

This Article is From Sep 10, 2025

Opinion | North India Underwater: Not Nature's Fury, But Human Folly



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Opinion, Updated: Oct 08, 2025 11:07 am IST

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In North India, the monsoon hasn't just rained: it has washed away lives, livelihoods, and the illusion that nature alone bears the blame. Across the region, at least 700 people have lost their lives, and hundreds of thousands have been displaced by relentless flooding and landslides in the Himalayas, Punjab, and Delhi. In Punjab alone, over 50 deaths have been reported, more than 3 lakh people impacted, and 1,400-plus villages submerged, with more than 2.5 lakh acres of farmland inundated

In Punjab's agricultural heartland, this is being called the worst flood in nearly four decades. The Yamuna in Delhi breached dangerous levels, forcing the evacuation of around 10,000 residents. Meanwhile, in Uttarakhand, a cloudburst-triggered flash flood in Dharali claimed at least six lives, with more than 50 missing and dozens of houses and hotels destroyed. In Kishtwar, Jammu & Kashmir, a flash flood struck after a cloudburst, leaving 67 dead, 300 injured, and roughly 200 missing.

These are not isolated tragedies-they are part of a clear pattern: the monsoon has become a chronic crisis born more from human excess than from clouds alone. To understand why destruction on this scale keeps repeating, we must look beyond rainfall charts and into how we have reshaped the land itself.

The Himalayas, Cracked by Our Greed

The Himalayas were never built to carry the weight we have forced upon them. These ranges are still young in geological terms, their slopes delicately balanced, their soil barely stitched together. Yet highways have been hammered through their rock faces, tunnels bored into their bellies, rivers strangled by dams, and wetlands converted into real estate.



No surprise, then, that the rains no longer soak these mountains; they shatter them. Each burst of cloud loosens slopes already cracked by dynamite and cement. Uttarakhand offers no different picture: landslides and flash floods here are not accidents of weather but the accumulated result of years of greed.

This year alone, April temperatures in North India spiked 5-8°C above the seasonal average, followed by record-breaking rainfall that wiped out entire crops. Scientists once predicted such extremes as "once-in-a-century" events. Now they arrive yearly, even monthly.

Drowning in Our Own Design

The floods do not stop at the hills. They spill into the plains and cities, exposing another fragility: one born not of weakness but of negligence. Villages in the Himalayas collapse because their slopes cannot hold. But what explains the sight of Delhi's expressways turned into rivers or Gurgaon's gleaming towers marooned in waist-deep water?

These are among the wealthiest regions in the country. Their drowning is not the failure of resources but of priorities. Storm drains lie buried under concrete, floodplains have been gifted to developers, and wetlands erased in the name of progress.

Urban growth was meant to open horizons, yet it has raised the walls higher. Responsibility now stops at the housing gate. Inside are glossy pavements and trimmed gardens; just beyond them, stagnant water and broken drains. India's richest cities sinking year after year is not a story of scarce funds; it is the reflection of a mindset that trades private comfort for collective well-being.

The Unequal Weight of a Shared Crisis

The climate crisis is not a leveller; it strikes along the lines of privilege. The wealthiest few burn fuel in the skies and in their sprawling lifestyles, while those with the smallest footprints are left to bury their dead or salvage drowned crops.

It is never the frequent flyer who is swept away in a flash flood or the industrialist who waits for drinking water when pumps fail. It is the orchard keeper in Himachal watching his soil slip down the slope, the daily-wage worker in Uttarakhand whose home is carried off by a cloudburst, and the rickshaw puller in Delhi who loses everything to waterlogged streets.

And the injustice runs through India's own veins. The energy-hungry lifestyles of urban elites leave behind an invisible debt that the poor are forced to repay. Those in makeshift hillside settlements, along swollen riverbanks, or in the unplanned colonies of expanding cities face the brunt. Climate change does not create new fault lines; it deepens the ones already there.

Inner Change as the Root of Outer Reform

If there is one lesson the floods insist on, it is this: our idea of progress stands on shaky ground. For too long, we have equated a "good life" with more possessions, bigger cars, taller buildings, and further flights. Yet these measures were never ours; they were sold to us by those who thrive on our endless wanting.

Restoring wetlands, reviving floodplains, taxing carbon-heavy indulgence, and demanding accountability from corporations are urgent steps. But policy alone will fail if desire itself remains unchecked. Without a shift in our definitions of joy and success, reforms will be no more than patches on widening cracks.

It is in this spirit that the PrashantAdvait Foundation has launched Operation 2030: a call to awaken before science's deadline closes the window. The warning is clear: unless the rise in global temperature is contained within 1.5°C by 2030, the earth's feedback cycles-melting glaciers, rising seas, collapsing ecosystems-will push us past the point of return. The mission rests on a simple understanding: outer change cannot last without inner clarity.

A Monsoon That Demands Awakening

The floods are not just calamities to be tallied in compensation reports; they are warnings etched into the land. Beyond a point, collapse is not a surprise; it is inevitable.

What we choose to do now matters. If we keep rebuilding on the same shaky foundations, the next monsoon will simply repeat the same disaster. If we can pause, really look at what's happening, and choose another way forward, even these losses can mark the beginning of change.

And this is where the Gita's timeless reminder resounds: action born of clarity frees, and action born of delusion binds. Development without wisdom is not progress; it is preparation for the next disaster.

The future will not remember how many millimetres of rain fell; it will remember the choices we made when the warnings were clear. Did we rush to rebuild on the same shaky ground, or did we stop long enough to take a different path, the right path?

[The author is a philosopher and teacher of global wisdom literature, and the founder of the PrashantAdvait Foundation. A bestselling author who brings timeless wisdom to urgent modern questions, he has been recognised for his contributions to thought and ethics - with honours from PETA ('Most Influential Vegan'), the Green Society of India ('Environmental Leadership'), and the IIT Delhi Alumni Association ('National Development').]

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