

GROWING INFRASTRUCTURE CONCERN

In recent years, India has witnessed a disturbing increase in incidents of bridge collapses, triggering public outcry and raising serious concerns about the safety, quality, and accountability of infrastructure development across the country. These tragedies are not only causing loss of human lives and property but also exposing systemic flaws in the way construction projects are planned, executed, and maintained.

Multiple bridge collapse incidents across states like Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and West Bengal have put the spotlight on India's crumbling infrastructure. In Bihar, within just a few days, several under-construction and newly built bridges collapsed, highlighting both design and execution failures. Such events are particularly shocking because they often involve projects meant to promote development and improve connectivity in rural and semi-urban areas. When these vital structures fail, they damage public trust and hinder progress.

One of the most common causes behind these collapses is the use of substandard materials during construction. In many cases, contractors cut corners to save costs or maximize profits, often under the protection of corrupt practices or weak oversight. As a result, structures that should last decades become vulnerable within a few years. Combined with poor construction techniques, this becomes a recipe for disaster.

Lack of regular maintenance is another critical issue. Thousands of older bridges across the country have not seen proper inspection or upkeep in years. Minor cracks, rusting joints, or eroded foundations are frequently ignored until they worsen into structural failures. Inadequate budgeting for maintenance and an overemphasis on new construction also contribute to the neglect of existing infrastructure.

Adding to the pressure is the growing impact of climate change. Many bridges, particularly older ones, were not designed to withstand the intense weather patterns we see today—heavy rainfall, floods, and soil erosion. These conditions accelerate wear and tear and often weaken foundations, especially in areas near rivers or in hilly terrain.

Another factor is the overloading of bridges. Many structures are forced to bear far more weight than they were originally designed for, particularly due to the unchecked movement of overloaded commercial vehicles. In urban areas, encroachments around bridge pillars or waterways further compromise the structural integrity of these bridges, making them more prone to collapse.

What makes the situation worse is the lack of transparency and accountability. After every collapse, investigations are promised but often yield little result. Contractors, engineers, and officials rarely face serious consequences. This lack of deterrent allows the cycle of poor quality and negligence to continue, sometimes with the same entities receiving new contracts despite past failures.

The consequences of bridge collapses extend far beyond the immediate damage. These incidents disrupt transport and trade, isolate communities, and hinder access to essential services like healthcare and education.

In rural areas, where connectivity is already limited, the loss of a single bridge can severely affect livelihoods and local economies.

To address this growing crisis, a comprehensive and multi-level approach is necessary. Regular, independent audits of bridges—both old and new—must be institutionalized. These should include not only physical inspections but also assessments of the construction process and materials used. There should also be a robust system to track the health of bridges using modern technology like sensors and AI-based monitoring.

Marking Cultural Milestone in J&K

■ MOHD YASEEN

Cluster University of Jammu has taken a historic leap in the field of higher education by introducing, for the very first time in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, postgraduate degree programmes in Performing Arts. Beginning from the academic session 2025-26, the university will offer Master of Performing Arts (MPA) degrees in two key disciplines, Indian Theatre and Music. This milestone has brought immense hope and excitement to hundreds of students, artists, and cultural workers across the region. The last date to apply for these courses is 22nd June 2025.

This unprecedented move marks the beginning of a new era in the cultural and academic life of Jammu and Kashmir. It addresses a long-standing gap in the formal education system where performing arts, despite their deep roots in the region's cultural fabric, had not been offered as full-fledged academic streams at the postgraduate level. With this initiative, Cluster University of Jammu becomes the first university in J&K to formally institutionalize MPA programmes, allowing students to pursue structured academic and professional training in theatre and music within their home state.

The vision of Dr. K. S. Chandrasekar, Vice Chancellor of Cluster University of Jammu, has been instrumental in bringing this idea to fruition. His commitment to promoting interdisciplinary education and encouraging regional talent has laid the foundation for this landmark academic step. The programmes are being launched under the academic leadership of Dr. Monika Sharma, Dean of the School of Humanities and Liberal Arts, whose guidance has been crucial in framing a curriculum that balances cultural tradition with modern performing arts pedagogy.

