

India's Aviation Paradox: Growth Amid Fragility – Part -2

By Uday Kumar Varma

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Profitability, Policy, and the Road Ahead

If Part 1 traced the dramatic growth and fragility of Indian aviation, Part 2 examines why profitability remains elusive, the structural and regulatory bottlenecks that reinforce fragility, and what can realistically be done to secure the sector's future.

Despite soaring passenger numbers, airlines struggle to convert traffic into profits. Fuel is the largest single cost: ATF taxes in India are among the world's highest, sometimes exceeding 30–35% of ticket revenue. Airport charges

further inflate costs. Indian passengers are extremely price-sensitive, and fare caps under schemes like UDAN often render routes financially unsustainable. Ancillary revenues—cargo, business-class premiums, lounges—remain limited compared to global peers. As a result, passenger growth alone does not ensure financial stability.

Historical patterns confirm this paradox. Legacy carriers like Jet Airways and Go First collapsed; SpiceJet has oscillated between losses and recovery for years. IndiGo remains profitable, but its dominance leaves the sector structurally fragile. Minimal redundancy means that if the largest carrier falters, the system experiences cascading failures, as the December crisis demonstrated.

Regulatory complexity compounds these challenges. Rules like the “5/20” requirement and Route Dispersal Guidelines, combined with micromanagement by regulators, create uncertainty. Even fare adjustments are fraught: airlines face scrutiny for raising prices, while fuel taxes and airport fees can spike without warning. The result is a market that is deregulated in theory but tightly constrained in practice.

Short-term challenges for new entrants, recently licensed by the government, are formidable. Airlines require years to reach operational maturity: aircraft procurement, crew training, route allocation, and airport slots all demand careful planning and substantial capital. Without predictable taxation and regulatory clarity, new carriers risk joining the growing list of airline failures before achieving scale.

Infrastructure constraints remain significant. Dozens of underutilized airports highlight the disconnect between infrastructure expansion and operational sustainability. Without financially viable airlines, even newly built airports cannot stimulate local economies. Alternative transport modes—railways and roads—cannot absorb sudden aviation disruptions, further emphasizing the importance of resilient air services.

Addressing these challenges requires both short-term and medium-term strategies. In the near term, rationalizing ATF taxes and airport fees would reduce immediate cost pressures. Streamlining regulations—simplifying route dispersal obligations, clarifying fare policies, and reducing unpredictable interventions—would enhance operational confidence. Support for new entrants, such as targeted capital or temporary incentives, could help them survive initial years while building operational scale.

Medium-term reforms must focus on resilience and competition. Encouraging multiple carriers on the same routes, fostering financially sustainable low-cost carriers, and enabling market-based pricing are critical. Policy must recognize that aviation is strategic infrastructure: stable airlines enhance connectivity, commerce, and national growth. Lessons from Singapore or Dubai show that treating aviation as a national instrument—rather than merely a revenue source—yields long-term benefits.

The prognosis is cautiously optimistic. India's domestic air travel will likely continue its upward trajectory, driven by rising incomes, urbanization, and consumer aspiration. Yet without structural reforms, policy clarity, and financial prudence, crises like the IndiGo meltdown may recur. New entrants will face the same pressures as their predecessors unless the economics of Indian aviation are corrected.

Ultimately, India's aviation sector is at a crossroads. Its infrastructure is impressive, its market large, and its consumer base aspirational. But growth alone is insufficient; stability, competition, and financial viability are essential. Until this balance is struck, India will continue producing passengers in record numbers—and, tragically, state funerals for airlines struggling to survive in skies engineered for fragility.

Rules for Some, Power for Others: Calling out Western Hypocrisy

By Viraj Vaidya

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Europe might impose sanctions on the USA for violating the territorial sovereignty of Venezuela, as it did against Russia for violating Ukraine's sovereignty. This statement would have held some credibility had it been the genuine Rule-Based International Order (RBIO), where rules applied equally to all the countries, but the great powers, who were assumed to be custodians of the rule-based order, themselves violate it. The core geopolitical principle, "In international relations, there are no permanent friends, or permanent enemies, but only permanent interests," sums up the double standards of western world very well.

Major powers today are increasingly employing might is right approach to further their territorial ambitions, China in Asia, Russia in Europe and the USA in the Western hemisphere; these are all permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Therefore, in this world, it would be foolish for other countries to depend on the presumed shield of RBIO, which has lost its restraining power, as global norms no longer guarantee a country's territorial integrity.

