Measuring What Matters:
Cultural Index Mapping and the Case for a New National Prosperity Framework in India

Theme: Cultural Index Mapping and Redefining National Income

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Abstract

India's economic growth is measured mainly by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which aims to measure economic production, not the larger aspects of civilizational development. This does not reflect the cultural, spiritual and intangible wealth of the country, despite the nominal GDP of India in FY 2024-25 being estimated at ₹324.11 lakh crore and the Net National Income (NNI) at ₹271.44 lakh crore. This study looks at the shortcomings of GDP in measuring India's overall prosperity and presents and analyses the Cultural Prosperity Index (CPI) that is based on Indian intellectual work, from Kautilya's Arthashastra to Amartya Sen's Capability Approach.

The creative economy accounts for around 2.5% of the GDP of India, and tourism supported 84.63 million jobs (direct and indirect) in 2023-24. At other times, a large-scale cultural event such as the Maha Kumbh Mela brings significant benefits to the local economy, but they are not fully reflected in the national accounts.

This paper proposes a six-pillar approach to the CPI – heritage economy, creative industries, tribal and folk economy, pilgrimage multipliers, intangible cultural assets and cultural participation and concludes that institutionalizing it would aid India to recognize its civilisational wealth and draw more inclusive cultural and economic policy.

Keywords: *Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Net National Income (NNI), Cultural Prosperity Index (CPI), Creative Economy, Cultural Accounting, Heritage Economy.*

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I. Introduction

India's emergence as a global power brings with it a unique economic paradox which undermines traditional development models. Judging by the traditional measurement criteria, it is the fifth biggest economy in the world. The country's rank in the list of 193 countries based on Human Development Index is 130th with projected nominal GDP of FY 2024-25 at ₹324.11 lakh crore. This divergence is not coincidental. The reason for it is the malfunctioning of the measurement system used in India to evaluate the country's economic prosperity that has been designed specifically to fit in the economic model of the industrialized West of the mid-twentieth century (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2025).

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was first estimated in the 1930s to help measure a country's industrial output and its recovery from the great depression. The shortcomings of GDP have been noted by Kuznets himself who stated that the welfare of a nation "can scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income. However, 20 years later, the only measure that government, international institutions and financial markets have of a country's wellbeing is GDP. It would be a proper indicator in most developed countries, but in countries like India, civilized, it would not be applicable (Kuznets, 1934).

The participation of 66.21 crore people in the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 in India created an economic activity of ₹2-3 lakh crore for 45 days, 84.63 million people involved in Indian tourism industry, creative industry of India valued at $35 billion and, Minor Forest Produce (MFP) economy with support of more than 100 million people in India. But all these have been left unaccounted for in the Indian GDP calculation system (Ministry of Tourism, 2025; Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2024).

The purpose of the current paper will be to show that Cultural Prosperity Index is yet another kind of national accounting that needs to be introduced in India to take into account all the aspects of its civilizational economy. The paper will suggest the development of another conception of Cultural Prosperity Index in India which can't be imported from any other

countries. In fact, the conceptions of India could be traced back to Arthashastra (4th century BC) of Kautilya and the Capability Approach (20th century) of Amartya Sen.

In this paper, I want to redefine the measurement of actual development in India beyond the shortcomings of the GDP and define the true measure of wealth that can be measured by cultural prosperity (Chapter II). I will do this, following the tradition of the Indian nation which began with Arthashastra (Kautilya), and is continued by the contemporary Capability Approach of Amartya Sen (Chapter III). Based on new surveys, numbers and international criteria, I investigate the real economic potential of the culture industry in India (Chapter IV - VI). They find their concrete realization in the case studies of the creative economy in Varanasi, Gond Art of Madhya Pradesh and economy of Kumbh Mela (Chapter VII). The connections between the commitments made by India at the 2023 G20 Summit and the notion of Cultural Prosperity Index (CPI) and implementation are drawn in the conclusion (Chapter VIII-XIII).

II. The Measurement Problem - Why GDP is Not Appropriate for India?

-The Ways GDP is calculated and problems with GDP

Gross Domestic Product is the total monetary value of all the final goods/services produced within a country's boundaries over a period of time. In other words, it's something that can be exchanged in the market, and it has a price tag. There are, of course, other elements of life, not quantifiable – at least for now – like unpaid domestic and household labour, volunteering in the community, sustainable development, social bonding, the cultural economy outside the market, intangible assets inherent in traditional practices, spirituality and religion. This is OK in most industrial countries but not India.

Indian's economy is likely to grow robustly with real GDP of ₹330.68 lakh crore and 6.5% growth as of FY 2024-25. The current value of Net National Income is ₹271.44 lakh crore. They're both good and respectable numbers. However, they don't include the Maha Kumbh Mela, the 16 living traditions recognized by UNESCO, the informal economy of the creative economy nor the economies of the 275 million Minor Forest Produce-collecting tribes. This is termed the Paradox of Human Development in India under the perspective of India's Human Development (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2025).

The disparity between the economic condition of India and human development status of the country has one of the most striking examples that GDP is not an appropriate measure to gauge

the condition in the country. From the economic performance point of view, India is in 5th position in the world. However, India's Human Development Index (HDI) is 0.685 and it is ranked at 130 positions in the list of 193 countries, which classifies India as being in the medium human development category group, Human Development Report 2025. Life expectancy is at 72 years; the number of years of schooling – at 13 and the average number of years of schooling – at 9 years. Even that is not the case as it were – it's just that it doesn't seem like it is sufficient in comparison with the performance of the country's economy (UNDP, 2025).

Yet another aspect of human well-being is cultural well-being and India is supreme in this as well. In India, there is a human prosperity which is not included in any other index – largest human assembly in the world in India (Kumbh Mela) and 16 UNESCO recognized living heritage traditions in India. The Cultural Prosperity Index will cover this type of prosperity.

In the broader discussions on the measurement of development that are taking place around the world, trust in GDP as a measure of development has begun to be undermined. The unwillingness to accept GDP as a measure of development has grown, in the international debate on measuring development. The OECD keeps an eye on the indicators of wellbeing from the outside, as measured by their Better Life Index, a set of 11 dimensions of life that encompass aspects of people's lives: life at home, quality of the environment, social interaction, feeling happy and more. The UNDP has expanded the measurement of income to measure health and education as well. In the “landmark report”, the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress recommended a number of measures, one of which was that of Stiglitz and Fitoussi. The United Nations had already introduced 17 Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 agenda of Sustainable Development, stating that the growth is not enough to measure the development. (United Nations, 2015).

In the international community, in general, the name of India is adopted as a representative one and not as a representation of its creation in their discourse. In India, the philosophy of Arthashastra was developed even before the theory of economics and the Capability Approach was developed by Amartya Sen in India. The idea that an India with a beautiful culture economy should only be a user of other people's systems and not developing its own, is an uncalled-for attack on the Indian system. The attack is on the Indian system, with the belief that whereas India has a beautiful culture economy, they can use other people's systems.