Dr. Kuldeep Raina, the Coordinator of the Master of Performing Arts programme, emphasized the significance of this initiative, shares, "This is a moment of cultural awakening. For the first time, our own students will not have to travel to Delhi, Punjab, or Mumbai to pursue their dreams in theatre or music. Cluster University of Jammu has now become a platform where art meets academia. We are creating a space where creativity will be nurtured with discipline, where tradition will be re-examined through scholarship, and where tal-

ent will be recognized through structured training. The MPA programme will offer both artistic freedom and academic rigour."

The eligibility criteria for the MPA in Indian Theatre have been designed to be both inclusive and merit-based, opening opportunities to academically qualified students as well as practicing artists. There are three pathways for admission. Firstly, candidates who have completed a Bachelor of Performing Arts (BPA) or a four-year/eight-semester undergraduate degree in the relevant field from a recognized university are eligible. This ensures continuity for students who have pursued theatre studies at the undergraduate level.

Secondly, candidates with a bachelor's degree in any discipline, who also have three years of verifiable stage experience with a recognized theatre group or under the mentorship of an acclaimed director, are eligible.

They must furnish documentary proof of their active participation. This pathway honours and recognizes the immense value of experience-based learning in the field of performance.

Thirdly, candidates who have a bachelor's degree and a one-year diploma in theatre from a recognized university are also eligible to apply.

This offers an opportunity to those who have taken short-term training to now advance to the next level.

Admission to the MPA in Indian Theatre programme will be based on a composite score, combining academic and practical evaluation.

Fifty percent weightage will be assigned to the marks obtained in the undergraduate programme, while the remaining fifty percent will be based on performance in an entrance test to be conducted by the university.

This method ensures that both theoretical knowledge and stagecraft are assessed equally.

The MPA in Music follows a similarly inclusive framework. Candidates who hold a bachelor's degree in Music—whether as a major, an elective, or an additional subject—are eligible. Additionally, those who have graduated in any discipline (Arts, Commerce, or Science) but hold a 6- or 7-year diploma in music from nationally recognized boards such as Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya Mandal, Miraj/Mumbai and Prayag Sangeet Samiti, Allahabad are also eligible for

admission.

This structure allows formally trained musicians without conventional academic music degrees to enter into advanced learning, contributing to a more holistic and diverse classroom.

The importance of these programmes is not limited to academic outcomes. Jammu and Kashmir has a vast and varied cultural landscape, encompassing Dogri, Kashmiri, Gojri, Ladakhi, and Pahari traditions, as well as folk forms like Bhand Pather and regional classical music practices.

The formal inclusion of performing arts in postgraduate education strengthens efforts to preserve, reinterpret, and evolve these traditions in a globalized cultural environment.

The MPA programme will not only produce skilled performers but also open doors to careers in theatre direction, acting, scriptwriting, musicology, arts management, cultural journalism, event production, and research-based artistic documentation.

Furthermore, students completing these programmes will be eligible to compete for national and international scholarships, fellowships, and doctoral studies, enhancing the profile of the region in the global arts community.

The university is also preparing the necessary infrastructure, faculty expertise, and academic collaborations required to deliver high-quality training. The curriculum will include performance-based workshops, classroom lectures, field studies, and participation in festivals and academic conferences. Collaborations with well-known artists, visiting faculty, and guest lecturers from leading institutions are also planned. These steps will provide students a comprehensive exposure to both traditional and contemporary forms of theatre and music.

The presence of the programmes within Jammu also means that the local cultural landscape will benefit from regular performances, exhibitions, and productions emerging from the university. It will revitalize community engagement with live performance, foster youth participation in artistic activities, and bring a new level of prestige to regional art forms.

In the words of one aspiring theatre artist from Jammu, "This is more than a course. It is an acknowledgment of our cultural roots and a recognition of our dreams. For someone like me, who has

been working in theatre informally for years, this programme gives my art an academic identity."

Cluster University's move is also in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which encourages the integration of creative arts into mainstream education.

The NEP emphasizes multidisciplinary learning, and the launch of MPA programmes reflects how universities can adopt this model in practical and meaningful ways.

