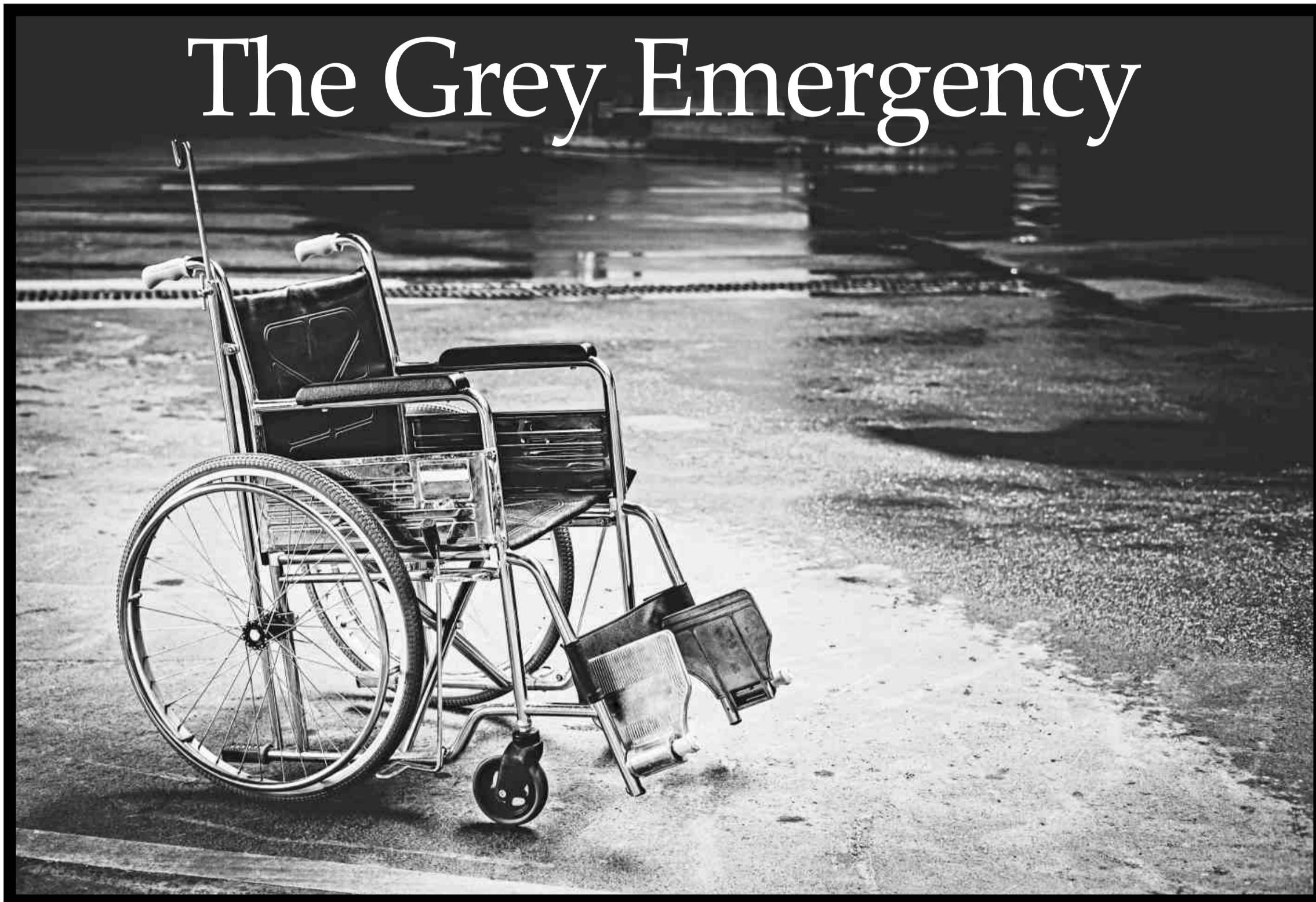


The Grey Emergency



As India ages at an unprecedented pace, millions of seniors are trapped in a catastrophic caregiving system that lacks meaningful regulation, trained professionals, and agency accountability

By SURUCHI KAPUR GOMES

Baat hoti hai, baat-cheet nahin hoti hai. Agar dekhbhal hoti hai toh paisa chahiye.

Words are cheap. Care is expensive. Listen to the refrain of India's wisdom generation—over-sixties who saw the country sprinting toward modernity while leaving them at the kerb. India, engineered by demographic accident into the world's youngest major nation, is ageing faster than it is preparing to care for its elderly. The stories of lack of care are stark and tragic; a couple of weeks ago, UP Police rescued 42 elderly people from an "illegal" old-age home in Noida, many of them locked away or tied up, and wallowing in filth. Frequent news reports mention increasing cases of digital arrest of vulnerable seniors—an elderly doctor couple in South Delhi lost nearly ₹14 crore which was transferred to criminals. A 60-year-old man in Madhya Pradesh was assaulted and dragged behind a motorcycle after refusing a demand for alcohol. A 70-year-old man and his 65-year-old wife were assaulted with a sickle by their son and daughter-in-law in Uttar Pradesh, in a dispute over property. By 2046, India will have more elders than children aged below 15.

Such cases and the absence of physical and medical protection reflect a grim future for India's elderly. By 2036, nearly 230 million Indians—about 15 per cent of the population—will be over 60. By 2050, that number could cross 20 per cent. This transformation—India's "silver shift"—is not simply a story about longevity. It is the 'crisis of caregiving'; a little acknowledged predicament.

Take 42-year-old Deepa Kamat who lives in Bengaluru, who watched her mother's dementia deepen while simultaneously managing children, a husband, in-laws and a career. She hired a general duty attendant for ₹20,000 a month and wound up having to train the caregiver herself. She is what sociologists now call a member of India's "sandwich generation"—adults compressed between the needs of children below and parents above, with no institutional support on either side. The emotional toll is enormous and almost entirely unacknowledged. There is no policy for her exhaustion. There is no helpline for the specific grief of watching a parent disappear into dementia. Such a complex challenge reveals a profound structural vacuum: the absence of a mandatory regulatory framework for senior living and caregiving. Access to dignified ageing is often directly proportional to the size of the bank balance. For the middle class and the poor, this means a relentless struggle to survive with dignity.

Helping them to do so is Santosh, an ex-Air Force officer who set up AIR Humanitarian Home. He can be seen coaxing movement from bodies that have mostly given up on the idea, or leading a group of residents through hesitant exercises. A man on crutches attempts a tentative step. A woman in a wheelchair

raises her arm. Outside, the city moves at its usual unsparing pace, indifferent to what is happening inside these walls. Here, 189 abandoned seniors live, many of whom were brought in by the police after found alone or destitute. Some sit quietly, withdrawn into themselves. Others carry simmering anger at life's betrayals. Rows of beds hold residents battling illness, disability and despair. In one corner, a physiotherapy session is underway. But the facility is barely holding together. The doctor has left. The pharmacy is struggling to keep up and the kitchen is short of supplies. This is not simply a story about longevity and pathos. Indian caregiving infrastructure is so threadbare it borders on civilisational negligence: 4.3 million trained caregivers needed, 36,000 available, and a government still treating the gap as if it is invisible. The country's much-celebrated youth bulge is already beginning to grey at the temples. AIR's caretaker Abha Sharma describes the arithmetic of survival: "We rely entirely on donations. We urgently need medicines and 1,800 diapers every month, because most residents are incontinent." Elder care does not win elections. It does not trend. It accumulates, quietly and invisibly, in places like this.

The caregiver, in all of this, is the most invisible figure of all. They are the first line of defence in elder care and the least protected participant in the system. Undertrained, underpaid, often working without formal contracts or benefits, frequently expected to double as domestic help—their labour is what holds everything together. Across the country, thousands of *bhaiyas* and *didis* are already the invisible backbone of elder care, learning on the job, absorbing expertise

through proximity and intuition rather than training, and receiving almost nothing in return—not wages that reflect the weight of the work, not insurance, not career progression, not recognition. "They don't have medical insurance, formal education, or career progression," says Jamuna Ravi of Bangalore-based geriatric care NGO, Vayah Vikas. Burnout is endemic. Social protection is essentially non-existent. Pavitra Reddy, COO at Vayah Vikas, argues that the sector urgently needs mandated standards that protect not just the elder but the caregiver too. "GDAs, or General Duty Assistants, must be

thoroughly vetted and their criminal record checks are a must. But I also find the handover process, followed in home care, lacking clarity. We need to examine what facilities are there in one's home for the caregiver, too." For some caregivers like Pooja Thakur, the satisfaction of the job comes first. She says, "It doesn't feel like just a job. I'm part of each elder's family. There's responsibility, and over time, a deep bond develops." Her work is of profound social value, which the system mostly fails to notice.

The nurse-to-patient ratio tells an important part of the story with cold efficiency: 1:670, against the World Health Organisation's recommended 1:300. As India's elderly population is projected to triple its demand for care by mid-century, the country has fewer than 36,000 trained caregivers to answer the call. This is not merely a gap. That is a chasm. The arithmetic of the future of elderly care makes it deeper: an 80-plus population growing by nearly 279 per cent by 2050. The darkness that lies ahead for them is dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, stroke, depression and terminal illnesses. An estimated four million Indians are living with dementia today—a number expected to swell past 13.4 million within three decades. Yet the ecosystem meant to address this—senior living communities, caregiving agencies, home care services—operates in a policy grey zone so murky it barely deserves to be called a system at all. There have been calls for a separate

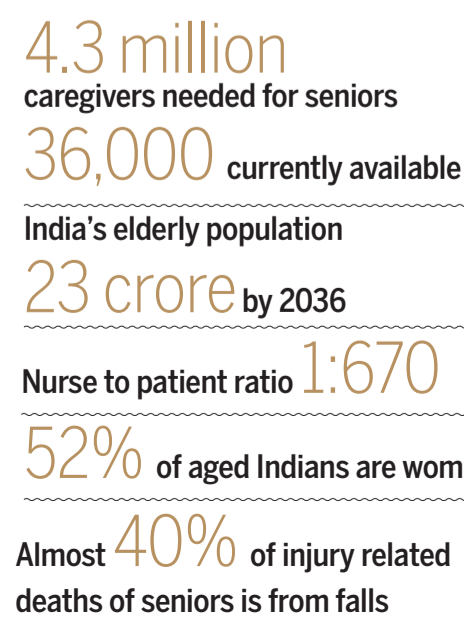
elder-care ministry, mandated caregiver training and regulatory frameworks. But between political rhetoric and structural change lies a vast, unaccountable middle distance in which millions of elderly Indians are quietly left to fend for themselves. "The volumes demand something fundamentally different," says Saumyajit Roy, founder and CEO of Emoha, a company that provides caregiving at home. "The need cannot be met by a few centres, self-regulation and lack of legislation," he warns.

One of such whose needs have to be met lives in Delhi; Palki Desai is 75 years old. She has seen revolving door of caregivers who lack meaningful medical knowledge. "I have had seven attenders, none with any medical knowledge. Two ran away with gold and money. The agency disappeared."

India's caregiving deficit is staggering. The country currently has a shortfall of 4.3 million trained caregivers. There is sad similarity between Desai and Jenna Mistry. Mistry, a Mumbai-based professional, cares for her elderly father and special-needs brother. She paid a registration fee to an agency but the caregiver they sent lasted just a few days. "He stayed for a few days and left. The agency vanished, and my refund was lost. We were back to square one." The same pool of caregivers circulates between agencies across cities, often unverified and untrained. Fraudulent operators collect fees from both job-seeking caregivers and fee-paying families, then disappear. Thangamma, who

Turn to page 2

Seniors rescued from an illegal Noida geriatric care home where they were ill-treated and ignored





60% have at least one chronic illness
20% need help with daily activities
5.3 million dementia cases (set to double by 2050)

India's caregiving deficit is staggering. The country currently has a shortfall of 4.3 million trained caregivers. Assisted living of seniors attracts 18 per cent GST

Continued from page 1

runs Divine Care in Bengaluru, recounts a recent incident with barely concealed outrage: "Some boys started an agency, promised jobs to 15 carers, collected registration fees from both attenders and clients, and disappeared." In Kochi, a woman caregiver was caught on camera assaulting an elderly person in her charge. The harsh truth is impossible to ignore. For millions of Indians over 60, ageing is not simply about growing older—it is about navigating a daily maze of physical decline, emotional isolation, financial strain and social invisibility. And far too often, they do it by themselves. India's caregiving economy is dominated by placement agencies of varying degrees of legitimacy, house helps pressed into service as medical

attendants, informal geriatric homes operating with no oversight, and high-priced elder-care chains whose self-regulation amounts to guidelines they wrote for themselves.

Old age isn't so bad if one can afford it. "Senior care is not a commercial venture," insists Rajit Mehta, MD and CEO of Antara Senior Living and chairman of ASLI—the Association of Senior Living India. "Treat elder care differently." At Antara Dehradun, the starting property price is ₹2.3 crore to ₹3.5 crore: these are upmarket retirement communities with on-call nurses, physiotherapy, dementia protocols and curated social programming. The promise is "independence with safety." The Golden Estate in Faridabad is a boutique, premium facility offering 24/7 medical care, personalised care plans, and luxury hotel-style services. Monthly rentals here start around ₹83,500 for single occupancy. The luxury old-age home Aurum offers "aesthetic and comfortable interiors that focus on hygiene, safety and privacy"—sip macha tea in the landscaped terrace garden here, or workout at the gym, relax with physio care or a massage and enjoy a gourmet meal overlooking the fountain in the 40,000 sq. ft. residence. Serene Communities by Columbia Pacific, which has multiple care needing communities across Bengaluru, Chennai, and Pune, is the largest senior living provider in India where the starting package is ₹68 lakh. According to Wealth Monitor app Deservz, there are currently two popular plans in India: buy a villa or apartment costing anywhere between ₹50 lakh to ₹3 crore, or pay a monthly maintenance or rental that includes all living costs. A person anticipating retirement 10 years later, may have to pony up ₹7.4 crore for double occupancy with an annual increment of 7 per cent. Even at these price points, operators must navigate a labyrinthine regulatory void. The luxury senior living sector is also an investment opportunity due to high demand and low supply; current luxury facilities are more than 2 per cent of the potential demand. This is a boon for realtors and the luxury items market who enjoy multiple streams of returns from property price appreciation, rentals yields, monthly maintenance charges, healthcare partnerships, and premium services. Elder care is not formally recognised as a sector, which means providers must curry favour with various authorities simultaneously. Assisted living attracts 18 per cent GST. Healthcare facilities in such homes are also chargeable separately: 10-15 per cent of the annual

living cost. Many retirement homes ask for a one-time security deposit of 3-6 months of monthly charges. The policy signal being sent here, whether intentional or not, is that keeping old people comfortable is a luxury Mehta flags a more immediate concern: geopolitical disruptions affecting LPG supply are creating shortages that impact senior care communities—a reminder that the sector's vulnerabilities span the macro and the mundane. But for people who cannot afford to pay for macha tea or a deluxe massage, the inventory gap is grotesque. India will need more than two million senior living units by 2030. Roy's Emoha—"a home" spelt backwards—has built a

closeness that was once normal in extended families. The Emoha Geriatric Academy in Gurugram now trains caregivers across nine modules: clinical care, emergency response, disease literacy, social and home skills, hygiene and technology. The programme is specifically designed to accommodate trainees from disadvantaged backgrounds with limited formal education. The goal is to create 100 newly trained caregivers per month. Against 4.3 million needed, it is at least a start.

