



Kumar Bahukhandi
Editor

The Masks-By- Kumar Bahukhandi

“

Doctors, lawyers, police personnel, journalists and people in several other professions are sometimes accused of being emotionless, hard-hearted or excessively serious. But what appears to be coldness may sometimes simply be the professional mask necessary to perform one's duty.

A man behaves differently as a father and as a son; as a husband and as a brother; as an employer and as an employee. There can be countless examples from our social relationships. With every situation, our mental attitude changes to some extent, and so does our body language. A person cannot behave with his mother, wife and sister in exactly the same manner. In fact, we do not behave with even the same person in precisely the same way on every occasion. Circumstances change. Responsibilities change. Our roles change. And sometimes, the mask we wear is a professional one.

Ek chehre pe kai chehre lagale hain log.”- Sahir Ludhianvi, Daag (1973)

The old Hindi number was playing on my car stereo. Beautiful, melodious and meaningful. Yet beneath its melody lies a rather sarcastic accusation: people put many faces over their real one, hiding themselves behind masks to achieve ulterior motives.

But as I listened, another thought occurred to me. Is every mask necessarily bad?

When we talk about a mask, after all, we are not talking about the face alone. A mask can represent a change in personality, attitude, behaviour or even body language. And we all change these, often without even realising it. In everyday conversation, such changes are usually described negatively. “Girgit ki tarah rang badalna”-changing colours like a chameleon- or “mukhota chadha-na”- putting on a mask — are expressions used for people whose behaviour changes according to circumstances.

But is that always wrong? Is every change of behaviour dishonest or mala fide?

I don't think so.

We all wear masks, and some

of them are necessary.

A man behaves differently as a father and as a son; as a husband and as a brother; as an employer and as an employee. There can be countless examples from our social relationships. With every situation, our mental attitude changes to some extent, and so does our body language.

A person cannot behave with his mother, wife and sister in exactly the same manner. In fact, we do not behave with even the same person in precisely the same way on every occasion. Circumstances change. Responsibilities change. Our roles change. And sometimes, the mask we wear is a professional one.

Doctors, lawyers, police personnel, journalists and people in several other professions are sometimes accused of being emotionless, hard-hearted or excessively serious. But what appears to be coldness may sometimes simply be the professional mask necessary to perform one's duty.

Consider a doctor.

A patient is critically ill and is about to undergo a difficult operation. Outside the operation theatre, the patient's family may

be frightened, emotional and perhaps crying. The doctor may feel the same human anxiety, but cannot afford to carry all those emotions onto the operating table. At that moment, professional composure becomes essential.

It does not necessarily mean that the doctor does not care. Perhaps the doctor also silently prays for the patient's recovery. Perhaps failure to save a life causes pain long after the hospital duty is over. The professional face, therefore, may conceal emotion not because emotion is absent, but because duty demands control over it.

A writer faces a different situation. Writing, particularly reflective or creative writing, draws deeply upon observation, memory and emotion. A writer may appear serious, detached or even stern while working, yet the very act of writing often requires sensitivity towards people and situations. This creates an interesting contradiction. Society expects a writer to be sensitive, but also expects a professional to remain composed.

Which mask, then, is the real one?

Perhaps both are.

he problem is not that human beings change their behaviour according to relationships, responsibilities and circumstances. The problem begins when they change their fundamental human values — honesty, commitment, trustworthiness and integrity.

There are, of course, people who deliberately conceal their intentions. They may appear friendly when they seek an advantage, loyal when loyalty

benefits them, or concerned when concern is merely a means to an end.

Those are the dangerous masks. The difference, therefore, is not between a person who changes and one who never changes. Human beings inevitably change according to circumstances. The real distinction is between adaptation and deception. One changes one's behaviour to fulfil a role. The other changes one's face to conceal an intention.

There is another kind of mask that fascinates me: the mask other people put on us.

Society tends to create rigid frames for different professions. A writer must supposedly always be serious. A doctor must be restrained. A teacher must behave in a particular manner. A police officer must look stern. A priest must fit another predetermined image.

And when the person walks out of that frame, people become uncomfortable.

I have experienced this myself. Some people who know me primarily through my professional work are surprised to discover that a serious writer can also be light-hearted, fun-loving and jovial at a social gathering. The person has not suddenly changed; what has broken is the frame in which someone else had placed him. Perhaps that is why we should be care-

ful before accusing someone of wearing too many masks. A father, son, husband, friend, teacher, writer or professional may present different faces to the world without any of those faces necessarily being false.

We are not one-dimensional beings. The real test is



much simpler: when the face changes, do the values underneath it remain the same?

If honesty remains honesty, commitment remains commitment and trust remains trust, a changing face may merely reflect the many roles of being human. But when values themselves change for convenience, the mask ceases to be a social necessity.

It becomes a disguise.

And perhaps the greater irony is that sometimes the mask we think we see on another person's face exists only in the frame through which we have chosen to see them.

Chhattisgarh Cabinet Clears 500-Crore Startup Mission, Export Policy and Major Employment Reforms



CM Vishnu Deo Sai-led Cabinet puts youth, skills and enterprise at the centre of its development push; government employees get higher age limit for applying to other services and senior posts

Raipur: In a significant package combining jobs, entrepreneurship, skills, exports and administrative reforms, the Chhattisgarh Cabinet chaired by Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Wednesday, September 9, 2026 approved a ₹500-crore Startup and NIPUN Mission, a new Export Promotion Policy 2026–30, land for a ₹200-crore National Skill Training Institute in Nava Raipur and a major relaxation in the upper age limit for government and associated employees seeking other government posts.

The decisions signal an attempt to connect Chhattisgarh's employment strategy with entrepreneurship and emerging technologies rather than depending solely on conventional recruitment.

At the centre of the package is the Mukhyamantri Startup and NIPUN Mission, for which the government has provided ₹500 crore over the next five years. Under the mission, Entrepreneurship Development Centres will be established in all 33 districts, alongside 100 Emerging Technology Labs and five Industry Excellence Centres.

The proposed NIPUN JOB



Engine will seek to align skill development with the actual workforce requirements of industries and facilitate formal employment. Chief Minister Sai said the larger objective was to create an ecosystem in which young people could move beyond merely searching for employment and begin generating opportunities themselves.

"Our aim is not only to provide better employment opportunities to the youth, but also to enable them to move from being job-seekers to job-creators," Sai said, outlining the thrust of the mission.

"We want to develop Chhattisgarh as a major centre for startups, innovation and industries based on new tech-



Cabinet Sets New Development Agenda: Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai presides over the Cabinet meeting at Mahanadi Bhawan in Raipur on Wednesday, September 9, 2026. The meeting cleared a series of major decisions covering startups and employment, the Export Promotion Policy 2026–30, a National Skill Training Institute in Nava Raipur, higher age-limit relaxation for eligible government and associated employees, and land for a new

nologies,” he added.

New Export Policy to Connect Chhattisgarh With Global Markets

In another major economic decision, the Cabinet approved the Chhattisgarh Export Promotion Policy 2026–30, aimed at developing the State into a prominent export hub.

The policy proposes a stronger export ecosystem and logistics infrastructure, improved market access and trade facilitation for exporters, and greater emphasis on exporting value-added agricultural and industrial products.

E-commerce, trade fairs and exhibitions are also expected to be used to connect entrepreneurs and exporters from Chhattisgarh directly with international markets.

Sai said the government’s economic strategy was increasingly focused on creating

opportunities for local youth while improving the State’s competitiveness.

“Investment, skills, innovation and employment must move together. Our priority is to create opportunities that enable the youth of Chhattisgarh to participate confidently in the changing economy,” the Chief Minister said. ₹200-Crore National Skill Training Institute for Nava Raipur

The Cabinet also approved the free allotment of 10 acres of land at Tendua village in Nava Raipur Atal Nagar to the Government of India’s skill development and entrepreneurship authorities for establishing a National Skill Training Institute (NSTI).

The proposed institute, estimated to cost around ₹200 crore, will have modern academic, administrative and hos-

tel infrastructure.

Once operational, it is expected to provide long-term technical and vocational training to 1,000 trainees annually, while another 3,000 trainees every year could undergo short-term programmes designed around contemporary industry requirements.

The institute is expected to expand opportunities for advanced skill training, internships and employment and strengthen Nava Raipur’s position as an emerging centre for technical and skill education.

Upper Age Limit Raised From 38 to 45 Years

In a decision likely to directly benefit a large section of the existing workforce, the Cabinet approved raising the prescribed maximum age limit from 38 years to 45 years for eligible employees applying for other government services and

higher posts.

The relaxation will cover permanent and temporary State government employees, employees of corporations, boards and autonomous institutions, contractual personnel and Nagar Sainiks (Home Guards).

The government will issue consolidated standing guidelines to implement the decision. The reform is intended to provide employees already serving in government or associated institutions greater and more equal opportunities to compete for higher positions and other government services.

New District Court Complex for Durg

The Cabinet also cleared a land arrangement for construction of a new Durg District Court building.

Four hectares near BIT College at Titurdih will be made available for the proposed judicial complex. Since the land is recorded in the name of Bhilai Steel Plant, 5.024 hectares of government land at Pahanda in Patan tehsil will be provided to the plant in exchange. According to the government, the current value of the two parcels is approximately equal. The decision clears the way for a modern and better-organised district court complex and is expected to strengthen judicial infrastructure in Durg.

Taken together, Wednesday's Cabinet decisions reflect a development strategy extending from startups and emerging technologies to conventional skills, exports and institutional infrastructure. The ₹500-crore Startup and NIPUN

“

The proposed institute, estimated to cost around **200 crore**, will have modern academic, administrative and hostel infrastructure. Once operational, it is expected to provide long-term technical and vocational training to **1,000** trainees annually, while another **3,000** trainees every year could undergo short-term programmes designed around contemporary industry requirements.

The institute is expected to expand opportunities for advanced skill training, internships and employment and strengthen Nava Raipur's position as an emerging centre for technical and skill education.

Upper Age Limit Raised From **38** to **45** Years

In a decision likely to directly benefit a large section of the existing workforce, the Cabinet approved raising the prescribed maximum age limit from **38** years to **45** years for eligible employees applying for other government services and higher posts.

The relaxation will cover permanent and temporary State government employees, employees of corporations, boards and autonomous institutions, contractual personnel and Nagar Sainiks (Home Guards).

Mission is particularly significant because its proposed network will extend to every dis-

trict rather than remain concentrated in Raipur or other major urban centres.

Chhattisgarh Gets 3.65 Lakh More PMAY-G Houses; Two Lakh Families Enter New Homes

“

Shivraj Singh Chouhan announces major housing allocation, Krishi Vigyan Kendra for Sakti and extension of Bastar housing survey; CM Vishnu Deo Sai says more than 11.50 lakh houses completed in two-and-a-half years

Sakti: Chhattisgarh received a major rural housing boost on Friday, September 11, 2026 as Union Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced 3.65 lakh additional houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), while two lakh families marked griha pravesha into their newly constructed homes.

