

INDIA-CANADA TIES

India and Canada, two vibrant democracies with shared values of pluralism, rule of law, and commitment to peace, have historically enjoyed strong bilateral ties. From deep-rooted people-to-people connections to growing economic engagement, the relationship between the two nations has spanned several decades. While recent diplomatic tensions have posed challenges, the long-term potential of India-Canada relations remains significant. The need of the hour is to focus on rebuilding trust, fostering dialogue, and advancing shared interests in a constructive and respectful manner.

Canada is home to one of the largest Indian diasporas in the world, with over 1.8 million people of Indian origin contributing actively to Canadian society, politics, and economy. This vibrant community serves as a natural bridge between the two countries. Strengthening cultural, educational, and technological collaborations will not only deepen mutual understanding but also promote soft diplomacy and goodwill.

Economically, the complementarities between India and Canada present vast opportunities. India, with its fast-growing economy and huge consumer base, offers Canadian businesses a promising market. In turn, Canada's expertise in clean energy, technology, education, infrastructure, and natural resources can play a vital role in India's development journey. Reviving the stalled talks on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) or an Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA) should be a top priority. Enhanced trade and investment can become a stabilizing factor in the bilateral relationship.

Strategically, both nations share concerns around global peace, climate change, and the need for a multipolar world order based on international law and respect for sovereignty. Cooperation in multilateral forums such as the G20, United Nations, and the Commonwealth can help address global challenges while reaffirming shared values. Areas such as climate change mitigation, green energy transition, and digital governance provide ample space for meaningful collaboration.

While the recent downturn in diplomatic relations has drawn global attention, it is important to approach differences with maturity and tact. Allegations must be dealt with through legal channels and mutual respect for sovereignty. Diplomacy, not disengagement, is the way forward. Both governments must focus on de-escalation and transparent dialogue to restore trust and ensure that short-term tensions do not overshadow long-term gains. The relationship between India and Canada is too important to be held hostage by individual events or political rhetoric. At a time when the world is facing uncertainty, conflict, and economic disruption, strong partnerships rooted in mutual respect are essential. With goodwill on both sides and a recognition of mutual interests, India and Canada can reset their ties on a more resilient, forward-looking foundation.

Modi's Hanuman Moment: India's Longer Leap in a World of Walls

■ HARDEEP SINGH PURI



As lamps are lit across India, a timeless scene from the Ramayana speaks to our present. Hanuman stands at the edge of the ocean, uncertain of his strength, until Jambavan reminds him of what he already possesses. The leap that follows is not a miracle; it is self-belief in motion. That is what Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been preparing the Indian economy for: one that draws from its inner strength to overcome global turbulence. As the world turns inwards with new visa barriers and tariffs, India under Modi is turning its own confidence outward, transforming adversity into acceleration.

In recent months, the United States has imposed a USD 1,00,000 fee for new H-1B visa petitions and a 100% tariff on branded and patented pharmaceutical imports. These moves were framed as job-protection, but they underscore a deeper churn: the return of protectionism and demographic anxiety in the developed world. India's answer under Prime Minister Modi has been to strengthen the three pillars that no tariff can touch: scale, skill and self-reliance.

The contrast with the world is striking. China's population is ageing rapidly, its median age now past forty, while India's remains under twenty-nine. Two-thirds of our people are below thirty-five. That youthful energy, harnessed through skilling, education and enterprise, is what makes India the growth engine of the world economy. It is not a slogan when global institutions report India contributing more than sixteen per cent of global growth last year. It is the result of a decade of reform, investment and infrastructure under the Prime Minister's leadership.

Recent data underlines this momentum. The Reserve Bank has revised India's GDP forecast for FY26 to 6.8 per cent, citing resilient domestic demand, steady investment

flows and a healthy monsoon outlook. GST collections in September crossed Rs 1.89 lakh crore, the ninth consecutive month above Rs 1.8 lakh crore, showing both buoyant consumption and a widening tax base. Foreign-exchange reserves have touched 700 billion dollars, enough to cover almost eleven months of imports, while remittances in the June quarter stood at 33.2 billion dollars, well above last year's levels. The manufacturing PMI held strong at 57.7 and services at 60.9, reaffirming India's status as the world's fastest-growing large economy.