What can dignified, well-executed care actually do for a person? Says Bisham Malkani, an Emoha subscriber in Pune who was sunk in the kind of grief that calcifies into something resembling the end of a person after losing his wife, and then his only son. "Emoha was a turning point in my life. Medical support, a care daughter, and social activities helped bring me back to life. It healed me." Stories like his exist alongside the AIR Humanitarian Home's rows of abandoned beds. Bani Jain, secretary general of the Association of Senior Living India (ASLI), is pushing for formal recognition of elder care as a sector with binding standards. "Without a regulatory body that sets mandatory guidelines, rules and standards, where do senior living communities register?" she asks. "Who regulates the caregiving gig economy?" The questions are rhetorical only in the sense that nobody currently has to answer. Certain unspoken norms do exist in the sector: no male attendant is sent to an elderly woman and no female caregiver is sent alone to an aged man but these are informal conventions, not enforceable rules. The difference matters enormously when things go wrong.

ElderAID, which operates across Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kochi and Chennai, has built his model around a single insight: most facilities are completely unprepared for medical emergencies, and the gap between a senior in crisis at home and a senior receiving appropriate hospital care is why people die. "We step in with care managers during emergencies," he says. His care managers are trained to serve as "proxy children"—a single, consistent, trusted point of contact. Roy believes preventing falls must become central to any caregiving system. "We have to transition from 'B2B'—bed to bed," he says, referring to the punishing cycle where seniors move from bed at home to hospital beds and back again. "Falls account for nearly 40 per cent of all injury deaths." A hospitalisation bill of ₹15-20 lakh can often be saved with preventive monitoring and care subscriptions that run just between ₹5,000 and ₹15,000 a month. The economics of prevention are straightforward. The political will to build the infrastructure for it is another matter.

Kerala, almost inevitably when it comes to progressive action, offers a model that outlines what is possible in senior care: free medicines, counseling and caregivers, and mobile clinics for the bedridden. The Arike project for geriatric care is successful with volunteer-supported home visits as a service with focus. "We give ₹10,000 per person, and in 180 old age homes, it is free of cost," says Babu Joseph, president of the Senior Living Association of Kerala. "Volunteers involve the marginalised from villages by offering them free meals to engage in daycare of seniors." District Collector Prem Kishan of Pathanamthitta says the state has built one of the most robust community-based care systems in India by treating elder care as a public responsibility rather than a private transaction. But all caregivers do not reflect this story. SG Soorej from Pallakad, who cared for his elderly father who died at 92, recalls the nightmare of hiring one at home. "They are so difficult to manage. They come at 9 am and leave at 6 pm with lunch and tea breaks in between. They charged ₹18,000 a month which wasn't worth it." He went through about six to seven caregivers before giving up.

India's relationship with elder care has always been embedded in the idea of familial duty: the moral architecture of the joint family and the unspoken compact between generations. Nearly 4.3 lakh adults aged 60 to 70 are themselves caring for older parents—a generation of the elderly caring for those even more elderly, in a country with almost no infrastructure to support either. Only 14.4 per cent of seniors have even one caregiver. The rest manage alone.

What India needs to solve this vast dilemma is a national framework, mandatory standards, a regulated workforce, and a caregiving economy that treats its workers with the dignity it asks them to extend to others. This requires the political will to stop treating the old as invisible. Caring for them is not a private matter. It is a national reform, already overdue.

LEGALLY THEIRS

India's legal framework for elderly care places primary responsibility on families, supported by state welfare measures. The central legislation, the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, makes it a legal obligation for adult children and heirs to financially support parents who cannot maintain themselves, with provisions for a monthly maintenance allowance (up to ₹10,000, depending on the state) through fast-track tribunals. It also protects seniors from neglect by allowing property transfers made in exchange for care to be revoked if that care is not provided, and mandates state governments to establish at least one old-age home per district for indigent seniors.

This framework is reinforced by constitutional intent under Article 41, which urges the state to provide assistance in old age, alongside criminal protections under the Indian law that penalise abuse, abandonment, and financial exploitation of the elderly. Additional support comes through policies like the National Policy on Older Persons and schemes such as the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme, which provide financial and welfare assistance.

In practice, senior citizens can seek redress through maintenance tribunals, police, and dedicated senior citizen cells. However, despite a reasonably strong legal structure, enforcement gaps, limited awareness, and uneven access to quality care services continue to shape the reality of elder care in India.

About 70% live in rural areas

75% don't get regular pension

65% are financially dependent on family

Less than 20% have health insurance

1,200 old age homes and 300-plus senior living communities for 15 crore elderly Indians

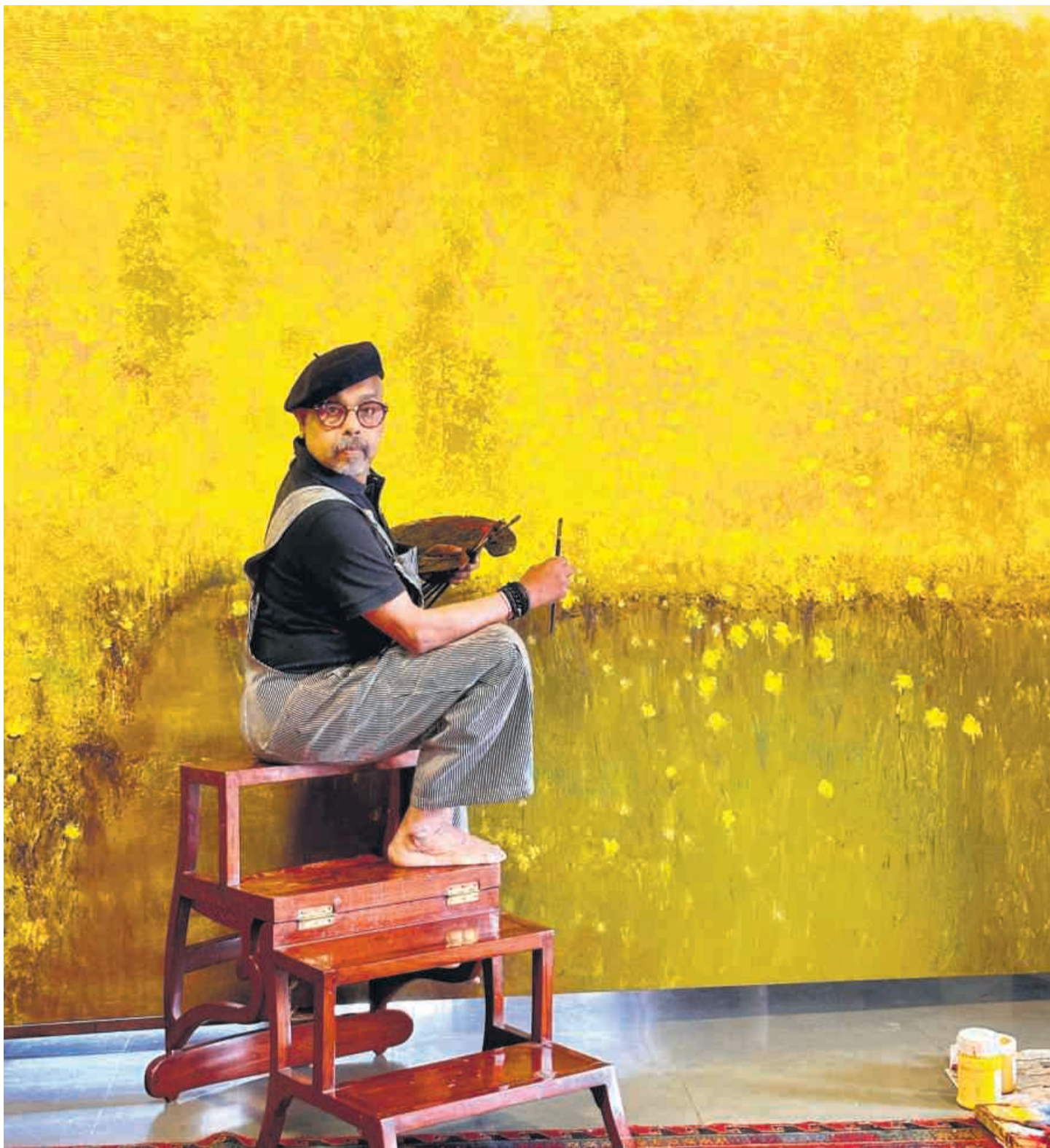
platform that now operates across 40 cities, with 8,000 caregivers supporting more than three lakhs elders living independently at home. He estimates that India's required true caregiver number is between 100 and 150 million trained professionals. But the mathematics of a nation of 1.4 billion people, ageing rapidly, with crumbling family structures and a near-total absence of institutional infrastructure, doesn't leave much room to argue. Roy entered this space through the door of personal grief. His mother's struggle with Alzheimer's and the impossibility of finding adequate care for her led him to build Emoha. His is a recurring pattern: personal catastrophe as the founding document of India's elder-care industry. Roy's model is built around the concept of hyperlocal care—"care buddies," trained "Emoha daughters," nurses backed by tech-enabled monitoring and a 24-hour helpline. In 400 neighbourhoods, the company has tried to manufacture the kind of



Photo courtesy: MAX HOSPITALS

All the Light We can See

Paresh Maity's recent exhibition reiterates how nature has long served as the central impulse behind his visual language



(Left) Paresh Maity; (above and below) artworks at the exhibition

By MEDHA DUTTA YADAV

For nearly five decades, artist Paresh Maity has been painting landscapes not simply as views of places but as emotional encounters with them. And the boat has been a constant. "For me, the boat is a metaphor for life. You will notice that even when a boat is anchored, it is gently swaying. It has life in it. That is why I'm drawn to paint it over and over

again," says the Delhi artist. In his ongoing solo exhibition *Luminous Terrains* at Art Alive Gallery, Maity brings together a body of work that reads almost like a visual travel diary, tracing landscapes across India, Venice, and France.

The exhibition marks his next major public showing following the widely attended *Infinite Light* exhibition at Bikaner House in 2022. Yet *Luminous Terrains* is less a sequel and

more a deepening of the artist's lifelong dialogue with nature. Maity has long been drawn to places where landscape, culture, and memory intersect. And the canvases as always are monumental and filled with colours. "I like painting in the day because then you can capture the real beauty of light. Also, the scale excites me. It is difficult to work on a large scale. Your imperfections and mistakes become magnified.

This is a challenge I love taking up each time," says the 61-year-old artist.

Maity's fascination with light echoes the explorations of European Impressionists—artists who sought to capture fleeting atmospheric conditions on canvas. Yet his interpretations remain distinctly his own. In his paintings of Venice and southern France, the light appears crisp and translucent, reflecting the clarity of Mediter-

ranean skies. By contrast, the Indian landscapes carry a different intensity: light filtered through dust and heat, thickened by the density of land and air.

The artist's sensitivity to landscape can be traced back to his childhood in Tamluk in West Bengal, a small town surrounded by rivers and open fields. As a child, he often walked along the banks of the Rupnarayan river sketching boats, trees, and changing skies. "Those early days taught me that light could transform an ordinary landscape into something dramatic and almost theatrical," he says. That early fascination with atmosphere later shaped his training at the Government College of Art & Craft in Kolkata, where he studied

painting but also began experimenting with sculpture and mixed media. "Not many know this, but I started my art life with clay sculptures," he smiles.

In the new works, these encounters appear as vivid painterly impressions. The calm expanse of Dal Lake in Srinagar, the shimmering lagoons of Venice, the flowing Ganga along the ghats of Varanasi, the sunlit French Riviera, the vast deserts of Rajasthan and the rugged terrains of Madhya Pradesh, all surface in the exhibition. Maity translates their atmosphere—the stillness of water, the glare of desert light, the haze of river dust—into colour, texture and movement.

Among his most recognisable works is the *Ganga* series, inspired by repeated visits to Varanasi, where he would spend hours sketching the river at dawn. His *Venice Watercolours* capture the city's fragile luminosity through swift washes of colour, while his Rajasthan desert landscapes explore heat and space through expansive bands of colour.

If Maity's landscapes share a common thread, it is his persistent return to the same question: how to paint light. The answer, for him, lies not in a single technique but in the act of returning—to places, to memories, and to the shifting terrain of nature itself.

WHEN & WHERE

Luminous Terrains; Till April 30; Art Alive Gallery, Delhi

WINE

LEISURE CORNER



SHELTERING THE WISDOM

This exhibition by the artist Subodh Gupta features a newly conceived immersive environment that reflects on migration, labour, memory and shelter. Curated by Clare Lilley, former Director of Yorkshire Sculpture Park, it brings together immersive environments, sculpture and moving image, with some works being presented in India for the first time. *A Fistful of Sky*; April 3 to May 17; NMACC, Mumbai; Entry: Free



WHIRLING TIMES AND TUNES

Conceived and curated by filmmaker Muzaffar Ali, this festival celebrates Sufi music, poetry, and spiritual heritage while bringing together artists, scholars, and audiences from across the world. The 2026 edition will feature an extraordinary musical lineup including Satinder Sartaj, Sukhwinder Singh, Hansraj Hans and Lakhwinder Wadali as headline performers. *Jahan-e-Khusrav*; March 27 to 29; Purana Qila, New Delhi; Entry: Rs 499 onwards

The Masketeers



A mask maker in Shergaon; the masks

document local traditions. What caught her attention were the masks. The wood was abundant, the stories still alive in memory, but the hands that once carved them had gone quiet.

Sensing this absence, Shukla worked with a local community library to bring together 10 villagers interested in learning the craft. A master artisan from a neighbouring village was invited to teach them, with support from the Wildlife Trust of India and Royal Enfield Social Mission. For Khrimey, it became more than a workshop—it was a chance to reclaim something his village had lost.

For the Sherdukpen tribe, masks are not decorative artefacts but living philosophy. They are worn during Bardo Chham, a folk dance performed at the monsoon festival of Prido Chhhepchi, unique to Shergaon. Each animal mask carries symbolic meaning; together they represent

Bardo—the liminal space between death and rebirth. For many Sherdukpens, mask making is a return to something admired from afar. The first masks carved by the new learners were donated to the village monastery. Khrimey now hopes to recreate the masks his grandfather once made, preserved today only as fragments of memory. In Shergaon, those memories are slowly being given faces again.

By SAMIYA CHOPRA

Dorjee Khandu Khrimey was 24 when he realised something strange about his own village. The ritual dances of Shergaon in Arunachal Pradesh still echoed with stories of animals and spirits, yet the masks that once carried those stories had disappeared. "Seeing the art of mask making disappear from our village, I thought of becoming a mask maker to preserve the craft and also make masks for posterity so that they have a keepsake from their culture."

