

ArthaShastra

u n b i a s e d *Insights*



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From the Editor's Desk...



Dear Reader,

As we begin 2026, we pause to take stock and reflect - not only on our journey, but also on the lessons that journey has taught us. By India. For India. Of India.

In September 2024, The Global South Convergence Forum (GSCF) began this journey with a simple conviction: to create a space that enables and facilitates socio-economic development convergences across the Global South nations.

Drawing on our decades of experience, we believed that perceptual change at the grassroots—fostered through deeper people-to-people exchanges — could help drive such convergence. Learning about one another, after all, has the potential to reduce trust deficits and enable mutually beneficial cooperation.

With this belief in mind, we began collecting data. But not data in the conventional sense of numbers and charts. We chose to go beyond statistics. We packed our bags and began engaging directly with the “**data points**” themselves: **people at the grassroots**. Over the year, we interacted with a wide range of stakeholders, including students, educators, policy-makers, bureaucrats, diplomats, and business people - primarily in India, and also across parts of the Global South.

We began our journey at home, in India, seeking to understand India's real story better. At the same time, we connected India's dots from outside its borders, examining where the country features in the grand scheme of global power shifts, particularly within the Global South.

In our quest, we learned the following:

1. India faces a deeper **challenge** than is often

not acknowledged - one of **mindset**, and the endogenous loop between perceptions and mindset.

2. The **disconnect** between the **top** - where policies are made - and the **bottom** - for whom they are intended - is not only evident but appears to be **widening**. India's limited willingness to engage beyond narrowly defined boundaries that serve predefined narratives risks undermining efforts undertaken in the country's true long-term interest. There is an **urgent** need to **refocus** policy attention on **strengthening** the Indian economy by **building foundational capacities**. To achieve this, economic policies must be oriented towards enabling **optimal interactions** between domestic and international factors of production - land, labour, capital, and enterprise.
3. At present, India is **not** operating from a **position of neutrality**. The **brain fog** is indeed **real**, creating a widening gap between perceived reality and actual reality. The business of narrative for perception management should be out of business. Else, casualty? Indian economy!
4. Above all, our **biggest concern** is for India's **youth**. What keeps me up at night, if you ask me, then it would be this question - how do you **expect a dividend** from a **demography** which you do not **invest in today**?

Our insights and experiences over 2025 have been compiled in [ARTHASHASTRA Volume 1 Issue 1-4](#).

So, dear reader, unbiased insights by **ARTHASHASTRA** will hopefully trigger and provoke unthought of thoughts, giving a fillip to a positive and offbeat direction. Until next time, keep your thinking caps on. Yes, we eagerly await your comments, suggestions, advice or criticism.

Warmly,

Dr. Natasha Agarwal

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The Global South Convergence Forum in India, are open to collaborations on commissioned projects, data-driven research & analytics, and more based on your requirements. Knowing the ecosystem in India, we are in a unique position to help you navigate your Indian journey.

We look forward to hearing from you at :
globalsouth@gscforum.org



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Listening to the Factory Floor: Rethinking Skills and Industrial Policy.

Dr. Natasha Agarwal

The academic economist in me has spent over a decade studying and analysing the impact of industrial policies. Data crunching, consulting with key stakeholders, and then translating the findings into evidence-based policy recommendations appeared to be the butter for my bread.

Yet, something in this equation never sat right with me. There remained a persistent disconnect between what my five senses registered as I lived through the economic realities of everyday life and what policy frameworks envisioned at the top. The gap between anticipated policy impact and on-the-ground outcome was palpable; somewhere along the way, the transmission mechanism was breaking down.

Consider India's **glaring skills gap** and the urgent need for the manufacturing sector to drive large-scale employment. At The Global South Convergence Forum (GSCF), we decided to tackle the issue head-on. We went directly to the ground to understand the forces behind this skills gap. We sought to examine industrial policy from the bottom up, grounded in the lived realities of market participants. In other words, we asked: *How does industrial policy function in the real world, where does its transmission fail, and how can these gaps be addressed?*

By navigating the by-lanes of industrial hubs and cold calling micro-enterprises across industries and regions, we understood that for India's manufacturing to leap forward, the focus must be on the **basic yet core engineering tools and skills**.

But which are these tools and skills?

Take, for example, an imported product that India could initially imitate and adapt to local market needs. The challenge then becomes: *How can India reproduce or refine the product*

effectively?

Moulds, along with other **foundational manufacturing tools**, play a crucial role in production. Moulds transform raw materials into finished products, enabling efficient replication, reproduction, and economies of scale. They also foster innovation by supporting iterative prototyping and testing, from simple to complex components.

Moulds play a central role in modern manufacturing across sectors such as drones, consumer goods, jewellery, automotive, hand-crafts, engineering components, and even specialized fields like dental and prosthetic applications.

In essence, moulds are indispensable, and learning to make them constitutes a foundational engineering capability in manufacturing.