III. India's Intellectual Tradition in Its Own Right: From Kautilya to Amartya Sen

The Arthashastra of Kautilya is the book of rulership, welfarism and multi-faceted prosperity. The book of 'Rulership, Welfarism and Multi-faceted Prosperity' is the Arthashastra of Kautilya.

Arthashastra was a great work of art that was written by Chanakya (also known as Kautilya) in the reign of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya in 4th century BC. The title of the work gives us an idea of the contents; the term Arthashastra means the science of material welfare and 'Artha' is used not only to mean wealth in terms of economy but material welfare and purposeful living in general. (Kangle, 1972).

The goal or purpose of state has been mentioned as the welfare of its people, Yogakshema in Sanskrit means welfare and security in terms of getting what is not earned and keeping what is earned. Hence, this complex idea of prosperity encompasses not just the monetary wealth but also social harmony, culture and moral governance.

It is noteworthy to mention here that Kautilya knew about culture, religion and community and he did not ignore its importance as a factor in the economic management but he recalled it as one of the factors of good governance while composing Arthashastra during his times. He provides a clear guidance on the role of the state, in relation to festivals, craft associations, temples and other rites. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the above concept in the form of Cultural Prosperity Index is not a new phenomenon but only a resurgence of the old concept which was practiced by Kautilya in 4th Century B.C.

Amartya Sen (1933) is one of the 20th century's eminent economists, and is a native of Santiniketan, India. The meaning of development in the capability approach varies when compared to other approaches to the issue. For instance, development can be seen as a process of expanding the capabilities and freedoms of people, or making them capable of living a life that they value, as opposed to just incomes or goods owned, Sen said (Sen, 1999).

The basis of the capability approach are two major ideas; one of them is the concept of capabilities and the other is the concept of capabilities as the basis of development. First of all, there is a notion of functioning that refer to the various kinds of states of people – for instance,

being educated, being nourished, and participating in social life. Secondly, the term capabilities are used to indicate what opportunities people have to do things.

UNDP in 1990 took up Sen's Capability Approach as a theoretical basis of the Human Development Index. The tradition of public reasoning, plurality and different perspectives nurtured by Indian civilization, Sen then goes on to explain, is a social capital and cultural wealth that can't be measured by any measure of GDP or HDI. In such manner Sen's framework is a new policy language for the translation of Yogakshema of Kautilya to a contemporary means for measuring national economy (UNDP, 1990).

The British Empire in India' (written by Shashi Tharoor) provides important support to the idea of 'Cultural Prosperity Index' on top of moral grounds. During the early days of the British colonization of India, its GDP was about 23% of world GDP, or equivalent to the GDP of all of Europe, Tharoor has said. It was exploited for 200 years and after independence in 1947 it has degraded to 3% now. This was not just the economic downfall of India, but also the systematic annihilation of Indian civilizational economy – the economy of the textile industry, artisans' guilds and indigenous trading network (Tharoor, 2017).

India has adopted GDP to measure its prosperity as an independent nation, but GDP had been created as a measure of productivity which is typical of the western economy that India was reduced to due to colonialism.

IV. The Invisible Economy: India’s Cultural Economy in Numbers

a) The Creative Economy

India’s creative economy has acquired status as a strategic economic sector in its own right. At present, India’s creative economy is a Rs $30-$35 billion industry and contributes around 2.5% to India’s GDP and 8% to the Indian population. Creative jobs contribute to 20% of the country’s Gross Value Added and pay 88% more than non-creative jobs. The value of India’s creative exports has grown by over ₹94,677 crore and jumped by 20% in 2023. India’s screen industry (films, television, and streaming) is estimated to be worth $61.2 billion and jobs generated was 2.64 million. Media and entertainment industry will generate a $50 billion and provide a potential opportunity for the live events industry in India by the end of 2029 growing at the rate of 15%/year The

sustainability of Pilgrimage and Heritage Tourism in the Economy (India Brand Equity Foundation [IBEF], 2025).

Indicator	Value	Source / Year
Creative Economy — Total Size	$35 Billion (₹3.01 lakh Cr)	IBEF, October 2025
Share of GDP	~2.5%	Ministry of I&B, 2024
Share of Employment	8% of National Workforce	Ministry of I&B, 2024
Screen Sector Economic Contribution (2024)	$61.2 Billion	MPA-Deloitte / WAVES 2025
Screen Sector Employment	2.64 million Jobs	MPA-Deloitte / WAVES 2025
M&E Sector Opportunity by 2029	$50 Billion	WAVES Summit, 2025
Creative Exports Growth (2023)	+20% Year-on-Year	IBEF, 2025
Creative Economy Wage Premium	~88% above non-creative	IBEF, 2025

Table 1: India's Creative Economy - Key Data Points (2024-25)

b) The Sustainability of Pilgrimage and Heritage Tourism in the Economy

The Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 in Prayagraj which is slated to be held between 13th January 2025 and 26th February 2025 is indeed an indication of India's real economy, which is much bigger than what is captured by the GDP numbers. 66.21 crore people turned up for the Mela in the last 45 days, making it the largest gathering of people globally. The state

government spent as high as ₹6,990 crore on development works for 549 projects relating to infrastructure, electric power, roads, sanitation, and logistic support. The economic impact of the Mela is unprecedented. The loss in terms of hotel bookings, hotel cancellations, food loss, etc., amounts to ₹2- 3 lakh crore. Mela has played a significant role in registering India's GDP growth of 6.5% for the fiscal year 2024-25. Market analysts expect that Mela would contribute 0.8-1% to the GDP growth of India. The faith and belief-based entire economy generated through the cultural and civilizational values have not been captured in any of the economic statistics of national accounts. In terms of India's larger tourism sector, it registered a contribution of ₹15.73 lakh crore or 5.22% of the GDP for the year 2023-24. Besides, the tourism sector created 36.90 million direct and 47.72 million indirect employment opportunities adding up to 13.34% of total jobs. The number of visits to 143 centrally protected ticketed monuments increased by 19.35% to 5.49 crore in 2023-24 over 4.60 crore in 2019-20 (Government of Uttar Pradesh, 2025).