Until 2022, mask making in Shergaon had been on pause for decades. Masks used in rituals were brought in from Tibet and Bhutan. The shift changed when wildlife researcher Tripti Shukla arrived in Shergaon to

By IRSHAD HUSSAIN

On crisp autumn mornings in the saffron fields of Lethpora in Pulwama, wooden bee boxes sit in rows among the purple blossoms. If you stand still long enough, a humming sound comes to you—a restless, busy orchestra. In the middle of it all is 23-year-old Sania Zehra, carefully checking the hives that have earned her an unusual title in Kashmir: the Bee Queen. Zehra, who grew up in Srinagar's Balhama locality, never imagined that she would one day run hundreds of bee colonies. The turning point came in 2020 when disaster struck the family enterprise run by her father. With the national highway closed, 150 of their bee colonies—worth ₹9 lakh—died. Only about 20 colonies survived. Instead of walking away from the struggling trade, Zehra decided to rebuild it. Today, she manages around 600 colonies and produces an average of six quintals of high-quality honey each year. "Beekeeping is our family's industry, and I decided to follow in my ancestors' footsteps," she says.

Before bees entered her life, Zehra had spent three years training in martial arts. The transition from martial arts practice to managing buzzing hives came abruptly, but she embraced it with determination. The location of her bee farm also attracts tourists, which turned into an unexpected business opportunity. "I mostly target tourist routes," Sania says. Yet success in beekeeping in Kashmir is never simple. Zehra points to the rapid disappearance of acacia trees—one of the most vital nectar sources for bees. These hardy trees sustain colonies during dry seasons and produce prized acacia honey, known for its pale colour and delicate flavour. Their decline has forced many beekeepers to migrate seasonally with their colonies. "Beekeepers move to Rajasthan, Punjab, Sonamarg, and Doodhpathri," she explains.

Then there is the proliferation of fake

The Bee Queen of Kashmir

A 23-year-old woman from Srinagar turned loss into a thriving honey enterprise—and a rallying point for women entrepreneurs



Sania Zehra

products. Without facilities to check the quality of honey, identifying fake honey becomes harder. Zehra has been creating awareness about the issue and has taken the campaign online, using her social media platforms to expose counterfeit honey brands. Her journey, however, has not been free of criticism. "Working as a woman in Kashmir means walking a double-edged sword, as people discourage you rather than giving you encouragement." But she is not giving up yet. Under the brand

Kashmir Pure Organics, she now produces organic cosmetics including face creams, soaps and hair oils derived from honey and other natural ingredients. "I travelled with my father to different regions and jungles of India, where I was repeatedly stung by bees," she says. The stings, it turns out, were only part of the apprenticeship. The buzzing kingdom she oversees today is proof that persistence can turn even a struggling hive into something thriving—and sweet.

Creation Myths that Gurus conjure

RESURRECTING FAITH

Devdutt
Pattanaik

Mythologist,
Author, Speaker



Creation myths are political long before they are cosmic. They tell people not only where the universe came from, but who has the right to interpret it, who commands obedience, and whose voice becomes sacred. In contemporary Hindu-inspired spirituality, three systems dominate popular imagination: Sadhguru's yoga universe, the Brahma Kumaris, and ISKCON. Each claims ancient roots, yet each is a modern engineering of tradition. Each rewires classical Hindu ideas to build a distinctive structure of authority. And each is very different from the biblical model of creation.

Sadhguru speaks through the language of Adiguru, the primordial yogi seated in absolute stillness on Kailash. From silence comes vibration, from vibration energy, and from energy the cosmos. There is no single moment of creation, no fixed beginning, no final end. Universes expand and dissolve like breaths of a vast being. Shiva is not a craftsman who manufactures the world but pure awareness that becomes form through Shakti. Time is immeasurable, fluid, almost arrogant in its refusal to fit human calendars.

This cosmology feels liberating, but it is anchored to one charismatic centre. The universe is so subtle, so layered, so experiential that ordinary seekers are told they cannot grasp it without a living guide. Adiguru becomes a symbolic mirror that reflects back to Sadhguru himself. He is not God, yet he becomes the necessary gateway to understanding creation. Science is embraced as a metaphor, rejected as a limitation. Freedom is promised, but the path leads repeatedly to retreats, initiations, branded practices, and the gravitational pull of one personality. This is not a community-run tradition. It is a cult of charisma.

The Brahma Kumari vision constructs creation very differently. Here, the cosmos is not fluid but tightly scheduled. Time runs in a precise 5,000-year loop divided into Golden, Silver, Copper, and Iron ages. Souls begin pure, gradually fall, and are purified again through divine intervention. Chaos is not creativity but moral decay. God, called Shiva, does not remain distant but speaks through a human medium.

What makes this system distinctive is that its power structure is primarily female-led. The organisation is run, managed, and ritualised by women who control teaching, meditation centres, and doctrinal boundaries. In a society where religious authority is overwhelmingly male, this inversion is striking. Women become gatekeepers of truth, disciplinarians, and managers of cosmic



time. Yet this does not make the system less controlling. Certainty replaces freedom. Doubt becomes disobedience. Liberation requires daily meditation, lifestyle regulation, and loyalty to the institution. Science is rejected because it disrupts the timetable of the soul. Here, creation becomes a bureaucratic moral machine, administered by women but no less rigid for it.

ISKCON offers a third kind of creation story, one that creatively reworks classical Vaishnava cosmology into a global devotional system. Instead of abstract

consciousness, the centre is Krishna in Goloka Vrindavan, a perfect spiritual realm beyond matter. From this transcendental world, Vishnu expands into multiple forms and oversees the creation of layered material universes. Brahma acts as a secondary creator, assembling planets, oceans, and life under divine supervision.

This draws from Puranic texts, but ISKCON standardises it into a quasi-scientific cosmic map of lokas, shells, and dimensions. The moral twist is that the material world is fundamentally

fallen, a prison for souls who forgot Krishna. Salvation comes through chanting, temple life, dietary rules, and allegiance to ISKCON's interpretation of bhakti.

Unlike the Brahma Kumaris, ISKCON is overwhelmingly male-controlled. Gurus, administrators, temple presidents, and doctrinal authorities are almost entirely men. Women participate as devotees but rarely as final decision-makers. Creation here becomes a devotional hierarchy where cosmic order mirrors patriarchal order. Manipulation

is soft, emotional, and ritualised, but real. Tradition is presented as eternal, yet it is curated, globalised, and packaged for a diaspora seeking identity.

All three systems reuse classical Hindu models: cyclical time, multiple divine forms, the cosmos as breathing rather than manufactured, and consciousness as foundational. Yet each reshapes these ideas to secure power. Sadhguru personalises the universe around charisma. Brahma Kumaris institutionalise it around a female-run discipline. ISKCON ritualises it around male-led devotion.

Where they diverge most sharply from the Bible is in their sense of time and creation. Biblical cosmology is linear: one God speaks once, the world appears, and history moves toward a final judgement. There is a single beginning, a single creator, and a moral drama that ends in heaven or hell. Hindu-derived systems retain cycles, multiplicity, and an endlessly regenerating universe. Yet modern movements paradoxically import biblical-style authority: one chosen medium in Brahma Kumaris, one supreme guru in Sadhguru's world, one centralised priesthood in ISKCON.

Thus, three contemporary creation myths coexist. One dazzles with cosmic openness, one governs with cosmic schedules, and one binds through devotional cosmology. None is neutral. Each turns the story of the universe into a mechanism of spiritual power.

Posts on X: @devduttmyth

Do Nothing and Listen to the Birds

BY INVITATION

Sathya
Saran

Author & Consulting
Editor, Penguin
Random House



For almost a week now, I have been doing nothing. It's a retreat of a kind. A self-imposed retreat into, I could say, myself. Or Nature. Or a lack of routine. All of which will be true.

So I neither read nor write, nor cook or clean. No chores. Instead, I listen to the sounds around me. Birds in the early morning, in the afternoon, and then again in the evening.

I discovered that birds are loudest in the morning. Afternoons, the crows caw, but most others are either foraging for food far away or busy with other chores, so except for the occasional cheep cheep or toot, there is bird silence.

Instead, the cricket raises its amp; the wind whispers through leaves, and sometimes there is a rustle in the grass which makes me put my feet up, out of the way of whatever it is that likes rustling about in secret.

I have made some discoveries. That I hear better with one ear than the

other... (needs looking into). The scent of the breeze in the morning is different from that which floats by in the evenings.

Part of doing nothing includes observing. So I watch a spider, as big as my fingernail, weaving its web. Drawing immaculate, straight lines and joining them with purpose and precision, creating a home that will be a storehouse and sanctuary. A craft learnt and practised through the eons, much before man learnt engineering or architecture.

And then there are the ants, walking across the courtyard, suspended on a wire. Carrying carefully a dead insect

Doing nothing should fill me with guilt since we are so used to swinging like monkeys, making ourselves useful. But I feel no guilt. Instead, I realise how much I have been missing out on

that they hold, balance, and ferry to the safety of firm ground, as they head to their hidden home.

Doing nothing should fill me with guilt; we are so used to swinging like monkeys, from one task to another, making ourselves useful, fulfilling our acquired roles as homemakers, workers in the job space, aspiring to climb the

career ladder and reach that magic space called the top. But I feel no guilt. Instead, I realise how much I have been missing out on.

My senses have dulled; my eyes are more often than not limited to looking at what the tiny, backlit screen of my phone shows me; my ears listen to sounds made by others who may or may not have an agenda to influence me. The panorama of the universe remains unseen, the orchestra of the universe remains unheard.

Of course, I know I must pick up life where it paused and continue the trek through the days, weeks, and years ahead; their chores wait to be done; their demands wait to be met.

But hitting the pause button, I realised, is revitalising. Priorities change, anxieties diminish, and a sense of proportion is reclaimed. And along with it all... a sense of wonder; something we tend to mislay along the way.

Nothing changed when I did nothing. Nothing will change when I return to 'normal' life and pick up the threads again. It's only our own egos that make us imagine that we, as humans, have achieved something. But have we indeed? Like the ant and the spider, we live our narrow lives and are gone. Like a breeze blowing past, or a rustling in the grass.

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How Much Democracy is Costing You And the Delimitation Math

PROVOCATEUR

Ravi
Shankar

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In politics, power is about seats. Everything else is commentary. India is about to upgrade its Parliament like it's adding extra seats to a sold-out concert—read: a bigger house, louder optics, more people on stage. The BJP's pitch is simple: more representation, more women, more democracy per square foot. To be clear, increasing women's representation is a

legitimate and overdue correction. Women account for only about 14.4 per cent of the Lok Sabha—78 out of 543. That gap deserves to be addressed. But the invoice, as always, goes to the taxpayer.

Do the math. An MP earns ₹1 lakh a month, a harmless number when a bank manager makes an average ₹1.5 lakh. But load the rest: ₹70,000 constituency allowance and ₹60,000 in office expenses leads to about ₹28 lakh a year before perks. Then come the privileges that rarely make it into speeches: 34 free flights a year (family included), unlimited AC train travel, prime Delhi housing at rates that belong to another era, subsidised utilities, staff, and ₹2,000 a day for attendance when Parliament is in session. Then the long tail: a pension starting at ₹25,000 a month after just five years, rising with tenure. Add security, administrative machinery, and the wider institutional costs that sit behind every elected office, and multiple estimates place the fully-loaded annual cost of an MP in the range of ₹2-5 crore. Now scale it. 543 MPs today. Even at the conservative end, that's thousands of crores spent by the taxpayer every year. Push that to 800-plus after delimitation—as widely expected—and you've effectively subscribed to a larger Parliament with auto-renewal and no cancellation button.

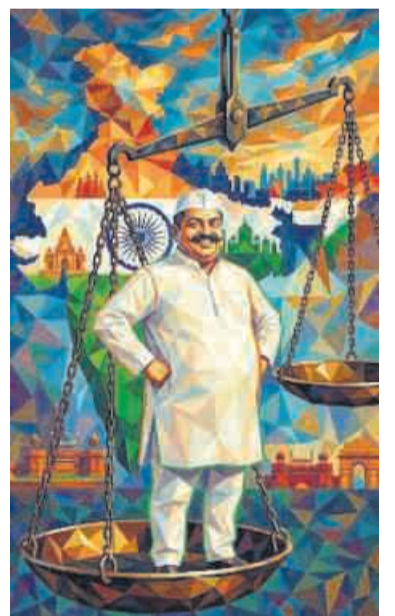
Which brings us to utilisation. Parliament has, in recent years, sat for roughly 55-70 days annually—65 days in 2023, 68 in 2022. Working hours are frequently

cut short by disruptions that are no longer occasional; they are structural. Entire sessions can lose 30-40 per cent of their time to adjournments. Participation is uneven. A minority of MPs carry the legislative load—asking questions, debating, showing up prepared. A significant number contribute little: many ask fewer than ten questions in a year, some record negligible speaking time. Private Member's Bills—the one route for non-minister MPs to shape law—are virtually extinct; the last one to pass dates back to 1970. Yet laws are still passed—around 30-40 a year at high speed. Bills are increasingly cleared in compressed time, often with limited debate. Committee scrutiny, once applied to 60-70 per cent of legislation in the early 2000s, has fallen to under 20 per cent in recent years. The system is efficient in throughput, less so in deliberation. Run the arithmetic. At ₹2 crore per MP per year and roughly 60 sitting days, that's over ₹3 lakh per MP per sitting day for a legislature where participation is uneven and scrutiny is thinning. The total bill goes vertical because about 257 more MPs are added into the same cost structure—using the widely cited estimate of ₹2 crore to ₹5 crore per year per MP; this expansion alone takes the total annual cost of running the Lok Sabha to somewhere between ₹1,600 crore and ₹4,000 crore. While some fixed costs like buildings and central infrastructure may not rise proportionately—especially with the new Parliament already designed for higher capacity—administrative, staffing, and logistical expenses will still bloat the cost enough so that any efficiency gains remain marginal. But seat expansion will not be uniform. Population growth is faster in northern and central states—Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan—than in much of the south. A new delimitation is therefore likely to increase the weight of regions where the BJP already has significant electoral strength. Layer the reservation on top of that—one-third of seats reserved for women, mapped onto a newly redrawn electoral geography, in a political environment where one party has invested heavily in building support among women voters; it's a saffron slam dunk. In a system where centralised decision-making is strong, control over candidate selection becomes a decisive advantage.

None of this makes the reform illegitimate. But it does mean it is not neutral. This is not just about adding women to Parliament. It is about adding seats, redrawing maps, and reshaping the electoral playing field at the same time. Which returns us to the original question. If a legislature meets for fewer than 70 days a year, loses significant time to disruption, and increasingly passes laws with limited scrutiny, what exactly is being scaled when we expand it?

The cost per MP stays broadly the same. The total cost does not. This isn't inflation. It is multiplication. India is not paying more for each MP. It is simply paying for a lot more of them.