The Anglo-Saxon countries, along with certain European countries, go on lecturing other countries for allegedly not complying with the rule of law. The problem with the Western world is that they do not practice at home what they preach abroad. These European countries accused India of funding the Ukraine war, some of them even went on to say that India is not buying Russian oil but is buying Ukraine's blood.

Yet, many of these same European countries continue to purchase Russian gas even today. So why is it only Russian oil coming to India, funding the war and not the gas going to Europe? Why is India subjected to an additional 25% tariff for buying Russian oil and not Turkey, a NATO member, despite purchasing Russian oil and gas?

On January 3rd 2026, the USA launched operation 'Absolute Resolve' to capture the President of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro and flew him to the USA to face American justice. This operation was a complete violation of international norms and articles of the UN charter. Had it been any country from the global south instead of the USA, the so-called guardians of the rule-based world, Western countries, would have gone ballistic against that country, but because it was the USA, you would see them justifying this operation.

Following the operation, President Donald Trump, during a press conference, said, "We are going to run Venezuela until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition." History has proven that the USA is very good at toppling the regime, but is very bad at running the country. Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011) are brilliant examples of the USA's ineptness in running the country post regime change operation.

Though this operation was carried out by accusing Venezuela of running a criminal network and smuggling drugs to the USA, the world knows that the real reason was to capture Venezuela's oil reserves, in fact, Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world, accounting for the 18.17% of world's total reserves. This is reflected in Donald Trump's statement, "We are going to have our very large US oil companies go and spend billions of dollars, fix oil infrastructure and start making money." Similarly, Iraq was invaded in 2003, accusing Saddam Hussein of possessing weapons of mass destruction, but the real reason was oil.

Donald Trump, in line with the USA's National Security Strategy 2025, further added, "America will never allow foreign powers (in veiled reference to increasing influence of China, Russia and Iran in Venezuela) to rob our people or drive us back out of our own hemisphere." This statement indicates that America is re-establishing its deterrence and dominance in western hemisphere as per Monroe Doctrine. A revival of this doctrine risks normalising sphere of influence politics over multilateral norms. This could be used to justify further interventions in other Latin American countries. Such a trajectory undermines the rules-based international order that the United States claims to uphold. Trump also said, "We have to be surrounded by safe and secure countries," which means the world would witness a wave of such operations across western hemisphere.

The USA has now set a bad precedent that might embolden China to invade Taiwan or North Korea to escalate its aggression towards South Korea or Russia to intensify fighting in Ukraine. The other less influential countries may draw the hard lessons that norms cannot safeguard territorial integrity and sovereignty unless backed by military capacity. This might encourage Iran to pursue nuclear weapons or Japan to start its own nuclear weapons program to deter China from invading Senkaku Island.

Ultimately, the selective application of international norms exposes the rule-based international order as conditional rather than universal. The more the great powers retain the privilege of ignoring the principle of sovereignty while demanding compliance from other countries, the less deterrent international norms will be. For middle powers and the Global South, this signals a world where strategic autonomy matters more than anything else. The revival of sphere of influence politics, whether in Europe, Asia, or the Western Hemisphere, risks pushing the international system further toward instability. In such an order, power, not principle, increasingly determines whose sovereignty is respected.

'Mother of all deals' will be a game-changer for India and Europe

By Dr. N. K. Somani

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After a long period of seven decades and complex rounds of negotiations, a free trade agreement has finally been concluded between India and the European Union (EU). Following this historic agreement, trade between the two sides could reach a new high of \$200 billion. Amidst America's protectionist policies and President Donald Trump's tariff terror, this India-EU agreement is being called the 'mother of all deals'. The agreement is a major blow to Trump. This is why, just before the agreement was finalized, he warned the EU that Europe was funding a war against itself. His remarks were directed at India's stance on the Russia-Ukraine war. Trump alleges that India is helping Russia in the Ukraine war. Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised the FTA, calling it an excellent example of partnership between two of the world's major economies.

This agreement, which connects global GDP and nearly two billion people, is one of the world's largest trade agreements. Following the agreement, import duties on more than 90 percent of mutually traded goods will be reduced or eliminated by both sides. This will allow Indian goods to reach the large and prosperous markets of 27 European countries. India's textile, pharmaceutical, petroleum products, steel, and machinery industries will benefit. However, the situation regarding the dairy and farm industry is still unclear. This has also been a major sticking point in the India-US trade agreement. Therefore, how both sides will proceed regarding the dairy and agriculture sectors remains to be seen.

