



# Indian Space Exploration: Economic Missions and Global Comparisons

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### Editorial

Volume 2 Issue 2

Received Date: August 13, 2024

Published Date: August 22, 2024

DOI: 10.23880/oaja-16000126

## Keywords

Chandrayaan-3; ISRO; Economic Missions; Global Comparisons

## Abbreviations

ISRO: Indian Space Research Organisation; CNSA: China National Space Administration; ESA: European Space Agency; PSLV: Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle.

## Editorial

India's journey in space exploration, spearheaded by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), has been a remarkable story of innovation, resilience, and ambition. From launching its first satellite, Aryabhata, in 1975 to the recent successes of missions like Chandrayaan-3 and the Mars Orbiter Mission (Mangalyaan), ISRO has made significant strides in space technology. This article delves into India's recent space explorations, focusing on their economic missions, comparing them with other leading space agencies like NASA, ESA, and CNSA, and highlighting the contributions of ISRO's scientists and engineers.

## Historical Context and Recent Achievements

ISRO's journey began in the 1960s with Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, the father of the Indian space program, who envisioned the benefits of space technology for a developing country like India. Over the decades, ISRO has grown from strength to strength, achieving several milestones that have

cemented its position as a major player in space exploration. **In recent years, ISRO has undertaken several high-profile missions that have garnered international attention:**

**Chandrayaan-2:** Launched in July 2019, this mission aimed to explore the Moon's south pole region. Although the lander, Vikram, did not achieve a soft landing, the orbiter continues to provide valuable data.

**Mangalyaan (Mars Orbiter Mission):** Launched in November 2013, Mangalyaan made India the first country to reach Mars orbit in its maiden attempt and at a fraction of the cost of similar missions by other space agencies.

**Gaganyaan:** Set to be India's first manned mission to space, Gaganyaan aims to send Indian astronauts, known as vyomanauts, into space by 2024.

**Chandrayaan-3:** Launched in July 2023, this mission aims to achieve a successful landing on the Moon, building on the lessons learned from Chandrayaan-2.

**Aditya-L1:** Scheduled for launch in 2024, this mission aims to study the Sun, particularly its outermost layer, and the corona.

## Economic Missions and Their Impact

One of ISRO's most notable achievements has been its ability to conduct cost-effective missions. The Mars Orbiter Mission, for instance, cost approximately \$74 million, significantly lower than similar missions by NASA or the European Space Agency (ESA). This cost-effectiveness has positioned ISRO as a competitive player in the global space market.

**ISRO's economic missions have several implications:**

**Commercial Satellite Launches:** ISRO's Polar Satellite

Launch Vehicle (PSLV) has become a reliable and cost-effective option for launching commercial satellites. By 2024, ISRO had launched over 300 foreign satellites from 33 countries, generating significant revenue.

**Space-Based Applications:** ISRO's satellites provide crucial data for weather forecasting, disaster management, agriculture, and navigation. These applications have direct economic benefits, enhancing productivity and mitigating risks.

**Technology Development and Innovation:** The frugality and ingenuity in ISRO's missions have led to technological advancements that can be applied in other sectors, fostering innovation and economic growth.

**Global Collaboration:** ISRO's partnerships with other space agencies and commercial entities have opened avenues for collaboration and knowledge exchange, further enhancing its capabilities and market presence.

### Comparisons with Other Space Agencies

While ISRO has made significant progress, it operates in a highly competitive global environment. Comparing ISRO with other leading space agencies provides insight into its achievements and areas for growth.

#### NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration)

**Budget and Scale:** NASA's annual budget is approximately \$25 billion, significantly higher than ISRO's. This allows NASA to undertake more extensive and ambitious missions.

**Technological Prowess:** NASA's missions, such as the Mars rovers, the James Webb Space Telescope, and the Artemis program (aiming to return humans to the Moon), showcase advanced technology and large-scale international collaboration.

**Scientific Contributions:** NASA's research contributions in astrophysics, planetary science, and human spaceflight are unparalleled, making it a leader in space exploration.

#### ESA (European Space Agency)

**Collaborative Approach:** ESA operates on a collaborative model with contributions from 22 member states. This approach enables sharing of resources and expertise, resulting in missions like the Rosetta comet mission and the Galileo navigation system.

