Why AI Is Suddenly Free in India?

And What It Really Means?

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Whether it's Sam Altman from OpenAI, Sundar Pichai from Google, or Aravind Srinivas from Perplexity, everyone once claimed AI would change the world. Companies hit sky-high valuations of billions of dollars and now plan to go public.

And yet, the same "world-changing" tools are now being offered for free in India. ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity are all handing out complimentary access. Why?

If something is valuable, would you ever give it away for free? There is more to this story than meets the eye.

- Perplexity once charged ₹18,000 a year for its subscription. Then it suddenly became free for Airtel users.

- Google followed, offering all Jio users access to Gemini and its full suite at no cost.

- ChatGPT launched a ₹399 "Go" plan for India but canceled it within two months and said, "Take it free."

This wave of generosity is not random. It is strategic.

The AI world is divided into two camps, power users and non-users. Power users like developers and researchers already pay $20 to $50 a month because their workflows depend on tools like Codex, Claude, and ChatGPT. But they represent less than one percent of all users.

The rest are casual users. They try AI for a few days and drop off. For companies investing billions in data centers, that's a problem. Their revenue cannot come only from the few who pay.

So the next step is simple, make everyone addicted. Offer it free until AI becomes a habit.

Behind the scenes, there's a larger financial loop. Nvidia, Microsoft, AMD, and Intel are all playing a circular investment game.

- Nvidia invests $100 billion but requires the recipient to buy its chips

- Microsoft invests $200 billion but demands that the same money be spent on Azure services.

- It inflates valuations and stock prices while cycling the money back to themselves.

The problem is that actual usage is not growing as fast as investors expect. ChatGPT's traffic dropped in the summer because students, who form its biggest user group, were on vacation. For something that was supposed to change the world, this is a reality check.

Now companies are desperate to drive usage. They are partnering with Indian schools, encouraging teachers to use AI for lesson plans and homework. They have

even hired education-tech leaders to push adoption in India.

Why India? Because after the US and China, it is the only large, open market left.

- Europe's AI growth is limited.

- China has built its own ecosystem and banned US models.

- That leaves India, with its population and digital base, as the next big opportunity.

To capture it, companies are training models in Indic languages, boasting that their AIs can now "understand Hindi." But this is not about love for India. It is about expanding the user base.

Meanwhile, Indian startups like Ola's Krutrim and Sarvam AI are trying to build local models.

- Krutrim became a unicorn on day one but has since gone quiet.

- Sarvam raised good money but struggles to grow its user base.

- The government's India AI mission is ambitious, but it lacks the compute power, local data, and scale to compete globally.

So while foreign companies give "AI for Bharat," they are really working toward "AI by the West, used in Bharat."

The reality is that freebies are not acts of generosity. They are market entry tactics. The goal is to hook users, create dependence, and then monetize later.

AI is indeed a brilliant tool. It can help us learn, create, and automate. But users need to stay aware. Not every revolution that arrives free stays free.

Future Directions

For India to avoid becoming just a market, it must invest in building its own models and compute infrastructure. Public-private partnerships, open-source language datasets, and regional innovation hubs can create sustainable AI growth. Indian startups must focus on solving local problems instead of competing head-on with global giants.

If we get this right, the future of AI in India won't just be about using tools built elsewhere. It will be about creating them here.

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