India is the European Union's largest trading partner. In the financial year 2024-25, trade between the two amounted to \$136.53 billion. Of this, India's exports were \$75.85 billion and imports were \$60.68 billion. After the agreement, India's exports will also be able to grow rapidly. Since Europe is also a large potential market for India's service exports, this agreement will open up significant opportunities for India's labour-intensive sectors, MSMEs, and manufacturing sector, while also expanding India's engineering exports. The trade agreement will not only ensure economic access for India and its companies in Europe but will also be beneficial in terms of establishing a strategic foothold on the European continent. The EU is also a major investor in India. It is said that the India-EU trade agreement will also boost foreign direct investment (FDI). From 2000 to September 2024, the EU invested \$117.4 billion in India. Now, after the agreement, EU investment will increase even further.

The foundation of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement was laid in 2007 during the tenure of then Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. In June 2007, negotiations began between India and the EU on a Broad-Based Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA). Despite 15 rounds of talks until 2013, no agreement could be reached due to disagreements on issues such as automobiles, spirits, data security, visa regulations, and market access. After this, the negotiation process remained stalled for about eight years. In 2021, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the talks resumed. This was followed by increasing difficulties for both India and the EU due to the changing world order, global tensions, and Donald Trump's tariff policies. India is facing 50 percent tariffs from the US. The India-US trade agreement is still in a state of flux. The US is a major trading partner of India. India has a trade surplus with the US. India is suffering heavy losses due to the 50 percent tariffs. To compensate for these losses, India was looking for a large market like the US. Now it has found a large market like Europe (worth \$20 trillion).

On the other hand, Europe is also under pressure due to Trump's policies. Trump has threatened to impose an additional 10 percent tariff on countries that oppose his acquisition of Greenland. This threat has further exacerbated Europe's crisis. Europe was also looking for an alternative to the American market. Europe has found a large and reliable market in India. In short, the FTA will reduce both sides' dependence on the US. As a result of the shared interests and needs of both parties, this historic agreement could be signed when EU Commissioner Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa visited New Delhi as chief guests for the 77th Republic Day celebrations.

In fact, in the midst of global uncertainties, free trade agreements have proven to be an effective step in providing a foundation for national economies by boosting exports. This is why India has so far signed Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPAs), or Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) with 17 countries. This includes the Five Eyes (Britain, Australia, and New Zealand). Negotiations with Canada are also expected to begin soon. The results of these trade agreements have also been satisfactory. Between November 2024 and November 2025, India's total exports (goods and services combined) increased from \$64.05 billion to \$73.99 billion, while imports remained stable at \$80.63 billion. As a result, the trade deficit decreased significantly. Looking at November alone, India's trade deficit decreased from \$41.68 billion to \$24.53 billion. This significant improvement is due to a reduction in the import costs of commodities such as gold, oil, and coal.

This is why India is moving forward with trade agreements. Recently, a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was signed with Oman. Following this agreement, more than 99 percent of India's exports to Oman will become tariff-free. Similarly, during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India in early December, an agreement was reached between Moscow and New Delhi to increase bilateral trade. Now, on the occasion of the 77th Republic Day, it is hoped that the "Mother of all Deals" between India and the European Union will create significant opportunities for people, businesses, and investors in both regions.

Rethinking Port-Led Growth in India's Maritime Economy

By Isha Panchal

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India's maritime sector has reached an important inflection point. After decades of underinvestment and fragmented governance, ports have emerged as central pillars of national economic strategy, logistics reform, and coastal development. Increasing cargo throughput, large-scale infrastructure expansion, and ambitious policy frameworks such as Maritime India Vision 2030 and the Sagarmala Programme suggest that port-led development is gradually moving from aspiration to implementation. The reality, however, is that the central challenge facing India today is not simply a matter of scaling port capacity but rather making this growth climate-resilient, financially sustainable, institutionally coherent, and socially inclusive in line with the broader imperatives of the Blue Economy.