**Scientific Missions:** ESA focuses on scientific missions that push the boundaries of knowledge, such as the ExoMars mission and the upcoming Jupiter Icy Moons Explorer (JUICE).

**Commercial Ventures:** ESA also supports commercial ventures, fostering a vibrant space industry in Europe.

#### CNSA (China National Space Administration)

**Rapid Advancements:** CNSA has made rapid advancements in space exploration, marked by the Chang'e lunar missions, the Tianwen-1 Mars mission, and the construction of the

Tiangong space station.

**Strategic Ambitions:** China's space program is part of its broader strategic ambitions, focusing on scientific discovery, military applications, and international prestige.

**Budget and Resources:** CNSA benefits from substantial government support, allowing for sustained investment in advanced technologies and large-scale missions.

### Contributions of ISRO Scientists and Engineers

The success of ISRO's missions can be attributed to the dedication and ingenuity of its scientists and engineers. Several individuals have made significant contributions in recent years:

**Dr. K. Sivan:** As the former Chairman of ISRO, Dr. Sivan oversaw key missions like Chandrayaan-2 and the development of the Gaganyaan project. His leadership and vision have been instrumental in advancing India's space program.

**MySwamy Annadurai:** Known as the "Moon Man of India," Annadurai was the project director for Chandrayaan-1 and Mangalyaan. His expertise in satellite technology has been crucial for ISRO's successes.

**Ritu Karidhal:** Often referred to as the "Rocket Woman of India," Karidhal was the deputy operations director for Mangalyaan and played a key role in Chandrayaan-2. Her work in mission planning and execution has been widely recognized.

**Dr. V.R. Lalithambika:** Heading the Gaganyaan project, Dr. Lalithambika is leading India's first human spaceflight mission. Her expertise in space robotics and mission design is pivotal for this ambitious endeavor.

**S. Somnath:** The current Chairman of ISRO, Somnath has been instrumental in developing the GSLV Mk III, the launch vehicle for the Gaganyaan mission. His contributions in launch vehicle technology have been crucial for ISRO's growth.

### Challenges and Future Prospects

**Despite its achievements, ISRO faces several challenges:**

**Budget Constraints:** ISRO operates with a relatively modest budget compared to NASA or CNSA. While this has led to innovative and cost-effective solutions, it also limits the scale and frequency of missions.

**Technological Advancements:** To compete with other space agencies, ISRO needs to invest in advanced technologies, such as reusable launch vehicles, deep space exploration, and human spaceflight capabilities.

**International Collaboration:** Expanding international collaborations can enhance ISRO's capabilities and provide access to advanced technologies and expertise.

### Looking ahead, ISRO has an ambitious roadmap

**Gaganyaan:** Successfully executing India's first manned mission will be a significant milestone, showcasing ISRO's capabilities in human spaceflight.

**Chandrayaan-3 and Beyond:** Continuing lunar exploration with Chandrayaan-3 and potential future missions will enhance India's presence in lunar science and exploration.

**Interplanetary Missions:** Building on the success of Mangalyaan, ISRO plans more interplanetary missions, including potential missions to Venus and an asteroid mission.

**Commercial Ventures:** ISRO aims to expand its commercial satellite launch services, leveraging its cost-effective launch capabilities to capture a larger share of the global market.

**Space-Based Applications:** Developing and deploying more satellites for applications like communication, navigation, and earth observation will have direct economic benefits for India.

### Conclusion

India's space exploration journey, led by ISRO, is a testament to the country's scientific and technological prowess. Despite operating with a modest budget, ISRO has achieved remarkable success in space exploration and economic missions. Comparing ISRO with NASA, ESA, and CNSA highlights its achievements and the potential for future growth.

The contributions of ISRO's scientists and engineers have been pivotal in these successes, driving innovation and excellence. As ISRO continues to push the boundaries of space exploration, it holds the promise of further enhancing India's stature in the global space community and delivering significant economic benefits. The future of India's space program looks bright, with ambitious missions on the horizon and a legacy of cost-effective innovation that sets it apart on the world stage.