61. Durgapur steel plant, Chittaranjan Locomotive Works, and Haldia refinery signalled continued state-led investment. But the seeds of centralisation were being sown.

- **1970s–80s: The long stagnation**

The Left Front came to power in 1977. Land reforms (Operation Barga) secured tenant rights and reduced rural poverty but created an anti-industrial image due to militant trade unionism and rigid labour laws. The infamous "bandh" culture and gherao politics scared away private capital. Industrial share in national output slid continuously.

- **1991 onwards: Missing the liberalisation bus**

While other states, especially in the south and west, raced ahead with reforms, West Bengal dithered. The state did not attract IT or manufacturing FDI at scale. Kolkata Port lost traffic to newer private ports. The state's share of India's GDP shrank.

- **2000s: Attempted industrial push and resistance**

The Left government, led by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, attempted a course correction—inviting Tata's Nano project to Singur (2006). Massive farmer protests over land acquisition, led by Mamata Banerjee, forced Tata out (2008). The episode cemented an investor perception of land acquisition as politically impossible.

- **2011–present: Trinamool Congress era**

The new government promised industry-friendly policies. Global Business Summits were held, investment pledges worth lakhs of crores announced. But actual translation into ground-level projects remained weak. FDI inflows (Rs 13,346 crore in five years) remained a fraction of southern states. Meanwhile, the national focus shifted to BIMSTEC, blue economy, and Infrastructure push, offering new narratives.

- **2020s: The maritime opportunity**

India's port capacity expansion targets, BIMSTEC Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement (2025), and renewed focus on the Bay of Bengal have created a window. Kolkata's strategic location is again in the spotlight, but the state must match it with political will and governance reform.

INTRODUCTION: THE ADI GANGA AS METAPHOR

1. The Adi Ganga: River of Vitality, Symbol of Stagnation



- Adi Ganga, the original Ganges flow, is now a stagnant urban canal.
- This neglect is a powerful metaphor for the state's trajectory: once an industrial heart, now facing significant challenges.
- Its restoration is not just environmental; it's a prerequisite for cultural and psychological resurgence.

ECONOMIC DECLINE AND BAY OF BENGAL OPPORTUNITY

2. The Statistical Decline and The Pivot East



- West Bengal's economic share of national GDP has more than halved since the 1960s.
- The key to unlocking potential lies in the 'Bay of Bengal Opportunity', leveraging the state as a gateway.
- Proximity to BIMSTEC and Southeast Asia makes it a natural trade hub.

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL BLUE RENAISSANCE

3. Five Pillars of Re-indus- trialization: 'The Blue Economy'



- **PORT-LED DEVELOPMENT:** Modernizing Haldia & Kolkata for container traffic.
- **MANUFACTURING STRENGTH:** Leveraging existing clusters like Kolkata Leather Complex.
- **DIGITAL/KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY:** Using high MSME & internet subscriber density.
- **THE BLUE ECONOMY:** Tapping coastline for fisheries and offshore energy.
- **CULTURAL ECONOMY:** Monetizing Kolkata's intellectual legacy for high-value tourism.

HISTORICAL & LOGICAL EVOLUTION

4. A History of Stagnation, A Logic of Determinism



Geography as
Destiny

- **HISTORICAL TIMELINE:** From British capital to post-liberalization struggles.
- **GEOGRAPHICAL DETERMINISM:** The logic that geography doesn't change; the potential for trade is constant.
- **RECLAIMING THE RENAISSANCE:** An appeal to intellectual legacy (Tagore, Ray) for a skilled, creative workforce.

CHALLENGES & THE WAY FORWARD

5. Obstacles and Practical Reforms



- **SILTATION & DREDGING:** The critical, constant challenge for navigable draft.
- **LABOR & LAND REFORMS:** Necessary institutional changes for private investment.
- **THE SEOUL MODEL:** Proposing urban renewal like Cheonggyecheon for the Adi Ganga.
- **INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK:** Creating a dedicated 'Bay of Bengal Authority'.

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**
- **Geographical determinism tempered by agency:** The delta, the port, the river—these are physical constants. The logic says: if the geography hasn't changed, the cause of decline must be human-made—policy failure, political choices. This rejects purely fatalistic or resource-constrained explanations. It is a call for reclaiming agency.
- **Path dependency and historical lock-in:** Bengal's colonial-era prosperity created institutions and a middle class, but the post-Partition shock and subsequent political culture locked the state into a low-equilibrium trap. Breaking out requires a deliberate “structural” effort, not incremental tweaks.
- **The metaphor of the river:** The Adi Ganga is not just a waterway; it is a philosophical device. Rivers in Indian civilisation symbolise purity, continuity, and life. Its choked, forgotten state mirrors Bengal's self-forgetfulness. Restoring it means restoring self-belief—a philosophical argument linking ecology to civilisational identity.
- **Capabilities approach:** Amartya Sen (a Bengali himself) spoke of development as freedom—expanding people's capabilities. The decline in per capita income, industrial jobs, and quality of life is a capabilities contraction. The five-pillar strategy implicitly aims to restore these capabilities among Bengalis.
- **Soft power and cultural capital:** Tagore, Ray, Sen, the Bengali Renaissance—these are not merely heritage; they are a form of capital that can generate economic value. This merges culture with economics, echoing thinkers like Pierre Bourdieu on “cultural capital.”
- **Ecological restoration as narrative renewal:** The Cheonggyecheon stream in Seoul was restored not just for flood control but to reshape the city's identity. Applying this to the Adi Ganga assumes that symbolic projects have real economic and psychological multiplier effects. It's a belief in the power of symbols to catalyse material change.
- **Underlying tension:** The argument is liberal and investment-friendly, but it glosses over the deep-seated suspicion of capital in Bengal's political culture—a legacy of class struggle, land rights, and a powerful intellectual Left. The philosophical challenge is to reconcile market-led growth with Bengal's egalitarian ethos.

- **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **Social Dimension**

- River revival can improve public health by reducing pollution and waterlogging. It can create better public spaces and revive community connection with the river. However, poor communities living along degraded channels must not be treated as obstacles.

- **Political Dimension**

- The issue involves Centre-State coordination, urban governance, regional diplomacy and policy continuity. Bengal's revival can also reshape eastern India's political economy.

- **Legal Dimension**

- Encroachment removal, environmental clearances, sewage regulation, port laws and municipal governance will be central. Courts may also play a role in enforcing river protection.

- **Ethical Dimension**

- Development must balance ecological restoration, heritage protection and livelihood justice. A clean river should not come at the cost of invisible suffering of the urban poor.

- **International Dimension**

- Bengal can connect India with Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and Southeast Asia. BIMSTEC, Act East Policy and India-Bangladesh connectivity are crucial.

- **Economic Dimension**

- The proposal can boost trade, logistics, tourism, fisheries, urban services, manufacturing and employment. It can help correct regional imbalance in India's growth story.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Class 6 Geography – The Earth: Our Habitat**
 - Useful for understanding rivers, drainage, landforms and human settlement around water bodies.
- **Class 7 Geography – Our Environment**
 - Links with human-environment interaction, water pollution, urbanisation and ecological balance.
- **Class 8 Geography – Resources and Development**
 - Relevant for resource use, sustainable development, industries and transport.
- **Class 9 Geography – Contemporary India I**
 - Drainage, climate and natural vegetation chapters help explain river systems and deltaic geography.
- **Class 10 Geography – Contemporary India II**
 - Manufacturing industries, lifelines of national economy and resources chapters directly connect with port-led development and transport.
- **Class 11 Geography – India: Physical Environment**
 - Important for understanding Indian drainage, delta formation, coastal geography and environmental vulnerabilities.
- **Class 12 Geography – India: People and Economy**
 - Highly relevant for transport, trade, human settlements, regional development and planning.
- **Class 12 Political Science**
 - Useful for federalism, regional cooperation and India's foreign policy in South Asia.
- **Class 12 Economics**
 - Links with infrastructure, regional inequality, employment, sustainable development and public investment.





- Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus
- GS Paper I
 - Urbanisation, Indian culture, river-based civilisation, regional geography and post-colonial economic change.
- GS Paper II
 - Federalism, urban governance, local bodies, India-Bangladesh relations, BIMSTEC and regional cooperation.
- GS Paper III
 - Infrastructure, ports, inland waterways, blue economy, environment, disaster management, industrial policy and regional development.
- GS Paper IV
 - Ethics of development, environmental justice, displacement, public accountability and intergenerational equity.
- Essay Paper
 - Themes such as “Rivers as civilisational lifelines”, “Development without memory is incomplete”, and “Geography, governance and destiny”.
- Optional Subjects
 - Geography, Political Science, Public Administration, Sociology, History and Economics have strong linkages.
 - The strongest connection is with GS III because the issue combines infrastructure, economy, environment and regional development.

- **Way Forward**
- **Prepare an Integrated River Rejuvenation Plan**
- Adi Ganga restoration should include sewage treatment, desilting, solid waste control, biodiversity restoration and flood management.
- **Stop Pollution at Source**
- No river revival can succeed if untreated sewage continues to enter the channel. Decentralised sewage treatment plants and strict municipal monitoring are necessary.
- **Protect Livelihoods**
- Street vendors, fisherfolk, boatmen, priests, small traders and informal settlers must be included through rehabilitation and livelihood planning.
- **Link Riverfront with Heritage Tourism**
- Temples, ghats, old settlements, colonial structures and cultural spaces can be connected through walking circuits, boat routes and interpretation centres.
- **Strengthen Kolkata-Haldia Port System**
- Modernisation, dredging, multimodal logistics, digital customs and faster cargo handling are required.
- **Use BIMSTEC and Act East Policy**
- Bengal should be positioned as India's eastern trade gateway connecting Northeast India with Bangladesh and Southeast Asia.
- **Build Climate-Resilient Infrastructure**
- Cyclone shelters, flood buffers, wetlands, mangrove protection and resilient drainage should be part of planning.
- **Create a Unified Authority**
- A special purpose authority may coordinate river restoration, port development, urban planning and environmental compliance.



- **Relevant Previous Year Questions**

- **UPSC CSE Mains – GS I**

- **2023:** Why is the world today confronted with a crisis of availability of and access to freshwater resources?

2020: Discuss the recent measures initiated in disaster management by the Government of India departing from the earlier reactive approach.

2016: The effective management of land and water resources will drastically reduce human miseries. Explain.

2013: Major hot deserts in northern hemisphere are located between 20-30 degree north and on western side of continents. Why?

- **UPSC CSE Mains – GS II**

- **2022:** The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act remains inadequate in promoting incentive-based education. Discuss.

2020: The strength and sustenance of local institutions in India has shifted from their formative phase of autonomy to capacity building. Discuss.

2018: Assess the importance of Panchayat system in India as a part of local government.

2017: “The local self-government system in India has not proved to be effective instrument of governance.” Critically examine.

- **UPSC CSE Mains – GS III**

- **2023:** Explain the mechanism and occurrence of cloudburst in the context of the Indian subcontinent. Discuss two recent examples.

2022: Explain the causes and effects of coastal erosion in India. What are the available coastal management techniques?

2021: Explain the purpose of Green Grid Initiative launched at World Leaders Summit of COP26.

2020: Account for the present location of iron and steel industries away from the source of raw material by giving examples.

2019: Coastal sand mining, whether legal or illegal, poses one of the biggest threats to our environment. Analyse.

2018: What are the impediments in disposing the huge quantities of discarded solid wastes continuously being generated?

2017: What are the salient features of National Waterways Act, 2016?

2016: Rehabilitation of human settlements is one of the important environmental impacts which always attracts controversy while planning major projects. Discuss.

2015: Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata are the three megacities of the country but the air pollution is much more serious problem in Delhi as compared to the other two. Why?

A relationship of unequals: US-India trade ties & twists

The coarsening of discourse by the US is likely part of a negotiating style, where public rhetoric shifts the terms of the negotiations

The India-US trade relationship has never been easy and has occasionally even been hostile. From aid to estrangement, from sanctions to strategic partnership, it has been tempestuous and is currently somewhere between partnership and irritant. The trade agreement hangs in balance, and what has changed is not the asymmetry which has always been there, but the willingness to weaponise it openly — naturally, by the side that can.

The US currently is India's largest export destination, accounting for roughly 18% of India's merchandise exports. It is also the primary market for India's information technology (IT) services. The Indian diaspora in America generates remittances exceeding \$32 billion annually. American institutional investors hold significant positions in Indian equity markets. To use a 2008 financial contagion inspired metaphor, when the US sneezes, India reaches for the inhaler.

The reverse is not true. America's exposure to India, while growing, remains manageable and is definitely not critical. This is the structural reality that entraps every conversation between the two countries.

What has changed materially over the better part of the last two and a half decades is the content of our trade with the US.

historical accident and an earlier act of foresight. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's investment in the ITs in the 1950s was motivated by the idea of nation-building, not export strategy. The engineers and (computer) scientists those institutions delivered were meant for India. Many went to America instead, embedded themselves in technology, medicine and finance and created a diaspora presence that became the foundation of the bilateral relationship. By 2023, the Indian-American community was about 4.4 million, playing a disproportionate role in leadership of American political and economic institutions. Naturally, US corporations are deeply invested in keeping the relationship functional regardless of what politicians on either side do.

The historical accident was Y2K. The fear that the global financial system would malfunction at the turn of the millennium sent American corporations looking for software engineers who could work in English, immediately and economically. India had them — trained by the institutions created in the late-1950s and 1960s, of course, for a very different purpose. The IT services industry that subsequently emerged from that moment has been India's most durable export engine since. By 2022-23, IT and business services exports to the US alone stood at approximately \$80 billion.

The goods trade has followed a more linear trajectory, up from \$5 billion in 1990 to over \$190 billion by 2023, although it has been considerably more politically complicated than services. The US runs a goods deficit with India of about \$45 billion while enjoying a services surplus of approximately

than the goods only figure. But it is the goods deficit that has been driving recent US trade policy. Counting goods and ignoring services when calculating bilateral balances is not an economically defensible position. It is analogous to an entrepreneur saying he does not take a salary from his wholly owned enterprise, while ignoring the profits it generates.

Advanced economies, including the US, are services-dominated, with services accounting for 70-80% of the GDP. Services trade has also grown faster than goods trade in recent years. These facts are central to understanding contemporary trade balances. India has not found a satisfactory way to make this argument land in Washington. While goods deficits are visible, services are diffuse and harder to measure. The result is a framing that is selective and the justification is largely political and therefore effective.

The 2005 civilian nuclear agreement was the high point of our relationship. It was the moment when the US formally acknowledged India's strategic weight. The Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement, negotiated during the Uruguay Round and operational from 1995, was at the other extreme. TRIPS required India to introduce product patents for pharmaceuticals by 2005, ending a regime under which Indian companies manufactured generic versions of patented medicines using reverse processes. The US pharmaceutical industry lobbied hard, arguing that innovation would slow. India complied by amending its Patents Act in 2005, but inserted Section 3(d), a provision that prevents patenting of new forms of existing mol-

ecules, the practice of making minor modifications to existing drugs and re-patenting them to extend monopoly periods.

