



“The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible.”

—Arthur C. Clarke



Building the foundations of a new economic India

■ DR PROSENJIT NATH

India's economic story today is not one of sudden take-off, but of deliberate construction. Unlike the rapid export-led booms witnessed in East Asian economies during the late twentieth century, India's transformation is unfolding through multiple structural shifts happening simultaneously across social policy, governance capacity, industrial strategy and political competition. Rather than a single dramatic reform moment, India's rise is being assembled piece by piece.

One useful way to understand this transformation is through two complementary lenses: the broad forces shaping India's macroeconomic trajectory and the emerging sectoral strategy through which industrial policy is now being deployed.

A civilizational quest for economic scale

India today is once again seeking civilizational economic scale. The ambition is not merely to grow steadily but to reposition itself structurally in the global economic order. For much of recorded history, India was one of the world's largest economic centers. Economic historian Angus Maddison famously estimated that India accounted for roughly 25-30 per cent of global GDP during large parts of the pre-modern era.

Colonial extraction and post-independence economic stagnation dramatically altered that position. Yet the contemporary Indian state appears to be

attempting something historically ambitious: rebuilding economic scale in a twenty-first century globalized economy. The aspiration is not only growth, but also influence an economy capable of shaping supply chains, technologies and markets.

The quiet social sector revolution One of the least discussed but most consequential developments in India's growth story is the quiet transformation underway in the social sector. Economic expansion cannot be sustained if households remain trapped in cycles of vulnerability. Over the past decade, several policy interventions have begun to reduce these risks.

In education, public schools are witnessing measurable improvements. Government school performance has reached some of its strongest levels in recent years according to the Annual Status of Education Report, which tracks learning outcomes across rural India. Improvements in basic reading and arithmetic, though still uneven, indicate that foundational capabilities are gradually strengthening.

Healthcare reforms are also reshaping household economics. Historically, medical expenses in India were overwhelmingly borne by families themselves. Nearly two-thirds of health expenditure came directly out of pocket, pushing millions into debt or poverty every year. The expansion of public health insurance under Ayushman Bharat, which now covers close to 50 crore citizens, has begun to reduce that burden. Out-of-pocket spending has

fallen significantly, limiting catastrophic financial shocks for vulnerable households.

Institutional reforms are emerging alongside these social interventions. The introduction of new criminal codes such as the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita aims to accelerate the justice system by introducing defined timelines for investigations and trials. While deeper police reforms remain pending, these changes signal an attempt to improve state capacity a crucial but often overlooked driver of economic development.

The structural shift: A cascade of consumers

These social changes are triggering what may be described as a cascade of consumers. When households experience greater income stability and reduced risk, consumption becomes more predictable and scalable. For decades, India's domestic market remained constrained by poverty, informality and poor infrastructure. That picture is gradually changing.

Approximately 25 crore Indians have moved out of poverty in recent years. Housing construction has expanded dramatically through programs such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, which has built millions of homes for low-income families. Electrification programs have connected roughly 25 crore citizens to reliable power under initiatives like Saubhagya Scheme.

Basic amenities are expanding rapidly as well. Around 15 crore households now have tap water through the Jal Jeevan Mission, while nearly 10 crore fami-

lies have gained access to clean cooking fuel via Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana. Financial inclusion has expanded on an unprecedented scale. More than 53 crore bank accounts have been opened through Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, while small entrepreneurs have accessed credit through initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana.

Taken together, these changes are gradually transforming India from a fragmented economy into a unified mass-consumption market.

Statecraft and political competition Economic change rarely occurs in isolation from political evolution. India's political system is undergoing its own transformation as governance becomes more centralized while electoral competition intensifies. National political narratives increasingly revisit the legacy of earlier economic models associated with the Congress era, while the current leadership under Narendra Modi emphasizes efficiency, infrastructure expansion and welfare delivery through technology-driven governance.

At the same time, Indian states are asserting stronger economic identities. States such as Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka compete aggressively for investment, manufacturing clusters and technology hubs. This federal competition can generate friction with the central government but also stimulates innovation and policy experimentation. India's institutional architecture continues to act as a balancing mechanism. The judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court of India, remains an important check

within the system, ensuring that the expanding role of the executive does not completely overshadow constitutional safeguards.

From license raj to strategic industrial policy

India's industrial policy has undergone a significant evolution. For decades after independence, the economy operated under the highly restrictive regime known as the License Raj, characterized by state control, bureaucratic approvals, and limited private sector participation. The liberalization reforms of the early 1990s dismantled much of that framework. Today, India appears to be entering a new strategic phase of industrial policy.

Instead of broad protectionism, the state is selectively promoting national champions in industries where scale and technological sophistication are critical. Historically, India possessed only a handful of globally competitive firms. The ambition now is to cultivate dozens across sectors ranging from electronics to pharmaceuticals.

The three C's of sectoral strategy Within this strategic phase, industrial policy increasingly operates through what may be called the "Three C's" framework.

Catch-up sectors include industries where India currently lacks foundational capability. Semiconductors, advanced hardware, artificial intelligence models, quantum computing, and large data centers fall into this category. The gap with global leaders remains substantial, so policy friction is relatively low. Foreign

investment and technology partnerships are often welcomed to build domestic capacity.

Contested sectors involve direct competition between domestic and foreign firms. Digital platforms such as e-commerce and ride-hailing illustrate this dynamic. Regulators attempt to maintain competition while ensuring that domestic firms have room to scale and innovate.

