



**Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute  
India Studies Program**

**Course: Contemporary India  
The World's Largest Democracy: From Panchayat to Parliament  
India in a Changing World**

**Faculty:** Dr. Ashish Kulkarni

**Delivery:** Online · 30 sessions × 90 minutes

**Language:** English

**Subject Cross-listings:** Political Science, International Studies, Public Policy, Economics

**Introduction:**

India's democracy is evolving within a world where liberal norms are under pressure, supply chains are fragmenting, and technology is rewiring politics. This 2025 update widens the lens: we examine India's constitutional foundations, federal dynamics, caste and representation (including the 2025 decision to enumerate caste in the national census), the political economy of industrial policy (PLI, semiconductors, trade), the implications of new U.S. tariff policies ("Trump tariffs"), and shifting geopolitics (BRICS expansion, the Indo-Pacific, a weakening arms-control order). We conclude with India and AI: compute, regulation, and realistic 2-, 3-, and 5-year horizons.

**How we'll work:** Each class has 3 parts — (1) briefing by faculty, (2) structured discussion, (3) take-home reflection. For every session you'll find **pre-reads**, **follow-ups**, and **discussion prompts**.

## Learning Objectives

- Identify and describe India's political structures and their evolution.
- Compare democratic experiences across caste, gender, religion, rural/urban.
- Analyze global democratic trends and India's position using leading datasets.
- Explain why India is conducting a caste-enumeration in the next census and the stakes for policy design.
- Evaluate industrial policy choices (PLI, trade, tariffs) and their distributional effects.
- Assess AI's near-term opportunities/risks for India and outline pragmatic horizons (2/3/5 years).



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**Session Outline**

**Structure per session:** Focus questions · Pre-reads (short, accessible) ·  
Follow-ups (deeper dives) · Discussion prompts

**Module A — Foundations (5)**

**1) India at Independence: The Starting Line**

**Focus:** Transfer of power, partition, administrative legacies. **Pre-reads:**

- Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi*, Ch.1.
- Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (Intro).

**Follow-ups:** Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India* (selections).

**Prompts:** What constraints did 1947 institutions impose? Which choices were necessity vs design? Could alternative federal designs have worked?

**2) The Constituent Assembly in Action**

**Focus:** Representation in the Assembly; key debates (federalism, rights, reservations).

**Pre-reads:**

- Selections from Constituent Assembly Debates (Preamble, Fundamental Rights).
- Madhav Khosla, *India's Founding Moment* (Ch.2). **Follow-ups:** Upendra Baxi, "Outline of a Theory of Constitutionalism." **Prompts:** How did the framers trade off unity vs diversity? What would they recognize in today's order — and what would surprise them?

**3) From Nehru to Indira: State-building & Centralization**

**Focus:** Planning, party dominance, Emergency precursors. **Pre-reads:**

- Katherine Frank, *Indira: The Life*.
- Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi*, Ch.13. **Follow-ups:** Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution* (selections). **Prompts:** Was centralization inevitable? With hindsight, what checks were missing?



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**4) The Emergency and its Aftermath**

**Focus:** 1975–77, rights suspension, institutions' resilience. **Pre-reads:**

- Guha, *India After Gandhi*, Ch.22.
- Austin, *Working a Democratic Constitution* (Emergency chapter). **Follow-ups:** Reports of the Shah Commission (excerpts). **Prompts:** What institutional guardrails failed? Which reforms endured?

**5) Federalism, Panchayati Raj & Devolution**

**Focus:** Strong Centre vs strong States; 73rd/74th Amendments; gender quotas. **Pre-reads:**

- Ashutosh Varshney, "How has Indian Federalism done?"
- M.R. Sharan, *Last Among Equals* (Ch.3). **Follow-ups:** Niraja Gopal Jayal (ed.), *Democracy in India* (federalism chapter). **Prompts:** Has devolution improved service delivery? Where does fiscal federalism bite?

**Module B — Democratic Practice Today (7)**

**6) Measuring Democracy: What the Datasets Say, and Don't Say (2025)**

**Focus:** V-Dem, Freedom House, EIU; interpreting methods, India's trajectory. **Pre-reads:**

- V-Dem, *Democracy Report 2025* (exec. summary).
- Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2025* (global overview + India). **Follow-ups:** Michael Coppedge et al., "V-Dem Methodology" (short note). **Prompts:** Where do measures agree/disagree? What signals vs noise for India?