Kumbh Mela 2025 — Indicator	Data	Source
Total Footfall	66.21 Crore (662 million)	UP Government / Official Records
State Government Infrastructure Budget	₹6,990 Crore	UP Government Budget, 2025
Economic Activity Generated	₹2–3 Lakh Crore	CAIT / UP Government, 2025
GDP Impact Estimate	~0.8–1% of GDP	Market Analysts, 2025
Temporary Jobs Created	6–7 Lakh Jobs	Industry Estimates, 2025
Comparison: Kumbh 2019 Revenue	₹1.2 Lakh Crore	Official Records

Table 2: Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 - Economic Impact Summary

c) An Intangible Inheritance that we cannot See, Hear, Smell or Taste

India has 16 intangible cultural heritage items listed by UNESCO which is among the highest in Asia. The 20th Session of Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, where India hosted for the first time as a country, was held at Red Fort New Delhi in December 2025. The intangible cultural heritage includes Vedic Chanting, Ramlila, Kutiyattam, Kalbelia, Chhau, Buddhist Chanting of Ladakh, Sankirtana of Manipur, Yoga, Kumbha Mela, Durga Puja, Garba of Gujarat. However, this is just the tip of the iceberg as far as India's rich intangible assets are concerned. India's oral literature, epics, stories, performing arts, domestic skills, and crafts are part of one of the richest living traditions in the world that is not captured in any of the country's economic data (UNESCO, 2025).

d) Tribal and Folk Economy

India is endowed with the richest variety of living cultures, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), and crafts among the 25 major STs (Schedule Tribes) with a population of 104 million, constituting 8.6% of the country's population. The allocation for Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes has increased manifold during the last decade rising from ₹ 24,598 crore in 2013-14 to ₹1,19,509 crore in 2023-24 while ₹13,000 crore has been allocated to Ministry of Tribal Affairs in Union Budget 2024-25 which is 73.60% higher than the previous year. Excluding family members and the supply chain, around 100 million persons from tribal communities can be considered engaged in the production of Minor Forest Produce (MFP). The tribal economy generates resources through collection, processing, and selling of products like bamboo, honey, lac, mahua, tendu leaves, herbal medicinal plants, and other forest produce.

V. Culture Economy of India: An International Perspective

India is by no means the first country to see that its economy is largely invisible in the conventional GDP-led metrics and to try to capture its cultural economy to come to terms with its economic value. Few countries can match India in the size and scope of its cultural economy, however, and examining practices adopted in other countries can provide insight into how India can deepen understanding of the economic impact of its cultural sector.

a) United Kingdom: The World's Most Comprehensive Cultural Economy accounting

The United Kingdom is one of the best examples of a nation that has developed a profound appreciation for the significance of its cultural economy to the nation's economic well-being. The most recent DCMS 2024 figures show that cultural industries contribute £145.8 billion, 5.5% of total UK GVA, of which 4.6% annual growth is more than four times better than the overall UK economic growth of 1%. Between 2010 and 2024, the GVA of the UK's creative industries grew by 60.3%, as compared to 24.3% of the total economy. The creative industries employed 2.4 million people in 2024-25, with nearly 30% of those working in the sector self-employed, and 269,655 creative firms, representing almost 10% of all legally registered businesses in the UK. Furthermore, £60m was set aside for the creative industries in the UK in 2025, the first of funds from a creative industries development budget (Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS], 2025). What is fascinating about the UK is however not the size of its creative economy, but its diversity. There are 9 categories of creative industries in the UK, including software, film and television, music, advertising, architecture, publishing, design, crafts and museums, all of which the DCMS system has analysed in great detail so that policy makers can review the data. India's creative sector seems to be far more significant when it comes to jobs than the UK, and perhaps even comparable in economic impact. However, such cultural economy accounting in India does not exist yet.

b) South Korea: Cultural Policy as a Growth Sector

South Korea seems to be the world's most effective innovator in the field of cultural economy as a competitive advantage. Having turned its entertainment, gaming, and cosmetics sectors into critical growth areas, South Korea saw its cultural industries produce exports of KRW 36.58 trillion (about $1.23 billion in 2010 to a record $9.85 billion) in 2024. This represents Korea's cultural intellectual property exports growth of 8x per 14 years. South Korea's gaming sector exported KRW 16.84 trillion (KRW 6.52 trillion in 2024 in USD) which is more than the combined export value of South Korea's music, film, broadcasting, animation and advertising industries. The government has created its goal to grow cultural exports to around $36 billion by 2030. (Bank of Korea, 2025). Additionally, the indirect effect of cultural economy development in South Korea, which is mostly manifested in the Korean Wave, seems to be tremendous. South Korea's cultural exports are already known as an economic growth engine, leading to international tourist spending of over $1.1 billion from cultural exports in 2019, and 55.3% of international tourists reporting the economic impact of the Korean Wave.

Since then, the Korean cultural economy has been making a leap with the rising popularity of Parasite, Squid Game and Han Kang, the first Korean to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2024 (Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange [KOFICE], 2025).

c) United States: A Strong Cultural Economy That Is Essentially Unmeasured

The volume of cultural goods and services produced in the US, and contributing to the US economy, is significant: the BEA projects that these goods and services made up $1.1 trillion, or 4.4% of GDP, in 2021. These encompass film and television, music, architecture, museums, performing arts, motion pictures, broadcasting and other entertainment. But, the cultural economics in the USA remain difficult to analyse due to their complexity and multiplicity. The BEA, one of the most capable entities in the world for the analysis of economic statistics, recognizes that the satellite program to account for the cultural sector excludes community cultural activities, intangible assets, indigenous knowledge and cultural social capital. The United States, then, is a fascinating example of a nation, with a complex and diverse cultural economy, which in spite of its difficulty of measurement is known to be vitally important. In turn, this assessment highlights the significance of CPI and its potential in the cultural economy analysis globally (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023).

d) Cultural Economy of India: Conclusion and Outlook

After reading the cultural economy state of affairs in several foreign countries, one finds that India is in an interesting situation between those countries that acknowledge the importance of the cultural economy, and those that still have not completely embraced and integrated it into the official economic accounting. India's creative economy is believed to be valued at approximately $35 billion, similar to the GVA of the UK. It looks like India's cultural economy has the same soft power influence as South Korea's, though without the systematic cultural economic policy that the South Koreans have. Meanwhile, India's cultural economy has the potential to be much larger than either of the two countries, with the economic impact of one such event being on the scale of the pilgrimage, being ₹2-3 lakh crore.

Country	Cultural Economy Measurement Tool	Key Metric	Lesson for India
United Kingdom	DCMS Creative Industries Economic Estimates (Annual)	£145.8 billion GVA / 5.5% of GDP (2024)	Build annual systematic measurement with standardised sub-sector definitions
South Korea	Bank of Korea IP Export Data + KOFICE Hallyu Reports	$9.85 billion IP exports (2024); target $36B by 2030	Treat cultural economy as strategic national priority with state investment
United States	BEA Arts & Cultural Production Satellite Account	$1.1 trillion / 4.4% of GDP (2021)	Use satellite account methodology — India already uses this for tourism
India (current)	No dedicated framework; fragmented sector-wise data	~$35B creative economy; ₹2-3L Cr Kumbh event — both unmeasured systematically	Develop a Cultural Prosperity Index integrating all cultural economy pillars

Table 3: Global Cultural Economy Measurement - Comparative Framework

What is even more fascinating is that there are other countries with a very small population base, cultural diversity, economic and civilizational potential that are much more advanced in terms of cultural economy accounting systems than India is. It is therefore a chance for India not only to reach the UK, South Korea and the USA in terms of the CP Index, but to outdo them with a new index which will capture some aspects of civilisational prosperity which are not being measured by any global index present

VI. Primary Survey: Public Perception of Cultural Prosperity in India

a) Overview and Methodology

A well-formulated primary survey titled "Measuring What Matters: Public Perceptions of Cultural Prosperity in India" was conducted via Google forms between July and August 2026 in this mixed method study. In total, there were 107 responses collected from the respondents who came from 16+ Indian states. They came mostly from the state of Uttar Pradesh, followed by responses collected from other states like Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and others in North India, South India, East India, Central India, and Western India. There were also some responses received from foreign regions, including UK, Australia, the US, and Canada due to natural international reach that the survey gained through Reddit, WhatsApp, and college contacts. All the responses were anonymous and were collected solely for the purposes of conducting research. (The complete survey questionnaire and response data are provided in Appendix A.)

