The highway is India's new high street

Somewhere on the Delhi-Chandigarh Expressway, a few kilometres from where I grew up in Haryana, sits a building that quietly rewrote the rules of Indian retail. In 2020, Tata Starbucks opened its first drive-thru café in the country — choosing neither a South Mumbai mall nor a Gurugram office park, but a highway. The tagline said it all: "Why wait for your brew when you can drive-thru?"



That store was an economic signal. The Indian highway — long a landscape of dust and travellers praying for a clean restroom before the next hundred kilometres — is becoming the most valuable commercial real estate in the country. Fuel plazas, EV grids, food courts and coffee outlets are now engineered around a single variable: passenger dwell time.

The road beneath the boom

India's national highway network has grown from roughly 91,000 km in 2014 to over 1.46 lakh km today, while construction has nearly tripled to 34 km a day. Highways are barely 2 per cent of our road length, yet carry over 40 per cent of traffic, move 85 per cent of passengers and support an estimated 3.6 per cent of GDP. The real game-changer is access-controlled expressways: from a meagre 93 km a decade ago to over 3,000 km of world-class asphalt today. These aren't just roads to speed past; they are becoming linear marketplaces. Every 50 kilometres, you hit a bustling oasis of travellers enjoying food, charging their cars and shopping at retail outlets — a thesis you can watch play out on the ?1 lakh crore Delhi–Mumbai Expressway, the Samruddhi Mahamarg and the Purvanchal corridor.

Amenities as retail hubs

The National Highways Authority has codified this through its Wayside Amenities framework: over 600 prime sites across 22 states, each bundling fuel, EV charging, food courts, clinics, clean restrooms and "Village Haats" for local artisans — the aim, as Union Minister Nitin Gadkari puts it, being world-class amenities every 50 kilometres. Yet the reality reveals an execution gap: of more than 700 planned sites and 510 awarded, only about 110 are operational — precisely where oil companies and organised hospitality groups are finding a lucrative arbitrage.

When the fuel pump became a food court

Oil marketing companies no longer merely sell low-margin fuel by the litre. A 20-minute EV charge is only the hook; the margin lies in the coffee and burger bought while waiting. HPCL has partnered with Burger King, BPCL has rolled out its Be Cafe chain across more than 21,000 stations, and Jio-bp is building "mobility stations" as retail plazas. India's QSR sector, worth around $27–28 billion, is set to touch $45 billion by 2031 — with highway demand growing fastest, at more than 11 per cent a year.

From unorganised to organised

For decades, the highway stop meant unbranded, transactional players. A tier of legacy operators — Mannat Group among them — crossed into institutional destinations on a single, unglamorous variable: uncompromising hygiene. A family in a premium car will bypass ten unorganised options over one doubt about a restroom. By institutionalising airport-grade washrooms, open-kitchen protocols and standardised filtration, organised players turned sanitation into a defensive moat, converting one-time drivers into loyal, repeat customers.

The asset-light lease revolution

You cannot match the pace of India's highway grid through capital-intensive land buying. The answer is the asset-light lease: the landowner funds the land and shell, while the operator brings systems, brand and footfall — bound by 15-30-year leases on a minimum-guarantee-plus-revenue-share model. Even the state runs on the same logic: NHAI has raised over Rs 1.5 lakh crore by monetising highways through Toll-Operate-Transfer and InvIT structures.

The mirror of a rising India

These roads tell a bigger story than infrastructure. Domestic tourism now drives 88 per cent of Indian travel spending; weekend road trips are rising by 20-25 per cent a year; and total tourism spend may approach Rs 34 trillion by 2034. Today's traveller no longer stops merely to refuel — they want the reliability of international retail alongside something distinctly local.

The market opportunity is no longer the constraint — execution is. Demand, infrastructure and policy are all in place; what is missing is the speed of conversion. Yet the direction is irreversible: the dhaba is becoming a premium lifestyle destination, and petrol pumps are becoming commercial hubs.

When bridges fall: Italy delivers justice, India delivers compensation

A recent judgement in Italy that took eight years and 280 hearings to reach a conclusion put a clutch of responsible people in jail, with sentences ranging from 12 years to five. It was for a bridge collapse that saw 480 people plunging to their deaths in their cars. But yes, all the culpable officials, including the head of the bridge authority, were punished in the end. This has never happened in India.