The announcement came at the state-level PMAY-G Griha Pravesha programme in Sakti, attended by Chouhan and Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai. Beneficiaries were symbolically presented keys to their new homes during the ceremony.

Chouhan also announced the establishment of a Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Sakti and extension of the deadline for the PMAY-G survey in Bastar division until October 31, 2026. He handed over the letter relating to the additional housing allocation to the Chief Minister.

More Than 1,600 Houses Being Completed Every Day

Highlighting the pace of construction, Chouhan said more than 1,600 PMAY houses were being completed every day in Chhattisgarh and



Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma looks on as Union Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan hands over the sanction letter for 3.65 lakh additional PMAY-G houses to Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai during the state-level Griha Pravesha programme in Sakti on Friday, September 11

praised the implementation of Central and State government schemes under Sai's leadership.

"The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana has turned the dream of a permanent home into reality for lakhs of poor families," Chouhan said.

He said a house should not be viewed merely as a roof over a family's head. Its impact becomes wider when accompanied by access to cooking gas, drinking water, sanitation, healthcare and food security through other welfare pro-

grammes.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan during the state-level PMAY-G Griha Pravesha programme in Sakti on Friday, September 11, 2026- Photo Credit:channel24india.com via CMO

The Union Minister said the Centre and Chhattisgarh Government were also working together to strengthen agriculture and the rural economy. The proposed Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Sakti, he said, would

help farmers gain local access to modern farming techniques, scientific guidance, improved cultivation practices and crop diversification.

11.50 Lakh-Plus Houses Completed: Sai

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said providing permanent houses to poor families remained one of his government's highest priorities.

He recalled that the State Government had demonstrated that commitment in its first Cabinet meeting by approving 18 lakh houses.

"In the past two-and-a-half years, more than 11.50 lakh houses have been completed in Chhattisgarh. Our effort is to ensure that no eligible poor family remains without a permanent home," Sai said.

The Chief Minister thanked Chouhan for the additional allocation and congratulated the two lakh beneficiary families entering their new homes.

Sai said approval had been secured for targets under the 2011 housing survey and Awas Plus survey, while the State had sought housing sanction for remaining eligible families identified under the subsequent survey.

Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma looks on as Union Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan hands over the sanction letter for 3.65 lakh additional PMAY-G houses to Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai during the state-level Griha Pravesh programme in Sakti on Friday, September 11, 2026.- Photo Credit:channel24india.com via CMO



- 3.65 lakh additional PMAY-G houses announced for Chhattisgarh.
- Two lakh families mark griha pravesh into newly constructed houses.
- More than 1,600 PMAY houses being completed daily in the State.
- More than 11.50 lakh houses completed over the past two-and-a-half years.
- Krishi Vigyan Kendra to be established in Sakti.
- Bastar PMAY-G survey deadline extended to October 31, 2026.
- 13.85 lakh women have become Lakhpati Didis.

13.85 Lakh Women Become 'Lakhpati Didis'

The Chief Minister also placed women's economic empowerment at the centre of the State's rural development programme, saying 13.85 lakh women in Chhattisgarh have become Lakhpati Didis through livelihood opportunities and self-help initiatives.

He said the National Rural Livelihood Mission and Bihan were helping rural women develop sustainable sources of income and greater financial independence.

Sai also said around 70 lakh women were benefiting from the Mahtari Vandan Yojana and that more than ₹20,000 crore had so far been transferred to beneficiaries.

The Sakti programme also saw the launch of several rural-development initiatives, including AI-based geo-tag

verification under the Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana-Gramin, new integrated farming clusters and livelihood and entrepreneurship programmes.

Lakhpati Didis, Dealer Didis and representatives of panchayats performing outstanding work in rural development were honoured at the event.

Union Minister of State Tokhan Sahu said the government's development programmes were guided by the principle of Antyodaya — ensuring that welfare reaches the person at the last mile.

Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma said rural development was not confined to housing and stressed transparency in development projects. He said barcodes were being introduced for panchayat development works so citizens could scan them and access information about individual projects.

Policy Reforms Give Chhattisgarh's Development a New Momentum

“

From farmers, women and poor families to industry, education, Bastar and governance, a series of policy decisions is reshaping the State's development landscape

Chhattisgarh is witnessing a significant shift in its development trajectory as a series of policy reforms and welfare decisions begin translating into changes on the ground. From housing and agriculture to women's economic empowerment, industrial investment, digital governance and the transformation of Bastar, the State government has sought to combine welfare delivery with longer-term structural reforms.

Under Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, the government's more than two-and-a-half years in office have been marked not merely by the announcement of schemes but by attempts to change systems governing their implementation. While welfare programmes have remained central to the administration's agenda, policy changes in industry, education, minerals and governance have simultaneously sought to build the foundation for sustained economic growth.

One of the government's earliest major decisions concerned housing for economically weaker families. At its first Cabinet meeting, the government decided to approve houses for more than 18 lakh needy families. Under the



A representational visual captures Chhattisgarh's changing development landscape — from farmers, women's empowerment and housing to a more connected Bastar, education, industrial investment and citizen-centric governance. The State's policy push seeks to translate welfare, reforms and investment into wider opportunities and long-term economic growth.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin, 24.40 lakh houses have now been sanctioned in the State.

Around 1,600 houses are being completed every day on average, while more than 11 lakh homes — including earlier and newly sanctioned houses — have been handed over to beneficiaries during the past two-and-a-half years.

Agriculture and Women at the Centre of Rural Growth

Agriculture has remained another major pillar of the government's development

strategy. Farmers have been allowed to sell paddy at ₹3,100 per quintal up to 21 quintals per acre.

During the 2025–26 Kharif marketing season, 141.04 lakh metric tonnes of paddy were procured from 25.24 lakh farmers. Combining the Minimum Support Price and benefits under the Krishak Unnati Yojana, nearly ₹43,723 crore was provided to farmers.

The procurement system has also undergone technological changes. Online tokens, biometric verification and real-

time monitoring have been introduced with the objective of making the process more transparent and convenient for farmers.

Women's economic empowerment has emerged as another major focus. Under the Mahtari Vandan Yojana, around 68 lakh eligible women have received more than ₹20,000 crore directly into their bank accounts through 31 instalments.

At the same time, 13.85 lakh women in the State have become Lakhpati Didis, while women from more than 31 lakh economically weaker families are associated with self-help groups under the Bihan Mission.

Measures have also been introduced to encourage women's ownership of property, including a 50 per cent concession in registration fees and a one-percentage-point concession in stamp duty.

Bastar Moves From Conflict Towards Connectivity

Perhaps the most consequential transformation is being attempted in Bastar, where decades of Naxal violence severely constrained infrastructure, education, healthcare and economic opportunities.

Alongside security operations, the government has adopted a strategy of taking public services and development programmes deeper into previously inaccessible areas. Initiatives such as Niyad Nellanar 2.0 and the Bastar Munne Abhiyan are aimed at extending government schemes to people living in remote regions.

• **More than 24.40 lakh PMAY-Gramin houses sanctioned; over 11 lakh homes completed and handed over during the past two-and-a-half years.**

• **25.24 lakh farmers participated in paddy procurement during 2025–26, with 141.04 lakh metric tonnes procured.**

• **Around 68 lakh women have received more than ₹20,000 crore through 31 Mahtari Vandan instalments.**

• **13.85 lakh women have become Lakhpati Didis.**

• **A ₹4,824-crore livelihood enhancement programme has been prepared for nearly 10 lakh Bastar families.**

• **More than 450 Ease of Doing Business reforms have been implemented.**

Education Cities are being developed in difficult areas such as Orchha and Jagargunda. A ₹4,824-crore livelihood enhancement programme has also been prepared with the objective of increasing the incomes of nearly 10 lakh families in Bastar.

Security camps in forested areas are increasingly being used as points through which services can reach remote communities. The Mukhyamantri Gramin Bus Seva has been launched to improve public transport, while roads, bridges, mobile connectivity, fair-price shops, health centres, schools and Anganwadi facilities are being expanded.

Under the Mukhyamantri Swasth Bastar Abhiyan, more than 34 lakh health examinations have been conducted

and digital health profiles prepared.

The broader objective is to move Bastar beyond its long association with conflict and strengthen its identity around education, tourism, livelihoods and economic opportunity.

Industrial Reforms Seek to Turn Investment Into Jobs

Chhattisgarh has simultaneously sought to simplify the process of establishing and operating industries. More than 450 Ease of Doing Business reforms have been implemented, while the State has introduced the Ease of Doing Business Act, 2026.

Under Jan Vishwas reforms, 279 minor offences have been decriminalised. A one-click single-window mechanism, simplified land diversion procedures and automatic mutation following property registration are among the administrative changes introduced to reduce procedural delays.

Following the Industrial Development Policy 2024–30, the State has received investment proposals worth more than ₹8 lakh crore. These proposals have the potential to generate more than 1.72 lakh employment opportunities if they translate into projects on the ground.

The emerging policy direction therefore extends beyond attracting investment alone. The larger challenge — and opportunity — is to convert investment commitments into industries, industries into employment, and economic expansion into improvements that are visible in the everyday lives of citizens.

India Hosting BRICS Reflects PM Modi's Growing Global Leadership: CM Sai

“

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister hails India's presidency of the 18th BRICS Summit as a symbol of growing global stature, says Modi has strengthened the voice of developing nations and the Global South

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Sunday, September 13, 2026 has hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership as India hosts the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi, describing the country's BRICS presidency as a reflection of its growing global prestige and leadership capacity. Sai said India under Modi is also giving a stronger voice to developing nations and the Global South



Raipur: As India hosts world leaders for the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai here on Sunday, September 13, 2026 has hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, saying the country's presidency of the influential grouping reflects how significantly India's stature has risen on the global stage.

Sai said India today commands greater credibility and influence internationally and described the hosting of BRICS under Modi's leadership as a matter of pride for every Indian.

"Under the strong and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has today emerged on the world stage as a credible and influential power," Sai said.

According to the Chief Minister, India's BRICS presidency in 2026 and the hosting of its 18th summit are not merely major diplomatic events but evidence of the country's growing international standing and its ability to provide leadership on issues affecting the developing world. Modi Leadership Gives Global South a Stronger Voice Sai said one of the most sig-

nificant aspects of India's growing global role has been its effort to bring the concerns and aspirations of developing countries to the centre of international discussions.

"This is a moment of pride for every Indian. Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, India is not only advancing its national interests with strength, but is also giving a powerful voice to the aspirations of developing countries and the Global South on international platforms," he said.

India's 2026 BRICS presidency is built around the theme "Building Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability." Sai said the theme reflects an approach that seeks to take countries forward together rather than view development through narrow national interests alone.

