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Shubhanshu Shukla's space odyssey: A new chapter in India's cosmic journey

On June 26, 2025, Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla etched his name into the annals of Indian history by becoming the second Indian astronaut to reach the International Space Station (ISS) as part of the Axiom-4 mission. This monumental achievement, 41 years after Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma's historic 1984 flight aboard the Soviet Soyuz T-11, marks a triumphant return for India to human spaceflight. Shukla's journey aboard SpaceX's Dragon spacecraft, launched from NASA's Kennedy Space Center, is not merely a personal triumph but a symbol of India's burgeoning ambitions in the global space arena. His feat rekindles national pride and underscores India's relentless pursuit of scientific excellence, echoing a legacy that stretches back to the mathematical genius of Aryabhata and the visionary foresight of Vikram Sarabhai and Abdul Kalam.

Rakesh Sharma, India's first astronaut, remains a legendary figure, his name imbued with a near-mythical aura. In 1984, when asked by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi how India looked from space, Sharma's immortal reply, "Saare Jahan Se Achha," captured the imagination of a nation. His words became a cultural touchstone, inspiring generations to dream beyond the horizon and igniting a passion for space exploration. Sharma's mission, a collaboration with the Soviet Union, was a beacon of hope for a young India, fostering interest in science and technology. Today, Shukla's odyssey completes a poetic circle. During a video interaction with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 28, 2025, Shukla reflected on the unity of Earth from space, stating, "What stood out most was the sheer unity of the planet," aligning his observations with India's ethos of unity in diversity. His message to students and Indians was simple yet profound: persevere through failures, for success is born of resilience. This sentiment resonates with the courage of Sunita Williams, another Indian-origin astronaut, who endured prolonged stays in space with unwavering determination, exemplifying the indomitable human spirit.

Shukla's mission arrives at a time when global powers like the United States and Russia appear increasingly focused on geopolitical manoeuvring, often prioritising the projection of dominance over smaller nations rather than fostering cooperative exploration. Unlike the Cold War-era space race, where the US and Soviet Union competed to land a man on the moon through the Apollo and Soyuz programmes, today's global dynamics reflect a shift toward terrestrial power struggles. Shukla's presence on the ISS, a collaborative platform involving multiple nations, underscores the potential for space to remain a domain of unity and shared progress. His mission, facilitated by a partnership between ISRO, NASA, and Axiom Space, highlights the value of international collaboration in advancing human knowledge, offering a counterpoint to divisive terrestrial rivalries.

Yet, amid the celebration of Shukla's achievement, a sobering reality persists: 56 years after humanity's first moon landing, India, the land of Sarabhai and Kalam, has yet to achieve a crewed lunar mission. While India leads in GDP growth and has made remarkable strides with missions like Chandrayaan-3, the dream of an Indian on the moon remains unfulfilled. This gap is a call to action. As Shukla's mission fuels national pride, it also galvanises India's resolve to accelerate its space programme. The Gaganyaan mission, India's ambitious human spaceflight programme, is a step toward this goal, with Shukla's 14-day stint in microgravity providing invaluable experience. His journey is a bridge between India's storied past and its aspirations to lead the global space charts.

Beyond symbolism, Shukla's mission emphasises the practical benefits of space exploration. His experiments on the ISS, including agricultural studies, aim to address real-world challenges. Space-based research on crop resilience and climate prediction holds promise for enhancing food security and mitigating the impacts of climate change—issues of paramount importance to India's agrarian society. Shukla's work underscores that space exploration is not a mere display of technological prowess but a tool for tangible benefits, aligning with Sarabhai's vision of leveraging space technology for the common good. From improving weather forecasting to advancing sustainable agriculture, these experiments highlight the potential of space to serve humanity.

Shukla's odyssey also carries cultural significance. His decision to bring gajar ka halwa, moong dal halwa, and aamras to the ISS introduced Indian flavours to his international crewmates, fostering cross-cultural bonds 400 kilometres above Earth. His words to PM Modi, describing India as "truly grand" from space, echo Sharma's iconic sentiment while reinforcing India's unique place in the cosmos. As Shukla navigates the ISS, his mission inspires a new generation, much as Sharma's did, proving that the sky is never the limit—not for him, not for India, and not for the dreams of 1.4 billion people.