This buoyancy is also mirrored in the markets and in the streets. Retail and e-commerce sales during this Dussehra have touched their highest levels ever, crossing Rs 3.7 lakh crore according to industry bodies such as CAIT and Retailers Association of India - nearly 15 per cent higher than last year. Online platforms alone clocked over Rs 90,000 crore in gross merchandise value during the first fortnight of the festive season, driven by demand for automobiles, electronics, gold and apparel. Diwali is now expected to break all previous records, signalling not only consumer confidence but also the success of the government's consistent push to expand formal credit, digital payments and rural purchasing power.

The economic foundations are solid. Over the past decade, India's GDP has nearly doubled to become the world's fourth largest and imminently expected to overtake Germany. Foreign-exchange reserves exceed USD 600billion. Inflation is moderate, and fiscal prudence is matched by record public capital expenditure. In 2024-25, India's overall exports of goods and services reached an all-time high of about USD 825 billion, while merchandise exports alone were about USD 437 billion. Renewable capacity has surpassed 220 GW. These numbers tell one story, of a nation that has moved from fragile to formidable under a leader who marries vision with execution.

It is a sad reality that Prime Minister Modi's approach to Atmanirbhar Bharat is being

miseconstrued for political gains by a few naysayers who are still viewing it through twentieth-century lenses. Self-reliance is not isolation. Atmanirbhar Bharat is best understood as strength turned outward. It is a strength that allows engagement on equal terms. It is the capacity to make in India for the world, to decentralise opportunity so that value flows to those who create it, and to engage global markets on equal terms. From mobile phones and defence equipment to medical devices and solar modules, production-linked incentives have catalysed investment, jobs and exports.

The Anusandhan National Research Foundation, with Rs 50,000 crore of planned outlay, will revitalise our R&D ecosystem. A second Fund-of-Funds for Start-ups and the expansion of PLI schemes will deepen our technology base. This is Atmanirbhar Bharat as strategic autonomy, which is rooted in self-belief, realised through policy, and amplified by global partnerships.

Under Modi's guidance, India built the world's most inclusive digital public infrastructure. The Unified Payments Interface now handles more daily transactions than Visa, over 650 million a day. Aadhaar, DigiLocker and ONDC together form an ecosystem that connects citizens, small businesses and innovators at a population scale. UPT's global partnerships with Singapore, the UAE and others show that Indian innovation can set global benchmarks. This is technology as governance, empowerment and export.

People remain the centrepiece of this story. Our diaspora, over 32 million strong, is among the world's most successful and respected. Eleven Fortune 500 companies today are led by Indian-origin CEOs commanding a combined market capitalisation above six trillion dollars. Their journeys mirror the aspirations of a new India: skilled, confident, solution-oriented. Remittances of \$135 billion in 2024 are not just inflows of wealth; they are affirmations of trust. As Prime Minister Modi has often said, the Indian

abroad is not just an expatriate but an ambassador of India's values and enterprise.

The Prime Minister's leadership has given this scattered global energy a domestic anchor: Make in India, Startup India, and Skill India are not parallel tracks but a connected value chain: identify opportunity, enable entrepreneurship, equip talent. The next step is a comprehensive global skilling mission that unites these initiatives under a single framework. Standardised curricula aligned with international certifications, pre-departure training for workers, language and cultural orientation, and portable social-security agreements, these will make the Indian worker the preferred professional across continents. It is an agenda already in motion through multiple G2G partnerships forged under Modi's diplomacy.

The symbolism of Hanuman's leap is therefore apt. It was not an act of defiance, but of duty fulfilled through self-realisation. Prime Minister Modi's governance philosophy is rooted in the same belief that India's destiny lies in awakening the potential of its people. Infrastructure, digital transformation, green energy and global partnerships are the instruments of that awakening. When others build walls, India builds capacity. When others narrow trade, India expands opportunity. When others fear the future, India prepares for it.