In India, bridges collapse time and again in Goa and Bihar and sometimes even in Gujarat. Nothing happens to those responsible except for a scapegoat or two, who are also let off when no one is looking. Tunnels bury people alive even after rescue efforts save a number. Cable cars hoist passengers hundreds of feet up in the air, and if the cars don't fall down, then commandos have to rescue the passengers. Lifts in buildings crash through many floors. Trains collide due to signalling faults, and hundreds die. Buses with drunken drivers fall into gorges. Dangerous roads. Dangerous drivers. No lights. Wrong-side movements. Animals. Tractors. Little children.

Deaths, injuries and accidents caused by misadventure are routine in India. From bungee jumps and paragliding deaths to inadvertent poisonings, deliberate murders and crimes of passion. We die in many ways every day amongst our almost 1.5 billion people. Many occur in cars and on motorcycles, killing people in or on them, but also other innocents — children, bystanders, sleeping people. Liquor is often a companion to these tragedies, and if they involve young people, there is often a sense of invincibility that is suddenly cut off.

In addition, it is almost always accompanied by civic apathy, callousness, sub-standard workmanship, open drains without barriers, huge pits dug and left unattended with no signage, unmarked diversions which are nevertheless precarious, balconies and entire buildings that collapse with people in them and on people passing by. Fires, floods, in hotels, guest houses, coaching centres, with just one inaccessible entrance-cum-exit, fixed windows, all overbuilt illegally and with impunity. Whole high-rise buildings that have to be brought down for faulty construction and illegal floors.

Corruption is rife and goes unpunished because of official collusion. The PWD, the NHAI, amongst many other contractors and agencies, build roads that develop craters, bridges and flyovers that collapse, more often than not killing people. It is an out-of-control phenomenon without end, perhaps linked to our belief in karma rather than any attempt to fix responsibility and improve accountability.

And then there is the curse of reservation that produces sub-standard administrators, engineers and doctors. A moribund and overburdened judiciary that takes decades to deliver a verdict. One that is not accountable owing to its closed-loop collegium system.

Wilful negligence results from all this, as culpability does not usually lead to retribution or justice. One tragedy overlaps another and all is forgotten without need of forgiveness. Politicians usually throw some compensation money at the victim families and express routine regret before moving on. Life itself is cheap in India and the best thing anyone can do is look out for oneself.

Where do you begin if you want to improve matters? At least in Western countries, where the population is small, accountability stands a chance. Here, we are masters at passing the buck. Fixing responsibility is well-nigh impossible when every action, or the lack of it, is diffused over an entire department.

Besides, you cannot sack a government official. You can suspend or transfer him or her. You cannot stop the salary or perquisites, the housing or facilities during suspension. Only if a government official is convicted can he or she be dismissed, and punitive measures like a stoppage of pension can be made. The sacked official can appeal in a court of law and, if successful, must be reinstated with full pay, perquisites and any loss of service restored.

These laws were set up by the British to suit themselves. Independent India has carefully preserved them undiluted. It is tantamount to immunity of a kind peculiar to Indian bureaucracy, and the politicians in Parliament or the state assemblies cannot be brought to book except by their peers. Likewise, the judiciary.

The private sector can be prosecuted and often is as a point of deflection, unless the bribery has been prophylactic.

In short, if something is done properly in India, that is well and good, because if it is not, there is little or no recourse. There are fast-track courts just as overburdened as the regular ones. There are draconian laws that cannot be enforced until the judiciary is satisfied on the particulars of the case in question. We live in a Kafkaesque impasse.

Beyond Jantar Mantar: When protest becomes performance

Every generation believes it has inherited a broken world. Every generation has wanted to change it — sometimes through protest, sometimes through rebellion. Rage, in that sense, is a constant in human history.

Anger, therefore, is not the problem. Nor is protest. Democracies can — and should — expect both. What democracies cannot survive, however, is the normalisation of chaos, violence and vulgarity as legitimate forms of socio-political expression.



Watch the videos from this week's protests in Delhi. At their core lay a legitimate demand for education reforms. Yet, equally striking was the normalisation of abuse in language and violence in conduct. While much of the violence and vandalism may have been the handiwork of criminal elements that infiltrated the crowd, that alone does not explain what unfolded. Equally disturbing was the coarsening of public discourse. The profanity with which some participants expressed themselves was not merely an emotional outburst; it reflected a deeper shift in the norms of public expression.