The age category of 18-25 years accounted for 68.9%, while the category of being a student accounted for 76.4% of all the responses collected. The professionals made up 16% of the respondents. It is a serious limitation of the study since the results are indicative rather of public perceptions of educated and computer literate people than of statistical conclusions regarding Indian population as a whole.

Demographic	Category	Percentage
Age Group	18-25 (majority)	68.9%
	26-40	13.2%
	Under 18	13.2%
	41-60 and above	4.7%
Occupation	Student	76.4%

Demographic	Category	Percentage
	Working Professional	16%
	Business Owner / Homemaker / Other	7.6%

Table 4: Survey Respondent Profile (N=107)

b) Key Findings

There are five aspects of this survey which hold relevance with regards to the arguments made in this paper.

First, concerning awareness of GDP measurement: 90.6% were aware that GDP mainly measures the value of goods and services produced – in other words, it reflects popular perception of what GDP is. At the same time, only 78.5% were either unaware or only slightly aware of the fact that India's cultural economy comprises of $35 billion and employs 8% of national workforce. The discrepancy between the public's awareness of what GDP measures and what it does not measure, allows for the construction of CPI.

Second, regarding contribution of culture to prosperity: 73.6% felt that Indian festivals, crafts, and culture make a "great" contribution to prosperity (rated either 4 or 5 out of 5). Those who felt that the contribution was minimal comprised of only 5.6% of the respondents. When asked which aspect of culture contributed the most to the economy, the majority, i.e., 30.2% said films and entertainment, followed by 27.1% who said that it was the pilgrimages and tourism.

Third, concerning Kumbh Mela: when shown the statistic which claimed that Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 had attracted 66 crore visitors and generated economic activity worth ₹2-3 lakh crore, the majority, 72.6%, said that it had influenced their perspectives regarding the economic impact of religious and cultural events to a great or moderate extent. Only 1.9% felt that religious events should not be evaluated in economic terms.

Fourth, on the question of GDP's ability to capture India's prosperity: 18.9% felt that GDP adequately captured India's prosperity, while 76.4% felt that it did not capture it to any reasonable extent. This shows the public's support of the thesis proposed in this paper.

Fifth, in regard to CPI: 73.6% felt that CPI needed to be developed with either an independent framework (34.9%) or as a complement to GDP (38.7%). Only 2.8% felt that neither GDP nor HDI needed any revision. The respondents evaluated the need for CPI on a five-point Likert scale, with 75.5% giving it a 4 or 5. This can be seen as an extension of the public's support for the thesis of this paper. This is further driven home by the fact that 77.4% of the respondents said that they and their families had spent money on cultural events during the past year.

Key Survey Finding	Result
Correctly understand what GDP measures	90.6%
Unaware or only vaguely aware of India's $35B creative economy	78.5%
Rate cultural traditions as highly contributing to prosperity (4 or 5/5)	73.6%
Feel GDP partially or entirely fails to capture India's prosperity	76.4%
Support creation of a Cultural Prosperity Index	73.6%
Rate cultural framework as important or very important (4 or 5/5)	75.5%
Spent money on cultural activities in the past year	77.4%

Table 5: Summary of Key Survey Findings (N=107)

c) What People Say GDP Is Missing - Respondent Voices

The final question was open-ended to give respondents an option to comment on any aspect of India's cultural heritage which helped it prosper but was not captured in economic statistics. Out of 107 respondents, 65 answered this question, and it received a 61.3% response rate for an optional question, demonstrating the interest in the topic. Of these, several gave brief non-substantive answers (e.g., 'not sure,' 'N/a'); (the 45 substantive responses are reproduced in Appendix. A)" There were three prominent themes which emerged out of this question.

The first was the aspect of community or social capital, i.e., Indians helping each other out within their families and communities as an unpaid social security and insurance network. "The most profound element of Indian culture that drives India towards prosperity and which is completely invisible in economic statistics is the socio-economic safety net formed by the Indian family system." And another respondent: "The best part of the Indian culture which makes India prosperous and is totally invisible in any economic statistics is the community feeling and compassion."

Second, in addition to the religious economy, was the theme of offerings and the temple economy - the amount of money spent on temples, mosques, churches, and gurudwaras as well as money spent on havans, poojas, and jagratas. This was succinctly captured by one respondent who wrote, 'The business of religion – the numbers are far higher than we think.' Another respondent wrote: 'Religious offerings and expenditure on places of worship.' This highlights Pillar I – the economic activity generated due to religious practices. Third, the theme of traditional craftsmanship and artisan industries – the conservation of traditional crafts and industries which form the hallmark of communities and attract tourism. 'The conservation of traditional craft and artisan industries, which help form the identity of the community and tourism, is often overlooked in economic calculations.'

What is interesting about these themes is that they provide a direct validation to the claims made in this paper from the respondent's perspective, ranging from social capital (community) as enshrined in Amartya Sen's capability approach to religious economy (pilgrimage and temple economy reflected in the Kumbh Mela statistics) as well as the traditional craftsmanship (tribal and folk economy pillar). This reflects a public sentiment which is not necessarily informed by the academic discourse on these issues but represents the ground reality. It is the lived experience that makes people realize that there is more to the Indian economy than what meets the eye.

It must be noted that the survey findings – both quantitative and qualitative – provide the empirical basis for this paper, with the former highlighting the popular perception of GDP and its limitations while the latter served to enhance the theoretical framework as well as provide additional support to the claims made.

In other words, while the public is largely aware about what GDP captures, it is also acutely aware about what it does not, especially when it comes to the Indian economy. This sentiment

is strongest when it comes to the aspects of the community and social capital, religious economy, and the importance of traditional craftsmanship. To a large extent, it was ordinary men and women who, without any academic qualification, realized the value of these aspects and their contribution to the Indian economy.

VII. Case Studies: Where Culture and Economy Meet in India

The theories that constitute the Cultural Prosperity Index come alive through the use of data from all over the subcontinent, in the case studies given below. In these case studies, the link between culture and economy in India is emphasized by the use of examples drawn from tourism, tribal art, and heritage cities, as well as the shortcomings of the new methodology suggested here.

Case Study 1: Varanasi - A City Where Culture is the Economy

Indeed, the example of Hindu Kashi or Banaras is the best evidence of the concept stated above. Varanasi is considered one of the oldest places of inhabitation that dates back to 3000 years ago. Varanasi is located at the banks of river Ganga. It is believed that this place is considered to be the centre of Hindu pilgrimages, Sanskrit learning, Banarasi silk weaving, classical music and it is one of the fastest-growing tourist attractions in India.