Hanuman's leap was the recovery of memory. Prime Minister Modi's project has been to restore that national memory of capacity. When others build walls, India builds capability. When others ration opportunity, India scales it. That is how a civilisational confidence becomes a modern competitive edge. As we approach Diwali, it is worth recalling that Hanuman's leap did not shorten the ocean; it enlarged his confidence. The world may raise new barriers, but India today has the leadership, resilience and purpose to rise higher. Guided by Prime Minister Modi's vision, this is a nation that will not pause at the shore. It remembers its strength and leaps ahead.

(The writer is the Union Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas)

Self-Help Groups (SHGs):A Pathway to Women's Empowerment

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

In a diverse country as India, tackling socio-economic issues is a monumental task. Gender equality and empowerment of women is accepted universally as an important aspect of development. Women empowerment is a buzz word in present time. The empowerment of women is one of the vital issues in the progression and improvement of countries across the globe. Women play a significant role in the development of any nation and it has proved in the history that no development is possible without the participation of women in the world. India is committed to empowerment of women. Rural India's self-help group movement has been a powerful incubator of female resilience and entrepreneurship. The concept of Self Help Groups(SHGs) is a powerful instrument for the economic empowerment of rural women. The empowerment of women is crucial for the economic development of a nation and also plays a significant role in building a base for change. It is important to empower the rural women economically by enhancing their role to the utmost level. SHGs has the potential to drastically

change the social construct of gender in villages. The term 'Self Help' was coined by Samuel Smiles in his book in 1859 to describe the people whom we might today call entrepreneurs. The critical factor that he found in people was not their individualism but their willingness to help themselves rather than waiting for others to help. The concept of Self-Help Groups gained significance after 1976 when Professor Mohammad Yunus of Bangladesh began experimenting with micro-credit and women SHGs. His planning made a revolution in Bangladesh in poverty eradication.

Sufia Begum was a 21 years old villager and a mother of three children when an Economics Professor Mohammad Yunus of Bangladesh (Nobel Peace Prize Winner 2006) met her in 1974 and asked her how much she earned. She replied that she borrowed 5 takas (about \$0.09) from a middleman for the bamboo for each stool. About \$0.02 of that went back to the lender. He thought that for five taka's she has become a slave. He thought that why she was so poor when she was making such beautiful things. The following day he and his students did a survey in the

woman's village, Jobra, Bangladesh and discovered that 43 villagers owned a total of 856 taka's (about \$27). He was unable to bear anymore. He put the \$27 out there and told them that they could liberate them. An idea of self-help groups came in his mind. His momentary generosity grows into a full-fledged concept that came to fruition with founding of Grameen Bank in 1983. Self-Help Group is a small, economically homogenous and affinity based group of people who have decided to save and contribute to a common fund to be lent to its members as per the group decisions. SHGs are a way to involve rural men and women actively in the developmental process by increasing the income, technical skills, mutual help, address constraints etc. The agenda of SHGs is 'Empowerment' and shift from dormant masses of the rural women to vibrant masses by bringing more income in the hands so that they can live better social life. The group can be formed by the initiative of a group of people or by the initiation of an NGO, bank, project, govt. programme etc. Programmes like National Rural Livelihood Mission(NRLM) are playing significant

role in SHGs formation and women empowerment. KVKs are also playing pivotal role in empowering the rural women by providing them technical skills.

President represents the SHG as group leader and he/she is selected by the members of the group. It is expected that the person who occupies this position should have good communication skills, leadership quality maintaining cohesiveness in the group and encourage participation of every member in all activities of the group. Secretary is responsible for organising all the meetings. He/she plays the role of president in his or her absence. Secretary keeps all the records of the group. Cashier acts as the financial custodian of the group. He/She is responsible for the maintenance of accounts of the group. He/She keeps the accounts of the members of the group for savings, internal lending, repayments, linkage with the banks, etc. Every SHG needs to pass through three stage of development, viz. forming and storming stage (0-3months), Norming stage(3-4months) and functioning and developing stage(6-12 months).