Scale and strategic importance of port-led growth

India's port sector performance in FY 2024-25, with major ports handling close to 855 million tonnes of cargo and non-major ports (state and private) processing close to 740 million tonnes, taking the combined throughput close to 1.6 billion tonnes annually. This growth reflects sustained demand across bulk commodities, containers, and energy cargoes, and underlines the increasing role of private and state-level ports in India's maritime landscape.

The ports still remain a lifeline for India's trade architecture and handle close to 95 per cent of the external trade by volume. Apart from facilitating trade, as economic nodes, they anchor industrial clusters, logistics parks, and coastal urbanization. The port-led development has thus emerged as a spatial strategy for regional growth, with important implications for the coastal states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh. At the same time, however, the sheer scale of expansion has accentuated environmental, governance, and social pressures that call for policy recalibration.

Policy architecture and the turn towards integrated maritime planning

The contemporary phase of port development is constituted by a reconfigured policy architecture. Maritime India Vision 2030 spells out a long-term roadmap for ports, shipping, and inland waterways, underpinning high investment requirements and incorporating efficiency, digitisation, and modal integration. Sagarmala Programme operationalises this through four pillars: port modernization, enhanced connectivity, port-linked industrialization, and coastal community development.

Put together, they announce the transition from port expansion in isolation to integrated maritime planning, which offers connectivity between ports, hinterland logistics corridors, and industrial value chains with port cities. The supplementing of the National Logistics Policy further reinforces the resolve to ease the cost of logistics, making exports globally competitive. After all is said and done, the success of this policy architecture would indeed depend on governance coordination and implementation capacity across multiple levels of government.

Pathways to sustainable finance and investment

First and foremost, financing remains a determining factor in shaping the quality and direction of port development. Traditional public funding and PPP models are increasingly unable to meet the capital demands of modern, climate-resilient ports. On the other hand, such institutional innovations as the Sagarmala Finance Corporation Limited (SMFCL) have already been introduced to perform and act as a dedicated maritime sector financier.

Long-term, concessional, and green finance instruments will be required for the transition to sustainable ports. Investments beyond mere capacity expansion are needed for climate-proofing infrastructure, deploying renewable energy, providing shore power, electrifying cargo-handling equipment, and upgrading digital systems. Green and blue bonds, blended finance involving multilateral institutions, and ESG-linked lending offer pathways to attract more private capital with reduced risk. However, regulatory clarity, project bankability, and transparent governance will also be required to avoid greenwashing and ensure financial sustainability.

Governance fragmentation and regulatory constraints

Despite policy momentum, governance remains as one of the most persistent binding constraints on port-led development. India's maritime governance is fragmented across central port authorities, state maritime boards, and urban local bodies governing port cities. This often leads to institutional complexity, overlapping mandates, and coordination failures, culminating in delays during project execution.

Regulatory regimes, including CRZ norms and EIAs, have critical roles in protecting sensitive coasts. However, procedural delays, limited institutional capacity, and poor integration of climate risk assessments weaken efficiency and environmental outcomes. The challenge is not in diluting this regulation, but in streamlining and strengthening governance mechanisms that achieve a balance between the economic imperatives and ecological sustainability with community consent.

Climate resilience and environmental sustainability

Climate change has structurally changed the risk profile that port infrastructures face. For instance, sea-level rise, coastal erosion, intensifying cyclones, and flooding will directly threaten port assets, hinterland connectivity, and port cities. In this respect, climate resilience has ceased to be a complementary and optional add-on but has become an intrinsic part of the marine development planning process.

Effective climate-proofing requires a combination of approaches: engineered solutions such as resilient breakwaters and elevated terminals; operational measures including improved drainage, early warning systems, and contingency planning; and nature-based solutions such as mangrove restoration and coastal buffers with co-benefits for biodiversity and fisheries. In parallel, port decarbonization through shore power, electrification, and renewable energy integration aligns India's maritime sector with global climate commitments and access to ESG-linked finance.

Inclusiveness and social dimensions of port development

Indeed, port expansion, due to the increase in trade volumes, has deep socio-economic implications for the communities residing along the coasts and even within the cities where the ports are located. This normally causes displacement of fishing communities, closure or restriction of access to certain parts of their usual coastal space, and loss of a traditional livelihood. Rapid port-led growth further increases demands on housing, transport, and public services, exacerbating inequities within already stressed coastal cities.