(Sources: Constitution of India (Articles 81, 82), PRS Legislative Research, Parliament performance, participation data Government of India/PIB, General census & delimitation framework)



Need Uni-schools as Intellectual Unicorns

BY INVITATION

S Vaidhyasubramaniam

Vice-Chancellor,
SASTRA Deemed
University



A student's lifecycle from the formative schooling years through the explorative college days is one of the key success factors for India that aspires to be Viksit Bharat @ 2047. Resting on the sinews of its education system to shape the professional trajectories of youthful millions needing enlightenment to be employable or entrepreneurial, there is telling visibility to confront the hurdling realities with candour & purpose. The two banks of the knowledge river—school & higher education is unbridged with systemic dissonance endured with disjunctions. Time has come for an integrative approach that cements school & higher education to build a strong foundation on which the tall dreams of higher education can be built.

The sweeping takeover by the coaching class ecosystem and the multiple entrance exam market economy has reduced school students into humanoids paraded as "exam-cracking automatons." Such an overwhelming preoccupation that clouds purpose has endangered a culture where entrance exam marks eclipse the meaning of schooling. The fictitious market capitalisation of the coaching class companies and their hyper-dramatic commoditisation of

exam coaching has made school education a cerebral surgical strike when it is supposed to enrich cerebral curiosity. Such administrative & policy incongruities shaping market thoughts and action are demolishing the very scaffolds on which intellectual human capital needs to be built. With Artificial Intelligence (AI) promising the stars and gullible youth chasing them as intellectual paratroopers, the foot soldiers of knowledge economy become victims of a competitive academic war when they enter higher education.

When students who are conditioned to chase scores with robotic precision sacrificing intellectual curiosity at the altars of JEE, NEET and other avoidable private university 'entrance exams' enter the orbit of higher education they fail to traverse the journey with confidence. The higher education pathway is a navigational exercise that demands independent thought and conceptual depth which is a shocking in-absentia for the majority entering this important phase. This predicament is further exacerbated by the conspicuous paucity of opportunities for creative expression in schools which are either coaching class controlled theatres of MCQ mania or stigmatised stereotypes of a rigid syllabi, prescriptive answers and time-bound assessments. When vital signals of school learning outcomes are weak due to such alarming levels of under nourishment with overly charged school fees, which is king's ransom in many cases, higher education institutions (HEIs) are forced to grapple with learners who are hesitant to question, imagine or innovate. Be that as it may, universities

and HEIs are at crucial cross roads sandwiched between automated schooling objectives and animated industry expectations.

Universities are now undertaking the arduous task of dismantling these ingrained habits before fostering higher-order cognitive abilities resulting in conflict of priorities. As such universities have their own laundry list of problems plagued with unmanageable heterogeneity with unrealistic demands of a system that treats the 3Ps—(p)ranking, placements



& publications with paramount importance. There are exceptional outliers to this, but a vast majority are still chartering in turbulence territories of unequal contours and vantage points. The absence of coherence at the foundational level thus reverberates across the entire educational continuum.

The contemporary socio-economic milieu demands agility, creativity, communication, and technological fluency. However, given that these competencies are insufficiently cultivated during school years, universities are compelled to compress skill development into a truncated timeframe. This often results in an

aspirational yet imperfect attempt to bridge the employability gap, sometimes privileging short-term training over enduring understanding. Can this be addressed to begin with in a small way before scaling to create multiplier effect?

The concerning disconnect between the School Education & Teacher Education policy ecosystem can be remedied by creating school education zones inside university campuses with a blanket approval to Top 100 NIRF universities to start schools within their campuses. These schools become the laboratories for the university's integrated teacher education programmes (ITEPs) promoting an osmotic school-higher education flow of skills. Such universities must be granted approval by the NCTE to start ITEPs for if teacher educators are not trained in contemporary pedagogical practices in the school grounds of learning, the never ending cycle of rote learning and limited skill development shall limitlessly perpetuate creating a feedback loop that is difficult to disrupt. Breaking the discrete silos to promote interdependent components of a unified school & higher-ed ecosystem, teachers and faculty must evolve as co-creators of a cohesive learning journey to ensure that education transcends fragmentation and becomes a continuum of intellectual growth.

As coaching classes begin to invade regular schools, schools must evade them by relocating themselves in thought and action inside university campuses. In short: Uni-schools need to enrich intellectual unicorns.

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The New Face of Beauty is Your Own

Clients are demanding authenticity over an overfilled face, choosing subtle, skin-first treatments that glow it up and make them look themselves



By TANISHA MAHANTA

The most radical thing you can do to your face right now might be to simply keep it natural. After years of sculpted cheekbones, inflated lips and algorithm-approved symmetry, the aesthetic mood is changing—almost with a relief. Clients are no longer asking their dermatologists to make them look dramatically younger, instead asking for a less altered, less edited, and less “done” look. The Internet, which once rewarded dramatic change in appearance, is now throwing shade on the overfilled face. For many look-seekers, circulating images of once-aspirational

celebrities and influencers have turned into cautionary tales. In response, a new category of skin-tightening treatments is rising. These non-surgical methods, designed to firm sagging skin by heating deeper layers to stimulate collagen production, are gaining popularity for being non-invasive—Thermage (RF), Ultherapy (ultrasound), and Sofwave—and offering very little to zero downtime.

The appeal is for authenticity: a look which is your own and not recognisably “done”. Techniques like Microneedling RF, Laser Resurfacing/Tightening and Laser-Assisted Radiofrequency (RFAL), result in firmer, more youthful skin



“The lack of downtime and the subtle but noticeable improvements are the reasons patients are choosing skin-tightening.”
DR KIRAN SETHI,
Dermatologist

that resists obvious detection. And unlike fillers, the results are rarely dramatic enough for the classic before-and-after reveal.

Dermatologist Dr Aanchal Panth believes, “The lack of downtime and the subtle but noticeable improvements are the reasons patients are choosing skin-tightening over fillers.” Recovery from dermal

fillers usually takes one to two weeks for swelling and bruising to fully subside. While initial results of two-to-four weeklong fillers are visible on the face immediately, they take time to fully settle and integrate into the skin tissues. This is a big concern for clients.

Facial aesthetics have also become an emotional issue tied to an individual identity. Fillers



“Undergoing HIFU on face, helps in reducing stubborn facial fat, defining jawline, and most importantly, tightening skin.”
DR SHIKHA SHAH,
Dermatologist

carries the risk of losing it altogether. Panth says this unease walks into their clinics every day. “Patients who undergo skin tightening treatment are often told they look rested or fresh. But, no one can quite pinpoint what has been done, and that’s exactly what patients are looking. There is a clear shift towards keeping individual facial features intact,” she adds.

This sensibility is visible among people in their twenties and early thirties—a generation raised online, one that has watched beauty trends rise, peak, and collapse in real time.

Sanjana Singh, a line producer who opted for radiofrequency and collagen-stimulating treatments says, “I chose it for long-term skin repair rather than altering how I look. It felt more like fixing what is already there than adding something extraneous.”

The results, she says, were gradual, but enough to boost her confidence. “After treatment, my skin began to look fresher, healthier, and firmer.”

The growing shift among once filler-enthusiasts for these treatments over fillers is striking. Several dermatologists report a rise in patrons asking for previously injected fillers to be dissolved before switching to regenerative protocols. Procedures once considered routine maintenance are now being reversed.

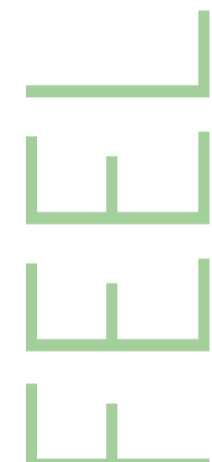
Cosmetic dermatologist Dr Shikha Shah sees the same mindset in her clientele.

“Undergoing HIFU (high-intensity focused ultrasound) on face, helps to reduce stubborn facial fat, define the jawline, and most importantly, tightens the skin.” Shah, who herself has undergone the treatment says, “Many people assumed I had lost weight, but what actually changed was targeted fat reduction and collagen stimulation.”

She has been offering these treatments to her patrons for over five years. “There are no needles, nothing excessive, and no change in facial features in this procedure. It is a simple process with zero lag. Skin tightness achieved with collagen supplements is minimal compared to the results seen with radiofrequency and HIFU.”

However, this does not mean aesthetic procedures are fading into irrelevance. Clients are simply interrogating its methods and effect more carefully, choosing treatments that collaborate with the body rather than overwrite its masterplan.

Perhaps that’s the modern beauty ideal: not a new face, but a recognisable one—one which you can own.



AYURWISDOM Dr Ramya Alakkal



Keeping Cool With Ayurveda

As temperatures rise and the sun grows harsher each day, *Greeshma Ritu* begins to test both body and mind. Staying cool, therefore, is not just about physical relief but about maintaining balance in every sense—physical, mental or even emotional. Ayurveda offers simple, time-tested guidance to navigate this intense season with ease and awareness.

Greeshma Ritu, the summer according to Ayurveda, follows *Vasantha Ritu* (spring), a time when *Kapha dosha* naturally increases in the body, often making it more prone to illness. Ayurveda recommends seasonal cleansing practices such as *Vamana* during this period. As spring transitions into summer, the sun begins to draw moisture from the earth. This leads to *Kapha kshaya* (depletion of *Kapha*) and *Vata kopa* (aggravation of *Vata*). As a result, the body becomes weaker and requires careful attention through proper *aahara* (diet) and *vihara* (lifestyle).

During summer, food choices play a key role in maintaining balance. Ayurveda suggests consuming foods that are *swadu* (sweet), *sheetha* (cool), and *drava* (liquid in nature). These help counteract the drying and heating effects of the season. Spicy, sour, and salty foods should be reduced, as they can increase internal heat. Similarly, intense physical activity should be replaced with mild exercises to avoid exhaustion. Alcohol and fermented drinks are also best avoided, as they can further disturb the body’s equilibrium.

To remain disease-free, simple daily practices can be very effective. The use of diluted milk and moderate amounts of ghee is recommended to keep *Pitta dosha* under control. Spending time in cool environments during the day and exposure to the gentle cooling rays of the moon at night are also beneficial. External application of cooling substances such as sandalwood paste, especially on the forehead and joints, helps reduce body heat.

One of the most effective cooling practices is head oil therapy. Applying oil to the scalp helps regulate body temperature and calm the system. Coconut oil is particularly recommended due to its natural ability to pacify *Pitta*. A simple routine of applying coconut oil, gently massaging for 5-10 minutes, and washing with normal water can be followed regularly. Traditional Ayurvedic oils such as Nalpamaradi Kera *Tailam*, Chandanadi

Tailam, and Balaguluchyadi *Tailam* are also commonly used during summer for this purpose.

Hydration is another essential aspect of summer care. Water stored in earthen pots naturally stays cool and is considered ideal for daily use. Refrigerated water may be consumed, but extremely chilled water should be avoided. Adding natural cooling ingredients like dried *amla* (gooseberry) or *ramacham* (vetiver) to stored water enhances its benefits by reducing body heat and thirst. Ayurveda also recommends *paanajal*, medicated water prepared by boiling herbs in water, and then cooling it before consumption.

The surroundings can also influence how the body experiences heat. Growing plants with white flowers like jasmine, lily, and white lotus around the home can create a naturally soothing environment. Sprinkling water on terraces or open spaces can help reduce ambient temperature. These natural methods are considered healthier alternatives to excessive reliance on air conditioning.

Practices such as *Sheetali pranayama*, *Nadishuddhi pranayama*, and gentle *sookshma vyayama* help maintain emotional balance. Bathing with water infused with *ramacham* or washing the head with amla-soaked water can provide relaxation. Wearing cooling crystal beads like *Sphatika mani* and using soothing natural fragrances are also recommended. A supportive social environment and avoiding stressful situations further contribute to inner calm.

Summer, when approached with awareness, can become a season of balance rather than discomfort. Let us cool our summer through Ayurveda.

The author is a Professor at the Department of Panchakarma, Ashtamgani Ayurveda Medical College, Kerala

FIT BIT



GLOW, THE JAPANESE WAY
After the global obsession with K-beauty, J-beauty is taking the spotlight over the Internet. Rooted in tradition, Japanese skincare is all about simplicity, balance, and mindful rituals. Instead of layering endless products, it focuses on gentle cleansing, hydration, and protection. Ingredients like rice bran, green tea, and fermented extracts nourish the skin while supporting overall well-being. The philosophy of *hinou dokon*—skin and mind as one—guides this approach. The result is soft, healthy, naturally radiant skin that reflects consistency, care, and a less-is-more beauty mindset. Users say it is especially helpful for the stressed skin. Time to cut the 12-step skin care routine to three mindful steps?



KERALAM TAILAM
The Internet is full of viral remedies and self-care skin routines. And its latest obsession is Nalpamaradi *Tailam*—a 3,000-year-old ayurvedic oil going viral for its skin-brightening and de-tanning oil for both the face and body. The ayurvedic oil is the latest addition to the growing shift toward natural remedies that nourish the skin from within. The viral reels claim that the oil, common in Kerala homes, is specifically designed to treat skin conditions, improve complexion, and remove sun tan, often utilising a base of coconut oil (*Kera Tailam*) or sesame oil. Nalpamaradi *Tailam* is made of four Ficus tree barks, including banyan, peepal, cluster fig, and Indian fig.

The Power of Ignoring

In an age of infinite information, the smartest skill may be knowing what not to read

By NOOR ANAND CHAWLA

The internet was a promise of unlimited knowledge. Now it often delivers unlimited noise. Between viral posts, endless headlines, algorithm-driven feeds and now AI-generated content, the sheer volume of information online can feel overwhelming. Increasingly, experts say the solution isn’t consuming more information—but learning what to ignore.

London-based writer Ruby remembers how easily the algorithm took over her attention. “My curiosity was chaotic. I’d save everything—essays, articles, posts—convincing myself I’d come back to them. There was always another headline, another ‘must-read’, another notification tugging at my attention... I was following wherever the algorithm was taking me,” she writes in her Substack newsletter *Ruby’s Studio*. “This flooding [of content] doesn’t just overwhelm us, it alters how we decide what deserves our attention.”

The problem has intensified with the rise of AI slop—low- to

mid-quality content generated with AI tools, often lacking factual accuracy. Combined with misinformation and agenda-driven posts amplified by algorithms, much of the content that fills our feeds is designed to provoke reaction rather than offer insight.

Researchers call the antidote “critical ignoring.” A 2022 paper in *Current Directions in Psychological Science* highlights “critical

ignoring” as an essential digital skill. The research describe it as “the ability to choose what to ignore and where to invest one’s limited attentional capacities.” They add that without this, “we will drown in a sea of information that is, at best, distracting and, at worst, misleading and harmful.”

For professionals whose work depends on accurate information, this selectivity is essential. Entrepreneur

In an age of information overload, the real digital literacy may lie not in reading everything—but in knowing what deserves your attention



Dhruv Tomar says constant streams of emotionally charged updates make intentional consumption necessary as it directly impacts public trust.