The outcome is worth noting. Indian generics have emerged as the world's largest source of generic medicines, meeting approximately 40% of American generic drug demand and a significant share of global supply. During Covid-19, Indian manufacturers also played a central role in vaccine production for the developing world. India continues to appear on the US Special 301 intellectual property watch list even as its pharmaceutical exports contribute materially to lowering health care costs in advanced economies, including the US.

The current state of the relationship reflects a sharper and more transactional phase under the Trump administration, but it is hardly exceptional. The first Trump administration removed India from the Generalised System of Preferences in 2019, ending preferential tariff treatment on approximately \$6 billion of Indian exports. The sec-



Rajat Kathuria



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described above, India has not retaliated. It has offered to increase purchases of American energy and defence equipment, signalled willingness to reduce tariffs on certain agricultural imports, and indicated flexibility in its energy sourcing. The posture has been quite accommodating.

Trump's recent description of India as a "hellhole" sits uneasily alongside the language of strategic partnership. Such remarks are often dismissed as undisciplined asides from an undisciplined commentator. A more plausible interpretation is that the coarsening of discourse is part of a negotiating style, where public rhetoric shifts the terms of negotiations. If that is the operating logic, India's restrained response offers little evidence that it is ineffective. Asymmetry is being asserted not only through tariffs and market access, but also through the tone in which engagement is conducted.

Why has India been soft? While India is not without options, these are limited. It

can firms, or accelerate alternative trade partnerships. It could leverage its market size and its role in supply chain diversification, especially away from China. But these have not translated into reality. The most possible explanation is that the US is simply too important to India's export earnings, its services revenues, its remittance flows, and its capital account to risk a serious deterioration. In other words, the luxury of principled retaliation has been eschewed in favour of patient negotiation.

Mirza Ghalib captured Adam's expulsion from paradise, and the dishonour of departure, in lines that continue to resonate: *Nikaah khuld se Aadam ka sunte aaye hain lekhn/ Bahut be-abru ho kar tere kache se hum nikle*

(We have heard (often) about the departure of Adam from Paradise. But with much greater dishonour, I left your street.)

Rajat Kathuria is dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and professor

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **1.1 Strategic Partnership**

- A relationship where two countries cooperate beyond routine diplomacy, especially in defence, technology, trade, security, energy, and geopolitics. India and the US are strategic partners because both share concerns over China, Indo-Pacific stability, technology security, and supply-chain diversification.

- **1.2 Goods Trade vs Services Trade**

- Goods trade includes physical products such as medicines, textiles, machinery, diamonds, petroleum products, and agricultural items. Services trade includes IT services, business process outsourcing, financial services, consulting, education, and digital services. The India-US relationship cannot be understood only through goods because services are central to both economies.

- **1.3 Generalised System of Preferences**

- It is a trade benefit system under which developed countries give tariff concessions to developing countries. India earlier enjoyed some preferential access to the US market, but this benefit was removed in 2019, affecting some Indian exports.

- **1.4 TRIPS Agreement**

- TRIPS stands for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights. It is a WTO agreement that introduced stronger global rules for patents, copyright, trademarks, and intellectual property. For India, its biggest impact was on pharmaceuticals because India had to recognise product patents in medicines.

- **1.5 Section 3(d) of Indian Patents Act**

- This provision prevents “evergreening” of patents. It says that a new form of an already known drug cannot be patented unless it shows enhanced therapeutic efficacy. This protects affordable generic medicines while still allowing genuine innovation.

- **1.6 Evergreening**

- Evergreening means extending monopoly over a medicine by making small modifications and claiming a new patent. For example, changing the form, dosage, or delivery method of an old medicine without real improvement may be considered evergreening.

- **1.7 Y2K Moment**

- Y2K refers to the fear that computer systems would fail when the year changed from 1999 to 2000. This created huge demand for software engineers. India’s English-speaking technical workforce helped solve the problem, giving Indian IT companies their global breakthrough.

- **1.8 Weaponisation of Asymmetry**

- This means using unequal economic power as a negotiating weapon. The stronger country can impose tariffs, pressure for market access, or use harsh public rhetoric because the weaker side is more dependent.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **2.1 Core Thesis**

- India-US trade relations are marked by deep interdependence but unequal vulnerability. India depends heavily on the US for exports, IT services, remittances, capital flows, and strategic support. The US values India, but India is not indispensable to the American economy in the same way.

- **2.2 Structural Asymmetry**

- The relationship is not equal. The US is India's largest export destination and a key market for IT services. American investors influence Indian capital markets. The Indian diaspora in the US sends large remittances and shapes bilateral goodwill. However, the US economy has many alternative partners and can absorb a disruption with India more easily.

- **2.3 Services as the Hidden Strength**

- India's strongest export relationship with the US lies in services, especially IT and business services. However, US trade politics often focuses on goods trade deficit. This creates a distorted picture because the US may have a goods deficit but earns significantly through services, finance, intellectual property, consulting, and technology platforms.

- **2.4 Historical Accident and Foresight**

- India's IT success was not originally designed as an export project. Nehru's investment in IITs and scientific institutions aimed at nation-building. Later, due to migration, diaspora formation, and Y2K demand, this technical capacity became India's global services engine.

- **2.5 Pharmaceuticals and Patent Conflict**

- India's pharmaceutical model shows another tension. The US pushes stronger intellectual property protection, while India defends affordable medicines and generic production. Section 3(d) represents India's attempt to balance innovation with public health.

- **2.6 India's Soft Response**

- India has avoided aggressive retaliation despite US tariffs and political pressure. This is not weakness alone; it reflects strategic caution. India does not want to risk exports, services, remittances, foreign investment, defence cooperation, and geopolitical alignment.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **1950s–1960s: Foundation of the Services Edifice**

Nehru's vision of scientific temper led to the establishment of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). These institutions were aimed at creating engineers for India's own industrialisation. Instead, partly through brain drain, they seeded a high-skill diaspora in the US. This diaspora would later become the anchor of India's IT services success and a bridge for bilateral linkages.

- **1980s: Early Economic Liberalisation and Pharma Regime**

India's Patents Act, 1970 allowed process patents but not product patents for medicines, enabling Indian firms to reverse-engineer lifesaving drugs and sell them at low cost. This regime stayed largely intact through the 1980s and early 1990s, nurturing a robust generic pharmaceutical industry even as the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations began to demand stronger intellectual property protection.

- **1995: WTO and the TRIPS Shock**

The TRIPS agreement, effective from 1995, mandated all members to introduce product patents for pharmaceuticals. India, as a developing country, was given a transition period until 2005. The US pharma lobby pushed hard, framing it as essential for innovation, while Indian and global health advocates feared access to medicines would suffer severely.

- **1999–2000: The Y2K Accident**

The Y2K bug created an enormous, immediate demand for software engineers to patch old code. America turned to India's large pool of English-speaking engineers, many trained in the IIT system. This incident catalysed the offshore IT services model, leading to long-term contracts and the birth of India's most durable export engine – a business that would soon clock \$80 billion in exports to the US alone.

- **2005: Nuclear Deal and Pharma Patent Amendment**

The India-US civil nuclear agreement symbolised a new strategic partnership, overcoming decades of estrangement and sanctions. In the same year, India amended its Patents Act to introduce product patents, fulfilling TRIPS requirements. Crucially, it inserted Section 3(d), blocking evergreening – a move that angered Western pharma companies but preserved a space for genuine generics.