The evidence of the above-mentioned information can be given through the statistics related to the number of people visiting the place in 2023. Namely, the number of tourists reached the mark of 11 crore people which is 18.7% higher compared to 2022 when Varanasi became the fastest-growing tourist attraction in India outranking other cities such as Goa or Shimla. As for the number of foreign tourists visiting the place in 2021, it amounted to 2,566 people while in 2024 the number of foreign tourists reached the amount of 3,09,932 people, which is 120 times higher compared to the year 2021. Following the opening of the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, the number of tourists in the area increased up to 25.28 crore, while the economic growth in the area reached ₹1.25 lakh crore.

About 58,000 workers are engaged in the Banarasi silk sector, which is part of a market valued at more than ₹700 crore and exportation to different countries such as USA, UAE, UK, and Australia. Currently, the Government of Uttar Pradesh plans to develop an Integrated Silk Complex costing ₹8 crore to make use of the One District One Product initiative for the

Banarasi weavers for making their livelihoods sustainable. As per ICICI Direct, the tourism sector contribution has led to an increase of 20-65 percent in the incomes of those who are associated with the sector and 34.18 percent in job creation. The beauty of Varanasi is that all the above elements can be found in the city of Varanasi, which form the CPI - pilgrimage economy, heritage tourism, creative industries, intangible heritage, cultural participation and soft power. The implementation of a CPI model would be a perfect choice for India, and Varanasi can prove to be a great case study.

Case Study 2: Gond paintings in Madhya Pradesh: from Tribal Art to Economic Success

In the forests of the Dindori and Mandla districts of Madhya Pradesh, there is an art tradition that comes into the international galleries and affects the district's economy but does not even become part of the national economy. Gond tribe is one of the biggest tribes of India and they have created one of the few folk-art traditions of the country, the special characteristics of which are vivid colours, dots, and lines, myths and images of nature.

The successful works of Gond artist Jangarh Singh Shyam in Tokyo and Paris led to the development of the modern Gond art economy where the art of the Gond tribe was introduced to the whole world. At present, more than 250 artists work in the village of Patangarh in Dindori district in creating Gond paintings. Thanks to the government's assistance through the National Rural Livelihood Mission, Gond artists can make enough money with the help of art only and not engage in subsistence farming.

The Gond paintings are sold in e-commerce sites, presented in five-star hotels and international art exhibitions – thus bringing export money to the families of tribals living in the most economically disadvantaged districts of India. Gond Case Study demonstrates all the three pillars of the CPI, the tribal economy, the intangible heritage and the creative industry, yet it is the best example that shows the exact measurement gaps that need to be filled in order for CPI to be achieved. It does not say anything about the financial value of Gond art in any documents related to development plans in terms of earnings from artists and tourism.

Case Study 3: Kumbh Mela - The Biggest Culture Economy Program in the World

There are some reasons for considering Kumbh Mela an extremely interesting case study, since there is no economic indicator that would clearly indicate the level of the Kumbh Mela. During

the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 that took place in Prayagraj, 66.21 crore pilgrims visited the event within 45 days; the number of visitors exceeds the population of some countries. The State government allocated ₹6,990 crore in 549 infrastructure projects that shows their dedication to the Kumbh Mela. It was reported that the economy formed by Kumbh was worth ₹2-3 lakh crore, which accounted for 0.8-1% of annual GDP of India and generated 6-7 lakh temporary jobs.

However, the most impressive aspect of the Kumbh Mela is its culture economy multiplier effect. Every pilgrim spends money on transportation, accommodations, food, offerings, and clothes, creating a chain of economic transactions, during which each item keeps passing hands of the florist who grows flowers to those who weave clothes and drive buses.

Nevertheless, the whole concept of the cultural economy ecosystem, which is based on the principle of faith, culture and civilization identity becomes a part of the GDP of such sectors like transportation, hospitality and retail sector without receiving any recognition as an economically significant culture-based concept. Kumbh cycle travels through Prayagraj, Haridwar, Nashik and Ujjain once in 12 years meaning that such kind of event occurs regularly. Thus, upcoming Kumbhs in Nashik, Ujjain and Haridwar will not only be regarded as religious events but as major economic projects and need to receive a proper consideration.

In conclusion, it is necessary to consider three examples of civilizational economic history of Varanasi, Gond art in Madhya Pradesh, and Kumbh Mela economy in order to prove the idea that cultural economy of India is not only theoretical concept but also successful reality that creates thousands of job opportunities and brings billions of dollars of profits annually. The thing that is missing in India is the evaluation mechanism that could recognize cultural economy and exactly this point is addressed by Cultural Prosperity Index.

VIII. The G20 Mandate: India Committed to Global Good

This makes the India-commitment on a global platform much more significant and thus the need of Cultural Prosperity Index. A huge cultural and artistic event was planned as part of the G20 Summit, which took place on September 9th-10th, 2023. The New Delhi Leaders' Declaration incorporated culture into clear policy pledges while achieving an inclusive and sustainable blue economy for people and the environment. The Government of India has stated that the Indian presidency of G20 brought about a paradigm shift in the world development

strategy wherein Culture was recognized as the centerpiece of sustainable development (Group of Twenty [G20], 2023).

The pact also reiterated that the countries which signed it would recognize the cultural and creative sector as an important driver of the economy, national development and social progress for inclusive growth, sustainable development and decent work. Also, it introduced the creative economy as an inclusive engine of economic growth and called for substantial investments in the cultural and creative sectors as job creation mechanisms by referring to the Development of models & measurement frameworks. Significantly, the wording "models and measurement frameworks" has been deliberately chosen as more buzzwords/appeal behind instruments informing upfront what could/could not be included is very clear as long as what new tangible measuring instruments measuring the impact of cultural economy and evidence/data used are sought.

It was unfair for India to make these promises in the world and not in the country. The eleven editions of events like 6th Cultural Economy Conclave (CEC26) together with its unprecedented 4th Kumbh Conclave organized by the India Think Council can precisely become the places with mechanism furthering this conceptualization approach to improve Cultural Prosperity Index.

IX. Cultural Prosperity Index: Six Pillars

The six pillars of cultural prosperity index proposed in this paper emerge from the arguments made in section 3 and the evidence presented in section 4. The CPI suggested here supplements GDP and HDI, with which it is used conjointly, and not as an alternative to them, in order to capture the civilizational surplus that these indices do not capture.

Pillar I: Heritage & Pilgrimage Economy Index

The first pillar would be the economy of the pilgrim circus – the ticketing, the hospitality, the transport, the retail, etc., and the generation of temporary employment in India's holy places and heritages sites, as well as long term capital investment, which can accrue on the basis of religious tourism. The Maha Kumbh provides a glimpse into the wealth that can accrue on a truly monumental scale - the 2-3 lakh crore that have accrued on a 45-day turn around in the past few years in one location itself, in the Kumbh. Pillar I can make the Kumbh a part of a

larger circuit that can generate several percentage points of GDP from such festivals while the Kumbh is conducted across three sites: Nashik, Ujjain and Haridwar.