Inclusive, port-led development needs institutionalized social impact assessments, transparent compensation and resettlement frameworks, and sustained community engagement. Skill development programs with a focus on port operations, logistics, and maritime services can create local employment opportunities, especially among youth and women. Supporting fisheries value chains by means of cold storage, processing, and access to markets can help integrate traditional livelihoods into the Blue Economy rather than marginalize them. The growth of non-major ports, accounting for nearly half of India's cargo, further underlines the role and influence of state governments and local institutions in shaping inclusive outcomes.

Towards sustainable and integrated pathways

The port-led maritime development of India requires an integrated set of policy actions: first, synchronizing coastal and port planning with unified digital platforms and mechanisms for coordinated clearance; second, scaling up sustainable finance instruments to support investment in climate-resilient and low-carbon infrastructure; third, advancing governance reforms to strengthen state maritime boards and clarify port-city land-use frameworks; fourth, embedding community-centric development at the project level; and lastly, data-driven decision-making and digitalization through port performance dashboards and logistics platforms to enhance efficiency while reducing emissions.

Conclusion

India's ports already show scale, capacity, and strategic relevance. The defining task of the next decade is to ensure that this expansion is resilient to climate shocks, supported by sustainable finance, governed coherently across levels, and inclusive of coastal communities. Achieving this delicate balance will go a long way in not merely securing India's trade competitiveness but in also transforming the ports from mere infrastructure assets into durable propellers of the Blue Economy.

Role of Civilization in Nation's Awakening: Way Ahead for Bharat (Military View) – Part - 2

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The Role of the Nation (Statecraft)

Chanakya's Saptanga Theory outlines seven essential pillars for a well-functioning and awakened state (nation-state):

Swamin (The Ruler)	The central figure responsible for all decisions and the welfare of the people.
Amatya (The Minister/Administration)	A competent and trustworthy bureaucracy to assist the ruler in governance.
Janapada (The Population and Territory)	The people should be loyal, disciplined, and hard-working, and the land should be fertile and well-resourced.
Durga (Fortification)	A strong defence system to protect against external aggression.
Kosha (Treasury)	A sound and well-managed financial system to fund state activities and welfare programs.
Danda (Army/Military)	A strong-armed force to ensure internal order and external security.
Mitra (Allies)	Strategic diplomatic relations with friendly nations.

In essence, Chanakya provides a comprehensive manual for nation-building, where "awakening" involves the continuous cultivation of these seven elements through wise leadership and an actively engaged, knowledgeable citizenry dedicated to the national interest.

6. Power, how to use it (Tactical & Strategic)

There are two types of powers in the worldly order: Hard & Soft

Hard Power definition: Hard Power uses military force, economic sanctions and aid to achieve their ambitions for their national interests For e.g. Armed forces are used when nation's sovereignty and national interest in danger. It also includes assets like various military system, intelligence agencies, new innovations which can change course of the present and future. It changes the on-ground power equation.

Soft Power definition: Soft Power used for influencing and changing the existing narrative and perception through culture and values. It includes use of literature, media, any art form, sports, which brings a different thought process by exhibiting the positives to the world. It strengthens the reputation of the country who uses the soft power to its advantage like Bharat has demonstrated its soft power with declaration of World Yoga Day on 21 June by UN.

But soft power looks good only when country is its best at hard power.

7. Examples which changed course of history using military:

Battle of Plassey: British Empire started in India with control over Bengal.

First Battle of Panipat: Mughal entered India by defeating Lodhis.

1971 Indo-Pak War: Liberation of Bangladesh.

8. How to secure Bharat interests militarily:

- Develop Blue Water Navy, develop capability to strike anywhere in the world to secure interests not to exploit.
- Accelerate Make in Indian Program for Defense Production for Self-Reliance.
- Develop Mindset to strike first thereby not waiting for adversary to act. Develop Killer Instinct.
- Deploy Latest Technology, train people for border protection.
- Mandatory Military/NCC service for all Indians (from Son of farmer to big industrialists like Ambani, Birla)
- Develop a sense of nationalism among citizens through educational patriotic programs and motivate young generations to join armed forces.
- Make one of the best elite special forces and intelligence agencies.
- Joint Tri Services Co-ordination.