Lawyer Dinesh Jotwani agrees, noting that prioritising credible information is crucial in fields like law, finance and governance. But he cautions that selectivity should not become an echo chamber; the aim is discernment, not avoidance of differing perspectives.

Practical habits can help: lateral reading (cross-checking facts while reading), muting distracting notifications, and refusing to engage with online provocations.

Delhi-based critic-curator Georgina Maddox follows a simple rule. “If I find something interesting, I read it for at least three minutes, after which I switch back to what I was originally doing,” she says.

In an age of information overload, the real digital literacy may lie not in reading everything, but in knowing what deserves your attention.

PRODUCT REVIEW

Skin Sips

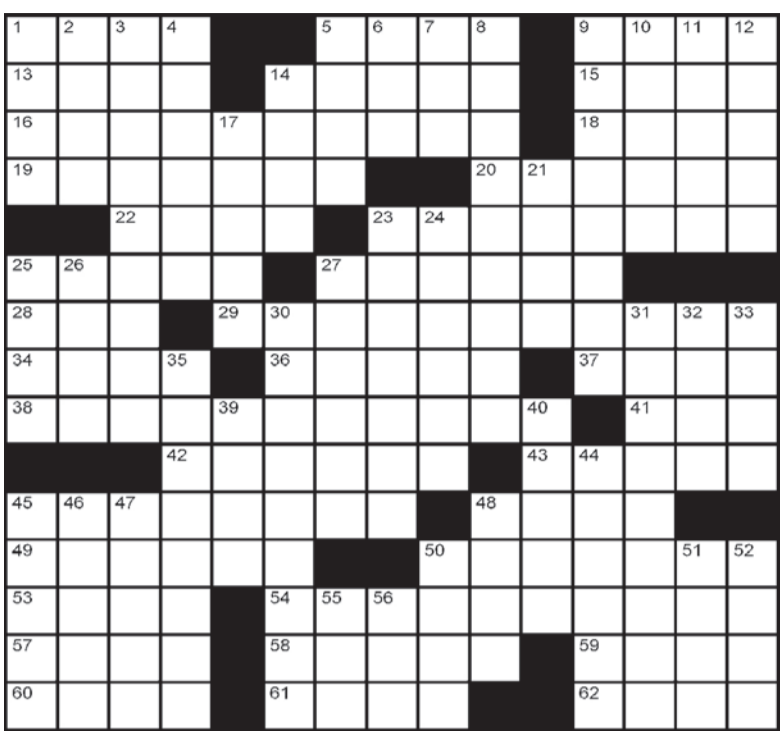
I have always believed that skincare works best when it feels effortless. Products that slip easily into a daily routine, smell wonderful and quietly do their job are the ones that stay on my shelf the longest. Dusky India’s Moondew Mogra Toner and Glow Getter—Gotukola Face Serum are exactly that kind of pair—simple, sensorial and surprisingly effective. The toner was the first thing that caught my attention. One spritz and the soft, comforting aroma of mogra instantly lifts the mood. The fragrance is natural and calming rather than overpowering. The mist itself is incredibly lightweight and absorbs almost immediately, leaving the skin feeling fresh rather than sticky. What I particularly like is how balanced my skin feels after using it. Over time, I also noticed that my skin looked smoother and pores appeared slightly more refined. Following it with the serum feels like the natural next step in the ritual. The serum has a silky texture that glides on easily and sinks into the skin within seconds. Despite being oil-based, it never feels heavy. Instead, it leaves behind a soft, nourished finish that gives the skin a subtle glow. What stands out most is how soothing it feels. On days when my skin feels tired or slightly irritated, the serum seems to calm everything down while restoring a healthy suppleness. The faint citrus note in the aroma adds a bright, uplifting touch without lingering too strongly.

—Medha Dutta Yadav



Dusky India
Moondew Mogra
Toner
Dusky India Glow
Getter—Gotukola
Face Serum
Price: ₹3,398
★★★★☆

Available: duskyindia.in



Across

- 1 Cannabis plant
- 5 Ties the knot
- 9 Film info site
- 13 "I'm so ___it!"
- 14 Minimally invasive eye surgery
- 15 "Heart of Gold" singer Young
- 16 System that Airbnb hosts participate in
- 18 Direction opposite oeste
- 19 Seasoning on some truffles
- 20 Takes forcibly
- 22 Hepta- + tri-
- 23 Music players with antennas
- 25 Author F. ___ Fitzgerald
- 27 Thoughtful?
- 28 F-, e.g.
- 29 "Let me rephrase ..."
- 34 Noisy dancing shoe
- 36 Apt name for someone who loves galleries?
- 37 Sch. close to the Getty Museum
- 38 Places to sing and drink
- 41 Capital of Ga.
- 42 Asparagus or pickle pieces

Down

- 1 Does not share
- 2 Name within "Genevieve"
- 3 Large-scale philanthropist
- 4 Car radio shortcut
- 5 Wish for
- 6 That, in Spanish
- 7 Not bright
- 8 Word cloud producer?
- 9 "Don't leave me"
- 10 Inter Miami CF soccer star Lionel

Across

- 11 "Same!"
- 12 Confer divine favor on
- 14 "Messy" singer Young
- 17 Prickly plants
- 21 Angry speech
- 23 Dude who might do a keg stand
- 24 Frenzies
- 25 "That's rad!"
- 26 Pepsi, e.g.
- 27 Plea for authenticity
- 30 One may include blush and a brush
- 31 Beyond impressive
- 32 Opposite of baja
- 33 Texas pronoun
- 35 Part of car whose name doesn't make sense for electric vehicles
- 39 Milky gem
- 40 "Cheese" product?
- 44 Perfect society
- 45 Move like a crab
- 46 Really bothered
- 47 Catherine of "The Studio"
- 48 Spring shape
- 50 Dec. 13, for Taylor Swift
- 51 "___ to self ..."
- 52 "Sadly ..."
- 55 Wedding words
- 56 Room for movie night, maybe

Solution to last week's puzzle in the bottom right corner of the page

ARE YOU A HYPOCHONDRIAC? (Adult Female)

1. You're watching a television documentary about a newly discovered disease. By the end of the programme, are you
 - a) Bored and waiting for the movie to begin
 - b) Educated by the television show
 - c) Convinced you've got all the symptoms and on the telephone to your doctor
2. A friend of yours has the flu and asks you to call round to her house to cheer her up. What do you do?
 - a) Go round and chat for a couple of hours, keeping her updated on all the local gossip
 - b) Hand over a few magazines on her doorstep, but refuse to go in for fear of catching the flu
 - c) Telephone her and wish her a speedy recovery
3. Do you have a home medical encyclopaedia?
 - a) No, you don't feel the need for one
 - b) Yes, a well-thumbed copy
 - c) Yes, but you rarely look at it
4. If one of your colleagues was to cut their finger at work and it was bleeding badly, would this mean?
 - a) You'd need to sit down because the sight of blood makes you feel faint and queasy
 - b) You would try to help, but probably be more of a hindrance
 - c) You would rush to their assistance with a first aid box
5. How many times have you visited your doctor's surgery in the last year?
 - a) So often that you are on first-name terms with the receptionist
 - b) Once or twice
 - c) Not at all
6. What makes up the content of your medicine cabinet?
 - a) A small tub of pain killers
 - b) Remedies for all common ills
 - c) Pills, lotions, ointments, creams, band-aids and more
7. Do you enjoy watching television medical soaps and dramas?
 - a) No, it's not the type of entertainment you like
 - b) Yes, the programmes welcome escape from reality
 - c) Yes, the realism of the storylines enthrall you
8. When you get a mild cold with just a few sneezes and sniffles, do you
 - a) Carry on as usual
 - b) Take to your bed
 - c) Dose yourself up with cold remedies
9. When you are ill and it is necessary for you to visit your doctor in the surgery, you
 - a) Tell him what you think is ailing you and what medicine he should prescribe
 - b) Tell him what you believe you are suffering from, but be prepared for him to make a different diagnosis
 - c) Tell him your symptoms and wait for him to diagnose your illness
10. As a part of training for your job, you have to go on a first aid course, how would you behave when attending the lessons?
 - a) You would make sure that the instructor knew what they were doing and be quick to point out any mistakes they might make
 - b) You would not take a lot of notice of the tutor, there's nothing about first aid that you don't already know
 - c) You would be attentive and keen to learn

HOW TO SCORE:

	a	b	c
1.	0	1	3
2.	1	2	3
3.	1	3	2
4.	1	2	3
5.	3	2	3
6.	0	1	3
7.	1	2	3
8.	1	3	2
9.	3	2	1
10.	3	2	1

What your score means:

Between 0-10: No one likes to be ill, but you absolutely hate being laid low. You are the type of admirable person who tries to simply shrug off a bout of the flu as a cold. You need to make sure that you take care of yourself. When you don't feel well you should take it easy and not struggle on. That way your recuperation will be a lot quicker and less stressful. **Between 11-20:** You are not an out-and-out hypochondriac. While you may never have imagined that you are ill, you do have the tendency to exaggerate any little complaint you may be suffering from. It seems that you do have a fascination with illness. You are possibly so notorious for your obsession that your friends come to you for a second opinion. Try to free yourself from this fixation by finding something else to occupy your mind. **Between 21-30:** There seems to be no doubt that you are a major hypochondriac. Every little twinge and ache sends you rushing for the medical encyclopaedia. It doesn't take much for you to convince yourself you're ill. There have been times when you have convinced yourself you were suffering from many illnesses, from something mild to the bubonic plague. You need to get a grip on your imagination; you'll feel a lot better for it.

GARFIELD by Jim Davis



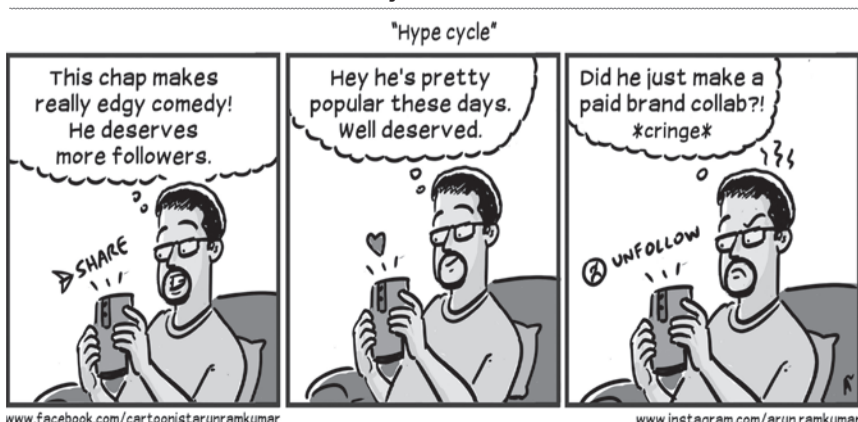
PEANUTS by Charles M Schulz



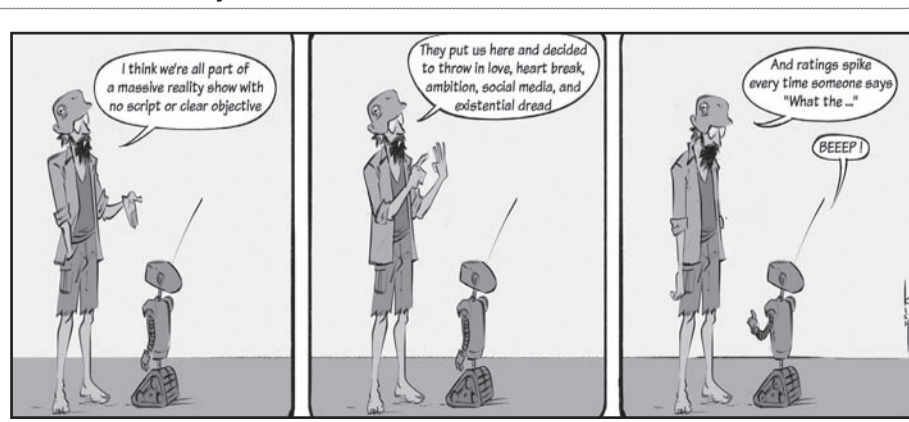
DO JUST ONE THING
BY DANNY SEO

When a recipe calls for an unusual flour made from almonds, rice or oats, running to the store or looking for another recipe aren't your only options. You can make these flours in your own home. All you need are raw almonds, white rice or uncooked oats. Toss the ingredient into your food processor and put it to work. As the blades process the ingredient, they'll transform it into a fluffy flour in just seconds. The tougher the ingredient, the longer it'll take to make, but no ingredient should take more than a minute to transform into flour.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS by Arun Ramkumar



FUTUREPAST by Kishore Mohan



Shortcuts GRAVITY

COMING TOGETHER WITH

Gravity is a force of attraction that keeps you on the ground and stops you from floating off into space. It is one of the four fundamental forces in nature, along with electromagnetism, the strong nuclear force and the weak nuclear force. Of these four forces, gravity is by far the weakest. But even though it is the weakest, gravity is still powerful enough to hold all the planets, stars and galaxies of our universe together.

Time runs slower in strong gravitational fields.

THE GREAT ESCAPE
"Escape velocity" is the speed at which an object must travel in order to escape the gravitational pull of large objects like planets and stars. The escape velocity of Earth is about 40,000 km/hr (25,000 mph). The gravity of a black hole is so powerful it requires an escape velocity so high that not even light can travel fast enough to escape.

Gravity is responsible for the creation, shape and orbits of stars and planets.

I can't believe I'm falling for this cartoon.

My gravity can even set poetry in motion.

Why did the astronaut fall up? He didn't understand the gravity of the situation.

Gravity travels at the speed of light.

ZERO GRAVITY
Can you help these astronauts get together?

WEIGHTY SUBJECT
The gravitational pull between the Earth and moon causes the ocean tides to rise and fall twice each day on our planet. The pull of gravity varies slightly in different areas of our planet. You would weigh slightly less at the equator than you would closer to the poles, and you would weigh less on a mountaintop than you would at sea level.

Gravity warps both space and time. Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity describes gravity using the effects we see from this curvature of space-time.

In the 1660s, Isaac Newton became the first to use mathematics to accurately describe the force of gravity.

All objects, including you, planets and stars, exert a gravitational pull on every other object.

While the gravity of an object weakens with distance, its effects extend throughout the entire universe.

What would happen if the Earth's gravity suddenly stopped? There would be an uprising.