- **2010s: India as Services Power and Growing Goods Trade**

Bilateral goods trade grew from *5 billion in 1990 to over* 190 billion by 2023. Simultaneously, the IT sector boomed, sending skilled workers to the US and earning vast export revenues. The Indian-American community swelled to 4.4 million, assuming leadership roles in business and politics. Yet trade frictions surfaced periodically over IP, data localisation, and market access.

- **2019: GSP Withdrawal**

Under the first Trump administration, the US terminated India's GSP status, affecting \$6 billion in exports. India responded not with retaliation but with offers to buy more American energy and defence equipment, signalling an accommodative approach even when targeted.

- **2020–Present: Tariffs, Pandemic, and Sharper Rhetoric**

During Covid-19, Indian pharma showed its global importance by supplying vaccines and generics. Yet US trade pressure intensified. A second Trump administration (conceptually) imposes broad 26% tariffs based purely on the goods deficit. The coarsening of language – “hellhole” – and the transactional tone mark a phase where asymmetry is asserted openly, and India continues its policy of calibrated non-retaliation to protect vital economic links.

THE TEMPOROUS & COMPLEX INDIA-A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS.

Beyond Just 'Partnership vs. Irritant' - A Deep Dive into Asymmetry, Goods, and Services.

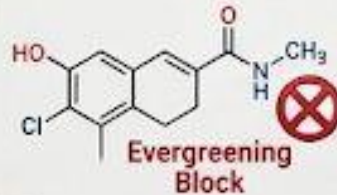
STRUCTURAL ASYMMETRY & DEPENDENCY

- India's Vulnerability vs. US Manageability
- US is India's Largest Export Destination (18% Merchandise)
- When US Sneezes, India Reaches for the Inhaler (Metaphor)

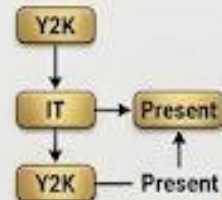


THE INDIAN PHARMA SUCCESS STORY

- Historical Accident (Y2K) meets Foresight (IITs)
- TRIPS Compliance & the Genius of Section 3(d)



- India as 'Pharmacy of the World' (Generic Source for 40% US Demand)
- IP Watch List vs. Real Healthcare Savings



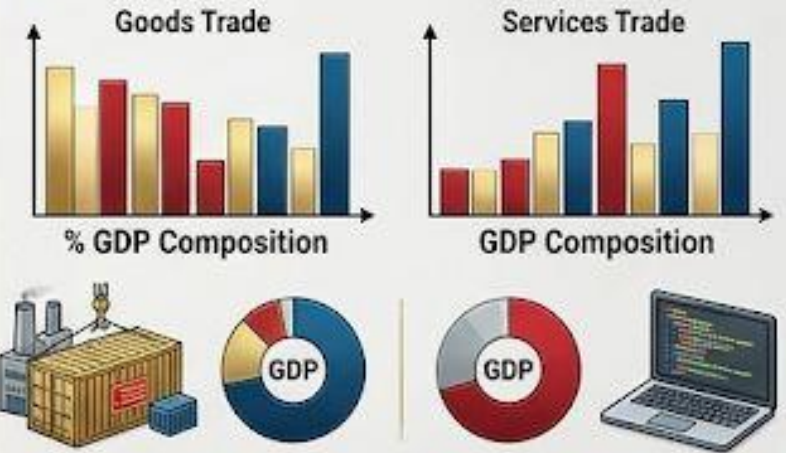
کالا خلد سے آدم نے کاسیاں کیں
 Nikalna khuld se Aadam ka sunte aaye hain lekin...
 We have heard about the departure of Adam from Paradise...

WAY FORWARD

- Diversify Export Markets (Beyond US Reliance)
- Invest in Better Services Data (To Win the Data Argument)
- Leverage China+1 and Supply Chain Resilience
- Move towards Domestic Pharmaceutical Innovation

THE GOODS VS. SERVICES DILEMMA

- US Goods Deficit Focus (\$45B Deficit) - Selective Framing
- US Services Surplus (\$15B Surplus)



Bilateral Balance is Incomplete without Services

UPSC RELEVANCE

- GS 2: Bilateral Groupings, Strategic Autonomy
- GS 3: Trade Balance, IPR, Effects of Liberalization
- GS 3: Trade Balance, IPR, Effects of Liberalization
- Essay & PSIR Optional

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**

- **Asymmetric Interdependence Logic**

The entire relationship operates on the principle that interdependence can be a source of vulnerability if it's not balanced. Drawing from realpolitik, the article assumes that the side with lower sensitivity to disruption (the US) holds structural power over the side that cannot easily absorb shocks (India). The logic of weaponising trade deficits flows directly from this asymmetry.

- **Mercantilist Framing vs. Welfare Economics**

The US administration's emphasis on the goods deficit alone is rooted in a crude mercantilist logic: exports are good, imports are bad. From the perspective of economics, however, trade benefits both parties through comparative advantage, and a services surplus represents real value created by American firms. Ignoring it is a political choice that prioritises visible factory jobs over higher-value IT, finance, and consulting exports.

- **Visibility Bias and Political Epistemology**

Goods deficits are tangible, countable, and emotive – ships, containers, factory closures. Services, by contrast, are intangible, diffuse, and harder to track. This visibility bias is exploited to create a narrative of victimhood. The philosophical assumption here is that what gets measured (or is easy to measure) determines what gets politicised.

- **Negotiation through Unreasonableness**

The coarsening of official discourse – from diplomatic language to personal insults – can be understood as a tactic deriving from a power-based ethics: the stronger party deliberately violates norms to redefine the negotiation range and unsettle the opponent. It tests India's threshold for silence, forcing it to either absorb humiliation or risk economic damage, thereby revealing the true extent of its dependence.

- **Pragmatism over Principle in Response**

India's restrained stance reflects a philosophical commitment to consequentialism in foreign policy: actions are judged by outcomes. The outcome of retaliation would be worse for the Indian economy than the symbolic dignity gained. Hence, the luxury of principled retaliation is eschewed for patient negotiation that protects export earnings, remittances, and capital flows.

- **IP and the Ethics of Access**

The pharmaceutical debate exemplifies the clash between deontological property rights and utilitarian public health. Patent protection is justified by the right of the inventor and the incentive for future innovation. Section 3(d) argues that the right to life and health of a larger population – especially in developing nations – can override minor extensions of those property rights, a fundamentally egalitarian and utilitarian stance.



- **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **8.1 Social Dimension**

- India-US trade affects students, professionals, migrants, tech workers, families, and middle-class aspirations. The American dream has shaped Indian educational choices. Any change in visa, outsourcing, or immigration policy has direct social consequences.

- **8.2 Political Dimension**

- Trade is no longer only an economic issue. It is linked with nationalism, elections, tariff politics, industrial protection, and leadership style. Both countries use trade policy to signal strength to domestic audiences.

- **8.3 Legal Dimension**

- WTO rules, patent law, investment agreements, digital regulations, tariff schedules, and dispute settlement mechanisms shape the legal framework. India must protect policy space while avoiding legal isolation.

- **8.4 Ethical Dimension**

- The ethical dilemma lies between power and fairness. A stronger country may legally impose tariffs, but the fairness of such pressure is debatable. Similarly, patents reward innovation, but medicine affordability is a human welfare concern.

- **8.5 International Dimension**

- India-US trade is linked with China, Indo-Pacific security, QUAD, supply chains, technology controls, Russia sanctions, energy markets, and global governance. Trade disputes cannot be separated from geopolitics.