SHGs general objectives are : to encourage small saving habits among the people, to bring an overall change in socio-economic conditions of people living below poverty line, to understand the dynamics of managing and collection of money, to make the people aware of banking procedures, to identify the leadership qualities in the people and also to encourage the people to avoid the traditional source of financing i.e. money lenders and also encourage the people to develop cordial environment within and outside the group. President represents the SHG as group leader and he/she is selected by the members of the group. It is expected that the person who occupies this position should have good communication skills, leadership quality maintaining cohesiveness in the group and encourage participation of every member in all activities of the group. Secretary is responsible for organising all the meetings. He/she plays the role of president in his or her absence. Secretary keeps all the records of the group. Cashier acts as the financial custodian of the group. He/She is responsible for the maintenance of accounts of the group. He/She keeps

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By forming the self help groups members can increase their income and employment, they can identify their potential to perform, they can develop collective approach, dependence on money lender is reduced, they can gain social recognition, women can become more assertive in confronting social evils and problems, initiate new ventures through which the group members can be benefited, facilitates group members to have easy access of information regarding state and central government schemes ,programmes, projects etc., speedup developmental efforts by developing the self-confidence and self reliance. Self-Help Groups can promote holistic development of rural India.

(The writer is Chief Scientist & Head of KVK Reasi SKUAST-J)

Let us vow to celebrate Diwali together, rising above religions and sects, and light Diwali lamps of wisdom within ourselves

■ SURJIT SINGH FLORA

India has been a multilingual, multi-cultural, multireligious, multinational country for centuries, and every religion has its own customs and festivals. That is why India is also called the country of festivals. Western countries adopted multiculturalism only a few decades ago out of their labour and population needs, but India had already created such a society centuries ago. For thousands of years, people of different cultures, languages, religions, and beliefs have been living in communal harmony.

People in India have been celebrating numerous festivals for centuries, even prior to the emergence of religious organizations. The only beauty of Hinduism in the world is that it has never made itself an organized sect. The trend of organizing religion through the influence of priests, capitalists, and rulers has originated from the West. According to the Indian spiritual tradition, religion is the personal practice of each individual, which has no connection with any sect. That is why Hinduism, even today, does not have any fixed rituals or worship rituals like other organized religions; everyone is free to do anything according to their wishes. This is the reason why Indian people have lived together with mutual brotherhood and coexistence despite their different opinions, beliefs, and oppositions. India has been under the influence of oppressive rulers and organized religions for almost a thousand years. As a result, while Indian religions attempted to organize themselves,

they were also significantly influenced by foreign religions.

My understanding is that many Indian folk festivals were closely associated with the seasons and agricultural practices. Vaisakhi and Diwali were the major folk festivals that people celebrated in their respective areas, each with their own customs and beliefs. Over time, these festivals became associated with or incorporated various historical or religious events. Gradually, organized religions, driven by their tendency to divide humanity, absorbed common folk festivals into their narrow-minded ideologies as part of their plans to separate people based on religion. The result of this evolution is that today people celebrate Diwali in the context of events related to or associated with their own community's Diwali instead of the festival of shared happiness and lights. Similarly, just as the capitalist system has commercialized everything for profit, these festivals have also been categorized and commercialized.

Today, a Sikh considers going to a temple and celebrating Diwali a threat to religion, and a Hindu feels that it is our festival and has nothing to do with others. For Muslims and Christians, it is a festival of foreign (Indian) religions, so they cannot have anything to do with it, even though Muslims and Christians have been living in India for a thousand years. Indian Muslims have never been able to embrace Indianness; instead, they still trace their roots to the Arabs. This is their tragedy. Sikhs are born and raised in Indian society alongside Hindus. How

can they be separate from this Indian culture? However, our religious leaders and priests are dividing society and fracturing the community by promoting Sikh festivals for their own narrow interests.

No historian has mentioned Bandi Chhor Divas anywhere in the Sikh Granth or Guru Granth Sahib ji. Even during the Guru period, there is no mention that Guru Hargobind Sahib travelled to Amritsar after his release from Gwalior Fort and lit Diwali or lamps on that day. According to Bhatt Vahiyan, Guru Hargobind Ji reached Amritsar in February and not on Diwali. In all Sikh histories of the 18th-19th centuries, the period of Misl, and during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sikhs and Hindus used to celebrate this festival together. We have been seeing in our childhood (3-4 decades ago) that Dussehra and Diwali were celebrated together by all and Bandi-Chhor was never heard of. This trend started in the past 20 years and is increasing day by day. This trend is not aligned with the interests of Sikhs and Sikhism, and it goes against the Gurbani-based commonality of the Gurus.