For more information: "You Wouldn't Want to Live Without Gravity" by Anne Rooney (Franklin Watts) or "Usborne Science Encyclopedia" by Kirsteen Robson (Usborne). www.shortcutscomic.com. Distributed by Andrews McMeel for US, Inc. © Jeff Harris 2025

SUDOKU | EVIL AND HARD

		5		3			6	
		9	8		2			
		1	6	9				
			4		2	9		
5						7		
3	6	8						
		4	5	2				
	1		9	7				
2		3			1			

	5			3			6	
	6	8	9			3		
3		4			6			
	7	2		5				
	8						3	
			3	7			8	
			1			2		5
	1			4	6	7		
7			2				4	

Test your number crunching with our unique 2-in-1 puzzle

Fill in the grid with digits in such a manner that every row, every column and every 3x3 box accommodates the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any. Each w has a unique solution that can be reached logically without guessing

QUESTION TIME
by Lalitha Balakrishnan

1. What is the complete form of XML?
 - (a) Extensible Markup Language
 - (b) Extra Machine Language
 - (c) Extra Markup Loop
2. What's the unit of measurement of a diamond's weight?
 - (a) Ounce
 - (b) Milligram
 - (c) Carat
3. Which growth strategy, coined by Reid Hoffman and Chris Yeh, involves sacrificing efficiency for rapid expansion to gain first-mover advantage in winner-takes-most markets?
 - (a) Cost leadership
 - (b) Blitzscaling
 - (c) Product differentiation
4. Which river is known as the sorrow of China?
 - (a) Yangtze
 - (b) Huang He
 - (c) Xijiang
5. Which of these "superfood" vegetables, often found frozen for soups and pastas, is classified as cruciferous?
 - (a) Broccoli
 - (b) Broccoli
 - (c) Carrot
6. Out of My Comfort Zone is the autobiography of which cricketer?
 - (a) Greg Chappell
 - (b) Mark Waugh
 - (c) Steve Waugh
7. Where is the Shaheed Bhagat Singh International Airport located?
 - (a) New Delhi
 - (b) Kolkata
 - (c) Chandigarh
8. Sania Mirza is associated with which sport?
 - (a) Tennis
 - (b) Table Tennis
 - (c) Squash
9. Which of these is not a capital city?
 - (a) London
 - (b) Munich
 - (c) Lisbon
10. Knesset is the parliament of which country?
 - (a) Israel
 - (b) Iran
 - (c) Lebanon

Answers to last week's questions
1.b, 2b, 3.a, 4.b, 5.c, 6.a, 7.a, 8.a, 9.b, 10.c

Winner
Adhyatmika Raut - Odisha
Sevika Devi - Tamil Nadu
Divya Tyagi - Uttar Pradesh
Aditya Kamble - Karnataka
Arjuna Rao P - Andhra Pradesh

Answers to this week's questions will appear next week. Only entries with all correct answers sent before Wednesday noon will be considered for prizes.

Email your answers along with your name, phone number and complete address to sundayquiz@newindianexpress.com. For example, if the answer for Question No. 1 is A, it should be written as 1.A. Please mention QT and the issue date in MM/DD/YY format (for example, QT, April 25, 2021) in the subject line of the email. Only entries with these details will be considered for prizes.

FIVE ALL-CORRECT LETTERS WILL WIN THE BOOK, 'THE GONKA LETTERS: AGONY AND ECSTASY IN THE INDIAN EXPRESS'

SUDOKU 1 TODAY'S SOLUTION

Evil Sudoku

9	1	5	7	2	3	4	8	6
7	4	6	9	8	5	2	3	1
8	2	3	1	4	6	9	5	7
1	7	8	6	5	4	3	2	9
4	5	9	2	3	1	6	7	8
3	6	2	8	7	9	5	1	4
6	8	4	5	1	2	7	9	3
5	3	1	4	9	7	8	6	2
2	9	7	3	6	8	1	4	5

Hard Sudoku

9	5	7	8	3	2	4	1	6
2	6	8	9	4	1	3	5	7
3	1	4	7	5	6	8	2	9
1	7	3	2	8	5	9	6	4
5	8	2	4	6	9	7	3	1
6	4	9	3	1	7	5	8	2
4	3	6	1	7	8	2	9	5
8	2	1	5	9	4	6	7	3
7	9	5	6	2	3	1	4	8

PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER

A	W	O	R	D	A	M	E	S	A	B	S		
M	A	K	E	U	C	A	S	E	P	R	O	W	
C	L	A	Y	M	A	T	I	N	E	T	I	A	
S	K	Y	P	R	E	Z	D	I	S	H	U	P	
A	S	I	D	E	S	N	C	I	S				
P	O	S	T	S	A	G	E	I	S	M			
E	R	N	I	E	T	U	T	E	E	T	I	P	
L	E	T	S	R	O	C	K	A	N	D	R	O	L
M	P	H	F	L	E	E	T	A	I	R	E	S	
S	E	R	I	A	L								
C	H	A	R	A	C	O	T	I	O	S			
P	H	O	N	E	S								
Y	O	U	D										
R	O	S	Y										
O	L	E											

Year: Parabhav
Panguni: Valar
Pirai Chaitra:
Shukla Paksha
Tithi: Ekadashi
till 07.47 hrs.
Nakshatra (Star):
Ashlesha till 14.40
hrs.
Moon in Karka
till 14.40 hrs.
Today is Kamada
Ekadashi
Rahukaalam:
04.30 pm to 06.00 pm
Yamagantam:
12 noon to 01.30 pm
Gulikakalam:
03.00 pm to 04.30 pm



**BIRTHSTONES
ARIES**

(March 21 - April 20)
Although Diamond is the birthstone, Aries also respond to a few other stones like Aquamarine, Bloodstone, Jasper, Topaz and Sapphire. Diamond actually renders its impact by conducting the energies of the ruling planet of Aries, that is Mars. Mars turns sympathetic towards the Arian who is wearing the birthstone. The gem helps the wearer focus the energies of Mars and channelise it to render a positive impact on their life. On a spiritual level, Diamond helps the Arian to overcome the splits of dualism that is the ego and non-ego. It ushers purity in the state of consciousness which radiates into every aspect of the wearer's personality. It gives a feeling of the opening up of many windows that translates into opportunities in life. Certain health issues that are naturally related to the Arian can be resolved through Diamond.

HOW THE CARDS FALL Meenakshi Rani
meenakshirani33@gmail.com



WHAT TO EXPECT, HOW TO COPE

LOVE RELATIONSHIPS WORK HEALTH MONEY

ARIES



Feelings of being 'hemmed in' are addressed. You decide to look beyond the 'constraints' of a relationship that has by far been more demanding than you expected. A hurdle you deemed 'insurmountable' lifts but you wonder if you were 'climbing all the wrong hills'. A chance encounter opens your eyes to an 'augmented reality' where trust issues, ownership, love and convenience are viewed through a new prism. An in-law mouths 'sweet nothings' but plays a complex game. You bond with a youngster who is clued in to your every need. Honest chats over your favourite beverage lighten the mood and strengthen Moon and Jupiter.

TAURUS



You play 'hide and seek' with someone, wondering if they glimpse too deeply 'into your soul'. Courtship is a fun process but you panic at the first signs of things turning serious. Some throw 'deliberately calibrated clues' to get someone 'off their scent' at the workplace for the only reason of greater privacy. A youngster is confused about friends, careers and 'reactions' and you teach them when to 'play it cool'; when to 'play dumb' but at all times to 'play fair'. In-laws need a reassurance of love and kindness. Magic shows, illusionists performances, abstract paintings, games and puzzles activate Neptune.

GEMINI



You take a moment and 'plan your big move'. Gone is the need for 'pent up feelings' and 'bottled emotions'. Circumstances get your message across beautifully with words that 'make things right'. Friendships are restored and you are put on a pedestal by someone grateful. A love interest is rekindled by someone who put their emotions 'out there'. You realise it's your turn to 'return the favour'. A love story is inspirational and you decide to work on yours with a hefty 'slice of courage' and a 'helping of sweetness'. Sundowners, late suppers and late night bites add an electric blend of Uranus and Jupiter.

CANCER



A pathway turns into chaos. An association you thought was the 'one stop solution' has you running in circles. You realise its time to 'cut the cord' and break away from someone. A symbiotic relationship shifts as 'needs' change and so do 'wants'. You inch away from controversy, scandal, clashes and disagreeable people. Calmer situations beckon for certain people have proved their 'staying power'. You resolve to be rid of an interloper, freeloader or false friend. A trip, change of scene or even a redecoration project brings forth an energized Mercury, Mars and Neptune.

LEO



A round-up of gossip has you realise you may have inadvertently alienated a friend. Thankfully you are more than willing 'to do right by them' as the week brings opportunities for peace, love and reconciliation. A marriage alliance 'shows its cracks' in a self-serving demand. A boss is eager to make you comfortable as the workload is upped in corporate shifting sands. Children adjust to changes in curriculum or schools with aplomb. An injury makes an elder mildly cranky but they soon recover. Restaurants with a fountain, fish tank, water body or ones facing the sea help harness the power of Ketu.

VIRGO



You stand at the edge of 'social waters' ready 'to dive right in'. 'Fine tuning your antenna' has you 'assess', 'process' and act in a variety of situations. Tact and mildness are your best friends. Someone schedules a change in your planner and throws your calendar into happy chaos. A friend who pondered a response but moved at a snail's pace; finally gives you one to your satisfaction. Someone seeks you out for solving a riddle, 'clearing their head' or achieving some closure. A sly operator requests money on a false pretext. Music concerts, performing arts, vocal recitals and panel discussions have you enjoy the juxtaposition of Mercury and Jupiter.

LIBRA



A 'rationing' style of doing the bare minimum emotionally has you at odds with a friend. Expectations mount on both sides and both detest a 'fair weather' approach. Someone expects you to 'kiss and make up' after childish name calling. An older relative has a health scare by defying doctor's orders. A lie is 'called out' and you try to clear your name and catch the real culprit. A neighbour who 'muddied the waters' gets a taste of censure or disapproval. A relative in exile makes a quiet comeback. Lecture demonstrations, live counters and cooking experiences bring forth a powerful Venus.

SCORPIO



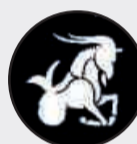
Mild curiosity has you ask all sorts of questions till people build firewalls through polite silences or distance. You relearn 'boundaries' in the closest relationships and learn to be comfortable with them. Extending help to a beloved or young relative for a dream project has you act generously but stay attentive. Someone relearns the meaning of self-reliance and has you to thank. An ex stages an emergency to get back on talking terms. An in-law shares a wealth of experience and practical advice. A relative responds poorly to pollution. Indoor games, mind sport, chess and board games 'tickle the intellect' and activate Mercury and Sun.

SAGITTARIUS



'The tide turns' and so does 'collective perception'. You are dazzled by the positive response that awaits after a veritable 'social drought'. From interviews where you leave people mesmerised to romantic equations that turn stronger, your 'quiet vibe' is as strong as the 'currency of vocabulary'. A boss identifies you for the perfect task or dream job and gives you a free hand and ample resources. In-laws surround you with protection and affection. A friend rues saying things in haste and makes a public apology. Old haunts, heritage walks, tech seminars and lunch at places that have received 'a facelift' galvanise Venus.

CAPRICORN



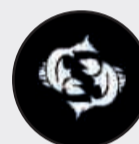
You turn to your 'core group' with heightened expectations and discover they 'hold their cards close to their chest'. While you rattle off all your stories and tales in complete confidence 'that the room lacks judgment', you find smug lines are neatly drawn. Someone 'indulges you' at the workplace but finds reasons to let another show you 'tough love' or do some career 'hard talk'. Older Capricorns look for the people who have stood by them like a 'rock solid investment' or like a Rock of Gibraltar. Professional bodies, business hubs and career inner circles come a calling as Saturn spins.

AQUARIUS



You take a long look at an imaginary mirror and wonder if you have overplayed your hand. Unrealistic expectations take a toll on friendships. Even a spouse is cagy with 'an omnipresent critical lens'. You have the tremendous courage to do what others neglect, 'to course correct' and make up for lost time. Relationships benefit with your nurturing skills. Someone you 'pretended to forget about' returns in a major way and bowls you over. A romance blooms despite the 'parched earth' of a staid work environment. Book readings and book and film clubs add common ground, humour and intensity and activate Jupiter.

PISCES



You are aware of the 'emotional strings' someone pulls every time they want something done. Now they parade 'the evidence' of events that pass for a 'guilt trip that sets you off your game'. You 'wise up' to the tactics of an extended family that wants to wrest control of a situation or assets. Some find a chasm wide and lack the emotional strength to bridge it immediately. Others find succour in a friendship that returns to its former glory. A sibling is envious of a development in your love life and worries that you may move away with a beloved. 'Artsy hobbies', painting, art appreciation, visiting perfumeries or writing help with bonding and activate Moon and Venus.

Holiday Mathis

holidaymathis@gmail.com



An Invitation to YOU

In this week when the Pink Moon, April Fool's Day and Passover happen all at once, the cosmos invite us into the slow burn of a tender awakening.

March 21-April 19: This week, you take care of business, and business takes care of you. But that's your baseline. The fun part is when you level up the care. You go the extra mile, give a little more, tip a little bigger, love stronger, lift higher and add sprinkles on top. You elevate the business, and the business elevates you.

July 24-Aug 23: Even as you experience an event with many others, you'll notice different things about it and have a perspective that's so uniquely you. This week shows you communicating your thoughts well and generously and listening to others with an open heart and mind. You participate in conversations that bring unity, clarity and respect.

Nov 23-Dec 22: People ask: What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail? But this week, a more interesting question is: What would you do if failure were inevitable? The answer reveals an innermost desire that's truer than ambition. This week, you'll be happy committing to actions that are worth doing for their own sake.

Apr 21-May 21: You're feeling proactive about many things this week. You'll anticipate problems and come prepared. You'll figure out what you want and need out of situations before you step into the room. You'll have a plan B, including things to do while waiting to make the most of your time. Preparedness is your superpower.

Aug 24-Sept 23: A room full of familiar people can be a joy. A room full of strangers can be an adventure. And a room full of just you is a solace you've been craving, so enjoy it when you get it this week. Your own space, your own time and a project that makes solitude rather glorious.

Dec 23-Jan 20: Feedback can be constructive, and people can grow from it. But in some environments, fault-finding becomes the background noise, and criticism turns toxic. This week, you'll assess your social swirl with honesty. Certain scenes may not be doing you any favors. Seek out spaces where support is the default.

May 22-June 21: This week, new people and unfamiliar environments will put you in a heightened state of awareness. Give yourself time to get relaxed. Once you're comfortable, that spontaneous charm of yours will take over and do all the work. Moments of acceptance and reciprocity are the start of fun times and new bonds.

Sept 24-Oct 23: Because we are social creatures who unconsciously mirror the emotional states and language patterns of those around us, positive attitudes are much easier to come by when that's what everyone is doing. Environment matters even more than usual this week, and you'll find the right rooms for what you need.

Jan 21-Feb 19: The help you've wanted hasn't always been there. You know what it's like to realize you're on your own and rise to that occasion. Now you know what you're capable of when left to your own devices. This week highlights your powerful self-trust. It opens doors for you, and you'll carry it into everything that comes.

June 22-July 23: You'll feel it all in this week, which reiterates that emotions aren't good or bad - they're just signals. Finding the right context to express yourself can be tricky, but you'll choose the time, place and tone that respects the room, protects connection and fits the situation so that all stays balanced in your world.

Oct 24-Nov 22: This week highlights your adaptability, not in an inconvenient way but in that brilliant openness you possess. Transformation is, after all, your talent. For you, changing the future is easy. You do just one thing differently, and when that has the desired effect, you follow through with the next step and then the next, altering the entire course.