He said India has consistently advocated cooperation and shared progress and that its leadership of BRICS provides an opportunity to give fresh direction to global collaboration, innovation and sustainable development. The Chief Minister's remarks come as the expanded BRICS grouping discusses some of the most pressing challenges confronting the international community, including geopolitical uncertainty, economic resilience, emerging technologies, supply chains and sustainable development. India's Development Experience on the Global Platform

Sai also pointed to India's record in digital public infrastructure, financial inclusion and technology-led governance, saying these experiences have increasingly become relevant to other developing countries. India's use of technology to extend public services and financial access to large sections of its population, he said, offers experiences that can be shared through international platforms such as BRICS. The Chief Minister also underlined India's position against terrorism, saying the country has consistently maintained a clear and firm stand on the issue at global forums. For Sai, these different strands — national security, technology, development and international cooperation — demonstrate how India's role has evolved from participating in global conversations to increasingly helping shape them.

Global Standing Can Bring Opportunities Home

Sai also connected India's enhanced international profile with economic opportunities within the country. He said India's expanding global role under Modi could bring new possibilities in investment, technology, innovation and employment, creating opportunities for states as well as the national economy. For Chhattisgarh, which is seeking to accelerate industrialisation, attract investment and expand employment opportunities, stronger international economic engagement can complement the State's own development ambitions. Sai said Chhattisgarh is moving

forward with the same long-term aspiration embodied in the national goal of *Viksit Bharat*. "In accordance with the resolve of *Viksit Bharat*, Chhattisgarh too is moving rapidly towards building a *Viksit Chhattisgarh*," he said. The Chief Minister's message therefore linked a major international summit in New Delhi with a broader transformation taking place within India — one in which stronger diplomatic influence is expected to translate into economic, technological and developmental opportunities across the country.

BRICS Presidency a Moment of National Pride

Congratulating Prime Minister Modi on India's BRICS presidency, Sai expressed confidence that New Delhi's leadership would contribute to stronger international cooperation while giving greater weight to countries whose concerns have traditionally received less attention in global decision-making. "India's leadership will play an important role in strengthening global cooperation, empowering the voice of the Global South and paving new paths towards shared prosperity," Sai said. For the Chhattisgarh Chief Minister, the significance of the BRICS Summit ultimately goes beyond the gathering of international leaders in New Delhi. It represents what he sees as a larger change in India's place in the world — a country increasingly confident in protecting its own interests while seeking a larger role in shaping the global conversation.

LIVE: A Diya, 1,000 and a Conversation: CM Sai Stops at Roadside Vendor's Stall

“ Vishnu Deo Sai buys an earthen lamp from roadside seller Meera at Telibandha, asks whether welfare schemes are reaching her

Raipur: It was an ordinary day of selling earthen lamps by the roadside for Meera until an unexpected visitor stopped at her modest stall at Telibandha Marine Drive in Raipur on Tuesday, September 15, 2026.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai stepped out to meet the woman vendor, looked through the earthen lamps arranged for sale and bought a diya from her for the upcoming 'Aashirwad Ka Diya' programme. He gave her ₹1,000, turning a brief roadside purchase into a conversation about livelihood, dignity and whether government welfare schemes were actually reaching people at the grassroots.

Sai spoke to Meera about her work and family and asked whether she was receiving benefits under Central and State government schemes.

Meera told him that she had a bank account under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana and was also receiving ₹1,000 every month under the Chhattisgarh Government's Mahtari Vandan Yojana.

For the Chief Minister, the answer offered an opportunity to underline what he described as the real test of welfare delivery.



Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai buys an earthen lamp from roadside vendor Meera during an interaction at Telibandha Marine Drive in Raipur on Tuesday, September 15, 2026

"Government schemes become meaningful only when their benefits reach the person who needs them, provide support and help improve their life," Sai said.

He said ensuring that eligible beneficiaries receive welfare benefits directly and transparently remains a priority of the government.

Referring to financial inclusion, Sai said the Jan Dhan ini-

tiative had brought economically weaker and previously unbanked families into the formal banking system, making direct transfer of benefits possible.

"Through the Mahtari Vandan Yojana, mothers and sisters of Chhattisgarh are receiving financial assistance of ₹1,000 every month. Besides helping them meet everyday expenses, the assistance is also

strengthening their economic confidence," the Chief Minister said.

A Roadside Purchase With a Larger Message

Sai also used his interaction with Meera to highlight the contribution of small vendors, potters, artisans and women producing and selling goods locally.

"Whether they are small roadside vendors, potters, artisans or our mothers and sisters making local products, the strength of an Atmanirbhar Chhattisgarh lies in their labour," he said.

The Chief Minister said purchasing locally made goods should be viewed as more than a commercial transaction because every such product carries the labour and skill of the person who makes or sells it.

"Behind a local product is a family's labour, an artisan's skill and the livelihood and self-respect of a small entrepreneur. When we buy from local vendors and artisans, even a small purchase supports their family and livelihood," Sai said.

The diya purchased from Meera is to become part of the 'Aashirwad Ka Diya' programme under the 'Seva Sankalp Abhiyan'.

Drawing on the symbolism of the earthen lamp, Sai said a diya represents more than illumination in Indian culture.

"A diya is not merely a source of light; it is a symbol of hope and positive resolve. Just as a small lamp dispels the darkness around it, an individual act of service can contribute to larger positive change when society acts together," he



A moment of livelihood and dignity: Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai interacts with Meera as she shows him earthen lamps at her roadside stall at Telibandha Marine Drive in Raipur on Tuesday, September 15, 2026.

said. The Chief Minister said the 'Aashirwad Ka Diya' initiative seeks to connect service, public participation and development through collective involvement.

The Seva Sankalp Abhiyan is scheduled to run from September 17 to October 17. Sai appealed to people to participate through activities such as cleanliness drives, environmental conservation, helping those in need, planting and caring for trees and supporting local artisans and vendors.

"No act of service is too small. Helping someone in need, keeping our surroundings clean, planting and caring for a tree, buying something from a local artisan or making any small contribution for soci-

ety can become an important form of public service," Sai said.

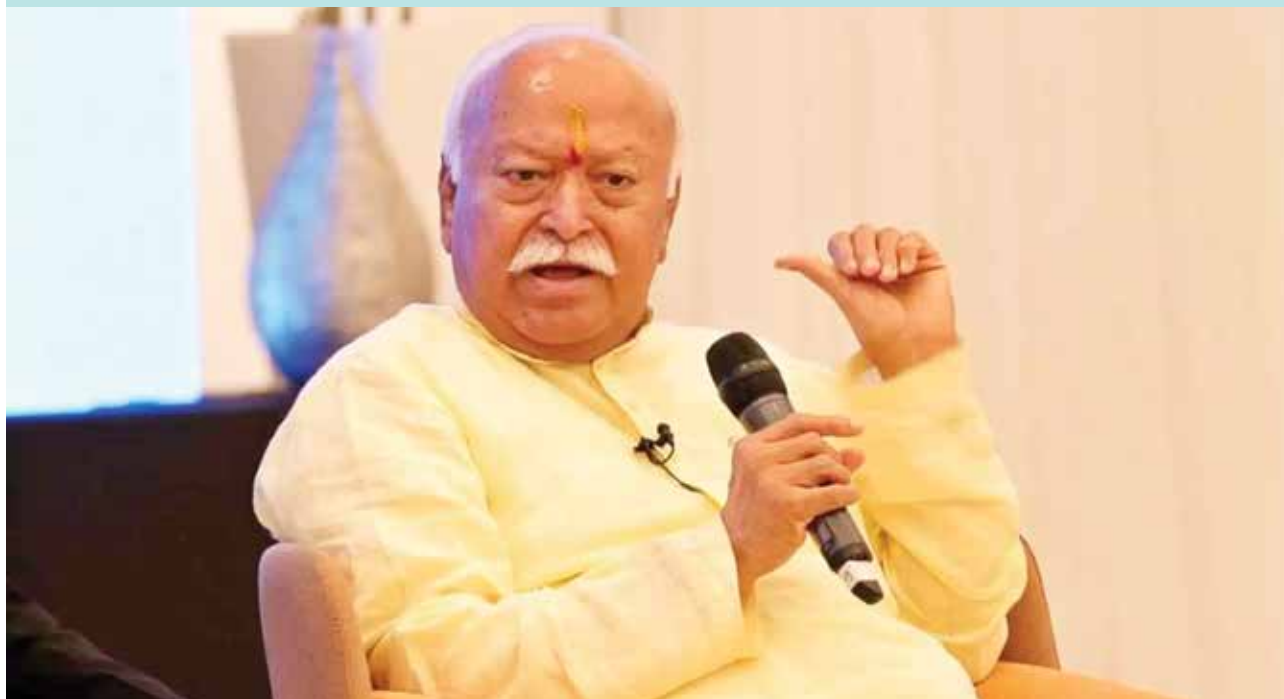
What began as a brief halt beside a roadside stall ultimately carried a wider message. For Meera, it meant recognition of the work through which she earns her livelihood. For the Chief Minister, the small earthen lamp became a symbol through which he sought to connect welfare delivery, local enterprise and public service.

In that sense, the most striking element of the encounter was perhaps its simplest one — a small diya bought from a roadside vendor becoming a conversation about livelihood, dignity and participation.

For British Hindus, Loyalty Lies With Their Karma Bhoomi- the UK': RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat



RSS chief says there is no conflict between being a committed Hindu and a loyal British citizen; explains Hindutva as a broader civilisational outlook rather than a particular religious practice or lifestyle



London: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat has said that Hindutva leaves no ambiguity over the loyalty of Hindus living outside India, asserting that their "karma bhoomi" — the land where they live, work and perform their duties — must command their loyalty.

Addressing a large Indian diaspora gathering titled 'Celebration of Oneness' in London on Sunday, Bhagwat responded to questions submitted by members of the audience, including concerns over whether British Hindus could face competing loyalties between India, viewed by many

as their ancestral or janma bhoomi, and Britain, their karma bhoomi.

"Actually, there is no conflict. If British Hindus are achcha, pukka, sacha — good, strong and true — Hindus, there will never be a conflict between British and Bharat interests," Bhagwat said.

The gathering was attended by community leaders, students and volunteers associated with the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) UK.

Key Highlights

- Bhagwat says the loyalty of British Hindus lies with their "karma bhoomi" — the United Kingdom.

- Says there need not be any conflict between British and Indian interests for Hindus living in Britain.

- Draws a distinction between "janma bhoomi" — the land of birth or ancestral connection — and "karma bhoomi", the land where one's duties are performed.

- Says the meaning of Hindu cannot be confined to a particular religious practice or lifestyle.

- Addresses questions surrounding perceptions and misconceptions about Hindutva.

- Remarks came during the London leg of the RSS chief's three-nation tour.

'There Is No Conflict'

Bhagwat's remarks directly addressed a question that has often accompanied debates about diaspora identity — whether strong cultural and emotional links with India can coexist with complete civic loyalty to the country in which a person lives.

His answer sought to separate cultural roots from civic responsibility.

"Your karma bhoomi is where your loyalties lie," Bhagwat said while explaining the position in the context of British Hindus.

In his formulation, maintaining a connection with Bharat as a civilisational or ancestral homeland does not require a person living permanently in another country to divide his or her national loyalty.

For British Hindus, he indicated, Britain is the place where their responsibilities as citizens are exercised.

What Does Hindutva Mean?