- **8.6 Economic Dimension**

- The US market supports Indian exports, IT revenues, remittances, investment flows, and employment. But overdependence increases vulnerability. India must build resilience through diversification, manufacturing strength, and domestic innovation.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Class 9 Economics – People as Resource**
 - The rise of Indian IT professionals and engineers connects with human capital formation. Investment in education, skills, and technical institutions can produce long-term economic gains.
- **Class 10 Economics – Globalisation and the Indian Economy**
 - India-US trade shows globalisation in practice: outsourcing, foreign investment, multinational corporations, trade barriers, and interdependence.
- **Class 11 Political Science – Political Theory**
 - Concepts such as power, justice, equality, rights, and state interest are useful for understanding asymmetry and fairness in trade negotiations.
- **Class 11 Economics – Indian Economic Development**
 - The shift from planning to liberalisation, WTO integration, and services growth links directly with India's post-1991 economic trajectory.
- **Class 12 Political Science – Contemporary World Politics**
 - India-US relations, global power structures, US hegemony, strategic partnerships, and globalisation are directly relevant.
- **Class 12 Economics – Macroeconomics**
 - Trade balance, exports, imports, foreign exchange, capital flows, and external sector stability are important for understanding the economic side.



- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**

- **GS Paper 2**

- Strongest linkage: India and its neighbourhood, bilateral relations, effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora, international institutions, WTO, and global governance.

- **GS Paper 3**

- Trade, external sector, investment, IT industry, intellectual property rights, pharmaceuticals, economic liberalisation, infrastructure, employment, and technology-driven growth.

- **GS Paper 1**

- Globalisation, Indian diaspora, post-independence development, and social effects of migration.

- **GS Paper 4**

- Ethics in international relations, fairness, dignity, public health, corporate responsibility, negotiation ethics, and human welfare.

- **Essay Paper**

- Possible themes: "Interdependence without equality", "Trade as diplomacy by other means", "Strategic autonomy in an unequal world", "Globalisation and national interest".

- **Optional Subjects**

- Political Science and International Relations, Sociology, Economics, Public Administration, History, Law, and Philosophy all have strong linkages.



- 
- **Way Forward**
 - **12.1 Build a Services-Based Trade Narrative**
 - India must consistently argue that modern trade cannot be judged only by goods. Services, digital trade, intellectual property income, finance, investment, and remittances must be included in any realistic assessment.
 - **12.2 Diversify Export Markets**
 - India should reduce overdependence on the US by expanding exports to EU, ASEAN, Africa, Latin America, West Asia, and Australia. This will improve resilience and bargaining power.
 - **12.3 Strengthen Domestic Manufacturing**
 - India must improve logistics, ports, electricity reliability, skilling, labour productivity, contract enforcement, and ease of doing business. External leverage begins with internal capacity.
 - **12.4 Protect Pharmaceuticals Carefully**
 - India should defend Section 3(d), generic medicines, and public health safeguards while encouraging genuine pharmaceutical innovation, R&D, and high-quality manufacturing.
 - **12.5 Use Diaspora Diplomacy**
 - Indian-origin professionals in the US can support technology partnerships, investment, research collaboration, public diplomacy, and political understanding.
 - **12.6 Negotiate with Calm Firmness**
 - India should avoid emotional retaliation but must not appear passive. A calibrated response through WTO-compatible measures, sectoral bargaining, and strategic diversification is preferable.
 - **12.7 Link Trade with Technology Partnership**
 - India should focus on semiconductors, AI, clean energy, defence technology, biotech, space, quantum technologies, and secure supply chains.
 - **12.8 Protect Vulnerable Groups**
 - Farmers, MSMEs, small exporters, IT workers, students, and patients must be considered while negotiating market access, tariffs, patents, and mobility rules.
- 

- **UPSC CSE Mains – GS Paper 2**

- **2023:** Indian diaspora has scaled new heights in the West. Describe its economic and political benefits for India.

2022: The USA is facing an existential threat in the form of China. Discuss how India can use this situation to advance its national interests.

2020: Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is transforming itself into a trade bloc from a military alliance. Discuss.

2019: What introduces friction into ties between India and the United States is that Washington is still unable to find a position for India in its global strategy. Explain.

2018: India and USA are two large democracies. Examine the basic tenets on which the two political systems are based.

2017: Indian diaspora has an important role to play in South-East Asian countries' economy and society. Appraise the role of Indian diaspora in India's foreign policy.

- **UPSC CSE Mains – GS Paper 3**

- **2023:** Faster economic growth requires increased share of manufacturing in GDP. Comment.

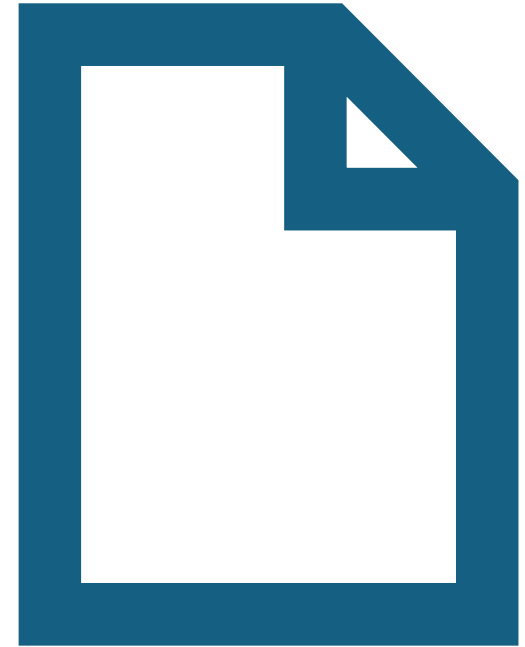
2022: How would the recent phenomena of protectionism and currency manipulations in world trade affect macroeconomic stability of India?

2021: What are the salient features of the National IPR Policy? Discuss the importance of intellectual property rights in economic development.

2020: Account for the present location of iron and steel industries away from the source of raw material by giving examples.

2019: Do you agree with the view that steady GDP growth and low inflation have left the Indian economy in good shape? Give reasons.

2018: How would India benefit from global value chains? Discuss.



Char Dham tourism, and the need to balance economy with ecology

SWAMINOMICS



SWAMINATHAN S ANKLESARIA AIYAR

The Char Dham season has just begun. Religious tourism is exploding at the four Himalayan shrines of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri.

Tourists to Badrinath increased between 2014 and 2024 from 1.8 lakh to 14.35 lakh, an eightfold increase. Tourists to Kedarnath rose from 40,800 to 16.52 lakh, a forty-fold increase, encouraged by PM Modi's highly publicised fondness for this Dham. But only slightly less explosive was the increase from 35,000 to 7.5 lakh for Gangotri and from 35,000 to 6.4 lakh for Yamunotri.

The Char Dham Pariyojana has facilitated this explosion. It is a Rs 12,000 crore project to widen roads and provide motorised access to pilgrimage sites. The state govt also plans rope-

ways to haul tourists over difficult stretches. Till now, tourists had to walk the final stretch from Gaurikund to Kedarnath. But a new ropeway will soon cut the nine-hour trek to a 36-minute ride. The huge rise in tourists is a great success for the state govt. India is a very religious country in which pilgrimage is a top spending priority of Hindu families as incomes rise. Uttarakhand gains financially from the boom, which is an important source of investment (in shops, hotels) and employment.

But enormous success inevitably has deleterious sideeffects. First, what used to be pilgrimage, with arduous uphill walking to seek salvation, has become mere tourism. Second, the environmental load on the four Dhams is becoming massive and poisonous. Something must give.