However, our engagements with MSMEs consistently revealed a severe shortage of skilled mould-makers. As one entrepreneur observed, *"India has a huge demand for skilled labour, yet vocational education lags at least a couple of decades behind."*

Recognising both the need to learn mould-making and the absence of formal training in this skill, Team GSCF developed a comprehensive *Mould Making Workshop Using Silicone*. Grounded in the belief that vocational education must be experiential, the workshop equips participants with an understanding of the conceptual and functional aspects of moulds while also offering hands-on production experience through a less capital-intensive medium namely silicone.

Our vision is that once trainees acquire mould-making skills, they will gain a deeper understanding of factory-floor processes across industries, enabling them to learn, adapt, and upgrade their skills over time. An important

outcome of this approach is immediate employability, whether through wage employment or self-employment in the silicone mould industry.

While MSMEs demonstrated strong uptake and a willingness to remain engaged, our most significant learning emerged from interactions with skill-training institutions - many of which were unfamiliar with mould-making as a skill. This revealed a **critical insight**: *India's industrial policy needs an upgrade, beginning with greater awareness of manufacturing processes, tools, and the skills they require.*

So here we are!

On December 12, 2025, Team GSCF hosted an **online awareness programme** for one of India's leading non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with participation from over **40 centre heads across multiple regions**. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the programme was curated and delivered by one of the members of Team GSCF, a businessman with hands-on experience in running a silicone mould factory.

The programme introduced participants to the conceptual, functional, and economic significance of moulds. The overwhelmingly positive response underscored a clear unmet demand for such skills - skills that build con-

fidence, enable wage- and self-employment, and strengthen India's manufacturing readiness from the grassroots up.



A member of Team GSCF conducting an online awareness programme on the foundations of moulds, for 40 centre heads from one of India's leading NGOs.

This initiative is just the beginning. Team GSCF aims to foster deeper collaborations through hands-on workshops and carefully designed mould-skilling modules that transform awareness into capability, and capability into sustainable livelihoods. Moving from insight to implementation, we look forward to an exciting phase of building manufacturing capacity from the ground up.

Dr. Natasha Agarwal acknowledges the technical contributions on moulds made by members of Team GSCF.

Postscript: Beyond the algorithm, stories from India's invisible frontlines

Nidhi Jamwal

While the world chases AI data points, I spent 2025 chasing grassroots stories on climate resilience because environmental journalism cannot be outsourced to algorithms.



Nidhi Jamwal reporting on illegal mica mining in a Santhal tribal village in Giridih district of Jharkhand. Picture Credit: Water Vagabond.

While the world obsesses over machine learning and artificial intelligence's (AI) predictive data points, I spent a significant part of

2025 in rural India documenting grassroots stories, the kind that AI algorithms systematically ignore.

Three Ts governed my journey—Travel, Tribal, and Training. As an environmental journalist, I felt the urgency to report on the lived realities of the people and the planet instead of relying on information coming out of ‘content creation’.

From the coalfields of Jharia in Jharkhand and the sacred hills of tribal communities in Odisha, to the villages of Tripura, the reporting assignments I went on were a masterclass in grassroots agency, which no journalism school can teach. I met the real faces of climate resilience, who were so much more than just data points. The message I brought back with me was clear - the community is the first line of defence in the war with climate change.

My travels to villages in [Marathwada](#) (Maharashtra) and [Odisha](#) uncovered a quiet but growing revolution of self-dependence and collective action. In the tribal areas in Mayurbhanj, Kalahandi, and Bargarh districts of Odisha, I witnessed how gram sabhas (village institutions) are coming together to form larger rural collectives that not only practise decentralised planning but also implement progressive farming techniques and forest governance.

In the [Kankadahad](#) block of Dhenkanal district in Odisha, emerging from the shadow of violent conflict of Naxals, a federation of 130 gram sabhas is scripting rules of forest protection and trade in forest produce for improved livelihoods.

Similarly, 43 tribal villages inside [Similipal](#) Tiger Reserve in Odisha have got together to stand up against eviction and relocation from the tiger reserve, which is their ancestral home.

This year also taught me that while government dashboards may boast of progress, the ground reality often tells a “cruel truth”. In [Tripura](#), where official data shows over 86 per cent functional tap water coverage, I found tribal women still trekking through steep terrain to fetch water from mountain springs because

the taps back home were never connected to a pipeline, or discharge contaminated water.

My experiences only reinforced what I always believed. Environmental journalism cannot be outsourced to algorithms or government press releases. Content creation cannot replace ground-up reporting. As journalists, we must travel to these far-flung edges not just to verify facts, but to ensure that the most vulnerable aren’t erased by a digital percentage point.

In an age of quick dissemination of misinformation and disinformation through social media and WhatsApp channels, media platforms need to invest in and scale up grassroots reporting because large chunks of facts never get recorded and reported.