9. Ayodhya & Future Temple Litigation (Ek Mashaal: Quest to resolve and reinstate old civilizational issue & followed by discovery of national pride)

Hoisting Dharam Dhwaj (religious flag) at top Ram Temple to declare the completion of the shrine construction. Acc. to PM Modi "Centuries old wounds are healing; long standing pain is finding closure and centuries old resolve is finally being fulfilled". I partially agree with this statement, wounds are healing but we have to fight to see this day, resolve is unfulfilled still Krishna Janambhoomi, Gyan Vapi Varanasi is still unresolved. We to open a Pandora box where we have to unearth the wrongdoings of Islamic & Christian Invaders. But Ayodhya offers a ray of hope for Sanatan Dharma to fight till last (Repeal Places of Worship Act, Start digging at various places under ASI & expose system & people). I want to ask PM, what stopping him to repeal 'Places of Worship Act' and all hurdles to build temples in Mathura and Varanasi.

10. Future Military & Diplomatic Alliance (Israel & Bharat): Basic Principles

We have to quit the membership of United Nations and have to make a bloc of countries who follow principles of Humanity, equality, mutual respect, zero tolerance against any exploitation, take effective steps in combating terrorism & fundamentalism. This bloc has to be blunt in the communication and aggressive to implement bloc objectives on ground. I can visualize Israel, Japan, Germany, African Union, may be France can quit UN membership. Its announcement should be done in US which would be symbolically shift power transfer from West dominated arena. A strong leader is necessity which has powerful leadership traits who can put country on financial reforms, sustain global supply chains for resources vital for country's interest and can take bring changes globally.

We are surrounded by hostile neighbours and we have to realize the idea of 'Akhand Bharat' so that whole mankind can get rid from menace of fundamentalism, terrorism, communalism. We have to face China one day so let's start preparing for it, exploit their weakness, build on our strengths. We have to fight China culturally, militarily, financially, ideologically. Bharat have to go back to its basics, attain confidence and finish the bullying and land grab China. We have to give China it's their bitter pill of psychological warfare, get our land back from the communists.

11. Conclusion:

Future is bright for Bharat. Bharat has to shed their image of people taking control & exploit them, scrap sadistic approach, decolonize the mindset and delegate responsibility by first training youth and trust them. Take tough decisions for improving country's financial and defense sector health. Build patriotic people for nationalist nation.

From Meme to Marine Sentinel: Why Sea Turtles Matter More Than Budget Jokes

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Sea turtles are among the most ancient survivors on Earth, silent witnesses to the rise and fall of civilizations, having existed for more than 110 million years—long before dinosaurs vanished from the planet. Yet, in post-budget Kerala, this extraordinary marine creature unexpectedly became the butt of social media jokes. Following the presentation of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's ninth Union Budget, the word "sea turtle" began trending in Kerala, spawning a wave of memes and trolls. The reason was the budget's promise to establish sea turtle conservation and care centres—an announcement many expected to be symbolic rather than substantive. But behind the humour lies a far more serious ecological, economic and diplomatic story that deserves attention rather than ridicule. Sea turtles are endangered marine reptiles whose lives are deeply intertwined with both the ocean and the land. Though they spend most of their lives at sea, they return to land only for one purpose: reproduction. What makes their life cycle truly remarkable is their instinctive fidelity to birthplace. When the time comes to lay eggs, female sea turtles return to the very same beach where they were born, even after travelling thousands of kilometres across oceans. This extraordinary phenomenon, known as *natal homing*, is one of nature's great mysteries.

Sea turtles typically live between 50 and 100 years. During nesting, females dig pits in the sand and lay their eggs, carefully covering them before returning to the sea. When the hatchlings emerge weeks later, they instinctively crawl towards the ocean. Conservationists repeatedly warn that humans should never pick up hatchlings and place them directly into the sea. That short but crucial crawl from nest to shoreline strengthens their muscles and helps them imprint the beach's magnetic signature, enabling them to return decades later to the same coast to nest. Unlike land turtles, sea turtles have flippers instead of legs, enabling swift movement through water. However, they cannot retract their heads or limbs into their shells, making them particularly vulnerable to predators and human activity. Of the seven species of sea turtles found globally, several are critically endangered today. Olive Ridley turtles are the most commonly sighted species along the Indian coast, including Kerala. Their most striking behaviour is *arribada*—the mass nesting event where thousands of females come ashore simultaneously to lay eggs.