Pillar II: Index of Creative Industries and Cultural Production

The data collected as per the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting would form the basis of this pillar, which would focus on quantifying the creative industry. The latter would include both formal and informal production, which would be captured under creative sectors such as film, music and OTT, performing arts, games, animation, design, fashion, advertising and digital content. What this would include is not only the Rs 35,000 crore of formal production (in USD 35 billion) but also a large informal sector of storytellers, street theatre, traditional artists and many more who create cultural products with continuing economic relevance.

Pillar III: Tribal and Folk Economy Index

The third pillar would be the tribal and folk economy – the production of goods and services by tribals and members of traditional communities, which would focus on non-timber forest produce and traditional handicrafts, as well as traditional knowledge systems such as the Ayurveda and Sidha, and the cultural production connected to tribal life, such as tribal art, music, dance and rituals, with a population base of about 275 million. The value of this has been recognized, with the Union Budget allocating funds for tribals and traditional communities, which have increased five-fold over the last five years. The next step is to turn to the cultural production of this large economy.

Pillar IV: Economic & Social Value of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

Economic & Social Value of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is a novel concept, a frontier topic. This pillar is about developing a method to arrive at the economic and social value of the 16 items of India's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as well as other tangible and intangible cultural assets in India which are not yet formally recognized by UNESCO. By analysing diverse facets of this topic, ranging from economic production to overall impact, this pillar seeks to arrive at a valuation methodology that uses metrics such as the economic output, the export potentials, number of livelihoods supported and the multiplier effects across various spheres. Since India hosts the UNESCO ICH committee in December 2025 which makes it the

ideal location to spearhead this initiative and define global standards for valuation practices concerning cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2025).

Pillar V: Cultural Participation and Social Capital Index

The cultural participation and social capital pillar build upon Amartya Sen's capability approach insofar as it argues that active cultural participation in the community is an index of prosperity, beyond the economic production. It can be measured by the extent of participation in festivals or performances or museum visits or libraries or cultural education or rites of passage. This cultural participation was measured as a part of the pilot study undertaken as a part of this research that captures, at least in part, the value system of the public regarding culture.

Pillar VI: Civilizational Soft Power & Cultural Diplomacy Index

Cultural diplomacy is fast becoming a new frontier of soft power, a type of which, this index terms as civilizational soft power. In many ways India has captured the imagination of the world: 300 million people practice Yoga, India's films are watched in 70 countries, Indian classical music has an audience in every corner of the globe and the spiritual tourism industry has taken off in spectacular fashion. However, there is currently no index that captures India's soft power.

CPI Pillar	Primary Data Sources	Estimated Coverage
I. Heritage & Pilgrimage Economy	ASI, Ministry of Tourism, State Govts	Kumbh alone: ₹2-3 lakh crore / event
II. Creative Industries	Ministry of I&B, FICCI-EY, UNCTAD	$35 billion (formal); informal unmeasured
III. Tribal & Folk Economy	TRIFED, Ministry of Tribal Affairs	275 million livelihoods via MFP
IV. Intangible Heritage Valuation	UNESCO, Ministry of Culture	16 UNESCO elements + unrecognised traditions

CPI Pillar	Primary Data Sources	Estimated Coverage
V. Cultural Participation & Social Capital	NSSO, Ministry of Culture, Primary Survey	Unmeasured in national accounts
VI. Soft Power & Cultural Diplomacy	MEA, ICCR, Ministry of Tourism	300M+ yoga practitioners globally

Table 6: Proposed Six-Pillar Cultural Prosperity Index - India

X. Challenges to the Implementation of the Cultural Prosperity Index.

All sensible changes proposals presuppose some awareness of problems inherent in it. However, though it was created by intelligent people, there will be some issues that need to be worked out in its implementation. Being not pessimistic but understanding the problems is a first step towards finding a solution to them. Five types of problems that need to be considered here are given below.

a) The Data Gap Challenge

The lack of data (comprehensive and standardized) is the problem in the immediate context in relation to almost all the six pillars of the CPI. The formal creative economy data which is available (in FICCI-EY white papers, MPA-Deloitte reports and MOI&B figures) is fairly comprehensive for India, however little data is available for the informal creative economy, tribal folk economy, intangible heritage economic value or cultural participation rate. The 275 million people who rely on the MFPs, the tens of thousands who rely on the folk artists, the millions who rely on the community cultural rites and rituals are not so simple an economic force whose impacts and economic numbers can be captured and measured using the existing Indian data infrastructure.

It appears that a solution to this issue would include new survey instruments that would explicitly ask questions about this, and with the assistance of which participatory surveys could engage communities in the process of defining their cultural economic involvement. An approach could be begun at the (MOC) level, with the various transient surveys, or at the TRIFED level with their statistics on the tribal economy, or using the current framework of the

tourism satellite account – but this would involve significant methodological effort for full CPI coverage.

b) The Valuation Challenge

This may actually be difficult when data is available, in terms of assigning economic value to cultural activities. For example, the Ganga Aarti, held at Dashashwamedh Ghat at Varanasi each evening, attracts thousands of worshippers and earns livelihoods for thousands of priests, boatmen (who take pilgrims across the river), flower hawkers and photographers, and is not easily quantifiable, but is a key element in building Varanasi's reputation as a global spiritual centre. What would you value a chanting of the Veda that has been transmitted orally and for 3000 years, spiritual tourism being the area where it takes place, the vast majority of the time above market?

There are various methodological approaches to this: contingency valuation, hedonic pricing and travel cost methods in addition to multiplier analysis - to mention some. The UNESCO method for economic valuation of intangible heritage would be shared at international level and India can play a crucial role in promoting it as host of the 2025 ICH Committee meeting. India also needs to use Tourism Satellite Account methodology, which has been successfully adopted in India, as an inspiration for cultural satellite accounting.

c) The Multi - Election political push

This new national accounting framework will require a continuous political will spanning multiple elections. At least five ministries with peculiar institutional dynamics will have to coordinate, namely Culture, Statistics, Tourism, Tribal Affairs, and Information and Broadcasting. Coordinating efforts so complex will likely not happen in the absence of clear political will from the high government circles. The Leaders' Declaration of the G20 in New Delhi 2023 offers the right political impetus. India has made a commitment to the world's top 20 economies to put in place the structures for cultural creative economy. It will entail civil society groups' work in coalition building with business organisations like FICCI and CII and state governments like UP, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan or Tamil Nadu.

d) The problem of terminological definitions.