Bhagwat was also asked to explain Hindutva amid differing interpretations of the term.

He argued that the word Hindu could not be understood merely through the prism of a particular form of worship, religious practice or lifestyle.

"The word Hindu cannot be understood on the basis of any religious practice or lifestyle," Bhagwat said.

His remarks presented Hindutva as a broader cultural and civilisational idea rather than one determined solely by ritual or a prescribed form of religious observance.

That distinction was central

“ The use of the two expressions - janma bhoomi and karma bhoomi- gave Bhagwat's comments particular significance. For generations of Indians who have settled overseas, India may remain a source of family, cultural, spiritual and civilisational connection. Bhagwat's remarks, however, placed civic responsibility firmly in the country that has become their field of work and duty. "If British Hindus are good, strong and true Hindus, there will never be a conflict between British and Bharat interests," he said. The message effectively sought to reject the idea that retaining a Hindu or Indian civilisational identity necessarily produces divided national loyalties.

to his response to concerns over diaspora identity: cultural inheritance, in Bhagwat's argument, need not compete with one's obligations towards the country in which one lives.

'Janma Bhoomi' and 'Karma Bhoomi'

The use of the two expressions - janma bhoomi and karma bhoomi- gave Bhagwat's comments particular significance.

For generations of Indians who have settled overseas, India may remain a source of family, cultural, spiritual and civilisational connection. Bhagwat's remarks, however, placed civic responsibility firmly in the country that has become their field of work and duty.

"If British Hindus are good, strong and true Hindus, there

will never be a conflict between British and Bharat interests," he said.

The message effectively sought to reject the idea that retaining a Hindu or Indian civilisational identity necessarily produces divided national loyalties.

The London interaction formed part of Bhagwat's overseas engagements and provided him with an opportunity to address questions surrounding Hindutva, identity and the place of Hindu communities in countries outside India.

At the heart of his message was a distinction between where one's cultural roots may lie and where one's civic duty lies — with Bhagwat making clear that, for British Hindus, that duty and loyalty belong to Britain.

From Chhattisgarh to Ram Lalla: A Journey of Faith That Has Fulfilled Thousands of Dreams-By-Kumar Bahukhandi

“ What began with CM Vishnu Deo Sai personally flagging off the first train to Ayodhya has grown into a pilgrimage movement touching more than 50,000 lives; another 850 devotees left Bilaspur on Wednesday for Ayodhya and Kashi

Raipur: For some, a journey to Ayodhya is a matter of travel. For others, particularly elderly devotees who have spent decades hearing the story of Lord Ram and carrying a quiet desire to bow before Ram Lalla at least once in their lifetime, it can represent the fulfilment of a deeply personal dream.

That emotion was visible again on Wednesday when 850 devotees from districts across Bilaspur division boarded a special train from Bilaspur for Ayodhya Dham under the Chhattisgarh government's Shri Ramlala Darshan Yojana.

There were families saying goodbye, devotees chanting "Jai Shri Ram", and passengers preparing for a journey that would take them not only to the Ram temple in Ayodhya but also to Kashi Vishwanath in Varanasi.

But Wednesday's departure was also another chapter in a journey that began more than two years ago.

The First Green Flag - and the Beginning of a Larger Journey

On March 5, 2024, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai stood at Raipur railway station and personally waved the green



The Green Flag That Began a Journey of Faith: Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai flags off the first special train under the Shri Ramlala Darshan Yojana from Raipur railway station on March 5, 2024. Beginning with 850 pilgrims from Raipur division, the initiative has since enabled more than 50,000 people from Chhattisgarh to visit Ram Lalla in Ayodhya. On Wednesday, September 9, 2026, another 850 devotees left Bilaspur for a pilgrimage covering Ayodhya and Kashi

flag to the first special train under the Shri Ramlala Darshan Yojana.

That inaugural 12-coach train carried 850 pilgrims from the five districts of Raipur division to Ayodhya. The State government's official record confirms Sai personally flagged off the service from Platform No. 7.

It was more than the inauguration of another government scheme.

For hundreds of passengers

sitting inside that train, the destination was a place they had known through faith long before they ever had an opportunity to see it.

Sai described the departure at the time as a significant occasion as people from Chhattisgarh began their journey to seek the blessings of Ram Lalla.

From there, the trains kept moving.

Different divisions and districts began sending groups of

pilgrims. From Raipur to Surguja, Rajnandgaon and other parts of the State, the scheme gradually turned an administrative programme into a recurring journey of faith.

When 850 devotees from Surguja division left for Ayodhya in 2024, the State's official account recorded pilgrims saying that a wish to visit Ayodhya was finally being fulfilled. The government package covered travel, accommodation, temple visits and meals, with tour escorts, security personnel and medical teams accompanying the pilgrims. That detail explains much of the scheme's significance.

For someone with sufficient money, mobility and experience, organising a pilgrimage may appear relatively straightforward. For an elderly person, a low-income household or someone living far from major transport connections, however, arranging railway reservations, accommodation, local transport, food and temple visits can turn a cherished wish into a journey repeatedly postponed.

The Shri Ramlala Darshan Yojana attempts to bridge precisely that distance.

From 850 Pilgrims to More Than 50,000

By August 2026, more than 50,000 devotees from Chhattisgarh had travelled for Ram Lalla darshan under the programme, according to reports based on State information.

The number gives scale to



A Personal Send-Off: Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai meets pilgrims inside a train compartment before their departure for Ayodhya under the Shri Ramlala Darshan Yojana, interacting with them and wishing them a safe, comfortable and spiritually fulfilling journey

the programme, but numbers alone cannot fully describe what those journeys mean.

Behind every figure is a passenger.

An elderly devotee who had perhaps imagined Ayodhya for years. A rural family for whom the cost and complexity of an independently organised pilgrimage might have been prohibitive. Someone who had seen the Ram temple only on television. Someone who may have wondered whether age would allow the journey at all.

That is where the programme acquires a dimension beyond conventional tourism.

It becomes about access to faith.

Sai's Personal Association With the Journey

The Chief Minister's association with the pilgrimage has not remained confined to policy announcements.

Sai was present at the begin-

ning, personally flagging off the inaugural train in March 2024. Photographs from the occasion show him standing at the railway station with the green flag as the first group began its journey.

The symbolism was unmistakable: the government had promised a route to Ayodhya, and the first train was physically leaving the platform.

The programme continued into the State's Silver Jubilee period. In July 2025, another group of 850 devotees from Raipur division was sent towards Ayodhya as the pilgrimage initiative entered a new financial year.

And the journeys continued.

In August this year, a special train departed from Rajnandgaon, with the cumulative number of beneficiaries already crossing 50,000.

Now Bilaspur has added another 850 pilgrims to that

continuing story.

Bilaspur's Turn: Ayodhya and Kashi on One Spiritual Journey

Wednesday's journey has an additional dimension.

The devotees leaving Bilaspur are scheduled not only to have darshan of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya, but also to visit Kashi Vishwanath in Varanasi.

Beltara MLA Sushant Shukla, Zila Panchayat President Rajesh Suryavanshi and Zila Panchayat Sabhapati Bharati Neeraj Mali were among the public representatives who flagged off the special train from Bilaspur railway station.

Tourism and Culture Minister Rajesh Agrawal described such pilgrimages as a means of connecting citizens with India's religious and cultural heritage.

For the passengers, however, the significance is simpler and more personal: Ayodhya and Kashi in a single journey—two places occupying an extraordinary position in India's spiritual imagination.

When Public Policy Meets Personal Faith

Government pilgrimage

schemes inevitably invite a broader discussion about the role of the State, expenditure and public priorities. Those are legitimate questions in a democracy.

But there is another dimension that also deserves recognition: access.

A pilgrimage that is easy for one citizen may be beyond the financial or physical reach of another.

For many beneficiaries, the value of such a programme cannot therefore be measured only by the price of a railway ticket. It lies in removing the practical barriers between an individual and a destination that may have occupied a place in his or her faith for decades.

This is especially relevant for elderly people and economically constrained families.

The train does not create their faith.

It provides the means to make a journey that faith had already inspired.

A Train Carrying More Than Passengers

Railway platforms usually

represent arrivals and departures. Under the Shri Ramlala Darshan Yojana, they have also become places where private aspirations become visible.

The green flag goes up.

The train begins moving.

Families wave from the platform. Devotees respond from the windows. Chants rise above the ordinary sounds of a railway station.

And somewhere inside those coaches may be a person who had spent most of his or her life saying:

Once, I want to see Ayodhya."

For more than 50,000 people from Chhattisgarh, that "once" has already arrived.

Another 850 devotees began that journey from Bilaspur on Wednesday, September 9, 2026

For them, Ayodhya is no longer only a place remembered through the Ramayana, photographs, television screens or prayer.

It is now a destination on their railway ticket.

And at the end of the journey waits Ram Lalla.



When Online Anger Turns Racial: Singapore's Warning Against Anti-Indian Prejudice

“ Prime Minister Lawrence Wong's intervention over racist abuse surrounding the Nepal-Tibet disaster and Singapore Airlines' investment in Air India raises a larger question: how does a successful multicultural society prevent legitimate debate from becoming hostility towards an entire community?”

Singapore has spent decades constructing an identity around an idea that sounds simple but is extraordinarily difficult to sustain: people of different races, religions and origins can belong equally to the same nation.

That idea is now confronting one of the defining challenges of the digital age.

Prime Minister Lawrence Wong's warning against anti-Indian prejudice did not arise from an abstract discussion about racial harmony. It followed two very different developments — the devastating Nepal-Tibet floods, in which Singaporeans were among those missing, and public debate surrounding Singapore Airlines' investment in Air India.

Neither issue is inherently racial. Yet parts of the online conversation surrounding both reportedly descended into abuse directed at Indians. Singaporean authorities have taken the matter seriously, with police examining racist and xenophobic comments and the government seeking the removal of content that breaches platform guidelines.

That distinction — between disagreement and prejudice — is precisely where Wong's intervention deserves attention far



Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong has warned against allowing racial prejudice to become normalised after anti-Indian abuse surfaced in online discussions surrounding the Nepal-Tibet disaster and Singapore Airlines' investment in Air India. He said robust debate must never become a cover for hostility towards a community or foreigners

beyond Singapore.

“We can and should have robust debates. But we should never use seemingly legitimate arguments as a cover to fuel prejudice against any community or hostility towards foreigners,” the Prime Minister said.

It is a remarkably relevant warning in an era when almost every political, commercial or social controversy can be converted within hours into an argument about nationality, ethnicity or religion.

A Business Question Is Not a

Racial Question

There is nothing improper about questioning Singapore Airlines' investment in Air India.

Shareholders can question strategy. Analysts can scrutinise losses. Citizens can debate whether an investment makes commercial sense. Journalists should examine management decisions. Indeed, serious scrutiny is part of a healthy economic and democratic culture.

But the ethnicity of an executive has nothing to do with whether a corporate investment

is sound.