The announcement has been met with enthusiastic support from the arts and academic community. Local theatre groups, music teachers, cultural activists, and former students have welcomed the move as long overdue. Many see this as an institutional recognition of the decades-long informal labour of artists in the region, many of whom have kept the arts alive despite the absence of formal academic or governmental support.

Cluster University's step not only affirms the role of the arts in education but also signals a commitment to nurture future generations of artists who are rooted in tradition and equipped for modern challenges. It marks a shift from seeing performing arts merely as extracurricular to recognizing them as professional, intellectual, and socially relevant disciplines.

The application window is now open. All eligible students, performers, and music practitioners who meet the criteria are encouraged to seize this opportunity.

The last date for application submission is 22nd June 2025, and with limited seats available, early registration is advised.

This is a proud moment for Jammu and Kashmir.

The launch of the MPA in Indian Theatre and Music at Cluster University is not just an academic development, it is a cultural turning point. It is a space where identity, creativity, and scholarship will meet, and where the next generation of performers and cultural leaders will be born.

This is also an opportune moment for the well-qualified people who have taken their degrees from the major cultural Institutions of India

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From sacred Seva to one-day Selfies: What are we becoming?

■ MAHADEEP SINGH JAMWAL

In recent decades, India has witnessed a surge in the observance of imported celebrations such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, Parents' Day, Valentine's Day, Friendship Day, Grandparents' Day, Daughter's Day, and Son's Day. These "days of love" have found prominence not just on social media but also in schools, offices, malls, and even homes. While the sentiments behind them may seem heartwarming, the shift raises a deeper question: Are we replacing a culture of lifelong reverence and duty with one-day performances driven by social validation and market forces?

In Western societies, the concept of such days emerged from a vacuum created by fragmented family structures, emotional distances, and the rise of individualism. In these cultures, children often live independently and far from parents; the emotional connect tends to wane with time. Therefore, symbolic dates such as Mother's Day or Friendship Day serve as scheduled reminders to reconnect - often celebrated with cards, flowers, or social media posts. As one observes, "In fast-paced lives with fractured ties, one-day tributes help love arise."

However, in Indian culture, particularly within the Hindu worldview, relationships

are not occasional expressions but eternal bonds that form the very fabric of Dharma. As proclaimed in the Taittiriya Upanishad: "Matru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava" - "Regard your mother and father as divine." This profound wisdom does not prescribe a ritual for a day; it instructs a way of life. Our relationships with parents, siblings, teachers, and even friends are based on duty (karta), gratitude, and daily acts of service (seva), not on calendar reminders.

Our ancient epics offer vivid illustrations of this value system. Shruvan Kumar, revered not for a celebration but for a life of devotion, carried his blind parents on his shoulders for a pilgrimage. Bhisma Pitamah gave up his right to the throne so his father could remarry, and Lord Rama walked away from his kingdom to uphold his father's promise. These were not symbolic gestures; they were lifetimes of self-sacrifice and unwavering duty. The concept of friendship too has been commercialized through Friendship Day, reducing a sacred bond to keychains and colored bands. Contrast this with the bond between Lord Krishna and Sudama - a relationship rooted in humility, loyalty, and unspoken love. Even Valentine's Day finds little relevance in a civilization where love is reflected in the devotion of Meera for

Krishna or the deep companionship of Sita and Rama - not in heart-shaped balloons but in shared pain and steadfastness.

Interestingly, the spread of these Western-origin celebrations is not uniform across India. Urban and metropolitan regions such as Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, and Hyderabad are far more inclined toward adopting Western cultural practices. These cities, being hubs of multinational corporations, elite education, and global media exposure, have fostered a lifestyle where Western celebrations have become the norm. Influenced by globalized work culture, English-medium education, social media trends, and aggressive consumerism, the youth in these cities are more likely to mark these days with Instagram posts, surprise parties, and gifts.

In contrast, culturally rooted regions such as Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Bihar, interior Rajasthan, and much of rural South India retain stronger ties to traditional practices. Here, family systems remain joint, rituals are observed daily, and values are passed down not through apps but through lived experience. In these places, a mother is not honoured once a year but revered each day through touch, service, and prayer. As the Garuda Purana details, ances-

tral reverence is not about cards and cakes but about shradh, rituals, silence, and remembrance.

