

VAISHNO DEVI SHRINE MAKEOVER

Jammu is blessed by Mata Viashno Devi both in reality and symbolically. The spirituality and power of common people is definitely due to the feminine divinity's handholding and the Her shrine in the Trikuta Hills has many a time loaned money to the J&K government and saved it from defaulting on loan repayments. Ever since the Shrine has been managed by a Board, the Karta has become a bustling town with a specialty Hospital, engineering college and a University. However, as the shrine enjoys the faith of millions and has corresponding foot-fall, it's still underdeveloped by international standards. Now, it seems the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board has finally decided to go bold and unleash its vision to create a world class infrastructure and experience for the devotees and even others. A massive transformative plan for the shrine is finalized and it envisages developing a large area around the shrine which is located amidst thick jungle. The idea seems to create facilities which will turn it into the most vibrant spiritual destination.

Indian shrines have been centers of devotion and spirituality and epitome of simplicity. Devotees would sit on bare ground and offer their prayers. However, in the changing times, where people all over the world are falling for experiences and facilities, the makeover of the shrine is an imperative. The Vatican City, the seat of the Catholic papacy, is a high end tourist destination. So, is Makkah and Madina in Saudi Arabia, al bait for Muslims only. However, it's heartening to know that the SMVDSB is also going to invest in human development by setting up coaching centers offering free NEET preparation to youth from surrounding areas. Likewise the rehabilitation plan for ponywalla and other who would be render jobless after the ropeway becomes operational and battery vehicles are freely available to those unable to trek the route to the shrine is also a welcome proposal. The management of the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine is a fine example of management of the places of pilgrimage.

India-EU FTA: Creating world's largest free trade area

Santhosh Mathew

When the proposed India-US interim trade agreement was hailed as the "father of all free trade deals," it sounded impressive—almost civilisational in scale. But from an Indian perspective, the phrase raises an uncomfortable question: what kind of economic child is this father expected to produce? For Western economies, such trade deals are engines of growth. For India, they often feel like threats. The reason lies not in the agreement itself, but in the structure of India's economy—still weighed down by an excessive dependence on agriculture for employment. Every trade negotiation with the United States or Europe eventually circles back to one flashpoint: agriculture. Soyabean oil, dairy products, fruits, animal feed, genetically modified crops—each item triggers anxiety, protests, and political assurances. Commerce ministers promise protection, farmers fear displacement, and the nation debates food security as if it were under siege. Yet the deeper truth is rarely stated openly. India's problem is not trade liberalisation; **it is that too many Indians are still trapped in farming.

Nearly 45 percent of India's workforce depends on agriculture, while the sector contributes only around 16 percent of GDP. No major economy in the world carries such an imbalance. In the

United States, agriculture employs barely 1.2 percent of the workforce; in the European Union, about 1.6 percent. Even countries that loudly defend farmers—France, Germany, Japan—do so with a small, technologically empowered agricultural population. Their farms are productive; their farmers are few. India's farms, by contrast, are crowded. Millions work on tiny, fragmented plots that cannot generate sustainable incomes. Climate uncertainty, volatile prices, rising input costs, and shrinking landholdings have turned agriculture into a livelihood of last resort rather than choice. People remain on farms not because farming is profitable, but because alternatives are scarce. This is why free trade agreements appear frightening. When half the population depends on agriculture, even modest imports can disrupt millions of lives. What is a routine policy adjustment for Washington becomes an existential issue in rural India. From a Western lens—where agriculture barely registers in GDP—calling an India-US FTA the "father of all deals" makes sense. From India's vantage point, it exposes how long we have delayed our economic transition.

Modern technology has fundamentally changed agriculture. Precision farming, mechanisation, artificial intelligence, improved seeds, and data-driven irrigation mean that "a very small

percentage of people can now feed entire nations". Globally, food security is no longer a function of manpower, but of technology and logistics. In pure economic terms, India needs "no more than 1 percent of its population in agriculture" to ensure food security—perhaps 5 percent if one accounts for transition and diversity. Anything beyond that is disguised unemployment. Yet we continue to hold nearly half the workforce on the land.

The result is predictable: low incomes, high distress, and generational stagnation. Agricultural growth struggles to cross 4-4.5 per cent even when the overall economy grows above 7 percent. This gap is not accidental; it is structural. The greatest casualty of this delay is India's youth. Every year, millions of young Indians enter the labour market. Encouraging them—directly or indirectly—to remain in agriculture is an economic injustice. Landholdings are shrinking, not expanding. Farming incomes remain unstable. Climate risks are intensifying.

India's youth belong in industry and services, not on ever-smaller farms. The country's global reputation today is not built on wheat or rice, but on software engineers, doctors, nurses, technicians, managers, and service professionals. Services already contribute more than half of India's GDP and dominate export earnings. Manufacturing, too, holds enormous potential to

absorb semi-skilled labour if supported by infrastructure, investment, and policy clarity. India's true natural resource is not land; it is human capital.