**7) Parties, Coalitions & Centralization (1989–2025)**

**Focus:** From coalition era to centralized leadership; party system change. **Pre-reads:**

- Vinay Sitapati, *Jugalbandi* (Ch.13).
- Pradeep Chhibber & Rahul Verma, *Ideology and Identity* (selections). **Follow-ups:** Kanchan Chandra, "Why Ethnic Parties Succeed" (selections). **Prompts:** Centralization vs coordination: efficiency or erosion of checks?



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8) Media, Platforms & the Public Sphere

**Focus:** TV, digital media, elections; content moderation, misinformation. **Pre-reads:**

- EPW: “Twitter and the Rebranding of Narendra Modi” (2016).
- Selections from *Whole Numbers and Half Truths* (Rukmini S). **Follow-ups:** ORF Digital Platforms reports (latest). **Prompts:** Who sets the agenda in India’s hybrid media ecosystem?

9) Courts, Election Commission & Independent Institutions

**Focus:** Autonomy, appointments, credibility of the ECI and higher judiciary. **Pre-reads:**

- [Suhrit Parthasarathy, essays on judicial review](#) (curated).
- PRS briefs on recent electoral and judicial reforms (curated). **Follow-ups:** Alok Prasanna Kumar, pieces on ECI and rule-making. **Prompts:** What reforms guard independence without gridlock?

10) Welfare State: Entitlements vs Enablement

**Focus:** RTE, RTI, MGNREGA, PDS, health; JAM & DBT politics. **Pre-reads:**

- Jean Drèze & Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory* (welfare chapters).
- SECC/DBT overview (PRS). **Follow-ups:** Himanshu (EPW) on poverty & welfare trends (curated). **Prompts:** Are we moving from rights to targeted transfers? With what trade-offs?

11) Urban India: Governance, Land & Infrastructure Politics

**Focus:** State–ULB relations; finance, migration, land acquisition politics. **Pre-reads:**

- Partha Mukhopadhyay, “Urban governance” (IDF/CPR notes).
- Aakash Mehrotra, *The Cities We Need* (selections). **Follow-ups:** Case note: Pune municipal governance (brief). **Prompts:** Why does urban India underperform despite rising revenues?



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12) Security & the State

**Focus:** Internal security, policing, federal roles; civil liberties. **Pre-reads:**

- Students to choose material they find relevant, curation as an in-class activity (curated).
- **Follow-ups:** NCRB trends brief. **Prompts:** What are the democratic costs of a security-first state?

Module C — Society, Identity & the 2025 Caste Census (4)

13) Caste & Democracy: The Long Arc

**Focus:** Caste as social order and political instrument; OBC politics. **Pre-reads:**

- Gail Omvedt, “Caste, Agrarian Relations and Conflicts.”
- Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution* (intro). **Follow-ups:** Ghanshyam Shah (ed.), *Caste and Democratic Politics in India* (selections). **Prompts:** When does caste mobilization deepen vs dilute democracy?

14) Why a Caste Census Now?

**Focus:** Political economy of enumeration; from Bihar survey to national census. **Pre-reads:**

- Reuters explainer on April 30, 2025 cabinet decision (short).
- PIB/PRS notes summarizing scope and rationale (curated). **Follow-ups:** Discussion on methods and pitfalls (curated). **Prompts:** Data for recognition vs redistribution ; what gets measured gets managed — but also politicized.

15) Designing Policy With Caste Data

**Focus:** Quotas, creamy layer, EWS; sectoral ceilings; targeting and leakages. **Pre-reads:**

- PRS brief on reservations & EWS (overview).
- **Follow-ups:** Academic debates on efficiency-equity trade-offs. **Prompts:** When do quotas correct disadvantage vs entrench divisions?



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16) Administration, Ethics & Data Governance

**Focus:** Enumerator design, privacy, DPDP-Act compliance, uses & misuse. **Pre-reads:**

- Data, development and democracy, a guided discussion
- IndiaAI Mission data & compute notes (overview). **Prompts:** What do you know about the SHRUG database?

Module D — Political Economy & Industrial Policy (5)

17) India's Industrial Policy Turn

**Focus:** From import-substitution to PLI and beyond; what's different now? **Pre-reads:**

- IMF WP *The Return of Industrial Policy in Data* (Evenett et al., 2024 — overview).
- Government/PIB snapshot of PLI investments & exports (2025). **Follow-ups:** World Bank *India CEM 2025* (industrialization chapters). **Prompts:** How should India pick sectors without picking losers?