Feb 20-Mar 20: This week, novelty doesn't just land in your routine; it must be pursued. You're game! You'll be enriched by a new experience you choose for yourself. And you can feel the value in choosing things on purpose just because they are new. Even when nothing tangible comes of it, the intangibles are magically and deeply felt.

YOUR FORTUNE THIS WEEK Amarakosha

What the planets say about your prospects for wealth, romance and professional success this week



ARIES (Mar 21-Apr 19)
Work: You may train new colleagues and become a peacemaker. Job offers may come but your boss may try to keep you with a better offer.
Money: Surprise bills for home, health, or repairs pop up. Beware of get-rich or spiritual scams.
Couples: You'll feel more understood and closer with quiet and sweet moments together.
Singles: Your charm will attract people, even those who may already be taken. Choose carefully.

TAURUS (Apr 20-May 20)
Work: You perform well in meetings, pitches, and presentations with main character energy. The boss may praise and give you a new chance.
Money: Awaited money may arrive with a small prize, but surprise costs for kids may crop up too.
Couples: A romantic trip may bring you and your partner closer again.
Singles: Someone online may impress you but you may be unsure to meet due to cultural differences.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
Work: Hidden issues may suddenly appear and need quick action. Save your work and protect important files.
Money: You spend more on treats, so saving may slow down. Stay away from fake investment offers.
Couples: With ups and downs, the relationship may feel tiring. The fear of change makes you stay.
Singles: You meet people but no one meets your standards; you don't wish to settle for less.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
Work: You may get a new assignment that pushes your limits, but higher ups will guide you. For jobseekers, a female friend may bring good news.
Money: One debt may be paid. Be careful with travel deals; one wrong click may lead to a fake tour.
Couples: An event may change your bond and require adjustment. Be ready for big decisions.
Singles: You may meet a few new people, but no strong feelings grow.

LEO (July 23-Aug 22)
Work: New team members, new tools, or more budget could help your project move faster. You may get chances to build strong work partnerships.
Money: Surprise expenses or fines may come up. Friends may connect you to a new income channel.
Couples: A stranger may flirt with you or your partner, and this may cause jealousy issues.
Singles: Someone in your circle may show interest. A foreigner may also try to get close to you.

VIRGO (Aug 23-Sept 22)
Work: Sudden changes and new tools may come, but you will adjust well. Teamwork and communication will be smooth. Work will move forward.
Money: Multiple income channels may come. Watch out for scams asking for your bank details.
Couples: Hidden truths and tensions may come up and disturb the peace between you two. Stay calm.
Singles: Be careful when meeting people as some may only want to hook up for fun.

LIBRA (Sept 23-Oct 22)
Work: You could get a difficult task done well and the boss may assign you another important task. But be careful, someone else may try to take credit.
Money: An older male friend or relative may connect you to a new income channel.
Couples: Your partner may act selfish at times, but you will still support and guide them through mess.
Singles: Your charm will stand out. People from both near and far may show interest in you.

SCORPIO (Oct 23-Nov 21)
Work: A team project will finish well with a small celebration. You may meet useful people. Jobseekers will get a job soon.
Money: Your mind is sharp with money. Luck is on your side. Self-earned money feels more rewarding.
Couples: Errands may pile up, but you both spend time together keeping healthy boundaries.
Singles: Love is not a priority this week. Your energy will go to work, money, and health.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22-Dec 21)
Work: A new project or expanded duties will help you learn how to handle office politics and work well with your boss.
Money: Surprise expenses for health or children may come. Read carefully before you sign papers.
Couples: Your secret may come out and cause discussion over commitment to become tense.
Singles: Friends or relatives in relationships may make hurtful comments about you being single.

CAPRICORN (Dec 22-Jan 19)
Work: You will resolve difficult issues and get complex tasks done on time. The boss may approve your ideas and assign you a lead role.
Money: Awaited money arrives with a small prize. Salary talks or money disputes go in your favour.
Couples: Disagreements will end quickly without drama. Good news may give a reason to celebrate.
Singles: You may meet new people through work events or friends who try to play cupid.

AQUARIUS (Jan 20-Feb 18)
Work: You will stay strong, focused, and move past problems. A job offer from another place may come, but it may not wait long.
Money: You may earn money from a skill or asset. Past work or investments may bring results.
Couples: Problems may come but you both will work to fix them. This sparks deeper commitment.
Singles: Love is not a priority this week. You will stay busy, calm, and focussed on living life well.

PISCES (Feb 19-Mar 20)
Work: Problems at work may become a chance for you to shine and meet more people. You may also get a chance to change departments or jobs.
Money: You would handle major expenses well. Be careful of fake messages that try to trick you.
Couples: Errands may pile up, but you both will stay supportive and still make time for each other.
Singles: You will focus more on making money and meeting work contacts than on love.

AUGURIES Meenakshi Chawla
gmail: astrologyandus@gmail.com Twitter: @Shiva_Vadini

March has given us some very unfortunate events. The red planet, Mars, stayed in Aquarius for the whole month making a close conjunction with Rahu and Saturn. It remained combust under the Sun's heat but was also closely conjunct with Neptune. Mercury was retrograde all the time. From today, all planets have come under Rahu-Ketu axis. This pattern will be broken by Moon or Venus from July 14 onwards. Because of this, many houses in the chart will lose their strength and will be deprived of giving their positive results. Travelling would stay imprecise and there is likelihood of an earthquake, unpredictable weather conditions, inflation and some new controversy. There will also be a need to address lack of confidence, lethargy, vulnerabilities and ingrained anger. The Middle East is one of the regions of the world that is associated with the Saturn and Neptune conjunction along with North and

South Korea. In the last close conjunction of Saturn and Neptune in Sagittarius in 1990, the Gulf War took place when Iraq invaded Kuwait. The war between North and South Korea took place when Saturn and Neptune met in Virgo in June 1950. Saturn in *bharini*, *krittika* or *rohini* nakshatra is associated with wars between India and its neighbouring countries. The India-Pakistan war in August-September 1965 occurred when Saturn was with Ketu while just opposite, Mars and Rahu were closely conjunct and Jupiter was retrograde. In December 1971, the third India-Pakistan war started as soon as Saturn moved into *rohini* by crossing *krittika*. June-July 1999 was the last time Saturn was in *bharini* nakshatra, and the result was the Kargil war. Saturn in *shravana* nakshatra and in close conjunction with Ketu has also given some terrible results such as the Covid-19 pandemic which continued right up to the

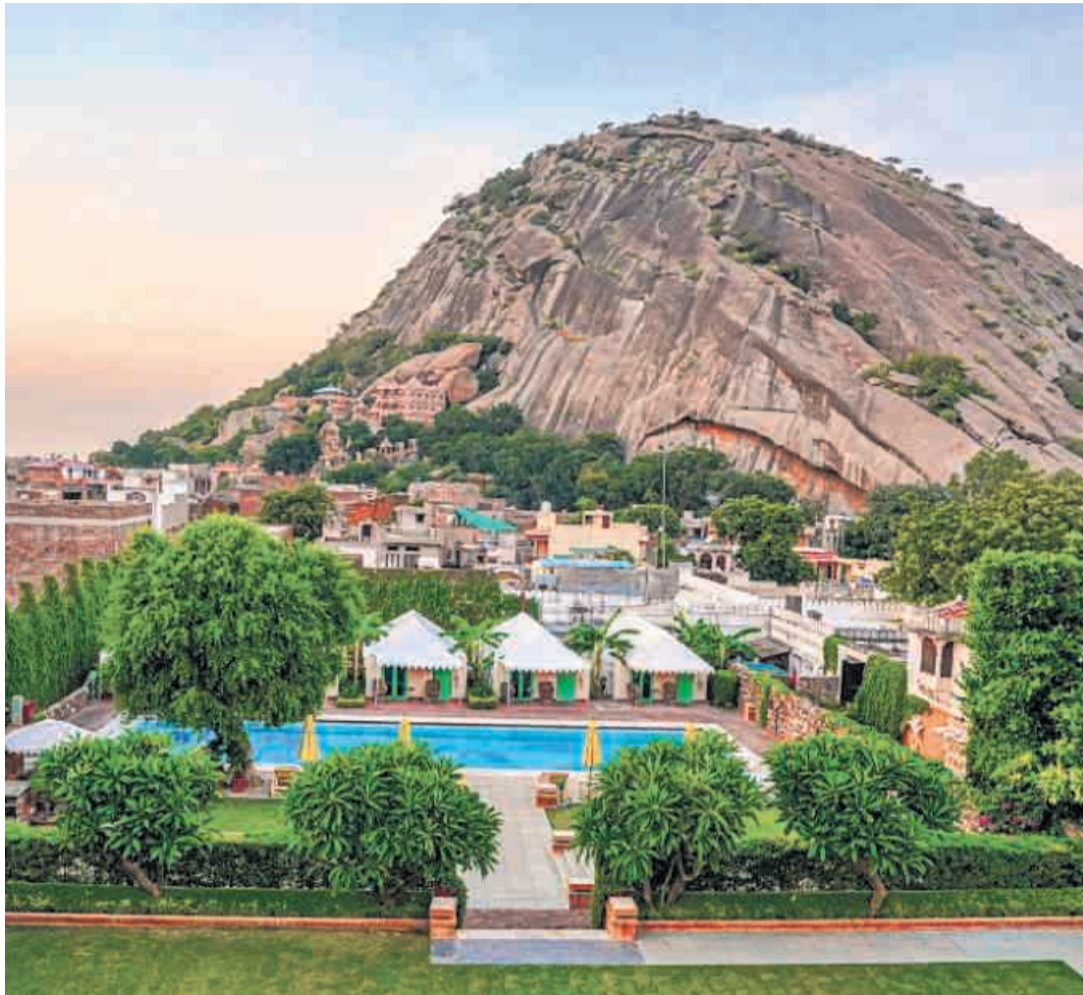


time when Saturn crossed *shravana* nakshatra. These are some planetary combinations that have given us wars or war-like situations. We still have one year and three months of Saturn and Neptune togetherness in Pisces which can be a cause of sleepless nights. As we are two years away from Saturn to enter the *bharini* nakshatra, India should be alert because this transit is combined with the *dasha* of Mars that signals aggression at the borders. On April 19, Ketu will move backwards to *magha* nakshatra in Leo. This period is strongly related with the fall of monarchy and fi-

nancial collapse. Ketu in *magha* nakshatra is also closely associated with China. The last time Ketu was in the *magha* nakshatra from August 2007 to May 2008, markets crashed causing a global recession. Further back in 1989, we also saw the fall of the Berlin wall and the breakup of the Soviet Union. Even earlier, 1970 was also a year of upheaval and unrest. There is already a speculation that oil prices could soon rise to levels that markets have not seen since 2008, the year that wreaked havoc across the world.

The Slow Safari on the Fast Track

India's safari experiences are now consciously shifting from chasing adrenaline to allowing nature to rest, restore, and recalibrate



By KONKANA RAY

The Indian safari was once defined almost exclusively by the chase, a high-octane pursuit of the checklist: the tiger, the leopard, or the sloth bear. Success was quantified in sightings, and the forest functioned largely as a backdrop. But across India's untamed hinterlands, the narrative is shifting. The modern safari is evolving into something slower, and far more introspective.

This is not wellness as the metropolis understands. No clinical aesthetic studios. No scheduled detox itineraries. Instead, a low-intervention approach, and deep sensory.

Threaded across India's wild landscapes, a growing number of retreats are expanding this idea

of wilderness wellness, shaped by its own ecology and cultural context.

For instance, at The Bamboo Forest Safari Lodge in Maharashtra's Tadoba, wellness unfolds without any rigid schedules or elaborate rituals. Founder Sudeep Mehta believes, the experiences guests remember vividly aren't the 'designed' ones. "It's the simple, almost forgotten moments. Walking through the forest without a phone. Sitting quietly near a water body at dawn. Or even just listening to the forest," he smiles.

Down South, in Kerala's spice-scented Thekkady hills, CGH Earth Spice Village retreat is conceived as a living village that evokes the rhythms of peaceful coexistence with wildlife. Guests stay in elephant grass cottages thatched by the

Mannan tribes, wander through spice gardens, and engage in immersive, slow-paced experiences like bamboo rafting and border hiking along the Periyar Tiger Reserve.

At the heart of this shift is a changing traveller profile. Luxury wildlife lodges are increasingly welcoming guests chasing relief from the relentless velocity of an urban life. The recalibration is precisely what contemporary luxury travellers seek.

Amruda Nair, founder of Uttarakhand's Aalia Jungle Retreat & Spa, tracks a marked change in the guest intent. "Now guests are using the wilderness as a reset button—for better sleep, less screen time, quieter mornings, slower meals, and that rare feeling of not having to be 'on' all day."



(clockwise from the left) Rawla Narlai, Kumbhalgarh; The Bamboo Forest Safari Lodge; Ameliya Safari

"Guests are using the wilderness as a reset button—for better sleep, less screen time, quieter mornings, slower meals, and that rare feeling of not having to be 'on' all day." Amruda Nair, founder, Aalia Jungle Retreat



While the safari drive still headlines the itinerary, the real story unfolds in the margins. Evolve Back, a luxury wildlife resort along the Kabini River in Kerala, offers a gentler, more reflective entry into the wild. The retreat integrates Ayurvedic therapies with its riverfront

setting, encouraging a slower rhythm, where time seems to stretch alongside the stillness of the water.

The common thread across these properties is restraint. Wildlife conservationist and Ameliya Safari's founder Suyash Keshari believes this restraint is

precisely why forest-forward wellness resonates deeply now. Forests offer what most urban wellness spaces cannot: perspective. "Travellers are looking for environments that genuinely help them slow down and reset," Keshari notes.

Interestingly, the shift has expanded the safari calendar. Off-season jungle visits are rising as wellness gives guests a reason to come even when sightings are unpredictable. It also allows wildlife lodges to cater to families and mixed-interest groups, where some pursue high-adrenaline safaris, while others engage with the forest through wellness, rest, and sensory immersion.

Local cuisine further reflects this broadening shift. At Rawla Narlai, Kumbhalgarh—a 17th-century royal hunting lodge turned heritage stay—food is an extension of the landscape. "Meals are built around seasonal, locally sourced ingredients from nearby farms, aligning with Ayurvedic principles without being prescriptive," says hotel manager Kripalini Singh.

As luxury safaris continue to evolve, the shift suggests a future where their success will no longer be judged by sightings, but by the depth of restoration one feels upon departure.

QUICK TAKE



SOOTHING SITAR

Pause, take a breath, and step into an evening where the soulful sitar meets wellness. Rishab Rikhiram Sharma invites you to unwind with Sitar for Mental Health, a deeply immersive experience crafted for relaxation and inner peace. Rooted in centuries of classical tradition, the sitar's ancient voice blends seamlessly with modern electronic elements. Through evocative soundscapes like *Chanakya*, *The Burning Ghat*, and *Roslyn*, Sharma guides listeners on a meditative journey. It is an evening designed for reflection, reconnection, and rediscovering calm through the timeless sitar.