The country today is witnessing a socio-cultural rupture unlike anything it has seen before. The divide is not merely political, religious or ideological. It is also between those who grew up in society and those who grew up on social media. Previous generations were socialised before they were digitised. Gen Z was digitised before it was fully socialised. They were born into a world of smartphones. That single difference explains far more than we realise.

In the past, parents corrected us, teachers disciplined us, and neighbours watched over us. Society constantly reminded us where the inviolable Lakshman Rekha lay. We instinctively knew that the language used with friends could never be used with elders. We understood that public spaces demanded a different standard of conduct from private conversations. We knew what was socially acceptable and what was not. We learnt restraint not from textbooks but from everyday life. Today's teenagers grow up differently. Their first community is not the neighbourhood but the algorithm. Their first audience is not the family but their followers. Their first validation often comes not from real-life achievement but from online engagement. They discover the wider world before they know their own neighbourhood. They can passionately debate conflicts thousands of kilometres away but may never have attended a residents' meeting. They care deeply about climate change but may never join a community clean-up. They belong everywhere online, yet often nowhere offline.

Gen Z is rooted in the reel and increasingly uprooted from the real. In Gen Z: Truth vs. Fiction, author Chet Matterson argues that the omnipresence of social media creates emotional instability among young people. As he writes, "A person may feel admired one day, ignored the next, and criticised publicly afterward. The emotional pressure of permanent visibility can become exhausting, especially during adolescence when identity is still forming."

The result is a generation conditioned to value performance over substance, reaction over reflection, comparison over contentment, and visibility over wisdom. Born with smartphones, these young people entered social media before they acquired emotional maturity. They experienced public visibility before they developed the capacity for private reflection. Previous generations certainly struggled with pressure, insecurity and loneliness, but they did so within families, neighbourhoods and communities. For many in Gen Z, those filters have become far weaker, if not totally non-existent. This is why they feel a sense of bravado in using expletives which they would have avoided using in the public in the past. In the past they would have been cornered for such words; today, they are applauded.

The omnipresence of the digital world has killed the sense of silence and stillness in the life of Gen Z. They live amid a constant stream of activity, noise and judgement. They are continuously watched, rated and compared. Algorithms reward performance, not wisdom; outrage, not reflection; speed, not understanding. The loudest voice travels furthest. The angriest clip receives the greatest reach. The most offensive post often generates the highest engagement. Moderation disappears because moderation is bad for business. Eventually, the performance never ends — not even when the camera is switched off. That is precisely what we witnessed at Jantar Mantar. Many participants appeared unable to distinguish between the real and the reel. The language and behaviour of online performance became the language and behaviour of protest. The logic of virality displaced the norms of civilised behaviour and citizenship.

Equally worrying is how easily digitally native generations can be influenced and manipulated by vested interests operating from thousands of kilometres away, without ever meeting them in person — and the Delhi protests do indeed showcase the imprints of similar such protests abroad. These shadowy figures just need to identify the prevailing mood, recruit the right influencers, and package an issue as fashionable or morally urgent. Once those ingredients are in place, a movement can be built without deploying a single weapon.

While the dubious foreign hands and the money trail can be handled by the government, what about algorithmic systems?

The instinctive answer is censorship. Ban this platform. Arrest that influencer. Shut down this content. Such responses may satisfy immediate impulses, but they rarely address the deeper problem. The more durable response lies in redefining the place of the digital world in the lives of young people. The solution must be governmental, societal and civilisational. All three must work together rather than in silos. We need a broad consensus that children need physical parks more than digital platforms, conversations more than comment sections, libraries more than livestreams, and festivals more than feeds.

The digital world is not going away. But it must stop becoming the only world.

Even within the digital world, one must discover and elevate newer, soberer, civilised heroes. Every society eventually produces the heroes it rewards. If vulgarity earns applause, vulgarity will multiply. If abuse becomes authenticity, abuse will become culture. And if every disagreement is performed as entertainment, politics itself will eventually become entertainment.

We need creators (heroes) whose influence rests on genuine achievement rather than manufactured outrage — people who make intelligence aspirational, curiosity fashionable, and civility admirable.

