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What India Discovers: On Research and the Innovation Gap

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SCIENCE & TECH

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GS3

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What India Discovers: On Research and the Innovation Gap

 **The Indian Express** 11 June 2026 **GS3**

Source: ujjari.com — Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India manufactures more each year, but discovers little of what it makes. What will it take to move India from a technology consumer to a technology creator?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Indian Express](#)

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources **HOW**

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

A recurring theme in India's growth debate is that the country increasingly **manufactures**, but **discovers** comparatively little of what it makes. For an aspirant, this is a sharp **GS3 (science and technology, economy) lead** on India's **research-and-development deficit** and the role of the new **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)**. The deeper point: real economic and strategic power lies in **creating** technology, not just assembling it.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

India spends **well under 1% of GDP on R&D**, far below major economies, and most of that is government money, leaving India a **technology consumer**, not creator, and dependent on imported core technologies. The **ANRF** is meant to catalyse a shift by **crowding in private and philanthropic funding** toward discovery. Success needs higher spending, stronger university research, and academia-industry links.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
R&D intensity	R&D spending as a share of GDP	India's is well below peers
Consumer vs creator	Applying vs inventing technology	Creation brings value and autonomy
ANRF	Anusandhan National Research Foundation	The catalytic funding body
Co-investment	Pooling government, industry, philanthropy	Crowds in private money

THE ANALYSIS: WHY DISCOVERY MATTERS

- 1 Investment is too low.** India's R&D-to-GDP ratio lags far behind leading economies.
- 2 The private share is thin.** Industry invests comparatively little, overburdening the government.
- 3 Dependence is the cost.** Weak research leaves India reliant on imported core technologies.
- 4 Autonomy lies in creation.** The countries that discover set the terms for those that only apply.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

India's **gross expenditure on R&D (GERD)** is well under **1% of GDP**, versus 2 to 4% in leading economies; the private-sector share is comparatively low. **Institution:** the **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)**, established to fund and steer research and crowd in non-government money; it subsumed the earlier SERB. **Policy frame:** the National Education Policy 2020 emphasis on research; deep-tech and **semiconductor, quantum and AI missions**. **Concepts:** **R&D intensity**; basic vs applied research; technology dependence vs **strategic autonomy**. **Linkage:** innovation, the knowledge economy and self-reliance.

THE DEBATE

Argument for application: India's strength is low-cost application at scale; frontier research is a luxury better left to richer economies.

Argument for discovery: The highest value and greatest autonomy lie in creating technology; dependence on imported core tech is a strategic vulnerability.

The balanced verdict: Application and discovery are not opposed, but India has leaned too far toward the former. It should **raise R&D spending**, use the ANRF to **crowd in private and philanthropic funds**, and strengthen the research base, so that India creates more of the technology it uses.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

A weak answer treats rising manufacturing as proof of technological strength. The strong answer distinguishes assembling a product from owning the knowledge behind it, and asks where the value and the autonomy actually sit. The move is from “Make in India” to “Discover in India.” The same lens applies to any debate about moving up the value chain.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Low R&D spend (<1% GDP) + thin private research -> India applies but does not invent -> dependence on imported core tech. The catalyst: ANRF co-invests across government + industry + academia + philanthropy. The goal: higher R&D intensity + strong university research + academia-industry links -> India as a technology creator.

THE WAY FORWARD

- 1 **Raise R&D spending** toward global benchmarks.
- 2 **Leverage the ANRF** to crowd in private and philanthropic funding, not replace it.
- 3 **Strengthen university research** and the link between campuses and companies.
- 4 **Protect intellectual property and academic freedom** to enable discovery.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

“India’s future depends not only on what it manufactures but on what it discovers.” Examine India’s research-and-development deficit and the role of the ANRF. (250 words)

“A nation that assembles what others invent is never truly self-reliant; discovery, not assembly, is where autonomy begins.”

Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) · gross expenditure on R&D (GERD) · R&D intensity (<1% of GDP) · SERB · NEP 2020 research focus.

Is frontier research a luxury for a developing country, or a necessity for autonomy?

Connects to GS3 PYQs on science-and-technology policy, indigenisation and the innovation ecosystem; a probable question is the consumer-versus-creator framing above.

today’s IN-SPACe LVM3 article (technology and self-reliance); static GS3 on science-and-technology policy and the knowledge economy.

Sources: Indian Express, ANRF, Department of Science and Technology

Source: What India Discovers: On Research and the Innovation Gap — Ujivari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

India’s research-and-development spending, at well under one percent of GDP, lags its peers and leaves the country a consumer rather than a creator of technology; the Anusandhan National Research Foundation can catalyse a shift by mobilising co-investment across government, industry, academia and philanthropy toward discovery.

✓ SUPPORTING

- India spends far less on R&D as a share of GDP than major economies, limiting frontier innovation and deep-tech capacity.
- Private-sector and industry research investment is comparatively low, so the burden falls disproportionately on the government.

- Without stronger research, India risks remaining dependent on imported core technologies in areas critical to its economy and security.

COUNTER

Some argue that India's strength lies in low-cost application and scale, and that frontier research is a luxury better left to richer economies.

WAY FORWARD

Raise R&D spending toward global benchmarks, leverage the ANRF to crowd in private and philanthropic funding, strengthen university research, link academia to industry, and protect intellectual property and research freedom.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

"India's future depends not only on what it manufactures but on what it discovers." Examine India's research-and-development deficit and the role of the ANRF. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

India increasingly makes things, from phones to vehicles. But making is not the same as inventing, and a nation that does not discover the technologies it uses remains dependent on those who do.

BODY

The core problem is investment. India spends well under one percent of its GDP on research and development, far below the two to four percent of leading economies, and a large part of even that comes from the government, with private industry investing comparatively little.

The result is that India excels at applying and scaling technology but discovers relatively little of the frontier knowledge behind it, leaving it dependent on imported core technologies in semiconductors, advanced materials, pharmaceuticals and defence. This dependence is a strategic as well as an economic vulnerability.

The counter-view, that India's comparative advantage is low-cost application at scale and that frontier research is a luxury, is short-sighted: the highest value and the greatest autonomy lie in creating technology, not merely assembling it, and the countries that lead in discovery set the terms for everyone else. The Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) is designed precisely to change this, by acting as a catalytic body that mobilises and co-invests funds across government, industry, academia and philanthropy, and steers research toward national priorities.

For it to succeed, India must raise overall R&D spending toward global benchmarks, use the ANRF to crowd in private and philanthropic money rather than substitute for it, strengthen university research and the link between campuses and companies, and protect intellectual property and academic freedom. Discovery cannot be commanded, but it can be funded and enabled.

CONCLUSION

India's economic and strategic future will be shaped less by what it assembles than by what it invents. Investing in discovery is not a luxury but a necessity.

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