Unlike land, it multiplies when invested in. Skill development, vocational training, digital literacy, and industry-linked education must therefore be treated as national infrastructure. In a globalised economy, skill is the new land, and productivity is the new harvest. Manpower export, often viewed with suspicion, is actually a strategic advantage. Remittances already form a critical part of India's foreign exchange earnings. This is where the irony of the "father of all trade deals" becomes clear. Free trade agreements are designed for economies where agriculture is marginal, productivity is high, and labour is mobile. India enters these agreements carrying the weight of an unfinished transition. That is why every FTA feels unequal, every tariff cut appears dangerous, and every import triggers panic. Protectionism may seem comforting, but it is not a long-term solution. No country has ever grown rich by shielding low-productivity sectors indefinitely. Tariffs can buy time, but they cannot buy prosperity. Without structural change, protection merely delays the inevitable—and increases the eventual cost.

Moving people out of agriculture does not mean abandoning farming. On the contrary, it is the only way to rescue it. Fewer farm-

ers mean larger holdings, better technology adoption, higher productivity, and dignified incomes. Agriculture must evolve into a high-value, high-tech sector, not a social safety net for surplus labour. India's own experience proves this point. Operation Flood transformed the country into the world's largest milk producer not by employing more people, but by improving efficiency, supply chains, and market access. The Green Revolution succeeded through science, not numbers. The next transformation must reduce manpower while increasing value.

As long as half the population depends on agriculture, India will negotiate trade deals from a position of fear. A confident India, by contrast, would enter global markets knowing that most of its people work in services and industry, while a small, skilled farming population ensures food security efficiently. The plough fed India for centuries. But the future will be built by skills, machines, and services.

The real challenge before India is not whether to sign the "father of all trade deals," but whether it is ready to raise a new economic generation—one that earns its living not from protection, but from productivity. Or, as one blunt economic truth puts it, "Nations do not grow rich by protecting old livelihoods forever, but by creating better ones for the next generation."

THE ANCIENT ART OF BECOMING A 'SAHRUDAYA'

Neelima Sona

It's 1:00 AM on February 14th. You're continuously staring at the screen and doom-scrolling through endless "same-day delivery" roses and exotic gift boxes. There is numbness, hollowness and heavy pressure to perform to make something BIG enough for an Instagram post. While sitting there, you might feel or realise that you can buy the bouquet, but you can't buy the link. In an era where the web of optics fibers more than by actual feeling with depth, we've ignored a profound secret from our own roots. "the art of becoming a Sahrudaya". This isn't just about just one bad date; it's an indication of a deeper crisis. While global trends push a transactional version of love measured in "likes" and surface aesthetics, our teachings provide a much stronger and sexier alternative. True Connection is not found in a Hallmark store. It is found when we trade Romantic Drama for Relationship Dharma. Let's learn how to find the Sahrudaya, a person who is "of the same heart" as you.

In modern dating, we've intentionally or unintentionally turned love into a math problem. Youngsters been told that an expensive dinner is the ultimate proof of how much we care and love. When you simply go buy a gift just be-



cause a calendar date says you have to, it's a calculation, not a connection. The Bhav, an Indianised version of Emotional Intelligence and the Indian concept of love, teaches us the ability to stop "spending" and start "sensing." A Sahrudaya understands that a twenty-minute, engaged conversation over a cup of chai carries more weight than a 5-star gala if the intent is genuinely present. The Bhav isn't about the size of the gesture; it's about the depth of the awareness behind it.

Navigating through the Nava Rasas

We try to force romance to live in a permanent state of Shringara, the rasa of beauty and attraction. But life isn't an Instagram post. Real relationships are a messy weave of the Nava Rasas, the nine fundamental emotions we all carry. There will be days of Karuna (compassion) when someone fails despite efforts, and even moments of Bibhatsa (frustration) when clashes occur. An Indian classic approach to Emotional Intelligence teaches us the maturity to navigate these shifts without hitting the "exit" button when relationships and

situations get complicated. Instead of chasing a constant, artificial "spark," a Sahrudaya or real partner uses their emotional depth and maturity to hold space for their partner's bad days.

Relationship Dharma

We often think of Dharma as a heavy, ancient burden. In modern love, it's actually quite simple: it's Emotional Responsibility. Valentine's Day has become a "Drama" day with lots of emotion spilling around at high intensity and a 24-hour performance that leaves everyone exhausted. Relationship Dharma is the quiet, invisible work you do on the other 364 days of the year. It's the daily choice of a partner to be present, to listen, and to stay attuned to who your partner is becoming. This is the "human premium" that no AI or digital substitute can ever touch. A machine might script a perfect romantic message, but it can't provide the comfort of a "same-heart" connection during a relationship crisis. Being a Sahrudaya is something you earn through practice, not a product you purchase. This February, don't just be a romantic for a night; strive to be a Sahrudaya for a lifetime. Logic might make you think, but only emotion will make you link. The future belongs to the pure connections.