The Dhams are located on small alpine meadows near great glaciers. What used to be pilgrimage places have become massive picnic spots. The Himalayan heights are lovely to behold, a

great tourist attraction. But other places are equally beautiful and have a much smaller human footprint, and so are better sites to develop from an ecological viewpoint.

Pilgrimage is encouraged by govt subsidies. The exponential growth of visitors to the Char Dhams suggests that in a few years each Dham may attract crores of visitors. Today, Vaishno Devi, the biggest Himalayan pilgrimage spot, attracts roughly one crore visitors per year. Access to Vaishno Devi is relatively easy — a train goes to Katra from where the pilgrimage begins. Access to Char Dham has historically been more difficult, and visitors correspondingly fewer. But new roads, ropeways, and helicopter flights threaten to increase visitors every year.

The limited space at each Dham is already covered with eating houses, tea houses, and lodgings. More visitors will mean an ugly overcrowded valley in place of the original beautiful Himalayan paradise. Solid waste disposal alone will become

hugely difficult. Much human and food waste is currently dumped into the holy rivers. But a point will come when, to paraphrase a famous Bollywood song, "Ram teri Ganga mailli ho gayi..."

Many global tourist spots are contemplating a ceiling on visitors per year. The most famous and successful is Bhutan, which not only sets an annual quota for foreign tourists but also levies a hefty fee for entry. We cannot levy a fee for entry into holy places but surely we can set a limit on the number of visitors. Since there will be an excess of applicants, we should have a lottery to determine the lucky ones who can enter.

In 1956, when I was just 13 years old, my mother took the family on a pilgrimage to Badrinath with a party of pilgrims from Sivnanda Ashram, Rishikesh. The bus journey ended at Pipalkoti, and we had to walk four days to reach Badrinath. This was not easy for elderly people like my mother. But for the entire party of pilgrims the whole point of the pilgrimage

was to strive mightily and be rewarded after four days of walking with the sight of Badrinath.


Can Himalayan tourism be reconverted to pilgrimage? Yes, by abolishing motorised access for the last 15-20 kms, and insisting that this should be covered on foot. The elderly can be carried on palanquins as in the old days.

A ropeway once built cannot easily be demolished. But surely further ropeways should be banned, and a quota set for ropeway travel each year. Char Dham tourism is very profitable for the state, which seeks to maximise visitors. But dharma and ecology cry out for a limit to this. We need annual quotas and compulsory walking for the final stretches.

Who can lead such a movement? The Shankaracharya of Badrinath will be the best, most credible candidate. He should surely be dismayed by the conversion of pilgrimage to tourism and the destruction of the alpine meadows. May he take the first step. ■



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Char Dham:** The four sacred Himalayan shrines in Uttarakhand—Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri. These are central to Hindu pilgrimage and are part of the larger Char Dham circuit (the other four are in the four corners of India). Devotees believe visiting these sites helps attain moksha or salvation.
 - **Char Dham Pariyojana:** A massive infrastructure project worth around Rs 12,000 crore launched by the central and state governments to widen roads and provide all-weather motorable access to the four shrines. It includes tunnels, bridges, and bypasses to cut travel time and increase safety.
 - **Pilgrimage vs. Tourism:** Pilgrimage traditionally involves hardship, walking, and spiritual intent; it is a sacred journey focused on inner transformation. Tourism, on the other hand, emphasizes comfort, sightseeing, and recreation. The blurring of these lines is a core concern—when motorable roads and ropeways replace the arduous trek, the spiritual essence may fade, turning a soul-searching journey into a casual vacation.
 - **Carrying Capacity:** The maximum number of visitors an ecosystem or site can sustain without irreversible damage. For Himalayan meadows receiving lakhs of tourists, this limit is often breached, leading to water pollution, solid waste accumulation, and biodiversity loss.
 - **Ropeway:** A cable car system proposed to replace steep treks, such as the Gaurikund–Kedarnath route (reducing a nine-hour walk to 36 minutes). While it improves accessibility for the elderly and disabled, it dramatically scales up visitor numbers and alters the experiential and ecological character of the site.
 - **Alpine Meadows (Bugyals):** High-altitude grasslands that are ecologically fragile and serve as water reservoirs and grazing grounds. Char Dham shrines are situated on or near such meadows, which are now threatened by construction, littering, and trampling.
 - **Dham:** In the Hindu context, a Dham is not merely a temple but a divine abode, a sacred geography where spirituality and nature are intertwined. The belief is that the entire landscape is infused with divine presence, so its degradation becomes a violation of sanctity.
- 

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Explosive growth is unsustainable:**

Between 2014 and 2024, Badrinath saw an eightfold rise in visitors, Kedarnath a fortyfold rise, and Gangotri–Yamunotri surged from thirty-five thousand each to 7.5 lakh and 6.4 lakh respectively. This exponential trajectory, if unchecked, will soon rival Vaishno Devi’s one crore annual footfall but in far more ecologically sensitive terrain.

- **Infrastructure as a double-edged sword:**

The Char Dham Pariyojana and proposed ropeways are portrayed as enablers of mass tourism. While they bring economic gains and ease of access, they fundamentally alter the nature of the experience—pilgrimage becomes “mere tourism”. The arduous walking, once integral to seeking salvation, is eliminated, robbing the journey of its transformative hardship.

- **Environmental cost is mounting:**

Limited alpine meadows are being covered with eateries, lodgings, and shops. Solid waste, human waste, and food waste increasingly poison the very rivers considered holy (with a poetic warning: “Ram teri Ganga maili ho gayi..”). The delicate Himalayan ecosystem, already stressed by climate change, faces a tipping point.

- **Need for regulatory ceilings:**

Drawing inspiration from Bhutan’s model of high-value, low-volume tourism, the author argues that a pilgrimage quota (annual visitor cap) and a lottery system are imperative. Since entry to holy places cannot be priced, quantity-based rationing becomes the logical alternative.

- **Reconversion to pilgrimage by compulsion of walking:**

A bold proposal calls for abolishing motorised access for the last 15–20 kilometres and mandating that the final stretch be covered on foot. Palanquins for the elderly could retain inclusivity while restoring tapasya (austerity) as the core.

- **Call for religious leadership:**

The Shankaracharya of Badrinath, as the highest spiritual authority, is urged to champion this cause. His moral weight could shift public opinion from consumption-driven tourism back to devotion-driven pilgrimage, bridging dharma and ecology.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-Independence Era:** Pilgrimage to Char Dham was a severe penance. Roads were non-existent beyond certain points. Pilgrims often walked from Rishikesh or Haridwar for weeks, carrying their own provisions. The journey itself was considered a spiritual equaliser—rich and poor walked the same paths. Palanquins and mules served the infirm.

- **1950s–60s:** The construction of motorable roads began, but they ended far from the shrines. The author’s personal recollection from 1956—a bus ride to Pipalkoti followed by a four-day walk to Badrinath—captures a transitional phase where technology had aided but not erased the physical trial.

- **1980s–90s:** Gradual road extensions and the rise of middle-class religious tourism. More guesthouses, dharamshalas, and tea stalls sprouted. Environmental concerns were still marginal in public discourse.

- **2013 Kedarnath Floods:** A catastrophic cloudburst and glacial lake outburst flood killed thousands. This was a wake-up call regarding unplanned construction, ecological fragility, and the wrath of nature. It brought the concept of “carrying capacity” into mainstream policy conversation, though enforcement remained weak.