Jantar Mantar's message is clear. Bharat, like much of the world, has a reel problem that is becoming dangerously real. It demands urgency. It demands wisdom. Above all, it demands empathy. Because this is not merely about politics. It is about our children, their future and, ultimately, the future of the country.

TRUHOME FINANCE LIMITED (Formerly Shriram Housing Finance Ltd.)

Truhome FINANCE

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APPENDIX-IV-A [SEE PROVISION TO RULE 8(6)] SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with provision to Rule 8(6)] of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower/s and Guarantor/s that the below described immovable properties mortgaged/ charged to Truhome Finance Limited (formerly Shriram Housing Finance Limited), the Physical Possession of which have been taken by the Authorized Officer of Truhome Finance Limited, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" basis for recovery of the balance due to Truhome Finance Limited from the Borrowers And Guarantors, as mentioned in the table. Details of Borrowers and Guarantors, amount due, Short Description of the immovable property, reserve price and earnest money deposit and date of Inspection are also given as:

Name of Borrowers/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/Mortgagers	Amount of Recovery and date of Demand Notice	Reserve Price (Rs.) & Bid Increment	Date & Time of Auction	Contact Person Details – (AO and Disposal team)
1. G B THREAD AND JARI **A Partnership Firm, Through its Partners** **(A) KAMLABEN HARIBHAI SUKHADIYA** **(B) VARSHABEN PARESHBHAI SUKHADIYA And** **2. KAMLABEN HARIBHAI SUKHADIYA And** **3. VARSHABEN PARESHBHAI SUKHADIYA And** **4. PARESHBHAI HARIBHAI SUKHADIYA** **All Residing At:-Shop No. 16, Ground Floor, Anuradha Complex, Opp. Gani Bhai Compound, A.K.Road, Surat-395008.** **Also At:-Shop No. 6, Vrundavan Point, Mahalaxmi Industrial Estate-2, Paiki Plot No. 16, U.M. Road, Udhana, Surat-394510.** **Also At:-Shop No. 26, Ground Floor, Biz Hub, Nr. 99 Shopping, Amroli-Sayan Road, Amroli, Surat-394107** **Also At:-B-901, Rameshwaram Palace, Nr. Podar Arcade, Canal Road, Bharthana, Vesu, Surat-395007** **LAN:- SLPHSRAT0002306 & TLPHSRAT0003178** **Date of Possession & Type** **19/07/2026 and Physical Possession** **Encumbranches known** Not Known	Demand Notice Date: 10/02/2026 Rs. 46,37,412/- (Rupees Forty Six Lakh Thirty Seven Thousand Four Hundred Twelve only) as on 07/02/2026 under reference of loan account no. SLPHSRAT0002306 & Rs. 5,62,717/- (Rupees Five Lakh Sixty Two Thousand Seven Hundred Seventeen only) as on 07/02/2026 under reference of loan account no. TLPHSRAT0003178 with further interest at the contractual rate, within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice	Rs. 68,90,600/- (Rupees Sixty Eight Lakh Ninety Thousand Six Hundred Only) **Bid Increment:** Rs.. 10,000/- and in such multiples. **Earnest Money Deposit (EMD)(Rs.)** Rs. 6,89,060/- (Rupees Six Lakh Eighty Nine Thousand Sixty Only) **Last date for submission of EMD : 30/08/2026, Time 10.00 a.m. to 05.00 p.m**	**31-AUG-2026 & Auction Time: 11.00 a.m. to 01.00 p.m.**	**Debjyoti Roy - 98747 02021** **Sandip Mahajan - 99989 44955** **Property inspection Date. 07/08/2026, Time.11 AM to 1 PM**

Description of Property

Non-agricultural plot of land in Moje: Chhaprabhatha, Surat lying being land bearing R. S. No. 65/3, Block no. 79/2, area admeasuring 2730.10 Sq. Mtrs., T.P. Scheme no. 70, F.P. no. 35 paiki Sub-Plot No. 2 area admeasuring 2686.43 Sq. Mtrs., for Commercial Purpose, Known as "BEEZ HUB" Paikki Ground Floor, Shop no. 26, Super Built up area admeasuring 876.22 Sq. Fts., i.e. 81.43 Sq. Mtrs., Built up area admeasuring 525.73 Sq. Fts., i.e. 48.86 Sq. Mtrs., Carpet area admeasuring 438.11 Sq. Fts., i.e. 40.71 Sq. Mtrs., at Sub-District Choryasi & District Surat within the State of Gujarat. Boundary as per Document:-East: By Shop no. 25, West: By Shop no. 27,North: By Beez Hub Ground Floor Common Passage, South: By Margin Space