In this moment, Shukla stands as a torchbearer in a continuum that began with ancient astronomers and continues through modern pioneers. His journey is a testament to India's resilience, ambition, and unwavering commitment to pushing the boundaries of human endeavour. As the nation cheers his success, it looks forward to a future where Indian astronauts not only visit space stations but also walk on the moon and perhaps Mars, carrying the tricolour to new frontiers.



Yet there is a limit to the solitary pilgrim's reach. One voice can cry, but a chorus can compel. One insight can transform a moment, but community transforms generations. We make a difference alone; together, we make a dent in history



voice can cry, but a chorus can compel. One insight can transform a moment, but community transforms generations. We make a difference alone; together, we make a dent in history.

This does not suggest that collectives are automatically virtuous; far from it. Groups can dilute integrity, magnify bias, or enable cowardice. However, in their nobler moments, communities—of practice,

of kinship, of care—remind us that we are strands in a larger weave, and that our impact need not be solitary to be meaningful.

And so, the question morphs: not individual or collective, but how do we hold both?

The key might be in how we view leadership—not as a position of elevation or control, but as response-ability. This means having the ability to respond with awareness, responsibility, and integrity. Leadership isn't about standing on a podium; it's about embodying a posture. It's a promise to show up, especially when things are uncertain, to create a supportive space when others feel scared, and to seek out better questions when the usual answers just don't fit anymore.

And here lies a radical proposition: not everyone needs to lead, but everyone can be generative.

To be generative is to create, to enable, to steward—whether seen or unseen. It is the patient hand that repairs the net while others fish. It is the quiet friend who reminds you of your gifts when you have forgotten them. It is the teammate who holds the emotional climate of the room, making it safe for others to speak.

Such generativity does not clamour for recognition. It simply seeks alignment with what matters most. Not success, but significance. Not applause, but coherence. Not outcome, but essence.

This orientation demands a different vocabulary. Not "competencies" and "skillsets" alone, but questions that awaken our inner compass:

- How do I show up in moments of friction or failure?
- Can I discern between reaction and response?
- Do I centre myself, or the shared purpose?
- Can I honour differences without collapsing into indifference?

These are not mere reflective prompts. They are the crucibles in which deep impact is forged. For impact is not what we do to the world; it is how we are with it.

We must also reimagine aspiration itself. The modern world often asks,

"What do you want to do?" But the more fundamental—and transformative—question might be: What do you want to be? A question not of titles or targets, but of texture. Of how you move through the world, and what kind of wake you leave behind.

Some aspire to create. Others aim to heal. Some burn brightly, while others tend the hearth. Each is sacred, each holds the potential for profound impact—if approached with awareness, humility, and care.

Indeed, across all these expressions lies a deeper human longing: to matter. To belong. To be part of something larger without losing oneself. And therein lies the paradox: We seek meaning beyond the self, and yet must begin within.

So, how do we make an impact—individually or together?

We do it by choosing to live in alignment, not ambition. We do it by walking toward the difficult, not away from it. We do it by illuminating paths, not just forging them. And perhaps most of all, we do it by remembering: the most lasting impact is rarely made in the spotlight. It is made in the dark, when some find themselves less alone because you showed up, not as a hero, but as a human.

Ultimately, we do not have to choose between being alone and being together. We learn to dance between them. To cultivate solitude that gives birth to conviction, and togetherness that gives birth to change.

Individually, we make a difference. Together, we make an impact.

Not as a slogan, but as a way of being. A quiet revolution of presence. A shared vow to keep playing the game—not to win, but to make it worthy of being played.

And that? That is the deepest impact of all.

(Steve Correa is an Executive Coach and HR Consultant, who has had over three decades of corporate experience. He is author of, *The Indian Boss at Work: Thinking Global Acting Indian*. Sage Publisher Ronald D'Souza is an entrepreneur, mentor, co-creator, angel investor and blogger.)