18) Semiconductors & Electronics

**Focus:** Foundry vs assembly; supply chains; incentives; India's bets. **Pre-reads:**

- MEITY/PIB notes on semicon policy & recent investments.
- Reuters/ET coverage on progress and gaps (balanced). **Follow-ups:** Academic/industry briefs on fab economics (curated). **Prompts:** Where can India realistically lead by 2030?

19) Trade Policy Crosswinds: "Trump Tariffs" & India

**Focus:** U.S. reciprocal tariffs (2025) and India's export/FDI strategy. **Pre-reads:**

- White House Executive Order (July 31, 2025) — summary.
- IMF/WB short notes on geoeconomic fragmentation (overview). **Follow-ups:** PIIE/think-tank analysis on tariff impacts (curated). **Prompts:** Hedge, align, or re-route? Triage for sectors most exposed.



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20) Energy, Green Industrial Policy & Manufacturing

**Focus:** Solar, batteries, green hydrogen; grid constraints; fiscal space. **Pre-reads:**

- World Bank/IMF briefs on green industrial policy tools (overview).
- India's solar manufacturing policy (curated note). **Follow-ups:** India's RE financing Module, Guest Talk(2025). **Prompts:** How to crowd-in private capital while avoiding lock-ins?

21) Jobs, Skills & the Labor Market

**Focus:** Employment elasticity of growth; informality; skilling policy. **Pre-reads:**

- CMIE employment overviews (curated graphs).
- WB/IMF notes on structural transformation in India (overview). **Follow-ups:** Evidence on clusters, GVCs and women's work (curated). **Prompts:** Which industrial policy complements maximize jobs per rupee?

Module E — India & the Changing World Order (5)

22) Multipolarity, Alliances & the Indo-Pacific

**Focus:** Quad, I2U2, European forays into Indo-Pacific; India's balancing act. **Pre-reads:**

- Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific.
- SIPRI Yearbook 2025 (summary) on security trends. **Follow-ups:** CFR backgrounder on BRICS expansion (2025). **Prompts:** What does "strategic autonomy" mean in practice in 2025?

23) BRICS+ & Global South Politics

**Focus:** BRICS expansion; development banks; payments and energy. **Pre-reads:**

- BRICS official "About" page (membership update).
- Carnegie compilation on BRICS expansion (2025). **Follow-ups:** IMF/WB notes on fragmentation and FDI relocation. **Prompts:** Can the Global South coordinate without a hegemon?



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24) Conflict, Arms & the Eroding Nuclear Order

**Focus:** Russia-Ukraine, Middle East flashpoints, arms spending, arms control. **Pre-reads:**

- SIPRI Yearbook 2025 press release/summary.
- IISS *Military Balance* (regional snapshots). **Follow-ups:** Case study packet on India's defense procurement choices. **Prompts:** What are the risks for India's deterrence and diplomacy?

25) India's Neighborhood

**Focus:** Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal; migration, water, trade. **Pre-reads:**

- World Bank South Asia update (2025 — regional overview).
- IDSA/ORF briefs on immediate neighbors (curated). **Follow-ups:** Fractured Lands, by Sam Dalrymple. **Prompts:** What is a realistic neighborhood policy doctrine for India?

26) Supply Chains, Standards & Techno-Industrial Competition

**Focus:** Chips, EVs, pharma, APIs; standards wars; export controls. **Pre-reads:**

- IMF/WTO notes on supply-chain re-routing & standards (GVCs).
- Indian policy notes on APIs/pharma & electronics (curated). **Follow-ups:** Case: India's electronics export surge (data packet). **Prompts:** How can India turn "China+1" into "India+N" sustainably?

**Module F — Technology, Data & AI for India (3)**

27) IndiaAI Mission: Compute, Models & Talent

**Focus:** IndiaAI Mission design; compute capacity; Foundation-model bets. **Pre-reads:**

- PIB/IndiaAI Mission note (budget, pillars).
- PIB note on compute capacity crossing ~34k GPUs (2025). **Follow-ups:** Industry caselets of Indian foundation-model startups. **Prompts:** Which public-goods should India prioritize: compute, data, or tooling?





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28) Regulating the New Stack: DPDP, Platform Rules & AI Advisories

**Focus:** DPDP Act + Draft Rules (2025); MeitY advisories (2024/25) on AI deployment; sandboxing. **Pre-reads:**

- Draft DPDP Rules 2025 (overview).
- Legal explainer on MeitY AI advisories (2024; revised). **Follow-ups:** Carnegie/ORF roadmap proposals for AI governance. **Prompts:** How to be pro-innovation and pro-safety — concretely — in India?