Creating a conducive learning environment

JS Rajput

The constitutional proviso of reservations for certain categories of people identified as SC/ST was initially meant for ten years only. Dr BR Ambedkar himself never wanted it to last long, as that would amount to the negation of the objectives which necessitated its implementation. It was a case of socially inherited inequalities that also led to economic and cultural deprivation. In other words, the inequalities created by the caste system and the related inhuman practice of untouchability were considered the main culprits. Both of these were rejected by the Constitution. Those outside this classification accepted the provisions of reservations, as the logic behind them was clear and convincing to one and all.

The Constitution was framed by men and women of unimpeachable integrity and total commitment to the nation. Most of them were part of the great freedom struggle and had earned the respect of the people through sheer sacrifice and suffering during alien rule. As the generations changed, adherence to human values was impacted globally. Advances in science and technology had created gadgets and implements that could reach every home and hearth that had the requisite resources. In India, the urge to accu-

mulate more brought about a great attitudinal transformation among those who were in power and authority. In a democratic setup, it was the politicians who were the privileged ones. They realised the 'benefits' that could accrue to an elected representative of the people, or better still, to being in a position of power. Expectedly, the approach and attraction to being in politics changed drastically. Exceptions apart, the prime consideration for being in public life, as articulated by Gandhiji - to serve the 'last man in the line' — was quietly replaced by 'politics for privilege and pelf', and for preparing inheritors from within the family. The Constitution was amended frequently; how power had changed the scenario was witnessed during the imposition of the Emergency, the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, and much more that followed.

Young persons in colleges and universities in the sixth decade of the 20th century were convinced that the caste system would disappear, as they thought the political persons around them were true to their words and were all committed to the upgradation of deprived people. After about three to four decades, the political generation had changed; so had the approach to democratic principles, and the people — the electors. Now politics, and

the politician, were busy exploring the new avenues that had suddenly appeared before them, and were indeed alluring and attractive. Being in the seat of power pays, and there are ways and means to ensure zero accountability. The integrity, sincerity, and honesty that were needed to make reservations for the SC/ST a success were shifted to the back burner. This is one project that has never been evaluated sincerely and scientifically. Now, these are not the only categories for which constitutional provision was made. There are many more. Gandhi was just forgotten, interestingly and most obviously by those who continue to claim to be the only inheritors of his legacy and values. The 'last man in the line' was lost in the glare and glamour that were blinding the political power scenario.

After four decades of the Constitution being in place, things were analysed at various levels. Dr Karan Singh wrote in 1993: "Our understanding was that castes would gradually erode, and that the whole point was to build a society where caste would no longer remain significant. But what do we find today? We find that attempts are being made to institutionalise caste, and not only four castes, but 3,000 castes. Is this what the Constitution envisaged? How does this tally

with the whole question of equal democratic rights?" It would be interesting to recall how the environment that promised total liquidation of the caste system was transformed into one that assures its continuation, and consequently a horrifying fragmentation of Indian society.

To arrive at a clearer picture of the current socio-cultural scenario on a broader canvas, one must recall the provisions specifically made for minorities in the Constitution in Article 30 of the Constitution of India, which, in fact, did not synchronise with the text and spirit of Article 15. The apparent contradictions are noted by every alert and active citizen who is not restricted by ideological or political leanings. As a practising academic, my impression stands gradually confirmed that the provisions of Article 30, with all the noble intents behind them, have, in actual practice, done more damage to minorities than supporting them in their educational advancement. The provisions have been grossly misused. I have personally observed how teacher-training (minority) institutions refused to follow any norms and obviously prepared teachers who were not trained adequately. There are numerous examples in other areas and sectors also. Article 30: Right of minorities to establish and ad-

minister educational institutions — (1) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. (2) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institutions on the ground that they are under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

The problem is that no learned discussion or sincere deliberation is allowed on such issues that are projected as sensitive zones. The fact remains that caste considerations and specific provisions for minorities are now creating unacceptable socio-cultural environments at various levels of educational institutions, which is not conducive to generating social cohesion and religious amity. What happened after the UGC Regulations on Equity were notified on January 13, 2026, and became effective from January 15, 2026 onwards?

Having served in institutions of varied levels for over five decades, one could safely state that concerns of harassment or ill-treatment among students could best be handled by the head of the institution and the faculty. National guidelines are needed, but the autonomy of institutions must remain sacred. Creating a so-

cially conducive campus environment is best supported by instilling a sense of responsibility among the stakeholders.

This is also high time to evolve ways and means on how to relate culturally evolved environments in schools and other institutions. National-level deliberations must be organised, sponsored, and supported. Let the intelligentsia of the nation re-read the constitutional provisions that could help move towards culturally enthralling, socially cohesive, and religiously amicable campuses. Eminent people have been thinking along these lines, but it needs to be organised seriously. I quote, as an example, the words of the late Vasant Sathe, a freedom fighter, Supreme Court lawyer, Union Minister, and a highly respected public figure. He wrote in 1993 about Article 30 of the Constitution: "This article should be deleted because to recognise some sections as minorities based on religion is contrary to the provisions of equality specified in Article 15 and threatens to create perpetual discrimination for such sections on the basis of a factor like religion, which is irreversible."

The NEP 2020 expects to move towards excellence in education. The prime requisite is a learning environment bubbling with mutual respect and positive energy.