AI models keep echoing and regurgitating information based on limited data points on which they are trained. Newsrooms today heavily depend on AI to curate content and dish out stories at breakneck speed that do not require any human intervention.

I am no Luddite, nor am I “anti-AI.” In fact, I am currently immersed in a 10-week programme by Google News Initiative AI Skills Academy to better understand how these tools can strengthen journalism, not substitute it. I now see the immense potential for AI to act as a force multiplier in the newsroom - helping us parse massive datasets on electoral results, air quality, deforestation patterns via satellite imagery, or automate the mundane tasks that eat away at a reporter’s time.

When used ethically, AI can help us see the big picture of the climate crisis more clearly than ever before. However, a lens is not the eye, and a data point is not the truth. And, AI must never - and can never - replace ground reporting.

If we allow algorithms to become our primary narrators, we run the risk of erasing the lives of millions. An AI model trained on mainstream datasets will never see the Adivasi woman in a remote forest of Kalahandi, or the jhum farmer practising shifting cultivation in Tripura, just because their lived experiences

aren't digitised.

Watching *Humans in the Loop* last night reminded me about why, as an environmental journalist, I chose the road over the dashboard. The film's protagonist, Nehma, an Adivasi woman from Jharkhand, captures the fundamental crisis of our digital age: the erasure of indigenous wisdom by the binary logic of algorithms.

When Nehma refuses to label a caterpillar as a "pest", she isn't just being difficult; she is asserting a generational worldview where nature is a symbiotic partner, not a resource to be sanitised. To the AI, the caterpillar is a target for a pesticide drone; to Nehma, it is a creature that eats only the rotten bits of leaves so the rest of the plant can survive.

Bottom-up reporting is the only antidote to this "algorithmic colonialism". If we rely on government dashboards and tech-driven climate solutions that often ignore traditional knowledge of indigenous people, we risk scaling up these very biases. Our job, thus, is to keep these "humans in the loop", documenting the nuances that machines are incapable of discerning or just designed to ignore.

Training is the final, and perhaps most vital "T" of my 2025. While ground reporting is the heartbeat of our craft, it is often a lonely and uphill battle for those writing from the most remote corners of India.

Grassroots journalists are our first responders to climate change, yet they frequently lack the formal support, scientific vocabulary, and digital tools to translate local struggles into stories with global resonance.

Training isn't just about polishing prose; it

is about empowering rural reporters to bridge the gap between traditional knowledge, people's lived experiences, and climate science.

So, my role as a co-mentor for the **VOICE Fellowship** (Voices of Impacted Communities and Environments), under the **CARE Project** (Communicating Action and Resilience for Environmental Health in India) at IISER Pune, is one I took very seriously.

From December 16-20, the VOICE Fellowship brought together a diverse cohort of 40 grassroots journalists and communicators from across India for an intensive residential programme. It was an initiative led by Shalini Sharma, a social scientist and associate professor at IISER Pune, to help regional communicators report on the complex intersections of climate change and public health - from respiratory disorders due to air pollution to its invisible toll on mental health.

Watching these grassroots journalists, many of whom work in regional languages and in underserved districts, engage with scientists and public health researchers was a powerful reminder of what is possible when we invest in strengthening the local voices.

Vital climate stories aren't found in cold statistics slapped onto glossy pitch decks. They are found in the voices of people who live closest to the land, and community reporters who have their ear to the ground.

We need to continue listening, and training the next generation of sentinels. In the end, the survival of our planet hinges not on the efficiency of our algorithms, but on our ability to hear the grassroots stories the machines ignored. These stories of climate resilience exist beyond the world of large language models (LLMs).

Nidhi Jamwal is an independent journalist who reports on environment, climate, health, and rural issues. This article was originally published on December 29, 2025, by Kashmir Times and can be accessed at <https://kashmirtimes.com/opinion/comment-articles/postscript-beyond-the-algorithm-stories-from-indias-invisible-frontlines>.

Mapping the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) from within India

On December 20, 2025, Dr. Natasha Agarwal participated in the **Shri Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj National Maritime Dialogue**, titled “*Mumbai to Marseille: IMEEC and the Transoceanic Economic Futures*”. The event was organised by the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Centre for Security & Strategic Studies (CSM-CSSS), School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, in collaboration with the University of Mumbai.



Source: Event organizers.

Speaking on the panel “*Eurasian Rerouting and Indo-Pacific Circuits: IMEC’s Mercantile Innovation Frontiers*,” Dr. Agarwal foregrounded the **economy - specifically the Indian economy** - and argued that **connectivity is a non-negotiable variable in India’s growth and development trajectory**.

In this context, she first focused on understanding..

What is connectivity?

Why do countries prioritise connectivity?

How can connectivity be enhanced?