What is the meaning of 'cultural economy'? For instance, the definition of cultural economy in the UK is given by the department of culture, media and sport to IT and software. Thus, in the same way, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, India is introducing digital technologies, including gaming. But should such a Cultural Production Index (CPI) be measured in service sector informational technology? Similarly, while formulating its CPI, should the applications of yoga be part of cultural economy? What if we compare Bollywood to the other Indian films? The CPI can't take off until these definitional issues are resolved. The nation must create its own definition of this term, not to copy the West, an MP said. For the Arthashastra tradition, cultural production is an economic process that removes all foreign concepts from the equation by valuing cultural, religious and artisan activities and community organizations. This is one of the first institutional steps which should be taken at the ministry of culture in this regard and this should be done through a working group on the definition.

e) The Risk of Commodification

Commodification is also an important issue in the field of culture and economy, albeit one that is not as visible. Such financial interpretations in cultural economy may turn the living cultures into merely goods. The Kumbh Mela will not be seen as a religious event but a financial one. Also, the assessment of the Vedic chanting will not be on spiritual criteria.

The answer to this problem is that in the framework of the CPI, the CPI is an economic value which is explicitly added, but not turned into economic money. The fifth pillar (Cultural Participation and Social Capital) will use human development as a starting point for the assessment of cultural participation instead of market value. It is important that local communities be involved in the evaluation of the sacred traditions and cultural systems of their kindreds if they are to re-benefit from the CPI.

XI. Policy Recommendations

It is important to note that the Transformation of the Cultural Prosperity Index needs to be a collaborative effort of various government ministries and agencies as it has been developed through the academic approach. Five suggestions from the existing institutional capabilities and experiences from foreign countries are: The establishment of the National Cultural Economy Bureau is recommended.

Recommendation 1: The introduction of the National Cultural Economy Bureau

The Indian Government has to create a National Cultural Economy Bureau under joint authority of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation. The Bureau will establish standard methods for the cultural economy measurement; the Bureau will publish the Cultural Economy Report on a yearly basis together with the Economic Survey and present the report to the parliament via a special committee. The development of foreign practices, for instance the Creative Industries Economic Estimates published annually by the UK, the EU Cultural Statistics system and the Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account statistics published annually by the USA, are numerous.

Recommendation 2: Develop a Cultural Satellite Account

Indian Tourism is the first to have adopted Tourism Satellite Account method and informed that the contribution of tourism to GDP and employment were 5.22% and 84.63 million in 2023-24 respectively. It will be worthwhile to set up a Cultural Satellite Account based on the same approach of input-output and chart the performances of the cultural economy in the overall economy.

Recommendation 3: ‘Make a statement on Cultural Economy'

It is recommended that a Union Budget statement on Cultural Economy be made part of Union Budget like Economic Survey and Gender Budget statement that should give specific information on the realization of cultural economy of India.

Recommendation 4: Development of International ICH Valuation Mechanisms

Now, India has a big opportunity to be an initiator in developing an approach towards the valuation of ICH at the international level with the 20th session of the UNESCO's ICH Committee to be held in India in December, 2025 and India having 16 elements in the UNESCO's records. The Government of India/UNESCO cooperation is to be initiated and 16 elements added by India are to be taken as a basis to define the measurement standards valid in international arena.

Recommendation 5: Standardization of the process of impact assessment of Kumbh Pilgrimage Economy

The time for systematic evaluation of the impact of pilgrimage economy in the form of Kumbh Melas is now in India, taking place in Nashik, Ujjain and Haridwar. There is need to create a Kumbh Economic Impact Assessment Protocol that can be created and institutionalized as a standard practice when organizing and implementing Kumbh events. The collected data from the years will be converted into the world's largest and greatest data base about Pilgrimage economy in the future.

XII. The Future of India

A Prospective to Become a Leader Country in Cultural Economics

At some point in History a nation is given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. India is the most populous country in the world, the fifth largest GDP and the second country in terms of ancient civilisations. The innovative approach towards economic growth by India puts it in a special position to be a leading country in G20 today. The Cultural Prosperity Index will create a new economic theory story, and will present a structure that enables economic development innovators in India and around the world to investigate and grasp the new economic paradigm - Cultural Economics.

A newly established Cultural Prosperity Index in 2030 will contribute to India's perception as a country that pioneers a different, fairer way to economic prosperity. The findings from the CPI will be incorporated in the Economic Survey of India, thus giving a holistic approach to an alternative economic theory. The introduction of the Cultural Economy Statement in the Indian Parliament officially places the creative economy within the realm of economic discourse on par with other important measures like Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Net National Income (NNI). India would indeed be a country that would set trends in the economic science.

The current world economic system only recognizes GDP (Gross Domestic Product) which measures degree of economic development, HDI (Human Development Index) which measures the state of a country, and the Better Life Index, which is built upon these. Meanwhile, India has Yogakshema (welfare), the Capability Approach developed by Professor Amartya Sen and a plethora of other thoughts to add to the international economic debate. The

world awaits India to lead by the light of its own immense, millennial history and not to see how it measures up to the rest of the world.

XIII. Conclusion

India is one of the most multifaceted civilizations states. It is a country where Vedic hymns, chanted thousands of years ago, still sound today; where 66 crore people make a 45-day pilgrimage; where the 16 traditional arts have received the highest international recognition; where the creative economy worth $35 billion provides employment to 8%. Moreover, the development index of India equals 130, while its growth is defined by the American invention of the 1930s.

A more positive perception of the country, its domestic culture, philosophy, and way of life was previously determined by Kautilya's Arthashastra, a treatise on the economic theory of statecraft, dating back to the 4th century BCE. It discloses a multi-faceted concept of political economy prosperity, which is further developed and promoted by the most renowned Indian economist Amartya Sen and his Capability Approach. This approach was advanced as an alternative to the standard GDP-centric perspective of economic development and became the agenda-setting statement for the G20 presidency in 2023. Thus, India released "G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration", which promotes the allocation of innovative methods for measuring the cultural and creative economy.

The Cultural Prosperity Index proposed by the authors of the article under analysis is a powerful tool to meet this agenda-setting goal. First of all, because, in general, and especially in the first six indicators, it sets forth objective evidence, comparative international analysis, and India's traditional values. However, there is still the need for further political and managerial activity at the level of policymakers to implement the outlined idea of domestic cultural prosperity. In general, it can be said that India needs this concept for self-esteem since the country has many positive aspects in its development, which should be emphasized. Therefore, India should change the narrative about itself from the perspective of the level of economic development, measured by the GDP indicator, to a multifaceted one. It is necessary to move from the policy of catching up with others to a competitive one, which would fix the position of the country in the context of its civilization.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument and Response Data

A.1 Survey Questionnaire (Total 14 Questions)

"Measuring What Matters: Public Perceptions of Cultural Prosperity in India" - collected via Google Forms, July - August 2026.