This growing inclination toward superficial celebration over soulful connection should concern us. Posting a selfie with one's mother on Mother's Day and ignoring her needs throughout the year is not love. Giving gifts to a father on Father's Day and disregarding his wisdom in everyday life is not respect. The culture of "one-day love" is gradually eroding the depth of lifelong obligations.

It is time for reflection. In India, relationships are not calendar-bound. We don't need a Friendship Day to value a friend, a Parents' Day to respect our elders, or a Valentine's Day to cherish love. Our culture teaches us that love, friendship, and devotion are daily offerings, not digital displays. These values are sanctified through actions, not celebrated with hashtags.

Let us not replace our sacred traditions with social media performances. Let us remember that a civilization that gave the world the concept of Dharma does not need imported days to honor human bonds. Because in India, "From sacred seva to one-day selfies - what are we becoming?" is not just a question. It is a call for cultural awakening.

In Reel So Real: How Media and AI Are Shaping-and Shaking-the Moral Compass of a Generation

■ RUCHI CHABRA

Centuries ago, Plato cautioned against drama that corrupts the soul. Freud spoke of catharsis through art. But in today's world, content no longer heals, educates, or uplifts. It seduces. It distracts. It distorts. Filters replace reflection. Virality replaces virtue. The result? A generation more attuned to reels than to reality, more loyal to screens than to values.

We are witnessing a quiet crisis. From OTT platforms and YouTube to online gaming and AI-generated deepfakes, our young citizens are growing up in an unregulated ocean of influence - often addictive, occasionally criminal, and almost always value-neutral. In Udaipur, a man brutally murdered a woman and burned her body - later confessing he was inspired by Drishyam and Crime Patrol. In Delhi, teenage boys formed a gang called Badnaam, imitating gangster portrayals from Pushpa and Bhaukaal, and stabbed a rival - all to shoot a reel. In Karnataka, six men printed fake currency after copying Shahid Kapoor's character in Farzi. In Maharashtra, a 17-year-old almost died performing a reel-themed suicide stunt gone wrong.

These aren't isolated anomalies. They are symptoms of a deeper cultural descent - where fiction is no longer watched passively but enacted tragically. The screen, once a window into imagined worlds, has become a mirror scripting

reality.

And it starts early. Cartoons like Shinchan, Doraemon, Motu Patlu, and Ogy and the Cockroaches model disobedience, mockery, and short-cut culture - rarely kindness, seldom hard work. In parallel, online games like PUBG, Free Fire, and GTA V normalize violence, deceit, and virtual crime. Most come with unsupervised chats that serve as breeding grounds for bullying, grooming, and dares with real-world consequences.

To this already volatile mix, a new element has been added: the illusion of easy money. Fantasy gaming apps like Dream11, WinZO, MPL, and Zube promote gambling, disguised as "skill-based gaming." For many teenagers, the dream is no longer to learn, create, or serve - but to earn by playing, scrolling, and chasing likes.

And now, the most insidious threat: AI misuse.

In Delhi, a schoolgirl attempted suicide after a deepfake obscene video - created using AI - went viral. In another case, a family lost ₹9 lakh after receiving an AI-generated voice call mimicking their son. With voice cloning, face swapping, and synthetic media becoming alarmingly accessible through apps like ElevenLabs, Midjourney, DeepFaceLab, and Pika Labs, impersonation and fraud have entered a new era. These are not futuristic fears - they are real, present, and rapidly growing.

AI, when unregulated, becomes a tool of

deception, exploitation, and psychological harm. With no ethical guardrails, it is now being used to generate misinformation, manipulate emotions, and distort identities - especially in young, impressionable minds. The lines between trend and truth, fact and fantasy, are dangerously blurred. We are raising children not by moral compass or community, but by algorithm - watch-time, clickbait, and views. Algorithms chase engagement, not ethics. Children as young as ten can access mature content with zero checks. The Indian Censor Board continues to monitor only theatrical releases, while the real battlefield is elsewhere - OTT content, YouTube, gaming apps, cartoon channels, and now AI content. But it is not merely a call for censorship, it is also a call for accountability.