Dr. Agarwal conceptualised connectivity as a condition in which **nodes** - firms, people, and institutions distributed across space - **are integrated and function as a unified whole**, characterised by minimal frictions, maximum capacity utilisation, leading to economic resilience. Countries, she observed, prioritise connectivity to leverage collective resources and capabilities

in pursuit of sustainable livelihoods. A mobile labour force, for instance, enables talent pooling, facilitates knowledge diffusion, and accelerates technological transfer.

She outlined three principal pathways through which countries enhance connectivity. The first is **physical connectivity**, achieved through building and integrating infrastructure such as roads, railways, ports, inland waterways, airports, and energy grids. The second is **digital connectivity**, enabled by interoperable communication systems and platforms. Most critically, she emphasised **institutional connectivity**, wherein countries develop frameworks for institutional integration. Such frameworks help overcome structural impediments to physical and digital connectivity. For example, building a multimodal ecosystem would also involve synchronization and harmonization of regulations which would ease vehicular movement.



Dr. Natasha Agarwal speaking at the Shri Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj National Maritime Dialogue hosted by Jawaharlal Nehru University and Mumbai University at Mumbai, India.

Turning specifically to IMEC, Dr. Agarwal noted that India has already begun implementing its commitments to the corridor. This is evident in initiatives such as the **announcement** of the Vadhavan Port in Maharashtra, the **launch** of the India-UAE Virtual Trade Corridor (VTC), and the MAITRI interface, among others. However, she cautioned that while these initiatives strengthen IMEC’s international engagements, the corridor’s **operational elasticity ultimately depends on the robustness of India’s domestic logistics ecosystem**.

To illustrate this point, she invited the audience to adopt a bird's-eye view of IMEC beyond its immediate nodes. A cargo arriving at an Indian port, she explained, must traverse a complex **multimodal domestic chain**, involving roads, railways, and in some cases inland waterways.



From L to R: Dr. Natasha Agarwal (Founder, Global South Convergence Forum) Dr. Aravind Yelery (Associate Professor and co-ordinator CSM-CSSS, SIS, Jawaharlal Nehru University), and Dr. J Jeganaathan (Associate Professor and co-ordinator CSM-CSSS, SIS, Jawaharlal Nehru University).

Dr. Agarwal observed that India's transportation landscape is currently undergoing a **structural transformation**. First, there has been a significant increase in investment aimed at building a modern and comprehensive transportation network spanning roads, railways, ports, inland waterways, and airports. Second, not only is there a transition across transportation modes (for example, from road to railways), but also a growing integration across these transport modes (for example, RoRo services - trucks on trains/ships). This transformation, she argued, fundamentally alters how transportation networks are coordinated, utilised, and leveraged within the Indian economy.

However, in a country where goods are still **predominantly transported by road**, Dr. Agarwal urged the audience to pay closer attention to the road transportation sector and its potential impact on IMEC's operational elasticity. She emphasized that the sector should not be viewed solely through the lens of physical infrastructure, but from the lens of the **end-service providers**, i.e. **road transporters and his entourage of trucks and truckers**.

In this context, she drew on insights from an **interview** conducted by Team GSCF with a veteran micro road transporter with over four decades of experience. While acknowledging that the sector has undergone transitions over time, she noted that **fundamental challenges not only persist but have intensified**. The sector, for instance, continues to remain unorganized and dominated by many small players. Moreover, they continue to face difficulties from the lack of formal recognition as an industry. As a result, transporters face severe constraints in accessing working capital from formal financial institutions, including banks, increasing their dependence on informal credit markets, further constraining their growth.

On infrastructural development, Dr. Agarwal drew on the transporter's four decades of lived experience to highlight that although overall infrastructure in the country has improved, progress has been uneven and local-level disparities are increasingly counterproductive. To illustrate this, she referred to **Bhiwandi**, a location of significant importance as a warehousing hub for a Mumbai audience. Despite its economic relevance to the road transport sector, poor infrastructure in Bhiwandi has exacerbated traffic congestion. She cited evidence shared by the transporter in the form of a video showing a **10-km-long traffic jam that stalled vehicular movement for eight to ten hours**.



Dr. Natasha Agarwal at Mumbai University.

She further noted that a road transporter's challenges do not end with road conditions, as is commonly assumed. The sector faces a chronic

shortage of truck drivers, while vehicle breakdowns now take significantly longer to resolve than in earlier years. These operational challenges are compounded by widespread corruption and routine harassment across the value chain including from dealing with insurance companies in cases of vehicles or goods lost in transit to being compelled to pay “goonda tax” while on the road. Giving voice to a frustrated businessman, Dr. Agarwal quoted, “*Even after so much advancement, nothing is getting abolished.*”

The biggest challenge for road transporters lies, Dr. Agarwal noted, is that of freight accumulation wherein road transporters are unable to accumulate freight sometimes even for a full truck-load, which then directly affects their bottom line.