Senior Minister K. Shanmugam said some online attacks had targeted the ethnicity of Temasek's leadership while discussion of Air India had produced what he characterised as anti-Indian racist abuse. He stressed that Singapore Airlines is a listed company whose investment decisions belong to its management and board and must ultimately be judged commercially.

This is where legitimate criticism crosses a dangerous line.

If an investment is poor, demonstrate why it is poor.

If management has made a mistake, produce the numbers.

If public policy deserves criticism, challenge the policy.

But when an argument shifts from what somebody has done to what somebody ethnically is, debate has ceased to be debate.

It has become prejudice wearing the clothes of argument.

Tragedy Should Bring Out Humanity, Not Racism

The reaction to the Nepal-Tibet disaster is even more disturbing.

A natural disaster does not ask the ethnicity of its victims before destroying homes or taking lives. Families waiting for information about missing relatives do not experience grief differently because of their race.

Yet racist comments reportedly targeted some of the Singaporeans missing in the disaster because they appeared to be Indian. Shanmugam publicly condemned examples of such commentary, while Wong warned against dismissing such behaviour as merely harmless chatter on the internet.

That should trouble anyone,

“Wong's response was therefore notable because he did not argue that disagreement should disappear. His point was almost the opposite: debate vigorously, but don't transform disagreement into collective hostility. Multiculturalism Is Maintained, Not Inherited Singapore's experience carries a lesson for India as well. Indians understandably object when members of the Indian diaspora encounter racism overseas. But the principle becomes meaningful only when applied universally. We cannot demand dignity for Indians abroad while treating prejudice against communities at home as harmless entertainment. A Sikh insulted because of his turban, an Indian targeted overseas because of skin colour, a migrant mocked for an accent, or any community stereotyped because of religion or ethnicity confront variations of the same human failure: judging the individual through an inherited label rather than individual conduct.

irrespective of nationality.

The internet has created a peculiar moral distance. People sometimes type things about strangers that they would hesitate to say while standing before their families.

A human tragedy becomes content.

Victims become photographs.

Photographs acquire comment boxes.

And behind the apparent anonymity of a screen, empathy can disappear with astonishing speed.

Wong identified the larger danger when he warned:

"If such behaviour goes unchecked, it can become nor-

malised, deepen mistrust between communities, and pull us apart."

The important word is normalised.

Societies rarely wake up one morning and collectively decide that prejudice is acceptable. Normalisation happens incrementally. A racial joke becomes ordinary. An insult becomes fashionable. A stereotype becomes a meme. Repetition makes language that once caused discomfort appear unremarkable.

Eventually, people stop asking whether the statement is racist and begin asking why anyone is offended by it.

That is when prejudice has

travelled from the margins towards the mainstream.

The Indian Question in Singapore

The episode also deserves attention because Indians are not outsiders to Singapore's national story.

Singapore is a deeply multi-cultural society in which the Indian community has long been part of public life, business, education, culture and government. Questions surrounding immigration and foreign labour can certainly be debated, just as they are in virtually every developed economy.

But an Indian citizen working temporarily in Singapore, a Singapore citizen of Indian ancestry and an Indian company doing business with Singapore are three entirely different things.

Online prejudice frequently collapses those distinctions.

Ethnicity becomes nationality; nationality becomes immigration status; immigration becomes economic grievance.

That intellectual laziness is precisely what responsible public discourse must resist.

Wong's response was therefore notable because he did not argue that disagreement should disappear. His point was almost the opposite: debate vigorously, but don't transform disagreement into collective hostility.

Multiculturalism Is Maintained, Not Inherited

Singapore's experience carries a lesson for India as well.

Indians understandably object when members of the Indian diaspora encounter racism overseas. But the principle becomes meaningful only when applied universally.

We cannot demand dignity

for Indians abroad while treating prejudice against communities at home as harmless entertainment.

A Sikh insulted because of his turban, an Indian targeted overseas because of skin colour, a migrant mocked for an accent, or any community stereotyped because of religion or ethnicity confront variations of the same human failure: judging the individual through an inherited label rather than individual conduct.

That is why racial harmony cannot simply be written into constitutions, pledges or legislation.

It has to be practised.

And in the social-media era, increasingly it has to be practised when nobody is physically watching.

Former Prime Minister and current Senior Minister Lee Hsien Loong also intervened, describing racist comments directed at the Indian community following the floods as deeply troubling and urging Singaporeans to stand together regardless of race, language or religion.

There is significance in senior political leaders speaking publicly when such incidents occur. Silence from institutions can sometimes be interpreted by extremists as permission.

But government action alone cannot manufacture tolerance.

Police can investigate unlawful speech. Platforms can remove prohibited content. Laws can establish boundaries.

None of them can compel one human being to respect another.

That responsibility remains social and individual.

The Test Comes When We Disagree

The easiest form of tolerance

is agreeing with people who resemble us and think like us.

The real test arrives when there is disagreement.

Singapore Airlines' relationship with Air India may succeed or fail. Its investment strategy should be scrutinised on its financial and commercial merits. Singapore's immigration policies can be questioned. Economic competition can be debated. Governments and companies should never be insulated from criticism merely because criticism could become uncomfortable.

But criticism acquires legitimacy from evidence, not ethnicity.

The moment someone's ancestry becomes the argument, the argument has already been lost.

Wong put the choice before Singaporeans plainly:

"We can reject such views, and refuse to give them more space or legitimacy."

That may ultimately be more important than removing a thousand offensive posts.

A multicultural country survives not because prejudice never appears, but because enough of its citizens refuse to make prejudice respectable.

Singapore's present controversy concerns anti-Indian abuse. Tomorrow the target could be another community, another nationality or another religion.

The names change.

The mechanism does not.

And perhaps that is the larger message from Singapore: the moment a society begins deciding whose prejudice is acceptable according to who happens to be its target, it has already weakened the principle that protects everyone.

Silent Diplomacy: Did India Help Pave the Way for Russia-Ukraine Peace Talks?



From Modi's message to Putin in Bishkek to Jaishankar's engagements with Moscow and Kyiv, the diplomatic sequence points to an increasingly active Indian role — but whether New Delhi actually brokered the latest peace initiative remains unconfirmed

New Delhi: In diplomacy, what is not announced can sometimes be as important as what is. Over the past several weeks, India has been talking to virtually every important player capable of influencing the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Individually, each engagement can be explained as routine diplomacy. Taken together, however, they form a sequence difficult to ignore.

The question therefore deserves to be asked: Did India quietly help create the diplomatic space for the latest attempt to bring Russia and Ukraine back towards negotiations?

There is no official confirmation from New Delhi that India acted as a mediator. Nor is there sufficient public evidence to claim that the latest American initiative was brokered by India. Any such conclusion would go beyond what is presently known.

But there is a difference between claiming mediation and recognising diplomatic signalling. And the signals are significant.

India has maintained communication with Moscow while



Diplomacy Behind the Handshake? Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Russian President Vladimir Putin during their meeting on the sidelines of the SCO Summit in Bishkek on August 31, 2026. Modi's call to move from "endless war" towards an "end of war", followed by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's diplomatic engagements in Kyiv and Warsaw and a renewed US peace initiative, has raised an intriguing question: has India been quietly helping to build a bridge between Moscow, Kyiv and Washington?

simultaneously engaging Kyiv and Washington. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the SCO Summit in Bishkek was particularly significant. There,

Modi publicly returned to an argument that has increasingly defined India's position on the conflict.

"We need to move from the state of endless war to the end of war."

Modi's message was not simply a rhetorical appeal for peace. He emphasised that every additional day of conflict pushes humanity backwards and reiterated India's willingness to support efforts aimed at achieving a peaceful settlement. His remarks to Putin on August 31 are independently documented.

Putin's response was restrained, but the diplomatic conversation did not end in Bishkek.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar subsequently travelled to Kyiv, where India again offered its assistance to efforts aimed at ending the conflict. His September 3 visit came only days after Modi's conversation with Putin, reinforcing India's attempt to remain engaged with both sides rather than becoming identified exclusively with either Moscow or Kyiv.

That is precisely where India's diplomatic position becomes interesting.

New Delhi enjoys a long-standing strategic relationship with Moscow but has also consistently maintained that dialogue and diplomacy offer the only sustainable route out of the Ukraine conflict. Unlike many countries attempting to influence the negotiations, India can communicate with Russia without the political baggage carried by Western powers while simultaneously maintaining relations with Ukraine, Europe and the United States.

Then came another development.— US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner travelled to Moscow for talks

with Putin before proceeding to Kyiv for discussions with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The Moscow discussions lasted more than three hours and were described by the Russian side as substantive and constructive, although no breakthrough was announced.

The Kremlin has since said it does not rule out a resumption of trilateral negotiations involving Russia, Ukraine and the United States, although it considers discussion of dates or venues premature.

None of this proves an Indian mediation channel.

But diplomacy rarely moves in a perfectly visible straight line. Governments exchange assessments, test proposals, convey red lines and explore possibilities through conversations that may never appear in official statements. A country does not necessarily have to sit at the negotiating table to influence what eventually reaches that table.

India may therefore be playing a role better described as facilitation rather than mediation — keeping channels open, carrying perspectives and encouraging the principal actors to explore political space for negotiation.

That distinction is important. Calling India the broker of Russia-Ukraine peace talks would presently be premature. Saying that India appears to be using its unusual access to Moscow, Kyiv and Washington to encourage diplomacy is much more defensible.

There is another reason for caution. Peace remains distant. Russia and Ukraine continue

to disagree fundamentally over territory, security guarantees and the conditions for ending hostilities. Indeed, Russian missile attacks on Kyiv resumed shortly after the latest American diplomatic mission, demonstrating how quickly battlefield realities can overwhelm diplomatic optimism.

Yet diplomacy is rarely measured only by immediate breakthroughs. Sometimes its first achievement is simply getting adversaries to consider talking again.

If India's conversations over recent weeks contributed even indirectly to that possibility, New Delhi may have achieved something significant without issuing a declaration, claiming credit or placing itself at the centre of the story.

That would also be characteristic of the diplomatic approach India appears to favour: maintain relationships, speak to competing sides and allow the process rather than publicity to become the objective. The coming weeks may reveal whether the sequence was coincidence or coordination. Until then, India should neither be prematurely crowned as the mediator nor excluded from the diplomatic equation.

Perhaps the most revealing clue remains Modi's choice of words in Bishkek:

"We need to move from the state of endless war to the end of war."

The world now waits to see whether those words were merely an appeal — or part of a much quieter diplomatic effort already under way.

Geopolitical Tensions Hurting Ordinary Lives, BRICS Must Respond Together: PM Modi



Prime Minister warns against weaponisation of technology and critical minerals as India pushes resilient supply chains, startup innovation, digital agriculture and stronger Global South cooperation



New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, September 13, 2026 warned that intensifying geopolitical tensions, disrupted supply chains, pandemics and climate-related disasters were no longer confined to individual countries or regions but were increasingly affecting the everyday lives of people across the world.

Addressing the second day of the 18th BRICS Summit at Bharat Mandapam, Modi called on the expanded grouping to translate its growing global weight into practical cooperation capable of strengthening resilience and delivering inclusive growth, particularly for the Global South.