29) AI & India's Next 2/3/5 Years

**Focus: Horizon 2 years (2027):** applied AI in public services, MSME tooling, skilling at scale. **Horizon 3 (2028):** sectoral diffusion (health, agri, justice), domestic FM viability. **Horizon 5 (2030):** compute sovereignty, exportable AI services, alignment with data/standards. **Pre-reads:**

- World Bank/IMF digital transformation notes (curated).
- IndiaAI ecosystem briefs (curated). **Follow-ups:** Case studies: AI in PDS, tele-medicine, education pilots. **Prompts:** What are India's comparative advantages — and bottlenecks?

**Module G — Futures & Synthesis (1)**

30) Scenarios for Indian Democracy, 2025–2035

**Focus:** Three plausible futures (optimistic, median, adverse) tying together institutions, identity, industry, and international order. **Pre-reads:**

- Select op-eds/briefs on India's democratic trajectory (curated). **Follow-ups:** Student scenario memos. **Prompts:** What levers matter most? What early warning indicators will you watch?

**Assessment**

- Participation & Weekly memos — 20%



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- Two short policy briefs (1,200–1,500 words) — 40%
- Final scenario memo + presentation — 40%

**Linked Sources**

- V-Dem, *Democracy Report 2025* (PDF): [https://www.v-dem.net/documents/60/V-dem-dr\\_2025\\_lowres.pdf](https://www.v-dem.net/documents/60/V-dem-dr_2025_lowres.pdf)
- Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2025* (Global PDF): [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/FITW\\_World\\_2025\\_Feb.2025.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/FITW_World_2025_Feb.2025.pdf)
- Freedom House — India country page (2025): <https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2025>
- White House Executive Order (July 31, 2025): <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/07/further-modifying-the-reciprocal-tariff-rates/>
- IMF, *World Economic Outlook Update* (July 2025) — PDF: <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/WEO/2025/update/july/english/text.ashx>
- SIPRI Yearbook 2025 — Summary (PDF): [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/yb25\\_summary\\_en.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/yb25_summary_en.pdf)
- IISS (2025) — European Defence Engagement in the Indo-Pacific (PDF): [https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/research-papers/2025/06/european-defence-engagement-in-the-indo-pacific/iiss\\_european-defence-engagement-in-the-indo-pacific\\_062025.pdf](https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/research-papers/2025/06/european-defence-engagement-in-the-indo-pacific/iiss_european-defence-engagement-in-the-indo-pacific_062025.pdf)
- CFR Backgrounder — BRICS expansion (2025): <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-brics-group-and-why-it-expanding>
- Carnegie Endowment — BRICS Expansion (2025): <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/03/brics-expansion-and-the-future-of-world-order-perspectives-from-member-states-partners-and-aspirants>
- BRICS official membership update (2025): <https://brics.br/en/about-the-brics>
- PRS Legislative Research — Monthly Policy Review (April 2025): <https://prsindia.org/policy/monthly-policy-review/april-2025>
- Government of India/PIB — IndiaAI Mission approval (Mar 7, 2024): <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2012355>



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- IndiaAI Hub — Mission overview: <https://indiaai.gov.in/news/cabinet-approves-india-ai-mission-at-an-outlay-of-rs-10-372-crore>
- PIB — India's compute capacity crosses ~34,000 GPUs (May 30, 2025): <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=2132817>
- MeitY Advisory on AI deployment (Mar 1, 2024) — PDF: [https://regmedia.co.uk/2024/03/04/meity\\_ai\\_advisory\\_1\\_march.pdf](https://regmedia.co.uk/2024/03/04/meity_ai_advisory_1_march.pdf)
- Draft DPDP Rules (2025) overviews: <https://www.dlapiperdataprotection.com/?c=IN&t=law> and <https://www.hoganlovells.com/en/publications/india-publishes-consent-management-rules-under-digital-personal-data-protection-act>
- IMF WP — *The Return of Industrial Policy in Data* (2024): <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/WP/2024/English/wpica2024001-print-pdf.ashx>
- World Bank — India Country Economic Memorandum (2025): <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/79e6a188-2329-42d4-91cf-b11c1b3cb8be>
- PIB — PLI performance snapshot (Mar 22, 2025): <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2114011>
- Reuters — India to include caste details in census (Apr 30, 2025): <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-count-castes-citizens-its-delayed-population-census-2025-04-30/>

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