1. What is your age group? *(18–25 / 26–40 / 41–60 / Above 60 / Under 18)*

2. Which state do you currently reside in? *(open text)*

3. What is your current occupation? *(Student / Working professional / Business Owner–Entrepreneur / Homemaker / Retired / Other)*

4. In your understanding, what does India's GDP mainly measure? *(Total goods and services produced / Happiness and wellbeing of citizens / Cultural and spiritual wealth of the country / I am not sure)*

5. Were you aware that India's creative economy (films, music, art, content creation) is worth approximately $35 billion and employs 8% of the national workforce? *(Yes, I was aware / I had a rough idea but not exact numbers / No, I was not aware)*

6. Which cultural activity do you think contributes the most to India's economy? *(Tourism / Religious pilgrimages / Traditional handicrafts / Festivals / Film & entertainment / Yoga & wellness / Cuisine / Other)*

7. How much do you feel India's cultural traditions - festivals, pilgrimages, arts, and crafts - contribute to the country's economic prosperity? *(1–5 scale)*

8. The Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 attracted 66 crore visitors and generated an estimated ₹2–3 lakh crore in economic activity. Does this change how you think about the economic value of religious and cultural events? *(Yes, significantly / Somewhat / Not really / No)*

9. Do you believe India's GDP accurately reflects the country's true prosperity and wellbeing?

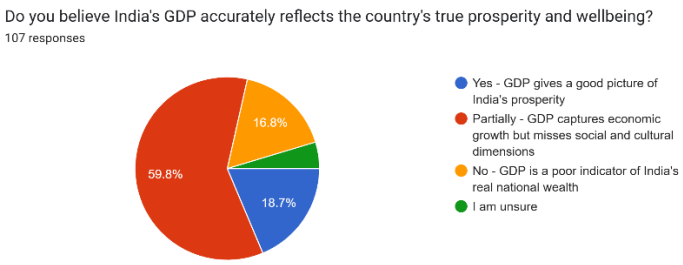


Figure - 01

10. In the past one year, have you or your family spent money on any of the following? *(Select all that apply - pilgrimage/religious trip, cultural festival/fair, traditional handicrafts/handloom/folk art, classical music/dance/theatre, heritage tourism, none of the above)*

11. Approximately how much did your household spend on cultural activities in the last year? *(Less than ₹2,000 / ₹2,000–₹10,000 / ₹10,000–₹50,000 / More than ₹50,000 / Prefer not to say)*

12. Should the Indian government create a separate Cultural Prosperity Index (CPI) to measure cultural, spiritual, and heritage contributions alongside GDP?

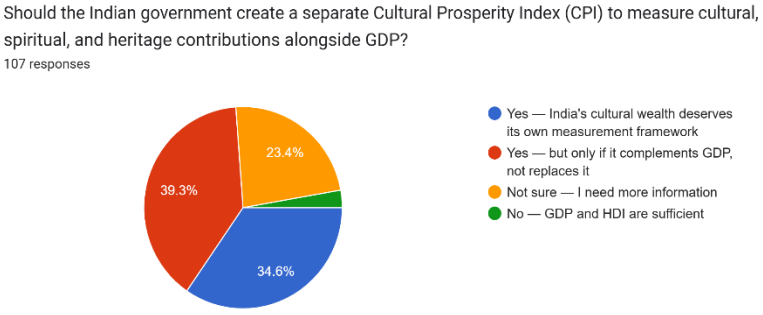


Figure – 02

13. How important do you feel it is for India to have a national framework that measures cultural and heritage economy contributions? *(1–5 scale)*

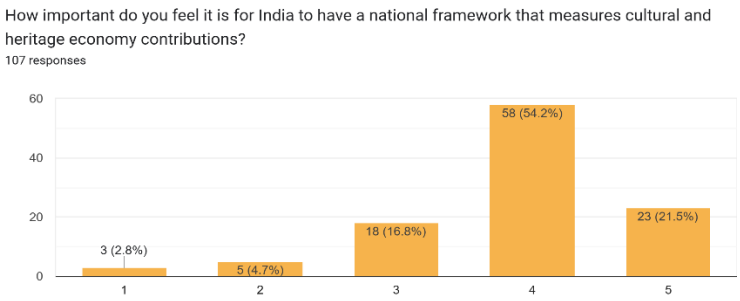


Figure - 03

Appendix A.2 - Open-Ended Responses (Q14) - Representative Sample

"In your own words, what aspect of India's culture or heritage do you feel contributes most to the nation's prosperity but is NOT captured in economic data?"

(A representative sample of responses is presented below, grouped by theme. The complete dataset is available upon request)

Theme 1: Community and Social Capital

1. "One aspect of India's culture that contributes immensely to the nation's prosperity but is rarely reflected in economic data is the culture of community support and social solidarity... While GDP measures market transactions, it cannot capture the value of these relationships, mutual cooperation, and the sense of collective responsibility that quietly sustains millions of people."

2. "The most profound aspect of Indian culture and heritage that drives national prosperity - yet completely escapes economic metrics - is the informal social and familial support system (social capital). In India, relationships and community ties function as an unpriced socio-economic safety net."

3. "I believe India's greatest strength is its sense of community and compassion. The way people come together to support each other, respect diverse cultures, and value relationships creates a strong social foundation that cannot be measured by economic data."

4. "The enduring strength of multi-generational family and kinship networks - rooted in cultural norms of mutual obligation, shared responsibility, and

intergenerational continuity - contributes more to India's sustained prosperity and resilience than most formal economic metrics capture."

5. "Social capital and trust built through shared heritage. The unifying nature of cultural festivals, spiritual traditions, and community gatherings fosters high levels of trust, social cohesion, and mutual cooperation — essential foundations for national stability that money cannot measure."

6. "India's strong family values and community support build resilience, encourage hard work, and help people succeed. This cultural strength contributes greatly to the nation's prosperity but isn't captured in economic data."

7. Cultural tradition of strong family structures and community solidarity.

8. Deep family community works.

9. I'm not too sure, maybe the culture of having large families and living together.

Theme 2: Religious Offerings and the Temple Economy

1. "The donations to religious places, sale of religious souvenirs, money spent on havans, pooja, jagrata, etc."

2. Religious donations and spending on temples, mosques, churches, gurudwaras, and other places of worship.

3. "Probably the business of religion — the numbers are much bigger than we know about."

4. "In my understanding, those religious trips and extra money we put on the box (daan paeti) is also part of a nation's prosperity, but it hasn't been given any record."

5. Religious pilgrimages.

6. Religious tourism is thought to be one of the important contributors but is not captured well enough in economic data.

7. Due to the commercialization of festival and religion events.

Theme 3: Traditional Crafts and Artisan Industries

1. The preservation of traditional crafts and artisan skills, which contribute to community identity and tourism, is often overlooked in economic data.
2. Small scale village handicraft industries.
3. Handicraft industries and traditional workers,
4. "India's traditional knowledge systems - such as sustainable farming practices, water conservation methods, and medicinal knowledge - continue to benefit communities across the country... Their contribution to environmental conservation and rural livelihoods is substantial, but it is rarely measured in conventional economic data."

Other themes mentioned (tourism, arts, work ethic)

1. Local village setting and culture that attracts tourists
2. Work ethic of people, still a lot of potential is untapped,
3. Knowledge and creativity.