The difficulties discussed, she emphasised, are **not confined to the road transportation sector alone**. She referred to an interview Team GSCF conducted with a micro Indian importer who explained how shortcomings in domestic port infrastructure and the resulting port congestion have adversely affected his procurement processes, planning, finances, and overall business margins.

Drawing further on her interactions with both multinational and domestic manufactur-

ing firms operating across India, Dr. Agarwal noted that the situation has become so severe that many firms have begun to **factor delays into their production planning**.

Dr. Agarwal warned that such chronic mode-wide operational difficulties could undermine IMEC’s operational elasticity, leading to delayed deliveries, unsustainable freight rates, and high labour and firm turnover.

She concluded by reiterating that IMEC holds immense promise and can significantly advance India’s broader economic internationalisation objectives. However, realising its full potential requires reforms that begin at home. Policymakers must therefore complement investments in hard infrastructure with efforts to address mode-specific constraints, enabling a **faster-to-port and faster-to-industry** approach. Policies, she argued, should create an enabling environment in which land, labour, capital, and enterprise interact seamlessly. In this context, formally recognising the road transportation sector as an industry would constitute a **game-changing reform**.

Ultimately, she emphasised that **domestic transformation is the key to achieving international ambitions**, particularly in building a spatially integrated and resilient network across domestic and international borders.

BRICS+ will benefit from opening way to free movement of workers

Dr. Natasha Agarwal

Member states can better absorb technology with infusions of human capital

The decision last month by the BRICS group to expand its membership by admitting six more countries is based on a vision of advancing the interests of the Global South.

The creation of an 11-member BRICS+ sends a message to the world that change is the new constant and indicates a recognition of the need for inclusive and peaceful economic growth and development resilient in the face of

geopolitical upheaval.

Leaders of this expanding group of countries joined together in Johannesburg to call for greater collaboration and cooperation in areas including the digital economy, green development, financial exchanges and inclusivity, international trade and investment, and people-to-people exchanges.

These countries are finding they have great technological knowledge that they can share with one another to facilitate closer economic integration, including India's successful experience with building digital public infrastructure such as the Unified Payments Interface system used for mobile payments.

In his address to the summit, Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged to set up what he called the China-BRICS Science and Innovation Incubation Park for the New Era and to look at setting up a BRICS platform for sharing satellite data. The leaders also agreed to set up a study group to explore and analyze artificial intelligence.

For BRICS+ nations, technological advancement and innovation are economic imperatives.

Technological transfers can be direct, with know-how shared with little restriction in study groups or corporate joint ventures. Technological advancement has meant that direct technological transfers can also happen through the utilization of open source software tools and the like.

In a globalized economy, technological transfers do not happen only through direct channels. Indirect channels such as technological spillovers can play a crucial role through mechanisms such as the cross-border movement of workers, corporate competition, imitation of foreign technologies and reverse engineering, and the integration of foreign technologies into domestic production.

Researchers have found ample evidence to show that spillovers have been a catalyst in determining countries' technological growth trajectories. The magnitude of technological spillover, though, largely depends on a country's ability to absorb and assimilate available knowledge, which in turn relates to the skills of its workforce, the state of its infrastructure, its institutional framework and its openness to structural reforms.

Countries must invest time, money and effort in structural and institutional reform. In this

way, the development of a country's absorptive capacity and the capabilities of its people to capitalize on technological spillovers can be the impetus for shifting to a new development paradigm.

At the BRICS summit, India and China highlighted reforms they have been pursuing to transform their economies and remain competitive in appealing to global capital and skilled workers.

Investment in education, whether by public authorities or by domestic or foreign private capital, is an obvious channel for improving the population's capacity to absorb new technologies. BRICS+ members should support their nationals in seeking knowledge at one another's institutions of learning through student exchanges and scholarship programs.

At the same time, it is important that governments create environments that will persuade nationals who study abroad that it is worthwhile to return home to pursue their careers while enabling seamless integration back into domestic society and the workforce.

Member states can also augment their human capital by tapping talented workers from other BRICS+ states or beyond, whether in terms of a short-term employment exchange or long-term residency. The free flow of labor across BRICS+ borders can enhance national capacity.

It is laudable that BRICS+ countries envision cooperating in the areas of education and skill development to promote vocational education and explore joint opportunities in digital education. This vision could facilitate the establishment of a pooled human resources foundation across the BRICS+.

To complement this vision, members should look at encouraging the free movement of persons across BRICS+ borders as well as the possibility of a common BRICS+ visa. As that may be too ambitious in the short term, BRICS+ governments could look at interim measures such as visa-free travel, visas on arrival or even just express airport immigration lines for na-

tionals from member states. This would also support intra-bloc health tourism.

Such measures would ensure greater BRICS+ integration and give the group a stronger voice in advocating for free movement on a wider global scale.

The article was originally published in Nikkei Asia on September 19, 2023 and can be accessed at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/BRICS-will-benefit-from-opening-way-to-free-movement-of-workers>.

