

**YOUTH SPECIAL**  
ASPIRING INDIA

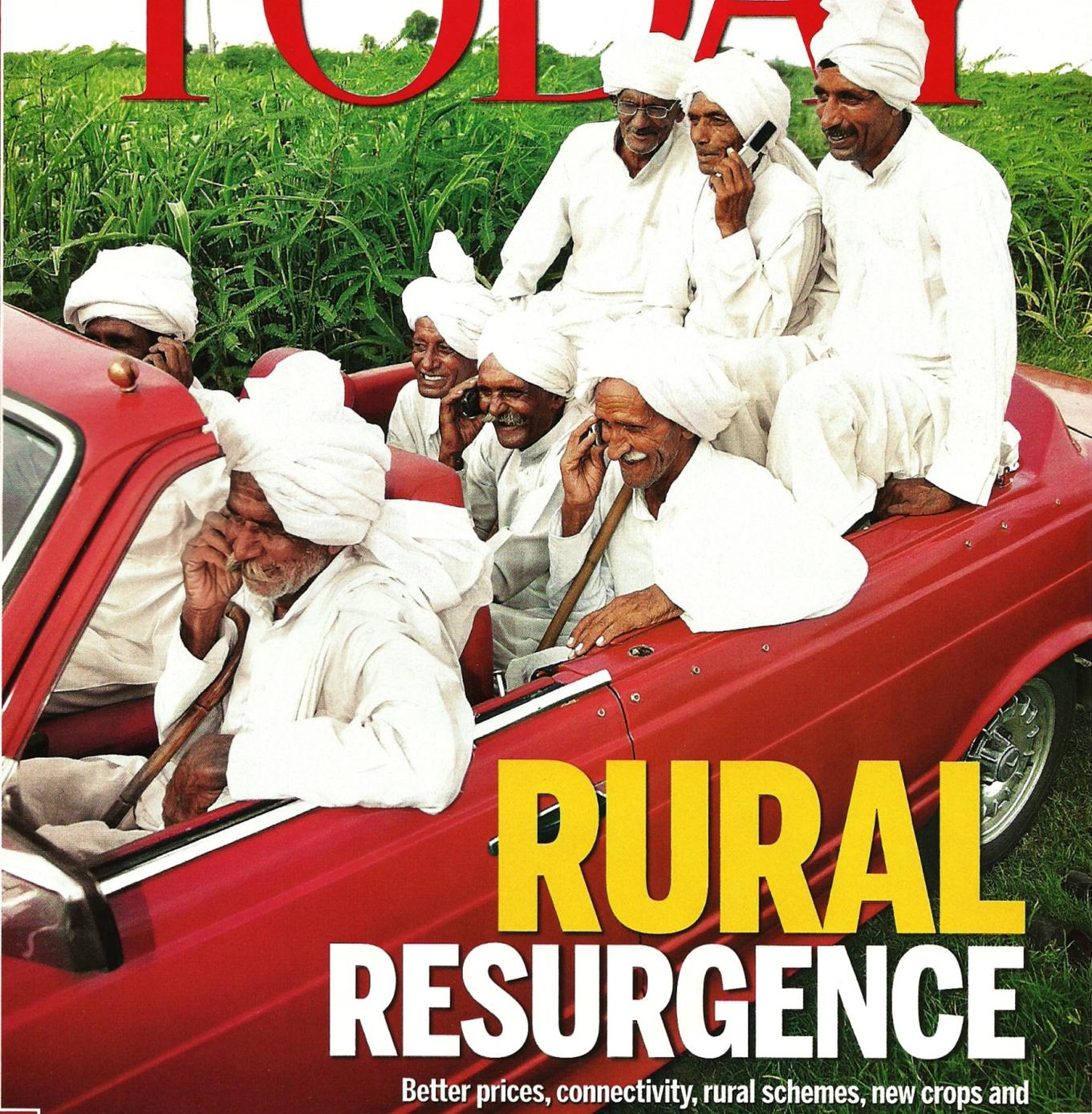
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# INDIA TODAY



# RURAL RESURGENCE

Better prices, connectivity, rural schemes, new crops and technology are among a host of factors which have changed the face of rural India and brought urban lifestyles and aspirations