- **2014–2024 Yoga and Spiritual Tourism Boom:** The election of Narendra Modi, a proclaimed devotee of Kedarnath, and the government’s aggressive promotion of spiritual tourism (including the Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD schemes) led to a surge. Kedarnath’s footfall exploded fortyfold. The Char Dham Pariyojana was pushed as a strategic necessity and an economic opportunity.

- **2018–2023 Infrastructure Expansion:** Road widening faced legal challenges from environmentalists (notably the Supreme Court-appointed HPC). Ropeway proposals for Kedarnath, Yamunotri, and Hemkund Sahib were fast-tracked. Helicopter services became popular for those who could afford them, further stratifying the experience.

- **Present Day:** We stand at a crossroads. The state government sees the boom as a success, a key source of employment and investment. Environmental and spiritual voices warn of imminent ruin. The debate is no longer about whether to allow development but about defining limits before the very soul of the Dhams is lost.



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Explosion of Numbers

PILGRIMAGE: THE SPIRITUAL ROOT (PRIORITIZING PENANCE & SANCTITY)



Arduous Journeys

Ancient Yatra value of shram, spiritual merit through effort.



Deep Spiritual Merit

Striving mighty for limited, reverent darshan.



Pristine Landscapes

Small foot-print near alpine meadows, 'Bhutan-like' low impact.

TOURISM: THE DELETERIOUS EXPLOSION (PRIORITIZING ACCESS & VOLUME)



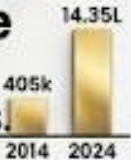
Convenience over Piousness

36-minute ropeway vs. 9-hour trek. Diminished spiritual focus.



Exponential Visitor Surge

Kedarnath 40k to 16.5L, Badrinath 1.8L to 14.35L in 10 yrs.



Massive Ecological Load

Garbage, solid waste, food waste, water pollution in holy rivers like Ganga.

WAY FORWARD: A BALANCED PATH



Mandatory Quotas

Carrying Capacity Assessment & Lottery for fair, limited access.



Last-Mile Walking

Abolishing motorized access for final 15-20km to restore sanctity.



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- **Logical and Philosophical Base**

- **The Tapasya Principle:**

Traditional pilgrimage is rooted in the concept of tapas—voluntary hardship undertaken for spiritual merit. Walking, fasting, and sleeping rough were not incidental hardships; they were the very means to purify the mind for darshan. By removing the effort, motorised access breaks this causal link between striving and spiritual reward.

- **Dharma as Ecological Duty:**

In Hindu cosmology, dharma is not just ritual duty but the cosmic order that includes nature. Rivers like Ganga and Yamuna are goddesses; polluting them is adharma (unrighteous action). The degradation of the alpine meadows is a violation of the sacred geography itself. Thus, limiting tourism becomes a dharmic obligation, not just a policy choice.

- **Tragedy of the Commons:**

The Himalayan shrine ecosystem is a common-pool resource. When every state department and tourist operator tries to maximise their share without restraint, collective ruin follows. The logic calls for mutual coercion, mutually agreed upon—here, state-enforced visitor caps—to prevent the collapse predicted by Garrett Hardin’s famous thesis.

- **Limits to Growth:**

The article implicitly adopts an ecological economics perspective: exponential growth cannot continue indefinitely on a finite planet, especially in fragile mountains. It challenges the dominant development paradigm that equates more visitors with greater success, proposing instead a steady-state pilgrimage economy.

- **Bhutan’s High-Value, Low-Volume Philosophy:**

Bhutan’s tourism policy is grounded in Gross National Happiness, which values cultural preservation and ecological integrity over GDP. The parallel drawn suggests that India should similarly measure success in spiritual and ecological terms, not footfall counts.

- **Religious Authority vs. State Policy:**

The call for the Shankaracharya’s intervention invokes the philosophical idea that spiritual decrees carry more weight in matters of faith than government diktats. If a revered figure declares “walking is the way,” it could reshape social norms through inner conviction rather than external enforcement.

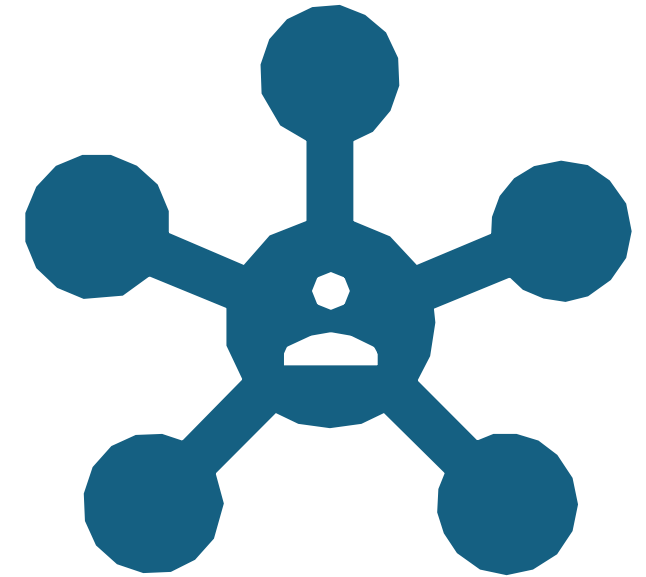
- **Epistemological Question: What is a Pilgrim?:**

The article compels us to ask—does a person who flies by helicopter, takes a selfie, and eats fast food at the shrine qualify as a pilgrim? The implicit answer is no; intent, effort, and reverence are essential to that identity. This is a normative claim about the essence of a religious practice.