The open session, titled "Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability: Shaping the Future for Inclusive Global Growth," reflected the four pillars of India's 2026 BRICS chairship.

Modi's intervention came a day after BRICS leaders adopt-

ed the New Delhi Declaration, which reaffirmed cooperation across global governance, development, trade, technology, artificial intelligence, climate action and other areas. The declaration was adopted by consensus despite the considerable geopolitical differences within the expanded grouping. "No crisis remains confined to a single region," Modi said as he stressed the need for greater resilience and collective preparedness in an increasingly uncertain international environment. Modi Warns Against Weaponising Technology and Critical Minerals

One of the strongest elements of the Prime Minister's address concerned the growing strategic importance of technology and critical minerals.

"Weaponisation of technology and critical minerals can hinder our shared progress," Modi warned, while calling for inclusivity in access to and adoption of technology.

The warning carries particu-

lar significance at a time when semiconductors, rare earths, battery materials, advanced technologies and supply chains have increasingly become elements of geopolitical and economic competition.

Rather than allowing such strategic resources to deepen global divisions, Modi's message positioned cooperation and reliable access as essential to shared development.

The Prime Minister also highlighted the BRICS Logistics Supply Chain Cooperation Framework, saying it would help make supply chains more reliable and resilient.

From Declarations to Practical BRICS Cooperation

Modi used Sunday's session to put forward a series of initiatives intended to turn the four pillars of India's chairship into concrete mechanisms.

These include a proposed BRICS Startup Innovation Fund, a BRICS Incubator Network connecting startups and incubators, cooperation on digital

agriculture using artificial intelligence and geospatial technologies, an Integrated Early Warning System for infectious diseases, and initiatives aimed at strengthening disaster preparedness and supply-chain resilience.

The Prime Minister also sought to take BRICS cooperation beyond governments.

"We want our entrepreneurs, farmers, researchers, women, youth and ordinary citizens to become active participants as well," Modi said.

That approach reflects India's effort to present BRICS not simply as a diplomatic grouping of emerging powers, but increasingly as a platform capable of connecting businesses, innovators, workers, researchers and communities across member countries.

Global South at the Centre

The second-day deliberations built on Modi's opening-day argument that developing countries should have a greater role in shaping the international system.

He had called for the Global South to move from being a "rule-follower" to a "rule-shaper", arguing that emerging domains including artificial intelligence, cyberspace, biotechnology, outer space and critical technologies are simultaneously creating opportunities and determining the rules of the future. Modi also called for the traditional "pyramid of privilege" in global governance to be replaced by a "platform of partnership." That theme has become central to India's BRICS presidency: the econom-

ic and demographic weight of emerging and developing economies should translate into a correspondingly greater voice in global institutions and rule-making.

New Delhi Declaration Sets Broader Direction

The New Delhi Declaration 2026, adopted on Saturday, provides the political framework for much of Sunday's discussion. It addresses reform of global governance, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, emerging technologies, digital transformation and cooperation across a range of developmental issues. It also backs an open, safe, secure and accessible information and communications technology environment while calling for technology to remain people-centred. The declaration also reflects BRICS concerns over unilateral economic measures and trade barriers and seeks stronger representation for developing countries in international institutions. For India, the consensus was significant because the expanded BRICS brings together countries whose strategic interests do not always coincide.

An Expanded BRICS With Growing Global Weight

BRICS now comprises 11 full members — Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — along with 10 partner countries.

According to figures highlighted during India's chairship, the grouping represents roughly half of the world's population, around 40 per cent of global GDP and more than a

quarter of global trade. Modi told the BRICS Business Forum earlier that the combined GDP of BRICS countries had expanded considerably faster than the world economy since the grouping's creation.

That scale is precisely why India's emphasis during the summit has been on moving BRICS from declarations towards deliverable solutions.

'Stronger in Purpose'

The 2026 summit has also demonstrated how dramatically BRICS has changed since its beginnings as a grouping of four emerging economies two decades ago. Its expansion has increased its economic and geopolitical weight while simultaneously making consensus more difficult. The New Delhi meeting nevertheless brought leaders representing markedly different strategic interests onto the same platform and secured agreement on a common declaration. For Modi, the challenge now is to ensure that this wider BRICS produces practical outcomes. His message on Sunday was therefore not simply about the size of the grouping. It was about whether that size can be converted into resilience, technological cooperation, reliable supply chains and opportunities reaching beyond governments to ordinary people. As geopolitical rivalries increasingly intersect with trade, technology, energy and critical resources, Modi's warning carried a broader message: BRICS will be judged not merely by the countries around its table, but by whether their cooperation can protect shared progress from an increasingly fragmented world.

Manusmriti in the Contemporary Context: Women, Autonomy, Dignity and the Problem of Interpretation -By-Kumar Bahukhandi



About the Author: Kumar Bahukhandi is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Pragati College, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, and a working journalist.

Abstract

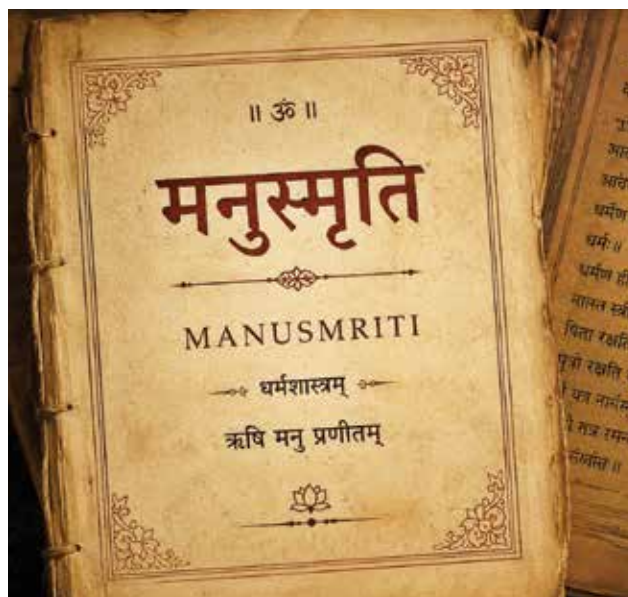
Manusmriti, or the Mnava-Dharmastra, remains among the most discussed, defended and criticised texts associated with the ancient Indian normative tradition. Its prescriptions concerning women are particularly contested.

StreamHistory Documentaries

One frequently cited passage, Manusmriti 9.3, places a woman under the protection of her father, husband and sons at different stages of life and concludes with the expression “na str svtantryam arhati”. Read through contemporary concepts of individual autonomy, this formulation appears fundamentally restrictive. Yet other passages within the same text, particularly Manusmriti 3.55–3.57, emphasise the honour, respect and wellbeing of women, including the celebrated declaration “yatra nryastu pjyante ramante tatra devat” — where women are honoured, there the gods rejoice (Manusmriti 3.56; Olivelle, 2005).

This paper examines this apparent tension without attempting either an uncritical defence or a wholesale rejection of the text. It argues that respect, protection and autonomy represent different normative concepts and that the high status rhetorically accorded to women in parts of the text does not automatically establish individual agency in the modern sense. Conversely, restrictive prescriptions should not be employed to erase passages that accord women honour and significance.

The paper also examines the widely circulated Sanskrit verse beginning “Kryeu mantr karaeud”, while cautioning that its attribution to Manusmriti is uncertain. The study proposes that ancient normative texts should be subjected to contextual, textual and comparative analysis



before being employed in contemporary political or social argument.

Keywords: Manusmriti, women, autonomy, gender, Sanskrit texts, Dharmastra, Indian tradition, constitutional equality, women's dignity, textual interpretation

StreamHistory Documentaries

1. Introduction

Few ancient Indian texts generate as much contemporary controversy as Manusmriti. Discussions surrounding it frequently move between two sharply opposed positions.

One treats the text as representative of ancient civilisational wisdom whose prescriptions must be understood in their historical setting. The other regards several of its social and gender prescriptions as evidence of hierarchical structures incompatible with contemporary ideas of equality.

The position of women is at the centre of this debate.

The difficulty begins when individual verses are detached from the larger text and made to represent Manusmriti in its entirety.

This is problematic whether the selected verse is favourable or restrictive.

A verse commanding society to honour women cannot by itself establish that Manusmriti recognised female autonomy in the modern sense. Equally, a verse restricting women's independence cannot, without further textual examination, establish that the entire work regarded women merely with hostility.

The central research question of this paper is therefore:

How should the apparently different conceptions of women's protection, dependence, honour and social importance in Manusmriti be understood when the text is examined in the contemporary context of autonomy and constitutional equality?

The purpose is neither to put an ancient text on trial according to twenty-first-century standards nor to exempt it from critical examination merely because of its antiquity.

The objective is to read before judging.

2. Manusmriti and the Problem of Historical Context

Manusmriti belongs to the Dharmastra tradition and represents a normative attempt to articulate duties, social relations, conduct, family structures, inheritance, governance and other dimensions of social order (Olivelle, 2005; Davis, 2010).

Understanding it simply as the equivalent of a modern statutory code can therefore be misleading. Scholarship on Dharmastra emphasises the broader relationship among law, religion, household, community, custom and social obligation within the Hindu legal tradition (Davis, 2010).

This distinction between a normative text and a descriptive historical record is fundamental.

A prescription tells us what its authors or transmitters believed ought to occur. It does not necessarily prove that every community throughout ancient India actually lived according to that prescription.

StreamHistory Documentaries

Modern interpretation becomes particularly difficult because terms such as dharma, rak and svatantrya carry intellectual and social associations that cannot always be transferred mechanically into contemporary English expressions such as religion, protection and independence.

Translation is therefore already an act of interpretation.

This becomes especially important in the discussion of women.

3. The Contested Proposition: "Na Str Svatantryam Arhati"

Among the passages most frequently cited in contemporary debates is Manusmriti 9.3:

पिता रक्षति कौमारे भर्ता रक्षति यौवने।

रक्षन्ति स्थविरे पुत्रा न स्त्री स्वातन्त्र्यमर्हति॥

Pit rakati kaumre bhart rakati yauvane,

Rakanti sthavire putr na str svatantryam arhati.

Broadly translated:

The father protects her in childhood, the husband protects her in youth, and the sons protect her in old age; a woman is not considered fit for independence.

(Manusmriti 9.3; Olivelle, 2005; Jha, 1999).

The final expression—

न स्त्री स्वातन्त्र्यमर्हति

na str svatantryam arhati

—creates the greatest difficulty for a contemporary reader.

Viewed through twenty-first-century concepts of individual liberty, the proposition conflicts with the principle that an adult woman possesses agency independently of her father, husband or sons.

Yet the preceding verb also requires attention:

रक्षति — rakati.

Its semantic field includes guarding, protecting or preserving. The verse therefore conceptualises male family members as bearing responsibility for a woman's protection at different stages of life.

But this does not eliminate the central problem.

Protection and autonomy are not synonymous.

A social system may sincerely consider itself protective while simultaneously limiting the

independence of the person being protected.