In recent years, Sikhs have begun referring to Diwali as Bandi Chhor Divas in an effort to distinguish their celebration from that of Hindus. Thousands of years ago, Hindu priests had associated Diwali with the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya with his wife, Sita, and brother, Lakshman, after a 14-year exile. In the joy of their return home and victory over

Ravana, the people of Ayodhya expressed their happiness by lighting oil lamps.

It marks the triumph of good over evil, symbolizing the return of Lord Rama and Sita to Ayodhya after fourteen years of exile. As the story of the Ramayana tells, the people of Ayodhya lit thousands of lamps to welcome their king and queen back to the kingdom, marking the end of darkness and the dawn of a new era of righteousness. This momentous occasion, celebrated to this day, symbolizes the spiritual triumph of goodness over evil and the light that dispels ignorance and negativity.

Also, in the ancient scriptures and teachings of Hinduism, the triumph of good over evil is not just a mythological narrative but a living philosophy that inspires countless generations to strive for righteousness. Millions of people around the world celebrate the Hindu festival of lights, Diwali, with great joy and devotion.

The Sikh celebration honours their rich history and the significant contributions of their sixth spiritual leader, Guru Hargobind. The celebration of Diwali among Sikhs commemorates the liberation of their sixth guru, Guru Hargobind, along with 52 other princes from captivity.

Sikhs refer to the day of Diwali as 'Bandi Chhor Diwas.' Today, the celebration of Bandi Chhor Divas features the illumination of the Golden Temple, accompanied by fireworks and additional festivities. The city was illuminated with lights and candles, reminiscent of how various communities

observe Diwali.

Individuals from the Sikh community typically visit Gurdwaras to engage in prayer and meditation, in honour of their Guru. The day holds profound meaning for the Sikh community.

The narrative of Bandi Chhor Divas:

On this day, 52 Hindu princes were graciously released from the Mughal Emperor Jahangir's Gwalior Fort in Madhya Pradesh, India, thanks to Guru Hargobind. This is why Sikhs commemorate Bandi Chhor, the celebration of release from prison. Guru was presented with the opportunity for freedom but declined unless the other princes, akin to modern political prisoners or prisoners of conscience, were also set free. Emperor Jahangir astutely consented to the stipulation that only individuals capable of grasping the Guru's cloak would be set free. The Guru instructed his Sikhs to create a cloak adorned with 52 tassels, which was then released alongside all the princes. The teaching from Guru Sahib emphasizes the importance of reflecting on the struggles of others prior to considering our own and high-lights that the freedoms and rights of others hold greater significance than our individual concerns.

Therefore, the Sikhs have made Diwali Bandi Chhor for the last few decades. If someone wishes people a happy Diwali instead of celebrating Bandi Chhor, many Sikhs may view that person as an RSS agent and a supporter of Modi. Sikhs are becoming victims of communal division by some Sikh groups who are doing politics of violence and hatred day by day, which

is a dangerous trend for the Sikh community living all over the world. Hatred based on religion and festivals can never be in the interest of the minority Sikh community living all over the world.

Come on! When the whole world has become a global village, let us all come together and celebrate all the folk festivals in the context of human brotherhood, leaving aside the divisions of religions, sects, countries, nations, languages, and beliefs. To counter the divisions in humanity caused by religious leaders for their own gain, let us work to move this folk festival from religious venues into the community.

Therefore, we can say that the festival of Diwali is a symbol of mutual love and harmony.

Embracing this message, Diwali reminds us that we can begin lighting another's candle at home. Helping family members with chores, offering words of encouragement, or simply making time for loved ones can brighten their day. Outside the home, small acts of kindness-like posting a positive review for a local business or letting someone with a low-priced item move ahead in line-extend the spirit of Diwali to the wider community. These simple gestures, like the lamps lit in Ayodhya to celebrate the return of Lord Rama, bring light to the lives of others in meaningful ways.

Happy Diwali to everyone, and come on! Let us rise above religious disputes and divisions and light the lamps of wisdom within ourselves.

(The writer is a freelance writer and journalist who lives in Brampton)