Despite their resilience over geological time, sea turtles now face existential threats from modern human activity. Marine pollution, plastic waste, climate change, unscientific fishing practices and coastal construction have pushed them towards extinction. Plastic debris floating in the sea is often mistaken for jellyfish—one of the turtles' primary food sources—leading to fatal ingestion. Fishing nets and trawlers kill thousands of turtles every year through accidental entanglement. Bright artificial lights, beachfront construction and sand mining disturb nesting beaches, driving turtles away from shores they have used for millennia.

Climate change has added another, more insidious threat. The sex of sea turtle hatchlings is determined not by genetics but by sand temperature. Warmer sand produces female hatchlings, while cooler sand produces males. Rising global temperatures are therefore skewing turtle populations heavily towards females, reducing the number of males and threatening future reproduction. Scientists warn that unchecked warming could collapse entire populations within decades. There is also a little-known phase in a turtle's life known as the "lost years." After hatchlings enter the sea, they disappear from human sight for nearly 10 to 15 years, swimming into deep waters and hiding among floating seaweed. Only after reaching maturity do they reappear near coastlines. Another misunderstood behaviour occurs during nesting, when turtles appear to "cry." These are not tears of emotion but a biological process called "crying salt", through which excess salt is expelled from their bodies. Beyond their intrinsic value, sea turtles play a crucial role in maintaining marine ecosystems. Green turtles feed primarily on seagrass. Without turtles, seagrass grows uncontrollably, blocks sunlight and eventually dies—destroying habitats for numerous marine species. Sea turtles also regulate jellyfish populations. If turtles disappear, jellyfish populations explode, severely impacting fish stocks and fishing livelihoods. Some turtle species feed on sponges found on coral reefs; without them, sponges overgrow and suffocate corals, leading to the collapse of reef ecosystems that support millions of marine organisms. Turtles also contribute to beach nourishment, preventing coastal erosion. In short, the disappearance of sea turtles would trigger cascading ecological disasters.

Against this backdrop, the Union Budget's proposal to establish sea turtle conservation centres takes on significance far beyond symbolism. Experts point out that Kerala stands to gain in two major ways if such centres are implemented effectively. Since 2019, shrimp exports from India have faced restrictions in the United States due to concerns over sea turtle protection. Under Section 609 of the US Public Law 101-162, only countries that adopt turtle-safe fishing practices are permitted to export shrimp to the US market. India has faced scrutiny because many trawlers do not use Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs)—special nets that allow turtles to escape while retaining fish catch. Fisherfolk have traditionally opposed TEDs, arguing that fish also escape through them, reducing income. The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute in Kochi has developed improved TED designs that address these concerns. A dedicated sea turtle conservation centre could promote the adoption of such technology, rescue injured turtles, and train fishing communities—helping India regain credibility with the US and other developed markets. If export barriers are lifted, India's seafood sector could witness a surge in foreign exchange earnings. Thus, turtle conservation is not merely an environmental issue but a matter of trade diplomacy and economic interest. It links marine biodiversity directly with livelihoods, exports, and India's international standing.

Yet, the budget also exposes a troubling contradiction. While announcing turtle conservation centres, it simultaneously promotes coastal mineral sand mining corridors—activities known to destroy nesting beaches and disrupt marine ecosystems. Critics argue that without addressing such policy inconsistencies, conservation announcements risk becoming mere optics. Countries that currently refuse Indian shrimp imports may view such declarations with scepticism unless backed by credible enforcement and regulatory reform.

The irony is hard to miss. Sea turtles, creatures that survived ice ages, asteroid impacts, and mass extinctions, are now struggling to survive memes, neglect, and policy apathy. Turning them into social media punchlines reflects not just political cynicism but a deeper disconnect between society and the ecological systems that sustain it. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's ninth budget will be remembered for many things, but its reference to sea turtle conservation offers a rare opportunity. If implemented with seriousness, it could mark a shift where environmental protection, economic logic, and international responsibility intersect. If ignored, it will remain another line item—mocked online and forgotten in practice.

Sea turtles do not return to their natal beaches for applause or recognition. They return because evolution has wired them to do so. The question is whether humans, armed with knowledge, resources, and policy tools, will show the same fidelity to responsibility. Protecting sea turtles is not charity. It is ecological common sense, economic prudence, and a test of governance maturity. What began as a meme deserves to end as a movement—one that recognises that saving sea turtles is ultimately about saving the balance of the seas, the livelihoods of coastal communities, and the credibility of a nation that claims to value sustainable development.