Consequently, recognising the protective dimension of rakati does not make the restriction upon svatantrya disappear.

This distinction is crucial to a balanced interpretation.

4. Honour and the Divine: A Different Voice

Within the Text

Another celebrated passage presents a different dimension of the text's conception of women.

Manusmriti 3.56 states:

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।

यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्राफलाः क्रियाः॥

Yatra naryastu pjyante ramante tatra devat,

Yatraisttu na pjyante sarvstatrphal kriy.

Broadly:

Where women are honoured, there the gods rejoice; where they are not honoured, all acts become fruitless.

(Manusmriti 3.56; Olivelle, 2005; Jha, 1999).

The importance attributed to women here is unmistakable.

The verse does not merely recommend courtesy. It connects the treatment of women with the moral and religious wellbeing of the household. The surrounding passages, particularly Manusmriti 3.55–3.57, reinforce the association between women's honour and familial wellbeing (Olivelle, 2005).

This creates one of the central interpretative problems addressed by this paper.

How can a text that restricts women's independence in one context simultaneously insist upon their honour in another?

The answer may lie in recognising that honour and autonomy belong to different conceptual categories.

5. Honour Is Not Necessarily Autonomy

A woman can occupy an honoured position within a social system without possessing the degree of individual independence recognised in a modern constitutional order.

Traditional Hindu jurisprudence placed substantial emphasis upon household and familial relationships as locations of normative obligation, rather than treating law exclusively as commands emanating from the state (Davis, 2010).

Within such a structure, a woman could simultaneously be considered worthy of protection, indispensable to household prosperity and deserving of honour while remaining subject to prescribed familial relationships.

Thus:

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते — “where women are honoured”

does not logically cancel:

न स्त्री स्वातन्त्र्यमर्हति — “a woman is not independent.”

Nor does the second expression erase the first.

The two passages instead reveal a conception of womanhood in which high social or moral value could coexist with restricted individual autonomy.

For a modern reader, this distinction is critical.

Contemporary equality demands more than honour.

It requires agency.

6. The Contemporary Constitutional Perspective

Modern India is governed not by Dharmashastra prescriptions but by the Constitution and laws enacted within the constitutional framework.

StreamHistory Documentaries

The Constitution transforms the legal foundation of citizenship by recognising women as individual rights-bearing citizens.

Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws.

Article 15 prohibits the State from discriminating against citizens on specified grounds including sex.

Article 21 guarantees that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law (Constitution of India, Arts. 14, 15 and 21).

Consequently, an adult woman's legal identity does not derive from her father, husband or son.

In contemporary constitutional terms:

A woman belongs to herself.

This proposition need not be understood as an attack upon family.

Family relationships can involve love, responsibility, protection and mutual dependence. What constitutional equality rejects is the transformation of those relationships into a legal justification for denying adult women agency.

The difference between the ancient and contemporary frameworks therefore lies substantially in the location and conception of authority.

One emphasises relational duties within a family-centred social order.

The other recognises the individual citizen as the bearer of fundamental constitutional rights.

7. “Kryeu Mantr”: The Ideal Wife in Popular Sanskrit Tradition

Another Sanskrit verse frequently appears in discussions of traditional Indian conceptions of the wife:

StreamHistory Documentaries

कार्येषु मन्त्री करणेषु दासी

भोज्येषु माता शयनेषु रम्भा।

धर्मानुकूला क्षमया धरित्री

भार्या च षाड्गुण्यवतीह दुर्लभा॥

Kryeu mantr karaeu ds,

Bhojyeu mt ayaneu rambh;

Dharmnukl kamay dharitr,

Bhry ca guyavatha durlabh.

The verse describes an idealised wife through six qualities.

The expression:

कार्येषु मन्त्री — kryeu mantr

is particularly significant.

Mantr means a counsellor or adviser. The wife is therefore represented as somebody whose counsel matters in affairs and decisions.

The verse goes on to portray her as devoted in duties, nurturing like a mother in matters of food, an intimate companion, supportive in dharma, and patient like the earth.

It consequently offers a multidimensional representation of the wife rather than one confined entirely to obedience.

At the same time, another expression—

करणेषु दासी — karaeu ds

—employs the image of service.

A contemporary gender analysis cannot simply ignore this because other portions of the verse appear favourable.

Ancient literature should neither be selectively condemned nor selectively sanitised.

A Necessary Textual Caution

Despite its widespread circulation, the precise textual provenance and authorship of the “Kryeu

Mantr” verse have not been established here with sufficient certainty to attribute it to Manusmriti.

It is therefore included in this paper only as an example of a widely circulated Sanskrit formula-tion concerning the ideal wife.

It is not used as primary textual evidence for the position of Manusmriti.

This distinction demonstrates a larger methodological principle: textual verification should precede attribution and interpretation.

8. Respect, Protection and Agency: Three Different Concepts

Much of the contemporary argument surrounding women in ancient texts becomes confused because three concepts are treated as though they were interchangeable:

Respect. Protection. Agency.

They are not.

Respect concerns the value and dignity accorded to a person.

Protection concerns responsibility for another person’s safety or welfare.

Agency concerns that person’s ability to make decisions and exercise autonomy.

A social system can provide the first two while restricting the third.

This conceptual distinction helps explain how apparently conflicting passages can coexist within a single normative framework.

The important scholarly question is consequently not simply:

“Did Manusmriti respect women?”

Nor is it adequately answered by asking:

“Did Manusmriti restrict women?”

A more productive inquiry is:

What conception of women’s social position emerges when its prescriptions concerning honour, protection, duties, dependence and agency are examined together?

9. The Danger of Selective Quotation

Selective quotation presents perhaps the greatest obstacle to serious discussion of ancient texts.

Those wishing to defend Manusmriti may quote:

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।

(Manusmriti 3.56).

Those wishing to condemn it may quote:

न स्त्री स्वातन्त्र्यमर्हति।

(Manusmriti 9.3).

Both quotations are relevant.

Neither quotation is the whole text.

The intellectual error begins when either fragment is made to carry a conclusion larger than the textual evidence permits.

A responsible interpretation must therefore consider the textual setting of individual verses, the meaning of Sanskrit terminology, the normative purpose of the work, its historical context and the difference between ancient social structures and contemporary constitutional principles (Olivelle, 2005; Davis, 2010).

This does not mean that objectionable prescriptions should escape criticism.

Contextualisation is not exoneration.

Likewise, criticism should not require the suppression of textual evidence that complicates the argument.

Scholarship begins precisely where such complications are allowed to remain visible.

10. Can Ancient Texts Be Judged by Modern Standards?

This question requires a distinction between historical understanding and contemporary application.

It would be historically simplistic to assume that the political, social and legal vocabulary of twenty-first-century constitutional democracy existed unchanged in ancient society.

But it would be equally problematic to argue that antiquity places a prescription permanently beyond moral examination.

Ancient texts can be studied historically while their prescriptions are simultaneously evaluated from contemporary ethical and constitutional perspectives.

The two exercises should not be confused.

Historical inquiry asks:

What did this prescription mean within the society and intellectual tradition in which it developed?

Contemporary normative inquiry asks:

Should such a prescription govern human relationships today?

The answer to the second question does not have to determine the answer to the first.

11. Manusmriti in Today's India

The continuing controversy surrounding Manusmriti demonstrates that ancient texts remain part of India's living intellectual and political discourse.

StreamHistory Documentaries

But modern India does not need to choose between two extremes: treating every ancient prescription as eternally binding or dismissing an entire intellectual tradition because portions of its normative literature conflict with contemporary values.

A mature engagement permits discrimination between ideas.

A prescription inconsistent with equality can be rejected.

A philosophical or ethical insight that retains value can be studied.

A historically significant text can be criticised without being caricatured.

And cultural inheritance can be respected without being placed beyond examination.

This approach is particularly necessary when discussing women.

Modern constitutional equality establishes a standard substantially different from the paternalistic social structures reflected in many ancient societies.

Honouring women is important.

Protecting women from violence and exploitation is important.

But neither can substitute for women's agency.

The contemporary principle must therefore be: Respect without control.

Protection without possession.

Family without subordination.

Equality with autonomy.

12. Discussion

The textual evidence examined here suggests that reducing Manusmriti either to a manifesto against women or to an uncomplicated celebration of women produces an inadequate interpretation.

The passages reveal a more complex normative

structure.

Women could be accorded considerable moral and familial significance while their independence remained constrained within a patriarchal organisation of social responsibility.

This need not appear internally contradictory when understood within a social framework organised substantially around household, family, duty and status. Scholarship on Hindu jurisprudence demonstrates the importance of precisely these social locations and relationships in understanding Dharmastra (Davis, 2010).

It becomes far more difficult when such prescriptions are transferred unchanged into a modern constitutional framework in which dignity and equality are associated with individual agency.

The central lesson is therefore methodological as much as social.

Ancient texts require contextual reading.

Translations require scrutiny.

Popularly attributed verses require textual verification.

And contemporary political or ideological arguments should distinguish between what a text actually states and what later traditions claim on its behalf.

13. Conclusion

Manusmriti cannot meaningfully be understood through one celebrated verse or one controversial expression.

“न स्त्री स्वातन्त्र्यमर्हति” raises a serious problem when examined through contemporary principles of female autonomy.

“यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः” demonstrates that the same text also assigns profound importance to honouring women.

Neither should be hidden.

Nor should one be employed to erase the other. The widely circulated “कार्येषु मन्त्री” verse adds another dimension to traditional representations of womanhood by imagining the wife as counselor, caregiver and companion, while simultaneously employing language of service. Its uncertain provenance, however, makes careful attribution essential.

The contemporary constitutional position

moves beyond these ancient formulations.

A woman need not be honoured because divine favour depends upon it.

Nor should she be protected because she is presumed incapable of independence.

She deserves dignity because she is a human being and equality because she is an equal citizen.

This does not make the study of Manusmriti irrelevant.

It makes careful study more important.

Ancient texts need neither blind reverence nor reflexive rejection. They require historical understanding, textual honesty and the intellectual confidence to distinguish between what belongs to the past and what continues to illuminate the present.

Before defending Manusmriti or condemning Manusmriti, the first scholarly obligation remains the simplest: read it.

References

- Davis, Donald R., Jr. (2010). *The Spirit of Hindu Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Government of India. *The Constitution of India*. Articles 14, 15 and 21. Legislative Department, Ministry of Law and Justice.
- Jha, Ganganath (ed. and trans.). (1999). *Manusmriti with the “Manubhya” of Medhithi*. 2nd ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. Originally published by the University of Calcutta, 1920–1939.
- Lingat, Robert. (1973). *The Classical Law of India*. Translated by J. Duncan M. Derrett. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Olivelle, Patrick (ed. and trans.). (2005). *Manu’s Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mnava-Dharmastra*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press

From Butter to the Bhagavad Gita: Krishna's Incredible Journey-By-Kumar Bahukhandi

“

From the child of Mathura and the playful companion of the gopas in Braj to the charioteer at Kurukshetra, Krishna's journey is not merely a movement through places and events. It is an extraordinary passage from innocence to responsibility, from affection to duty, from the music of the flute to the eternal questions of human existence

There is something almost unbelievable about the distance between the two most familiar images of Krishna.