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# 'We want freedom to innovate and experiment'

With two-thirds of the population under 35, the world's largest democracy can dare to dream. Five young Indians from different backgrounds come together to help us understand both the dreams, and the nightmares. Participating in the discussion are a group of young professionals and parliamentarians: Jayant Chaudhary, 30, a first time MP from Mathura from the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) and Chaudhary Charan Singh's grandson; Deepender Hooda, 31, another third generation politician and MP from Rohtak whose current project is the democratisation of the Youth Congress; Janardhana Swamy, 41, from the BJP, an NRI from the Silicon Valley before he flew in to contest from Chitradurga in Karnataka; Vibha Galhotra, 31, contemporary artist and sculptor; and Ratish Nanda, 36, a conservation architect who has worked on many projects in India and Afghanistan. The debate was moderated by Associate Editors Sandeep Unnithan and Priya Sahgal. Excerpts.

**Jayant Chaudhary** If I may quote Sharad Pawar, I am not an astrologer, so I really can't say what shape this decade will take. But our demographic dividend should propel our country, in the next 20-30 years, to a position where development is more democratised. Till now, we have taken a very limited and urban view of development. The key challenges, I prefer this word to opportunities, are education and basic infrastructure. **Vibha Galhotra** Art has changed from being only a pictorial refreshment to becoming a statement which affects the social and political life of the country. However, I am looking for the freedom of expression, for innovations and experimentation by the new generation. **Deepender Hooda** The youth need to shift from agriculture to manufacturing and services at a much faster pace. We have to ensure that our growth trajectory not only fulfills the demands of the growing population but also achieves something sustain-

able over the future. The nature of political debate must shift from divisive lines to development. The Congress is trying to empower youth by bringing in internal party democracy. **Ratish Nanda** As Mahatma Gandhi said, Earth has enough for every man's needs, not for every man's greed. The quality of life of the average citizen is going down and apathy is building. It is up to the youth to demand an improvement in the quality of life and involve civil society. The government cannot do it alone. Heritage is one aspect which does not need to be looked anymore as monument centric. We have to get over the fact that we have the Taj Mahal. The NREGA needs to shift its employment-only focus towards sustainable projects. **Janardhana Swamy** Education needs to focus on ensuring that what we study ends up in what we understand. We have travelled from being a technology observer to becoming a technology follower. As long as the cost of getting



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(L TO R) NANDA, CHAUDHARY, GALHOTRA, SWAMY AND HOODA

**"It is up to the youth to demand improvement in the quality of life and involve civil society."**

**RATISH NANDA**  
Conservation Architect

**"As a responsible country, how we utilise our resources is the biggest challenge."**

**JAYANT CHAUDHARY**  
RLD MP

**"Decision-makers like Mayawati want to build statues. Few support radical art."**

**VIBHA GALHOTRA**  
Artist

**"As long as the cost of getting elected remains high in this country, corruption will survive."**

**JANARDHANA SWAMY**  
BJP MP

**"I want to see the empowerment of youth by giving them internal party democracy."**

**DEEPENDER HOODA**  
Congress MP

elected remains high in this country, corruption will live. Rs 25 lakh is the expenditure limit for a candidate. If a candidate does not follow rules, this means he becomes a law-breaker before becoming a law-maker. **INDIA TODAY** Change is the buzzword these days. The youth, however, don't seem to be challenging the system but getting merged in it. **Nanda** Ever since Mandal Commission, has the youth agitated about anything? What about civil society? Everybody is dependent on the judiciary for making changes. What happens if the judiciary collapses? We

need to strengthen our Panchayati Raj system and the NGO sector to bring about change. We are building flyovers without understanding the impact. The high-handedness of the government needs to stop and people's opinions need to be sought as part of the system. **Galhotra** The country's urban planning is aesthetically horrible. We have a lot of funds for doing things right. But our decision-making process is just not transparent. **Chaudhary** The broader points that need to be looked at are the delivery mechanisms and governance. There