BRICS+ states are embracing a multipolar world as they pursue an independent path of economic growth and development through an interconnected world. This show of political will can bring economic benefits for the people of BRICS+ nations.

QUADRO and India's Global Strategy: Reflections from Sariska

On November 28–29, 2025, Dr. Natasha Agarwal participated in a **closed-door deliberation** on the evolving global order, convened by the **Chintan Research Foundation (CRF)** and **CUTS International**. The discussions focused on prospects for constructive engagement amongst, what the **conveners conceptualise as, QUADRO - Russia, India, China, and the United States**.



Participants at Sariska, Rajasthan.

In the deliberation, Dr. Agarwal emphasized that in an **aspiring multipolar world characterized by bipolarisation**, nations - both knowingly and unknowingly 1. have to make a choice, and in fact, are already making a choice everyday; and 2. must not only live but - as a matter of fact - are already living with the consequences of those choices.

She argued that we must recognise China's position as a pole in the bipolar equation and,

within this context, its ability to shape, reinforce, and consolidate conversations around international politics, economics and global governance. This is evident in the **initiatives promulgated** by China, including the Global Developmental Initiative (GDI, 2021), Global Security Initiative (GSI, 2022), Global Civilizational Initiative (GCI, 2023), and Global Governance Initiative (GGI, 2024). Beyond this, China is also driving home governance conversations on economic internationalisation. For instance, China has moved the needle on foreign direct investment (FDI) discourse by engaging with questions on **global FDI governance**, articulating its role and strategy within this evolving governance architecture. To put China's role in perspective, conversations in India on FDI remain relatively nascent, thriving on a politically driven agenda of whether India should **relax** Press Note 3 allowing for greater Chinese FDI.

At a time when **geopolitics increasingly shapes nations' economic internationalisation strategies**, India must move beyond rhetoric and perception management. Diplomatic outreach should translate into tangible economic outcomes that generate measurable benefits at the grassroots level.

To this end, she contends that India should **prioritise the development of domestic ca-**

pacities and capabilities. Accordingly, economic policies should be designed to facilitate interactions between domestic and international factors of production - land, labour, capital, and enterprise. For example, adopting a liberal visa regime and establishing direct international flight connections would promote knowledge flows through the mobility of people, benefiting both domestic and multinational firms operating in India. Such an approach would enable India to advance its internationalisation objectives by more effectively leveraging global economic engagement.

Media coverage of the deliberation is presented below.

Experts call for strengthening dialogue through collective leadership of major economies

Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury

Leading experts from India's strategic community and the business world recently held a brainstorming session to discuss the imperative of strengthening multilateral institutions, particularly the G20, through enhanced cooperation amongst the world's major economies.

The roundtable, organised by Chintan Research Foundation (CRF) and the CUTS International, brought together approximately 20 experts from across India to deliberate on the future of global governance amidst growing uncertainties in trade, security and climate action.

Participants emphasised the urgent need to buttress the G20's institutional capacity with several experts advocating for the establishment of a permanent secretariat to enhance the forum's effectiveness and continuity.

The discussions underscored that strengthening multilateral frameworks is essential to prevent the world from falling deeper into what economists term the Kindleberger Trap, where neither established nor emerging powers adequately provide global public goods.

Central to the deliberations was the concept of QUADRO, a proposed framework that

emphasises collective leadership among the United States, China, India, and Russia. Several members pointed to the practicality of China accepting India as a partner in a new exclusive power grouping sans a bilateral understanding between the two of outstanding issues. Most of them argued in favour of building institutional frameworks for cooperation amongst the four major powers. One member proposed that the likelihood would increase if QUADRO was projected as an Indo-Pacific entity, which in the fulness of time and dynamic changes in relative power across the four, might extend to global cooperation.

The roundtable addressed pressing global challenges, including disruptions to the rules-based trading system, mounting security threats, inadequate climate action, and emerging concerns around artificial intelligence, technology governance and energy transitions.

Participants noted that uncertainty, rather than merely tariffs or regulatory barriers, poses the greatest threat to international cooperation and economic stability.

A significant portion of the deliberations focused on the state of multipolarity and whether the current global order is transiting into a different form of power distribution.

Experts debated whether the world is entering an age dominated by plurilateral and minilateral arrangements rather than traditional multilateral institutions.

The discussions also examined the future of UN Security Council reform, particularly the challenges of expanding permanent membership beyond the current P5 structure whilst maintaining the body's effectiveness and legitimacy.

Some experts argued that Veto power will not expand beyond the P5 despite more countries becoming a permanent member (in this case India). Participants considered how BRICS (now BRICS-Plus), could be transformed into a more effective platform for its member states, noting that institutional reforms must balance representation with opera-

tional efficiency.

Several experts drew parallels with the formation of the Bretton Woods system, examining the key factors and circumstances that enabled its creation in the aftermath of World War II.