In one, there is a little boy with butter on his hands, mischief in his eyes and complaints against him reaching Yashoda. There are cows wandering through green pastures, young companions running beside him, gopis drawn towards the music of his flute and the Yamuna flowing quietly through a world that generations would remember as Braj.

In the other, there is no flute. There is a conch, a chariot, two armies and a warrior who suddenly does not want to fight. Krishna is no longer running with the gopas. He is holding the reins of Arjuna's horses.

The mischievous child has become a statesman. The flute-player has become a counsellor. The boy whose childhood stories make people smile is now answering questions about life and death, action and inaction, duty and desire, attachment and liberation. And what he says on that



battlefield becomes the Bhagavad Gita.

How did the journey travel so far?

Perhaps that is one of the reasons Krishna remains among the most fascinating personalities in India's spiritual and cultural consciousness. His life cannot be captured by one age, one role, one emotion or even one philosophy.

He laughs.

He plays.

He loves.

He fights injustice.

He negotiates.

He withdraws when withdrawal is wiser than vanity.

He builds alliances.

He accepts responsibility.

And when a mighty warrior collapses emotionally before the greatest battle of his life, Krishna does something even more remarkable: he talks to him.

The journey towards that conversation begins under circumstances in which conversation itself seems impossible.

Krishna is born in Mathura, not amid celebration and freedom, but under the shadow of imprisonment and death.

His parents, Devaki and Vasudeva, are prisoners of Kansa. A prophecy hangs over the ruler: Devaki's eighth child will become the cause of his

destruction.

Kansa responds as frightened power often does. He attempts to destroy the future before the future can challenge him.

Yet the child survives.

Vasudeva carries the newborn Krishna across the Yamuna to Gokul. The imagery has been told and retold for centuries—the storm, the river, the journey through darkness and the infant being taken towards safety.

The circumstances of his birth are political, violent and dangerous.

His childhood, however, becomes almost their opposite.

Before the Battlefield, There Was Braj

In Gokul and Vrindavan, Krishna belongs to everybody.

He is Yashoda's troublesome child, Nanda's son, the companion of cowherd boys and the source of endless exasperation and affection among the women of Braj.

The butter-stealing stories matter not because butter itself is important, but because they bring the divine into the most ordinary corners of domestic life.

Krishna does not remain distant.

He enters homes.

He gets caught.

He is complained about.

He is scolded.

He makes excuses.

He plays with children.

The extraordinary is presented through the language of the ordinary.

This may explain why the Krishna of childhood has remained so deeply embedded

in popular imagination. People do not merely worship him; they feel permitted to love him, tease him, complain to him and even argue with him.

His divinity does not eliminate intimacy.

Then there is the flute.

Few objects in Indian cultural memory carry so much meaning with so little material presence. A hollow piece of bamboo becomes inseparable from Krishna.

The flute commands nobody.

It threatens nobody.

It does not issue instructions.

It simply calls.

The gopis hear it. The gopas know its sound. Braj gathers around it. In later devotional traditions, the flute becomes a metaphor for surrender, attraction and the mysterious call of the divine.

But Krishna's childhood is not merely an uninterrupted festival of innocence.

Danger repeatedly enters Braj.

The stories of Putana, Kaliya and the other threats surrounding the young Krishna remind us that darkness has followed him from Mathura. Even in the landscape of play, responsibility is quietly taking shape.

The child is already a protector.

Still, Braj cannot hold him forever.

And this is where Krishna's story begins to acquire a distinctly human poignancy.

Growing up means leaving something behind.

Krishna must leave the people who love him.

He must return towards Mathura and confront the world from which he had once been carried away as an infant.

The boy who escaped Kansa must now face Kansa.

Childhood gives way to history.

When Krishna Leaves the Flute Behind

The defeat of Kansa might have provided a convenient ending for a simpler hero.

The tyrant falls. Justice triumphs. The hero wins.

But Krishna's journey refuses to end there.

Because life after victory continues.

New enemies emerge. Kingdoms have to survive. Communities require protection. Alliances matter. Political decisions have consequences.

Sometimes courage means confronting an adversary; at other times wisdom lies in refusing to sacrifice people merely to satisfy the prestige of rulers.

The world of Krishna becomes larger and morally more complicated.

Eventually, Dwarka emerges as another defining landscape of his life.

By now the child of Braj has travelled an enormous distance—not simply geographically, but in responsibility.

He becomes a figure of political intelligence and diplomacy.

This aspect of Krishna is sometimes overshadowed by either the charming child of Vrindavan or the divine teacher of the Gita. Yet the statesman between these two figures is essential to understanding the journey.

Krishna knows that righteousness does not operate in a vacuum. It must survive in a world containing ambition, jealousy, pride, deception, loyalty, family relationships and competing claims of duty.

Then come the Pandavas and Kauravas. And eventually, Kurukshetra.

Here the story reaches its astonishing reversal. Krishna, capable of influencing kings and armies, chooses not to fight. Arjuna chooses Krishna himself rather than Krishna's army, and Krishna becomes his charioteer.

Consider that image for a moment. The man around whom kingdoms and warriors revolve voluntarily takes the driver's place.

He holds the reins.

There is a lesson even before the Gita begins.

Power does not always need the throne.

Leadership does not always occupy the highest seat.

Sometimes the person who guides history is the one apparently sitting in front simply holding the reins.

And then Arjuna asks Krishna to take the chariot between the two armies.

Krishna does.

What Arjuna sees there destroys his certainty.

When the Warrior Does Not Want to Fight

Arjuna had arrived at Kurukshetra as a warrior.

He knew how to fight. He had trained for it. He possessed extraordinary skill. The question was not whether his hands were capable of using the bow.

The crisis was whether his

conscience would allow them to do so.

Across the battlefield stood people who were not strangers.

Teachers.

Relatives.

Elders.

Friends.

Members of his own extended family.

Suddenly the language of victory becomes hollow.

What is a kingdom worth if acquiring it requires killing those with whom one might have shared it?

Arjuna's bow slips.

The warrior who could confront armies cannot resolve the battle taking place inside himself. And this is precisely where the Bhagavad Gita begins.

That fact deserves attention.

One of the world's most influential philosophical dialogues does not begin because a student calmly approaches a teacher seeking abstract knowledge.

It begins because a human being breaks down.

Arjuna is confused, emotionally overwhelmed and unable to determine what is right.

His problem is remarkably modern.

What should we do when every choice appears morally compromised?

Should emotion decide duty?

Can refusing to act itself become an action with consequences?

How does one distinguish compassion from avoidance?

How can a person perform a difficult responsibility without being consumed by ambition, fear or the desire for

reward?

Krishna does not answer with a convenient slogan.

The conversation moves through duty, action, knowledge, discipline, devotion, the nature of the self and the relationship between the temporary and the eternal.

And from this conversation emerges one of the Gita's most enduring principles: perform the action that is yours to perform, but do not make yourself a prisoner of its fruits.

This is not an argument for indifference.

Quite the opposite.

Krishna asks Arjuna to act fully while loosening the ego's demand to control every consequence.

It is an extraordinarily difficult proposition.

Human beings generally act because they want something.

Recognition.

Victory.

Money.

Love.

Power.

Security.

Revenge.

Approval.

The Gita asks whether action can rise above this endless bargaining with outcomes.

That question is as relevant in an office, a family, a classroom or public life as it was symbolically on the battlefield.

The Flute and the Chariot Were Never Opposites

At first sight, the Krishna of Braj and the Krishna of Kurukshetra appear almost impossible to reconcile.

One represents play.

The other responsibility.

One carries a flute.

The other holds reins.

One is surrounded by gopas and gopis. The other stands between armies.

One steals butter.

The other discusses the immortality of the self. Yet perhaps this contrast is precisely the point. Human life itself contains all these worlds.

Nobody remains forever in childhood. There are periods when life resembles Braj—friendship, family, laughter, affection, music and the feeling that tomorrow can wait.

Then, sooner or later, everyone encounters a Kurukshetra.

Not necessarily a battlefield of weapons.

A difficult decision can be Kurukshetra.

Choosing between personal affection and professional responsibility can be Kurukshetra.

Standing against somebody one loves can be Kurukshetra.

Accepting an unpleasant truth can be Kurukshetra.

Ageing can be Kurukshetra. can be Kurukshetra.

The conflict between what we want and what we believe we ought to do is perhaps the most common Kurukshetra of all. This is where Krishna's long journey acquires its deeper coherence. The Gita is not spoken by someone who has remained outside life.

Krishna has already experienced relationships, separation, danger, responsibility, political conflict and the burden of decisions. The teacher at Kurukshetra knows the colour of Braj. He has heard laughter before hearing the conches of war. He has played the flute before holding the reins. That makes the journey

all the more compelling.

Krishna Does Not Ask Arjuna to Escape Life

There is another reason the Gita has travelled so far beyond its original setting.

Krishna's answer to confusion is not simply withdrawal.

He does not tell Arjuna that the world is difficult and therefore should be abandoned.

He asks him to understand his responsibility and then enter the world with greater clarity. This distinction is important. Spirituality can easily be misunderstood as escape—a retreat from difficult people, difficult duties and difficult consequences.

Krishna offers something more demanding. Remain in life. Act.

But understand why you act. Perform your responsibility without allowing success to intoxicate you or failure to destroy you.

Care deeply without assuming that everything belongs to you. Participate without becoming possessed by possession itself. This is easier to admire than to practise.

Perhaps that is why the Gita continues to be read rather than merely remembered.

Every generation discovers its own Arjuna within it.

There is a beautiful question hidden inside Krishna's journey. Where did the flute go?

The Krishna of Kurukshetra is rarely imagined playing it.

Perhaps the answer need not be literal. The flute belongs to one stage of the journey, the chariot to another.

Life does not always permit us to carry the symbols of childhood into every responsi-

bility of adulthood.

But what the flute represented need not disappear.

Joy need not disappear when duty arrives. Love need not disappear when judgement becomes necessary.

Inner freedom need not disappear because the world has become complicated.

The same Krishna who once attracted people through music later guides Arjuna through wisdom.

The instrument changes.

The act of guidance remains. At Braj, people move towards Krishna after hearing his flute.

At Kurukshetra, Arjuna moves towards clarity after hearing his words.

Perhaps the distance between the flute and the Gita is not as great as it initially appears.

Both are calls. One reaches the heart through music. The other reaches a confused human being through knowledge.

An Incredible Journey — and a Human One

Krishna's journey begins in a prison but refuses to be imprisoned by circumstance.

It passes through the waters of the Yamuna into the arms of Yashoda. It runs barefoot through the childhood landscapes of Gokul and Vrindavan.

It plays among the gopas.

It becomes inseparable from the affection of the gopis.

It confronts Kansa. It moves through the responsibilities of Mathura and Dwarka. It enters diplomacy and politics. It attempts to navigate a conflict that human pride has made increasingly unavoidable.