Name of Borrowers/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/Mortgagers	Amount of Recovery and date of Demand Notice	Reserve Price (Rs.) & Bid Increment	Date & Time of Auction	Contact Person Details – (AO and Disposal team)
1. GANESH AJABRAO BHENDEKAR And **2. SONALI PURSHOTTAM GHUGE W/O GANESH BHENDEKAR** **All Residing At:-304, Durga Palace, Opp. Gokuldham Lake City, At. Sanki Gam, Ta.Palsana, Di.Surat-394305** **Also At:-@Shree Sahajanand Industries Pvt Ltd. 5 to 9, Gujarat Eco textile Park, N.H. No.8, Nr. Palsana Crossing, Nr. Kala Ghoda, Palsana, Surat-394315** **Also At:-Plot No.85, Shakti Villa, Opp. Gokuldham Lake City, At. Sanki Gam, Ta.Palsana, Di.Surat-394305** **LAN:- SHLHSRAT0001566** **Date of Possession & Type** **19/07/2026 and Physical Possession** **Encumbranches known** Not Known	Demand Notice Date: 17/03/2026 Rs. 13,97,232/- (Rupees Thirteen Lakh Ninety Seven Thousand Two Hundred Thirty Two only) as on 07/03/2026 under reference of loan account no. SHLHSRAT0001566 with further interest at the contractual rate, within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice	Rs. 14,88,400/- (Rupees Fourteen Lakh Eighty Eight Thousand Four Hundred Only) **Bid Increment:** Rs.. 10,000/- and in such multiples. **Earnest Money Deposit (EMD)(Rs.)** Rs. 1,48,840/- (Rupees One Lakh Forty Eight Thousand Eight Hundred Forty Only) **Last date for submission of EMD : 30/08/2026, Time 10.00 a.m. to 05.00 p.m**	**31-AUG-2026 & Auction Time: 11.00 a.m. to 01.00 p.m.**	**Debjyoti Roy - 98747 02021** **Sandip Mahajan - 99989 44955** **Property inspection Date. 07/08/2026, Time.11 AM to 1 PM**

Description of Property

All that piece and parcel of the immovable property bearing Plot No.85, adm.65.01 sq.mtrs., togetherwith undivided proportionate share in road & COP in "Shakti Villa", Situated on the land bearing Block No.100/C, Khata No.2182 adm. 10578 sq.mtrs. of Village: Sanki, Taluka Palsana, Dist. Surat. Boundaries (As per Document & As per Site)
East: Adj. Plot, West: Entry & Road, North: Plot No.86, South: Plot No.84.

1) For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer the website of Truhome Finance Limited (Formerly Shriram Housing Finance Limited) website.
2) The intending bidders have to submit their EMD amount to be deposited by way of RTGS/NEFT to the account details mentioned herein below: BANK NAME: AXIS BANK LIMITED BRANCH: BANDRA KURLA COMPLEX, MUMBAI BANK ACCOUNT NO. Current Account No. 911020045677633 IFSC CODE: UTIB0000230.
3) The mortgagors/borrowers are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest before auction, failing which secured assets will be sold as per above schedule.
4) The mortgagors/borrowers are requested to collect your all remaining movable items within period of 7 days without damages of the property. If you fail to take movable assets, then it would be deemed that you have no claim and no interest in taking back such items. In case you still prefer to ignore this notice, we shall be constrained to treat them as unclaimed and waste materials and shall not be liable for any loss or damage whatsoever to such articles and also may sell all movable Items and adjust the amount against outstanding dues of your loan account. It will be also deemed that you have no claim and interest in taking back such items and also have no objection, if such items are disposed-off or sold by us as items are having negligible substantial value. Also note that by not taking the items within specified time, you will also relinquish any right or claim over such items in future.

Place : Surat
Date: 28/07/2026

Sd/- Authorised Officer- Truhome Finance Limited
(Formerly Shriram Housing Finance Limited)