A consensus emerged that today's institutional reforms must be based on learnings from historical precedents whilst acknowledging that the multipolar nature of contemporary global power requires novel approaches to collective leadership.

Unlike the post-war era when American hegemony was readily accepted, the current transition demands genuine power sharing and mutual accommodation amongst major economies.

Discussion also turned to recent developments in global diplomacy. Many agreed that many similar actions by the US in recent years undermine the inclusive spirit necessary for effective multilateral cooperation.

The session held in Sariska mark the beginning of a broader initiative to develop a forward-looking agenda for collective global leadership. Participants will continue to explore the conditions under which major economies can work together to provide stability, security and prosperity whilst respecting principles of mutual responsibility, resilience and commitment to

multilateralism.

Prominent participants included Montek Singh Ahluwalia, former Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of India, Kanwal Sibal, former Foreign Secretary of India, former Ambassadors Ashok Sajjanhar and Sanjay Bhattacharya alongside distinguished academics and policy experts such as Amitendu Palit from the National University of Singapore; Sanjeev Ahluwalia, Distinguished Fellow of Chintan Research Foundation; Bipul Chatterjee and Indranil Banerjee of CUTS; Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli, Prof. Manish Dabhade and Prof. Arvind Yelery from Jawaharlal Nehru University; Prof. Chintamani Mahapatra, founder Kalinga Institute; Priyam Gandhi-Mody of Vishwamitra Research Foundation; Nandita Baruah, Asia Foundation and Sriparna Pathak from O. P. Jindal Global University among others.

The deliberations were adroitly moderated by Pradeep S. Mehta, Secretary General of CUTS International. He was assisted by Purushendra Singh and Dhruv Bansal of CUTS and Dr. Bhavna Singh of CRF.

The organisers emphasised that without such cooperation, the world risks falling into a low-level economic trap characterised by reduced consumption, hampered production, and widespread socioeconomic strife.

The media article was originally published on December 10, 2025, in The Economic Times and can be accessed at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/experts-call-for-strengthening-dialogue-through-collective-leadership-of-major-economies/articleshow/125889691.cms?from=mdr>

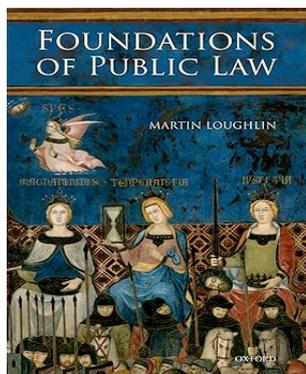
Media Quotes

South China Morning Post (SCMP) in their article [India proposes reopening government bidding to Chinese firms as ties thaw](#) published on January 14, 2026 quotes **Dr. Natasha Agarwal**:

“China has clearly established its role in global politics. Concerning India, Beijing will operate from a space where it deeply understands Delhi’s equation with the US, and thus its potential impact on China” she said, adding that “China is going to give what it wants to give and at the cost price, financial and non-financial, it wants to give. India has done little and

continues to do little when it comes to easing concerns from China. Businesses cannot operate in such an uncertain environment.”.

Recommended Reads



Book Title: The idea of Public Law.

Author: Martin Loughlin

Reviewer: Rajas A. Vaishampayan.

Review: Martin Loughlin’s *The Idea of Public Law* stands as a monumental intervention in contemporary national state governance and civil society scholarship, a work of profound intellectual ambition that seeks nothing less than to rescue the discipline of public law from the stifling confines of positivist formalism and liberal normativism. In an era where constitutional theory has increasingly retreated into the sterile domain of abstract rights discourse—viewing the state primarily as a potential transgressor to be restrained—Loughlin offers a potent corrective, recovering the ancient and vital tradition of *droit politique*. This treatise acts as an intellectual excavation, unearthing the foundations of governance that have been obscured by the modern obsession with treating public law merely as a specialized branch of private law or a mechanism for judicial review.

Loughlin challenges the prevailing reductionist view that equates the “rule of law” solely with the limitation of power. Instead, he rigorously articulates public law as an autonomous “scheme of intelligibility”, a distinct mode of political jurisprudence that possesses its own

grammar, logic, and historical necessity. By severing the study of public law from the “pure theory of law” - which attempts to sanitize legal study by stripping away its political and sociological dimensions - Loughlin restores the discipline to its proper place as the essential mediator between the reality of political power and the normative requirements of justice.

The central theoretical engine of the work is the critical distinction Loughlin draws between *potentia* and *potestas*, a conceptual separation that is indispensable for any sophisticated understanding of the modern state. *Potentia* refers to the raw, physical capacity to coerce - the power of the sword, the sheer “might” of the political entity. *Potestas*, conversely, is legal authority; it is power that has been recognized, formalized, and legitimized through rightful process. Loughlin argues that the unique genius of public law lies not in the denial of *potentia*, but in its capacity to alchemize this volatile force into the stable gold of *potestas*. This transmutation is the primary function of the constitution. Thus, the constitution is not merely a “check” on the government, as liberal theory often posits; it is the very instrument that generates the power to govern.