is complete lack of focus amongst the politicians and administration on urban planning. India has been a rural country and that is the mindset we need to change to tackle this problem. **Swamy** We have been treating the symptoms rather than the cause. The cost of getting elected is very high, which creates an obligation for those elected to survive. Having a rule and not implementing it is more dangerous than not having a rule as it keeps law-abiding people away. **Hooda** Whenever there is talk about increasing the salaries of members of Parliament, there is a lot of hue and

cry. A lot of professionals are doing well monetarily. So, why would they enter politics on the wages that politicians get? **INDIA TODAY** Why cannot all young MPs say we will not spend more than Rs 25 lakh on our campaigns and put pressure on their leadership to follow suit? **Nanda** What you are saying is that each individual can make a difference. But that is not happening. **Hooda** We should all agree upon a limit which is rationalised, realistic, and can be implemented. **Swamy** But the moot question is, how do you ensure that everyone remains

committed, that they are not violating on the sly?

**INDIA TODAY** But why is politics so divisive? Can all three of you come together on the delivery mechanism and administrative reforms?

**Chaudhary** Recently my party began an agitation on price hike and even though my party is very small with only five MPs, the entire Opposition joined in, including a few belonging to the ruling coalition. There is issue-based support across party lines. The larger problem is to break the hold of identity politics. Also, money is still not considered good in our country. So any politician who talks openly about it is not considered morally upright.

**Nanda** The other question is, what is the role of the media? How can the media break stories of politicians spending more, if it is asking for money to carry their stories?

**INDIA TODAY** You will have to make a start and say okay, I will not pay. Don't carry my story.

**Swamy** A novel thought, but how do we ensure our opponents do the same?

**INDIA TODAY** What are the issues that dominate this generation's mindset?

**Hooda** I think unemployment and unemployability are the main issues. On the one hand NASSCOM predicts a shortfall of millions of qualified engineers, on the other hand you see lakhs of people applying for jobs of police constables or clerks. The second thing is infrastructure. Young people see the good life and the fact that India's growth may not be percolating as fast as they want. So, the real challenge ahead of us is how to deliver on their expectations, that too at a fast pace.

**INDIA TODAY** Do you think China is the new Pakistan?

**Swamy** That relationship is not well defined. We should be a lot smarter on how we handle China. I don't think we have done our part.

**INDIA TODAY** Should there be a retirement age for politicians?

**Hooda** I think there should be, if not a retirement age, a time till somebody is able to perform to the best of their abilities. Ultimately, in a democracy,



NANDA



SWAMY



HOODA



CHAUDHARY



GALHOTRA

it goes back to the people. Experience is a valuable asset but if someone's mental capacity is compromised, he must retire. But we cannot expect the young to start running the country overnight.

**Chaudhary** I feel it is entirely up to the individual but the whole argument of experience has also been stretched in our context. Twenty years in the profession is long

enough. If I haven't made an impression till then, what is the point?

**Hooda** People are sharp. They can easily judge a 50-year-old candidate who does not deliver and a 70-year-old who does.

**Swamy** There should be no retirement age for politicians. Let people decide for themselves.

**Galhotra** There should be a retirement age for them which must not go beyond 60.

**Nanda** The number of terms whether in state legislatures or in Parliament must be fixed.

**Hooda** No party will remove a four-time standing member unless circumstances are against him.

**INDIA TODAY** But why is art silent in all this?

**Galhotra** Because there are a few decision-makers sitting over there who would like to make statues like Mayawati did. We don't have people to understand the new generation of artists. We need to hire a group and educate the authorities about contemporary art. They don't see commercial viability in radical art. So ultimately artists have to get regular jobs or go to galleries to do commercial work—things that kill the real artist.

**INDIA TODAY** Every generation talks about making a change. What makes you different from the last decade?

**Swamy** Twenty or 30 years ago, we were technology observers. After some time, we became its followers and have remained so till date. This country is more focused on capitalising on our human resources, which is good. We need to build next generation companies—how can you create the next generation Google, IBM or Sony in India? We also need to ensure that intellectual property rights are protected.

**Hooda** An important change is the fast pace at which this generation wants things done. Their expectations are very high and they are empowered, technologically and politically. If they can forget about flaunting fancy mobile phones, hanging around malls and start taking risks, I think the future is bright. ■