Beyond the self: How do we make deep impact?

people's *edit*

DOES EVERYTHING HAPPEN FOR A REASON?

RAGHAV GADGIL

Look at the comments section of any YouTube video or Facebook/Instagram post, and you will find a litany of 'experts' dissecting any situation with sequential, probable reasons that caused the event or that could have avoided the event.

It is like watching *Final Destination* (a popular movie), which portrays a set of events linked to each other, leading to the final one. Fundamental difference here is that, in the movie, the events are linked purposely for a predetermined end, whereas what transpires in reality has a complex and convoluted set of related events that form the eventuality we tend to see.

This could be an accident on the road, or a flood-like situation or the caving of the roads or any other mishap. It is like all the reasons listed out for an event were staring in our face, but we were not tuned to see them. Which also means outcomes were determined and were bound to happen. People often sound opinionated in their comments, betraying a misunderstanding of how events actually unfold. Can we unfold event in all its completeness?

Then there is an Indian philosophy of 'Everything happens for a reason'. Ever since the cognitive revolution, which took place 12000 years ago, finding reasons behind events has been our goal. Every event is remembered as a story with causes and effects. This layer of thinking promises that each joy, loss, or coincidence slots into a kind of cosmic ledger—some traceable cause, moral or mechanical, that explains why the event had to be.

When you examine how the world works, you realise outcomes arrive through tangled threads, none of which runs the whole length. No event has a complete cause, only a dense braid of partial ones, each nudging the other without owning the whole outcome. Explanations are neither singular nor finished. All the causes are intermixed and influence each other, giving the ultimate outcome. 'You succeed because you earned it' or 'You suffer because you deserve it' make us believe that outcomes are deterministic. This is applicable to those who believe that their reasoning was the crucial one. We also see a strange pattern -- comments are liked and seconded by others who believe in such outcomes. They are trapped in their echo chambers.

No one notices as many averted accidents along a junction or a swerve. We only see a mishap. We turn to all independent and tangled precautions lurking in the face, but were not taken. That would have avoided the mishap. I am not here to advocate the attitude that normalises such mishaps, but only to indicate what transpires in our minds when we analyse one. The fact-finding committee also blamed all the stakeholders for a complex event like the stampede deaths at the Lairai Zatra. The stampede was not intended, but it happened on the spur of the moment.

When something startling happens, we feel jittery until we can tag a cause and file the episode away. The word 'accident' means an event that could not be determined in all its completeness. But in such a scenario, a human feels powerless. Finding causes leads us to be more precautionary and prevent similar future occurrences. No two events are exactly the same. By looking at a controlled view of events, we get a (false) sense of being in control of a situation.

Social media portrays any event as "overdetermined". From that angle, saying "this happened because of this reason" is like crediting one domino for toppling a long line. Everything happens when enough reasons, seen and unseen, line up together.

I wish people behaved sensibly and politely. Your choices matter, but so do luck, timing, and other people's actions. That balanced view keeps pride and guilt in proportion.

turing. If anything, our leaders should strive to be linguistically versatile, not linguistically defensive—especially when representing India on international platforms where diplomacy demands clarity, not translation.

Multilingualism is India's superpower. Let's not reduce it to a political football.

Everette Assis Teles, Margao

Blow to wildlife conservation

The death of a tigress and her four cubs due to poisoning in Male Mahadeshwara Hills Wildlife Sanctuary is an outrageous affront to wildlife conservation efforts.

Equally disturbing is the unexplained death of another tigress within Bandipur Tiger Reserve limits. These incidents strike at the heart of Karnataka's tiger protection legacy and expose glaring gaps in enforcement around protected areas.

Poisoning—a cruel, deliberate act—suggests premeditated hostility, possibly driven by retaliatory motives or poaching. It wipes out endangered lives and disrupts the ecological balance of the region. The incidents raise serious questions about surveillance, patrolling, and intelligence gathering by forest authorities.

Tiger conservation is about preserving ecosystems. The perpetrators must be punished to set a strong deterrent. Conservation demands zero tolerance for such brutalities. Every tiger lost to human malice is a failure we cannot afford to repeat.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru

Who will hold aloft Coupe Suzzane Lenglen?