Commanded sectors are areas where India already enjoys strong capabilities. Digital public infrastructure, fintech systems like the Unified Payments Interface, and pharmaceutical generics are prime examples. Policy in these sectors focuses on protecting ecosystem sovereignty and consolidating India's global leadership.

A durable path to growth India's economic trajectory is therefore less about dramatic take-off and more about patient construction. The state is rebuilding the foundations of the economy social security, infrastructure, institutional capacity, and industrial capability before chasing the upper limits of growth.

This may not be the fastest path to economic expansion, but it could prove to be the most durable. Social gains must continue to compound, industrial policy must avoid capture or complacency, and political centralization must not erode institutional trust. Yet the promise is unmistakable: an India that sustains mass consumption at home while competing at global scale abroad not through sudden leaps, but through deliberate, steady construction/ORGANISER.ORG

Human rights in the United States: Doctrine of structures domination

■ RAHUL PAWA

If this history is told from the vantage point of humanity, the first fact is not liberty. It is conquest. Before America became the self-appointed custodian of human rights, European settlers arrived in America with scripture, sovereignty doctrines, and a civilising mission that treated native nations not as equals but as peoples to be subdued, absorbed, or erased. The language of law came early; the practice of exclusion came earlier still. The U.S. Constitution itself originally excluded "Indians not taxed" from representation. Native Americans were not universally recognised as U.S. citizens until the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. Meanwhile, the federal boarding-school system pursued forced assimilation for generations. That is not a strong foundation on which to lecture the world about universal rights.

This is the deeper pattern: rights in the Atlantic world were proclaimed as universal only after power had already decided who counted as fully human, fully civilised, and fully sovereign. The West's great rights tradition was never born as a charter for all humankind. It began as an internal code for ordering power within a Christian feudal and later imperial world.

Decoding Magna Carta Magna Carta, celebrated by some as a foundational liberty document, is the clearest example. It is often presented as the beginning of constitutional freedom, due process, and the rule of law. But Magna Carta was not a democratic charter. It was a political settlement between a king, the Church, and a rebellious aristocracy. It restrained royal arbitrariness within a feudal Christian order; it did not emancipate humanity. Its later myth became much broader than its original social reach. That matters, because it reveals a recurring Western habit: elite bargains are later universalised as moral breakthroughs.

The same pattern appears in the English Bill of Rights of 1689. It restricted monarchical power, insisted on parliamentary forms, and advanced legal protections, but only within a narrow political community already defined by rank, empire, and confessional history. Likewise, the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the American Declaration of Independence announced liberty in universal language while operating within a settler-colonial order built on slavery, indigenous dispossession, and racial hierarchy. The language was universal. The beneficiaries were not.

The US Constitution and Bill of Rights carried that contradiction forward. Their language gave enduring form to due process, protection from arbitrary state power, and individual liberty. The Fifth Amendment's due process guarantee plainly echoes the Magna Carta tradition. Yet the same constitutional order coexisted with slavery, denied women full political personhood, excluded native nations from the democratic body, and tolerated racial caste for generations. In other words, rights were never absent. They were distributed selectively. America did not invent hypocrisy at the margins; it built selectivity into the structure of its freedom.

Dissecting US's Human Rights At home, America's own record remains stained by segregation, race violence, mass incarceration, surveillance excesses, and repeated failures to apply equal dignity across class and race. Abroad, however, Washington acquired the ability to define which states were violators, which crises deserved outrage, which victims counted, and which coercive tools were morally justified. This is how selective universalism matures into doctrine. That is why so much of the modern rights discourse appears, from the outside, less like an impartial legal order and more like a civilisational grammar of power. It presumes the

authority to define them, prioritise and enforce them. Once that authority is normalised, the cycle becomes familiar. Reports are issued. Narratives of atrocity are consolidated. Sanctions are framed as moral necessity. Economic leverage is described as accountability. Political pressure is dressed as

ently in the language of rights sustaining systems of detention, torture, secrecy, and legal black holes when it was itself the actor. Libya followed another arc: intervention justified in the name of protection, followed by collapse, fragmentation, and enduring instability. More recently, the US abduction of Nicolas Maduro

What emerged was not an equal moral order, but a stratified regime of dignity in which powerful states and their allies claimed the authority to define the universal in the image of their own history, faith, and strategic interests.

From the vantage point of humanity, the contradiction is

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Unlawful Interference The Iraq war remains a devastating illustration. A civilisation that claimed to uphold international order manufactured moral urgency around weapons that were never found. Kosovo had earlier shown how war itself could be narrated as humanitarian necessity. Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, and the El-Masri rendition case exposed the inward exception: a state that spoke most flu-

from Caracas highlighted the same hierarchy: international law is most readily preached as a discipline for the weak and most readily relaxed when the powerful claim necessity. In each case, the rhetoric of higher values widened the moral space within which force, exception, or impunity could be defended.

Unmistakable Contradiction That is the core argument. America did not construct human rights as an impartial universal ethic. It consolidated a rights tradition rooted in exclusion, translated it into universal language without surrendering selective application, and internationalised it from a position of overwhelming Western dominance.

unmistakable. The state that now presents itself as the guardian of universal rights built its moral vocabulary through conquest, exclusion, and selective inclusion, and later internationalised it under conditions of overwhelming Western power. That is not a footnote to the history of human rights. It is history. America developed human rights first as an inheritance for itself, and then as a language through which it could judge, pressure, and discipline others, while never fully submitting itself to the same standard. What it universalised was not dignity, but a structure of domination spoken in the name of dignity/ORGANISER.ORG