This insight fundamentally reorients our understanding of the state. It suggests that public law is a constructive enterprise, a system of rules and practices that enables the state to act effectively in the collective interest. By positioning the state not as a necessary evil but as the institutional embodiment of the public realm, Loughlin validates the active, powerful state as a prerequisite for, rather than an antagonist to, political liberty.

This validation of the active state is where *The Idea of Public Law* becomes urgently relevant to the discussions of constitutional democ-

racies in the Global South. In the post-colonial contexts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the state is frequently tasked with gigantic projects of social transformation, economic development, and nation-building that far exceed the “night-watchman” role envisioned by classical Western liberalism. Constitutional scholars in these regions have long struggled to reconcile the reality of their powerful, interventionist states with a legal theory that views such power with inherent suspicion.

Loughlin’s framework resolves this tension by demonstrating that the accumulation and exercise of public power is a legitimate, indeed necessary, object of public law. When a state in the Global South nationalizes or privatizes an industry, redraws internal borders to manage ethnic diversity, or implements affirmative action to correct historical injustices, it is not merely “interfering” with private rights; it is exercising potestas to maintain the “public good” and ensure the survival of the political community. Loughlin’s concept of *droit politique* allows scholars to defend these “developmental states” not as authoritarian aberrations, but as authentic expressions of the political right necessary to secure the welfare of the people. It provides a theoretical vocabulary to articulate that in fragile or developing polities, the *generation* of capacity is as constitutionally vital as the *limitation* of authority.

Furthermore, Loughlin’s sophisticated exploration of “prudence” (*prudentia*) as the supreme virtue of governance offers a novel paradigm for understanding the messy, often turbulent political realities of the Global South. He argues that the political domain is characterized by conflict, contingency, and the inescapable need for decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. Consequently, public law cannot be reduced to a rigid, gapless system of positive rules or a “scientific” application of algorithms. There will always be a “surplus” of the political that positive law cannot fully capture. This acknowledgment is particularly liberating for legal theorists in the Global South, where the gap between the pristine text of the

constitution and the gritty reality of governance is often vast.

Conventional legal critiques tend to view this gap as a failure of the rule of law or a sign of institutional decay. Loughlin, however, invites us to view it through the lens of *prudence* - the art of managing the tension between the ideal and the real. He validates the idea that “reason of state” (the preservation of the state’s existence) is not an extra-legal monstrosity, but a fundamental aspect of the “business of government” that public law must account for. By integrating the “exception” and the necessity of preserving the realm into the very definition of public law, Loughlin provides a robust defense against the naive legalism that often paralyzes decision-making in crisis-prone regions.

The relevance of this work extends to the very ontology of the “public” in societies characterized by deep pluralism and communal division. Loughlin posits that public law is the practice that constitutes the “public sphere” as a distinct autonomous realm, separate from the private interests of individuals or specific communities. In many Global South nations, where primary loyalties often lie with the tribe, the caste, or the religious sect rather than the abstract state, the creation of this “public” is the primary existential challenge of constitutionalism.

Loughlin’s work suggests that the state must possess the “absolute authority” to transcend these particularistic fractures and impose a unified “scheme of intelligibility”. This does not imply totalitarianism, but rather the necessary supremacy of the public sphere over private allegiances. For the Global South, this reframes the narrative of state-building: the centralization of power and the assertion of sovereignty are not necessarily acts of domination, but are the essential juridical acts required to create a “people” out of a fragmented population. It offers a way to understand the fiercely “political” nature of courts and constitutions in the Global South not as a corruption of legal purity, but as the active negotiation of the social contract in real time.

The Idea of Public Law is an indispensable text because it treats the constitution not as a static contract or a suicide pact, but as a living architecture of power. By rejecting the “pure theory” which exiles the political from the legal, Loughlin empowers scholars to engage with the world as it actually is. For the Global South, this is an act of intellectual decolonization. It grants permission to move beyond the mimicry of Western liberal forms and to embrace a functionalist understanding of law - one where the legitimacy of the state is derived not just from

its adherence to procedural niceties, but from its effectiveness in maintaining the peace, securing the commonwealth, and navigating the treacherous currents of history.

Loughlin restores the dignity of the political, reminding us that before a state can be limited, it must first be constituted, and before law can rule, it must first be established. In doing so, he provides the blueprint for a new, robust constitutionalism that is capable of addressing the unique and urgent challenges of the twenty-first century.

Rajas A. Vaishampayan teaches Philosophy, especially the thought of Sri Aurobindo at various Indian institutions including Nalanda University, and Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (online mode). His work on Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Philosophy of History has recently been published by Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. He is also an independent researcher working on varied projects in the field of cultural studies. Rajas can be contacted at rajasvishwakosh@gmail.com



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