To protect the moral and mental fabric of the next generation, we do not lack laws. We lack cohesion, vision, and urgency. India already possesses a foundational legal framework to regulate digital content and behaviour-through the IT Act, IT Rules (2021), Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. All of these provide fragments of a framework which need to be integrated into a comprehensive national response to digital toxicity and AI misuse. We need a dedicated national IT task force - proactive, anticipatory, and rooted in child safety - to formulate

and enforce policies that are attuned to the digital realities of our time. Digital platforms like OTT, YouTube, immersive gaming, AI-generated content, and gambling disguised as skill-based gaming must be held accountable through algorithm audits and transparency mandates - not just for what they show, but for how they shape minds. Age-verification protocols, mandatory content classification, and watermarking of synthetic media must become non-negotiable. Media literacy, AI ethics, and digital behaviour must be taught in schools as core life skills, not as optional add-ons.

This is not about silencing technology or throttling creativity. It is about shaping a humane digital culture that places conscience above clicks, and citizenship above consumption.

We may already be late. But if we delay further, we risk more than just the innocence of our children. We risk the moral architecture of our society. Let us not raise a generation fluent in trends but unfamiliar with truth. Let us not outsource parenting, education, and moral reasoning to the algorithm. Let us reclaim stories from screens, and values from code. Because if we do not act now, the most dangerous fiction of all may be that we had control - and chose not to use it.

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The Plight of Sea Turtles: Threats and Solutions

■ VINOD CHANDRASHEKHAR DIXIT

World Sea Turtle Day falls on June 16 each year and highlights the importance of sea turtles. The Day takes place on this particular date in honor of Dr. Archie Carr, who was considered by many to be the "father of sea turtle biology" and was born in Mobile, Alabama on June 16, 1909. Dr. Archie Carr was a great biologist. His early descriptive studies of turtles set the standard of quality in the field of natural history. Later on, as he focused on sea turtles, he moved toward ecology and behavior, although his work always retained a taxonomic and evolutionary perspective. Today, we are encouraging global supporters to dive into the threats that sea turtles face. There are many other threats to sea turtles, such as encroachment of coastal development on nesting beaches, marine pollutants, accidental drowning on fishing gear, and the international turtle meat trade.

Graceful and beautiful, with streamlined bodies and flippers adapted for swimming, the seven existing species of sea turtles are among approximately 360 species of turtles and tortoises and have been navigating the world's oceans for 200 million years. Sea turtles lay eggs in the sand and their gender is determined by the temperature: cool results in males, warm in females, and a fluctuating temperature produces a mix of both. Sea turtles can live between 50 to 100 years and some sea turtles travel more than 1,000 miles to return to their nesting ground. They nest multiple times, about two weeks apart, and lay up to 125 eggs per nest.

Temperature has a significant impact on the sea turtle sex ratio. Warmer temperatures produce more females, while cooler temperatures are found to produce more males. Human activities such as hunting for sea turtles, plastic and chemical pollution, irresponsible fishing practices, coastal development, light pollution and other issues, as well as climate change, are all contributing to the reduction in sea turtle populations. Additionally, sea turtles often fall victim to entanglement in fishing gear, resulting in injuries or death. The ingestion of plastic garbage, mistaken for food, poses a serious threat to their health. Sea turtles often confuse plastic trash for jellyfish or other prey, leading to ingestion and internal damage or blockages.

World Sea Turtle Day reminds us of our responsibility to protect and conserve these ancient mariners. By mitigating the threats they face, promoting sustainable practices, and supporting rehabilitation and release initiatives, we can contribute to preserving sea turtles and their precious habitats.

The point of the day is to let more people know about the plight of sea turtles and to increase education and participation to help sea turtles survive, including political advocacy and community responsibility. Let us keep beaches trash free to avoid turtles mistaking it for food or getting caught in plastic loops. Single use plastic bags are often mistaken by sea turtles for their favorite food, jellyfish. Consumption can cause them to suffocate. Promoting responsible coastal development practices that preserve nesting habitats and implementing stricter regulations on fishing gear can help reduce accidental capture and entanglement. Education and outreach programs can certainly raise awareness among local communities and tourists about the importance of conservation and responsible behavior when encountering sea turtles.