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India is Proud of:

Jeet Singh Negi

**Garhwali Folk lore composer and Singer
(02 Feb 1925 – 21 June 2020)**



तू व्हेली बीरा ऊंची निसि डांङ्गूं मान घसियार्यूं का भेस में meaning

“You, O valiant warrior, stand there day and night, disguised in the attire of a grass cutter”, stirred so much the insight of Uttarakhand was written by Jeet Singh Negi. This song mesmerized soon not only common Garhwali men but even the knowledgeable Uttarakhandis who perceive that this famous song is a folk song.

Very few people know that one day Jeet Singh Negi created this song while walking on, Agara Road, in Bhandup, Mumbai at around 11PM. And this song became a house hold song amongst Garhwali's everywhere.

Shri Jeet Singh Negi, a sparkling star from the cultural horizons of Uttarakhand, was a famous Garhwali folk songs creator and singer. His dedication towards the upliftment of the healthy traditions like mountain culture, language, folk songs, folk dance, folk music etc, being a descendant of Garhwali Sehgal, adds more to his distinctive aura. He represents the essence of the mountainous life, through his songs, dance-dramas, and song-plays in a very lively and effective manner.

Jeet Singh Negi was born to Sultan Singh Negi and Roop Devi Negi, on 2nd February 1925, in Ayal village of Pauri. He was completed his education from different places as well, other than Pauri. He went to Lahore, Pakistan for education. At a very young age, Shri Negi went to Burma with his father, where he received his elementary education. Being from mountains, he already had the impression of folk songs in his mind, and his attraction towards Bollywood movies, and singers like Manna De and K.L Sehgal, further inspired him to write songs.

His golden journey began in his student life, when in 1942 he performed his self-written Garhwali song on Paudi. Singing the folk songs in his melodious voice made him famous. His life took a great turn in 1949, when the Young India Gramophone Company invited him to Mumbai, where he recorded his very popular and appreciated first six songs. In 1952, Jeet Singh Negi successfully staged the drama "Bhari Bhool", under the aegis of Garhwal Bhartru Mandal Mumbai. After this, in 1954-55, Shri Negi directed and staged the above drama from the platform of Himalaya Art Sangam, Delhi. In Dehradun (1970), Shri Jeet Singh Negi composed and performed an exciting play "Maletha Ki Kool", based on the event of the creation of the Malletha village by the commander of Tehri, Shri Madho Singh Bhandari. Other than this, "Jitu Baghwal", a famous Garhwali folklore, based on the life of popular flute player, was performed in Dehradun and Chandigarh, in 1984 and 1987, respectively. 'Tu Holi Uncha Dandu Maa Veera Ghasariy Ku Bhesh Maa' was the first folk song to get recognition as the most popular song by the Indian Census Survey Department in 1961. His songs, 'Rami', 'Raju Postman' gathered a lot of fame. Also, many of Shri Jeet Singh Negi's songs have been on air at Aakashvani Najibabad, Delhi, and Lucknow. The Hindi adaptation of his play 'Rami' got the privilege of broadcast on Doordarshan, Delhi, and many movies have also been released based on his compositions. Shri Negi has also earned a record on his name for recording eight Garhwali songs for HMB and Colombian Gramophone Company, in 1957 and 1964, respectively. He also marked his success through the songs and dialogues from the famous Garhwali film 'Meri Pyari Boi'.

Shri Jeet Singh Negi was awarded the Legendary Singer award, along with him, the famous folk singer Chandra Singh Rahi was honored with 'Young Uttarakhand Life Time Achievement'. Also, the songs of Shri Negi been compiled as a book by the Cultural Department. This is none the less than an award, that his songs from 1950s and 60s era have been included in the book named Mayara Geet. These songs are considered as cultural heritage of Uttarakhand, as they were quite popular in their time in the Garhwal and Kumaon regions.

There is no comparison of Shri Negi in the terms of expressing social concerns, political aspirations and religious views in the ancient and modern surroundings of Garhwal, through his songs and dramas. Jeet Singh Negi has practiced and worked on almost all the modes of mountain life, and thus is an outstanding example for those researching on the vocals and rhythm of Garhwali folklore. To tell the reputation of Shri Negi, his association with countless national and international cultural organizations, and various ranks and awards are enough. Jeet Singh Negi can be considered as the source inspiration and the god father for the today's song writers and musicians. The melody and serenity in his voice till date still inspires music lovers.

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