It's that time of the year at Wimbledon when fans can relish the ice-cream and the strawberries. Come June 30, you can expect some exhilarating tennis and mind you it's the damsels, in their sporting sartorial finery who are going to hog the limelight.

In the run up to the grass court event, there have been some stunning performances and well all eyes will be on the big names. But do not expect it all to be easy for the top seeded women as the unseeded, wild card entries and the qualifiers are all going to give the top seeds a run for their money.

The most fancied to win the Coupe Suzzane Lenglen are Aryna Sabalenka, Coco Gauff, Jessica Pegula, Jasmine Paolini, Iga Swiatek, Qinwen Zheng, Madison Keys and Mirrra Andreeva, who will all be defending their seeding and displaying their serve and volley grass court skills in quest of donning the mantle of the best women on grass at the Wimbledon under the gaze of adoring fans, who will make up exotic settings at each of the 127 singles matches that are to be played in quest of the coveted Coupe Suzzane Lenglen. Look forward to such mind-boggling tennis in these two weeks of this prestigious event.

Elvidio Miranda, Panjim

Luxury buses & leaking buses

The Kadamba Transport Corporation (KTC) has introduced

electric and air-conditioned buses on some routes for the comfort of the commuters.

On the one hand we have luxury buses and on the other hand we have leaking buses. On Thursday passengers of a KTC bus reportedly complained of rainwater entering the vehicle through a missing window pane, prompting an NGO to threaten formal action over the deteriorating condition of public transport vehicles.

The makeshift tin covering failed to prevent rainwater from seeping into the bus, causing considerable inconvenience to commuters during their journey.

Commuters are being forced to travel in a bus that lacks basic safety and comfort standards. Incidentally this is not the first time complaints have been raised about rainwater entering KTCL buses. The latest incident adds to mounting concerns over the poor maintenance of KTC buses, especially on high-traffic routes like the Margao-Panjim corridor, which serves hundreds of daily passengers.

Passengers are often left soaked and uncomfortable throughout the journey. Commuters may be forced to wear their raincoat while travelling in the bus or may have to open their umbrellas to shield themselves from rainwater entering the bus.

This may be the case even with private buses. Rainwater leaking into the driver's cabin can ob-

struct visibility, make the steering wheel slippery, or even get into the driver's eyes, potentially causing a distraction and increasing the risk of an accident. A post that has gone viral on social media shows a damaged window of a school bus being covered by an aluminium sheet in order to protect against the rains, raising serious concerns for the children.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Dream of a progressive India

I have a dream that India will take its rightful place in the comity of nations; a country forward looking, progressive, free from casteism, religious strife and bigotry.

An India that is at the bleeding edge of technology driven by innovation and research, a place where getting rich does not involve taking away from the poor but by creating new job opportunities and improving the lot of the underprivileged.

An India where every Indian speaks fluent English, the medium that bridges us to the world, while at the same time retaining our rich cultural heritage and keeping alive local languages.

An India where nobody goes to sleep hungry and where no one is dependent on the government dole of 5 kg of rations. We don't want an India with a per capita income of a measly \$2,300,

which ranks us as the 50th poorest nation in the world.

I dream of an India, a thriving and a market attractive enough for the world to invest where educated youth are gainfully employed.

Rekha Sarin Trehan, Benaulim

Language politics

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent dig at English speakers—saying they should feel "ashamed"—has stirred quite the storm. In a country as multilingual as India, such comments strike a discordant note.

English in India is more than a colonial hangover. It's a bridge—linking diverse communities, powering global careers, and fuelling aspirations from classrooms in Kerala to boardrooms in Gurugram. To call its use shameful is to ignore its evolution as a tool of empowerment. Ironically, it was the British who planted the seed, but Indians didn't just adopt English—they redefined it. A global study even ranked Mumbai as the world's most English-proficient city, ahead of London, which speaks volumes. India's linguistic landscape is vast and beautiful. Hindi may have its place, but so do Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Konkani and countless others. English co-exists—not competes.

This feels less like cultural pride and more like political pos-