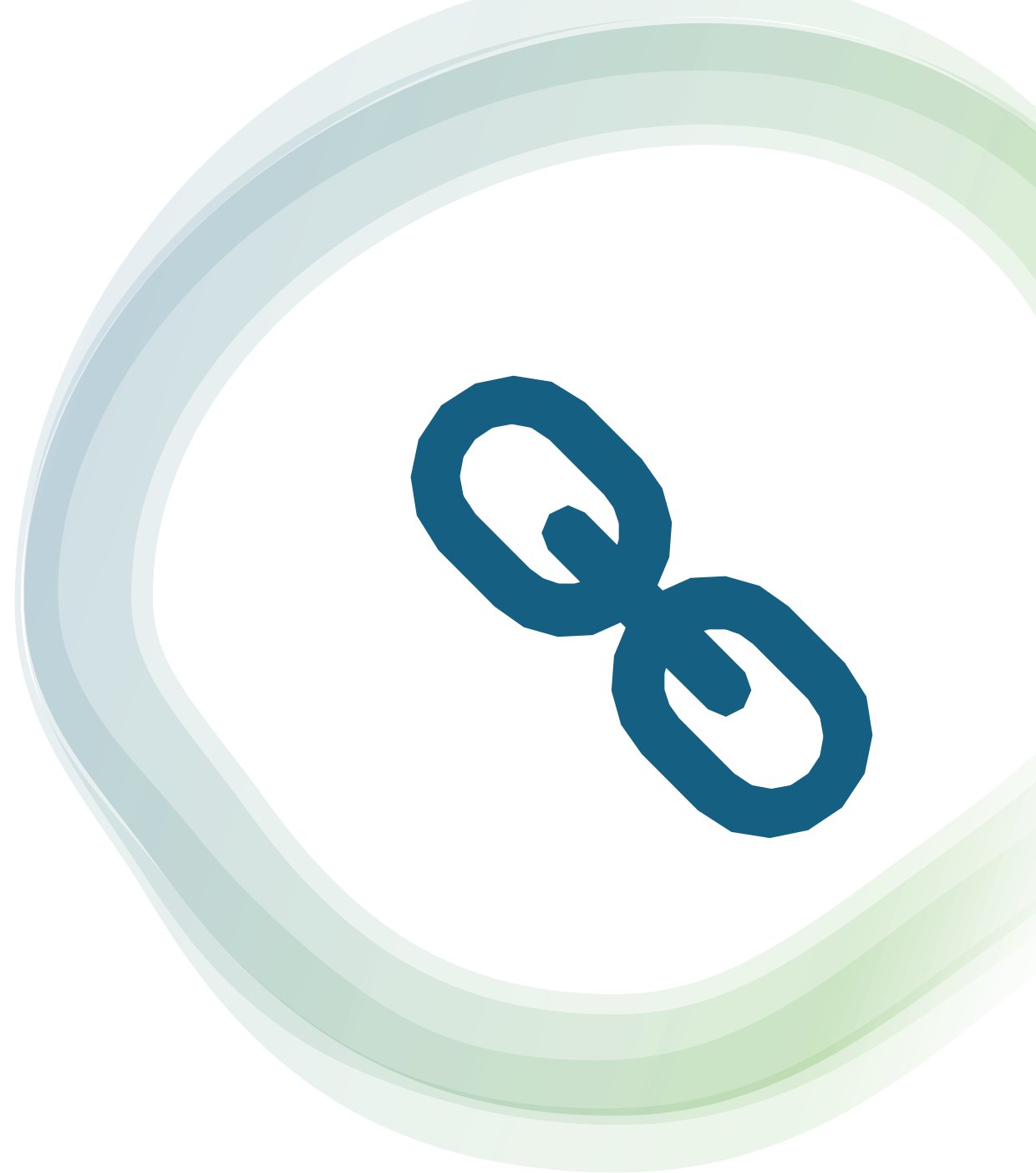


- **Multidimensional Analysis**
- **Social Dimension**
 - Char Dham pilgrimage creates community bonding and cultural continuity. But overcrowding reduces spiritual experience and increases risks for elderly pilgrims, women, children and poor travellers.
- **Political Dimension**
 - Governments promote pilgrimage infrastructure for development, religious sentiment and electoral legitimacy. However, political leadership must balance popularity with ecological responsibility.
- **Legal Dimension**
 - The state has a duty to protect life, environment and public health. Courts have repeatedly linked environmental protection with Article 21. Regulation of pilgrimage can be justified if based on safety and ecology.
- **Ethical Dimension**
 - The core ethical question is: can devotion justify ecological harm? True religious ethics should include restraint, cleanliness, compassion and respect for sacred rivers and mountains.
- **International Dimension**
 - Many countries regulate fragile tourist destinations through quotas, permits, fees and timed entry. India can adapt such systems without commercialising sacred access.
- **Economic Dimension**
 - Tourism supports Uttarakhand's economy, but unregulated tourism creates hidden costs: waste treatment, disaster relief, road repair, health emergencies and ecological restoration.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Class 6 Geography – The Earth: Our Habitat**
 - Useful for understanding mountains, rivers, physical landscapes and human-environment interaction.
- **Class 7 Geography – Our Environment**
 - Relevant for ecosystems, natural vegetation, human settlements and environmental balance.
- **Class 8 Geography – Resources and Development**
 - Connects with sustainable use of resources, land degradation and conservation.
- **Class 9 Geography – Contemporary India I**
 - Links with Himalayan physiography, drainage systems and natural vegetation.
- **Class 10 Geography – Contemporary India II**
 - Useful for resource planning, sustainable development, water resources and environmental degradation.
- **Class 11 Geography – India: Physical Environment**
 - Important for Himalayas, drainage, climate, natural hazards and ecological fragility.
- **Class 12 Geography – India: People and Economy**
 - Connects tourism, transport, regional development, population pressure and environmental planning.
- **Class 11 Political Science – Indian Constitution at Work**
 - Useful for rights, duties, federal governance and state responsibility.
- **Class 12 Political Science – Politics in India Since Independence**
 - Helps understand development politics, regional aspirations and state-led modernisation.



- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **GS Paper 1**
 - Indian culture, sacred geography, pilgrimage traditions, Himalayan society and human-environment relations.
- **GS Paper 2**
 - Governance, policy implementation, Centre-State coordination, rights versus regulation, role of religious institutions and local administration.
- **GS Paper 3**
 - Environment, disaster management, sustainable tourism, infrastructure, climate vulnerability, fragile ecosystems and ecological carrying capacity.
- **GS Paper 4**
 - Ethics of development, public interest, environmental ethics, intergenerational justice, duty-based citizenship and leadership responsibility.
- **Essay Paper**
 - Themes such as “Development and environment”, “Faith and reason”, “Tradition and modernity”, “Tourism and sustainability”, “Rights and responsibilities”.
- **Optional Subjects**
 - Geography, Sociology, Public Administration, Political Science, Philosophy and Anthropology all have strong linkages.



- **Way Forward**
- **Scientific Carrying Capacity**
 - Each shrine and route must have a scientifically determined daily and seasonal visitor limit based on slope stability, water availability, waste capacity and disaster risk.
- **Digital Permit System**
 - A transparent online registration and slot system can regulate crowding. Emergency pilgrims, elderly persons and local residents may be given special provisions.
- **Eco-sensitive Zoning**
 - Construction near glaciers, riverbanks and unstable slopes should be strictly regulated. Hotels and shops must follow green building norms.
- **Waste and Sewage Management**
 - Every shrine route needs decentralised waste segregation, composting, plastic restrictions, bio-toilets and sewage treatment systems.
- **Restore Pilgrimage Character**
 - Final stretches may be kept walking-based where feasible. Palanquins, medical support and regulated pony services can assist elderly pilgrims.
- **Livelihood Transition**
 - Local communities must not be made victims of ecological regulation. They should be trained in eco-guiding, homestays, waste management, local crafts and regulated services.
- **Religious Leadership**
 - Temple authorities and religious leaders should promote “green pilgrimage” as a dharmic duty.
- **Disaster Preparedness**
 - Real-time weather alerts, evacuation routes, medical posts and strict road safety regulation are essential.



- **UPSC Mains – GS Paper 1**

- **2013:** Discuss the factors responsible for landslides in Himalayan regions.
- 2014:** Explain the formation of Himalayas and their significance.
- 2015:** The Himalayas are highly prone to landslides. Discuss causes and mitigation.
- 2020:** Discuss the vulnerability of Himalayan ecosystems.

- **UPSC Mains – GS Paper 2**

- **2019:** What are the challenges of governance in implementing welfare and development programmes?
- 2020:** Discuss the role of civil society and community institutions in governance.
- 2021:** Examine the role of local bodies in sustainable development.

- **UPSC Mains – GS Paper 3**

- **2013:** Enumerate National Water Policy features and discuss river conservation.
- 2014:** Environmental impact assessment is necessary for development projects. Discuss.
- 2015:** Discuss the Namami Gange programme and river conservation challenges.
- 2018:** Disaster preparedness is the first step in disaster management. Explain.
- 2019:** Vulnerability of India to landslides and mitigation measures.
- 2021:** Explain the causes of cloudbursts and their impact in Himalayan states.
- 2022:** Discuss the role of infrastructure development in border areas and its environmental implications.
- 2023:** What are the consequences of climate change on Himalayan glaciers?

- **UPSC Mains – GS Paper 4**

- **2016:** Environmental ethics and sustainable development.
- 2018:** Public service values in balancing development and public welfare.
- 2020:** Ethical governance in conflict between economic growth and environmental protection.



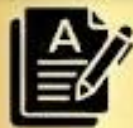
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