When: April 3
Where: Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Academy, Chennai



THE WEDDING FEAST

Craving a Karnataka wedding feast? Beegara Oota, organised by Skydeck, invites you to indulge in a one-of-a-kind unlimited dining experience. Celebrating the rich traditions of a post-wedding meal, the feast is served the authentic way on fresh banana leaves. Expect an all-you-can-eat spread of regional delicacies, crafted from age-old recipes and bursting with flavour. Held every Sunday for a limited time, this culinary showcase offers a delicious journey into the heart of Karnataka's heritage, where every bite tells a story of culture, generosity, and celebration. Come hungry and leave with unforgettable memories.

Where: MG Road, Bengaluru

Making Hay While the Paddy's Shine

A new food hall at Sydney's historic Paddy's Markets is turning global street flavours into a sensory spectacle of colours, figures and flavours

By KIRAN MEHTA

At first, the sights and sounds of Sydney's Hay St Market feel intoxicating. A tall flame bursts from a sizzling wok, wine glasses clink to toast, and the warm aroma of caramelised sugar drifts from a bakery window. Around another corner, bright, flickering displays call out from every direction, offering everything from burgers to *bánh mì*. The Hay St Market is the latest addition to Sydney's famous Paddy's Markets—a long-standing Australian market for the curious of mind, and the budget conscious.

Paddy's Markets began in 1834 when informal trading and bartering took root in this very square. Irish settlers were among the earliest traders, and were soon joined by waves of immigrants—Greeks, Lebanese, Chinese, Italians, Malaysians and many others—each bringing goods and flavours from their homelands. Soon, what began as a produce market gradually evolved into a global bazaar.

No matter which corner of the world migrants arrived from, Paddy's offered something recognisable. "When we first shifted to Sydney, we visited Paddy's every other weekend. It felt familiar," says Asha, who moved here from India in the 1970s. "From Indian spices to decorative *torans*, laughing



(Above) locals and tourists enjoying an evening at Sydney's Hay St Market; (below) food at the market

Buddha figurines, boomerangs featuring native Indigenous art, cans of Greek olives, mezze platters—you can find anything here," she smiles.

Earlier, in 2025, the site underwent a major revamp worth nearly AUD 20 million, making room for the new Hay St Market. In keeping with Paddy's long-standing ethos, the new 3,000-square-foot space is entirely devoted to food and drinks, offering a taste of

everywhere: 48 vendors serving more than 25 cuisines, with new stalls continuing to appear. Walking through the market can feel like navigating a maze.

At K-Pocha, Korean fried chicken arrives with a crispy-crackly crust coated in a sticky sweet-and-spicy glaze. Burger Box piles melted cheese and tangy pickles onto juicy patties tucked into soft buns, served with hot chips. At Madam Bánh Mì, queues snake past the

counter as Vietnamese baguettes are stuffed with tender spiced meats, bright pickles and glossy sauces.

A fruity hint of mango leads to the Curry House, where mango *chutney* accompanies Thai curries and familiar comfort food such as creamy butter chicken served with warm *naan*.

"Hay St Market looks like a street market, feels like a street food market, and smells like it too, but instead of being gritty, it's got this casual-chic vibe," says Sheela, a regular visitor.

After sunset, the atmosphere shifts. Performances by DJs and local bands turn the market into something closer to a lively nightlife spot. Some vendors host their own events too.

Paddy's Markets has always been a reflection of Australia's many cultures. Hay St Market gives that legacy a new stage—one filled with sizzling woks, drifting aromas and plates that carry flavours from every corner of the world.

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Raising a Glass Under the Bar

Delhi's buzzy cocktail bar goes underground with a nine-seat, tasting-style drinks experience



With Cavity, Barbet & Pals, co-founders Jeet Rana and Chirag Pal have built a reputation for turning unlikely ingredients into cocktails that feel both inventive and deeply rooted in place. With this new nine-seater tasting counter, the duo transforms drinks into a carefully choreographed, multi-course experience.

Food: Designed as an immersive tasting counter, Cavity replaces the usual ordering with a structured, nine-course progression of drinks along with food. Don't be surprised by their bite-size servings. Food here is consciously cast for a supporting character and gradually advances to a complete meal. The opening meal is gentle and floral, its honeyed sweetness tapering into a dry, almost wine-like finish. A clever hot-and-cold course follows—warm fermented rice, reminiscent of Northeast brews like *chhaang*, paired with a chilled *rasam* that cuts through with tamarind and peppery brightness. Then comes a bold pivot: a smoky whisky cocktail inspired by Guntur chilli chicken, rimmed with dehydrated chicken salt. It's paired with *Gunpowder Idli*, a square cake filled with pepper crab and topped with caviar. The Slow-Braised *Kareli*, served with Cavity's signature cocktail Black Cardamom, goes well with the spice notes of the drink. It is the Chef's own take on *nihari*. The Sea Salt Soft *Rosogulla* infused with *nolen gur*, puts a sweet end to the experience. ★★★★★

Décor: Minimal and deliberate, it's designed like an intimate tasting counter rather than a conventional bar. Tucked into the basement, the space leans into low lighting and a close-quarters layout that keeps guests within arm's reach. ★★★★★

Service: Rana and Pal, along with co-founder Chef Aminder Sandhu, are the servers here. And, boy, is it fun! The banter, the conversations, the intimacy... one can't ask for more. ★★★★★

Price: At ₹4,500 plus taxes, it's not really expensive, given the number of courses, and of course, the overall experience. ★★★★★

Address: Barbet & Pals, M-51, Ground Floor, M Block Market, Greater Kailash II, New Delhi 110048

—Medha Dutta Yadav

Better Now Than Never

Delay is not laziness but avoidance. Here are seven practical ways to act before hesitation hardens into habit

By ANIL BHATNAGAR

In the summer of 1854, a deadly cholera outbreak swept through London's Soho district. Physician John Snow identified the cause—contaminated water from the Broad Street hand pump—and urged officials to remove it. But the authorities hesitated, waiting for certainty. And while they waited, more people died.

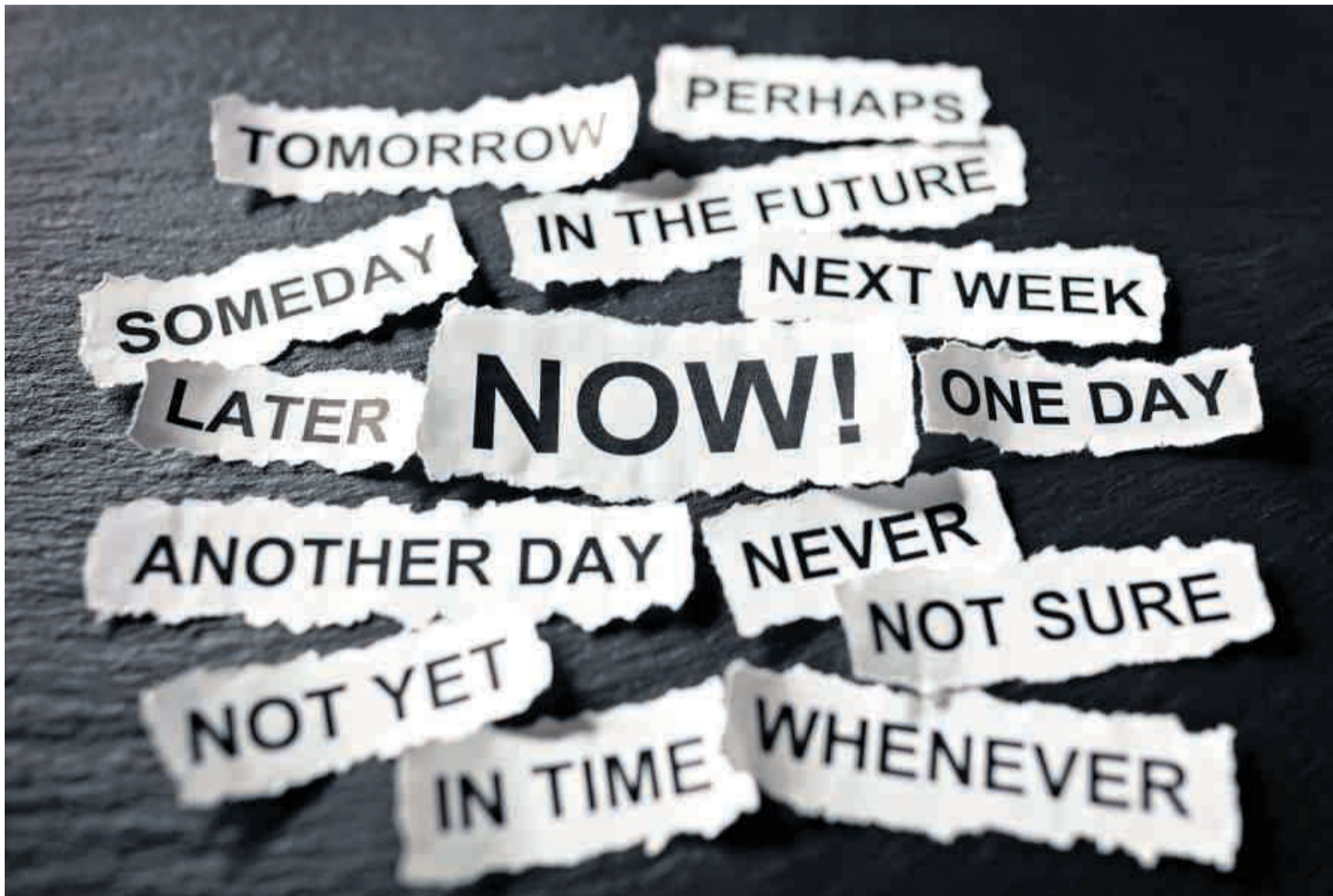
Once the pump was removed, the outbreak subsided overnight, and a quieter lesson emerged: the greatest danger is not ignorance but delay. We may not be facing epidemics, but we mirror this pattern—postponing the report, avoiding the conversation, delaying the check up, choosing comfort over future peace.

Procrastination isn't laziness; it's emotional avoidance—escaping discomfort rather than addressing it. Beneath daily activity hums a faint vigilance—an evolutionary paranoid preparedness for a plausible disaster. To conserve energy for such emergencies, the mind offloads repetitive tasks to efficient but short-sighted unconscious habits, favouring routine and reactivity over proactive, sustained effort. This neural economy tacitly trades a tiny discomfort today for greater pain tomorrow, vainly hoping our future self will be braver.

We don't procrastinate on everything—only on tasks that feel inconvenient, expose a gap in our knowledge or confidence, or carry feared risks. Procrastination gathers where uncertainty meets emotional discomfort. Addressing these roots—rather than blaming willpower—dis-mantles the habit. The encouraging truth: procrastination isn't an irreversible flaw. Here are seven ways to bust it.

1. Name the real enemy: emotional avoidance

Procrastination falsely whispers that tomorrow will be easier, but it rarely is. The antidote isn't inspiration, it is starting before feeling ready



Whether it is a difficult conversation or a high-stakes decision, we avoid it not from weakness of character but to escape emotional discomfort. "Affect labelling"—simply naming the feeling as "anxiety" or "fear of failure"—calms the amygdala, the brain's alarm system. When we name it, we tame it.

2. Lower the starting threshold

We recoil when we see the task because we visualise the intimidating mountain of effort rather than just the first step. To bypass this reflex, start small:

five minutes of work or writing just a single paragraph. Once we begin, the Zeigarnik effect takes place—our discomfort with the unfinished—nudges you toward closure. The struggle isn't doing the work—it's starting.

3. Replace willpower with clear plans

Psychologist Peter Gollwitzer found that specifying the when, where and how—known as implementation intentions—triples your likelihood of following through. Replace "I should exercise more" with "At 7 am tomorrow, I'll walk for 30 minutes after brushing." Intentions fade; protocols endure.

4. Connect the task to what matters

Procrastination thrives when

the task's meaning slips through our conscious awareness.

Writing the deeper purpose alongside a goal restores that vision: a teacher grading papers isn't marking mistakes, they are shaping minds; a writer isn't just filling a draft, they are shifting social awareness. When we anchor a goal to its "why", resistance dissolves.

5. Stop punishing yourself for the delay

Self-flagellation fuels avoidance. Shame is a momentum-killer. Replace guilt with self-compassion. Instead of saying, "I'm lazy", acknowledge: "I stumbled, but I can restart." Forgiveness restores momentum; self-blame freezes it.

6. Design your environment for action

Phones buzz, notifications flash—temptation everywhere. Our environment shapes behaviour more than willpower does. Our surroundings feed procrastination as much as our minds do. So design spaces where doing the work is the path of least resistance. Mute notifications. Clear your desk. Use site blockers.

7. Build accountability and celebrate small wins

We act more reliably when someone expects progress. Sharing goals with a colleague or mentor creates a 'social contract' that drives follow-through. Just as important: celebrate tiny victories. Each completed task releases dopamine, the brain's reward chemical, reinforcing the neural

pathways that got you there. Progress fuels motivation; acknowledgement cements it.

Procrastination doesn't just target the lazy—it visits the motivated equally. Even Leonardo da Vinci left several masterpieces unfinished. It is a conflict we decide in favour of the comfort of now, not our duty in the future.

Once, I asked a group of 40 professionals: "What's the one task you've been avoiding that you shouldn't?" Silence followed; none thought there was any. But when I asked, "Have you prepared your will?" only a single hand rose. We delay what matters most not because it's trivial, but because it forces us to face mortality, risk, vulnerability, and responsibility.

In 1854, lives were lost to hesitation and delay. Today, each of us has a similar "pump handle" waiting—a small decision or action that could change a life. "The trouble is," as the Buddha noted, "you think you have time."

So ask yourself often: if the end came tomorrow, what would you regret not doing?

Make a list—not of ambitions, but of postponements: the deferred journey, the unwritten book, the ignored health check-up, or the distanced relationship. Not acting on these isn't a luxury—it is holding your life captive. Acting on them breaks the cycle.

Procrastination falsely whispers that tomorrow will be easier. It rarely is—postponed tasks gather weight and sap motivation. The antidote isn't inspiration; it is starting before feeling ready. Start small. Start imperfectly. But start. The question is not 'if' but 'what' you are postponing as hours pass by, never to return.

Anil Bhatnagar is a corporate trainer, spiritual coach, a student of neuroscience, and the author of several books, including Success 24 X 7. He can be reached at thrive.ab@gmail.com

BELIEVE

SACRED SPACE | Golden Temple, Amritsar



The Harmandir Sahib or Golden Temple in Amritsar is centred on the Amrit Sarovar, which anchors the complex. The city, founded in 1577 by Guru Ram Das, grew around this sacred tank, which gave Amritsar its name. The temple was designed and completed under his successor, Guru Arjan Dev, who in 1604, installed the Adi Granth—the early recension of the Guru Granth Sahib—within the sanctum.

The gurudwara stands at the centre of the sarovar, reached by a straight causeway, placing the scripture physically and symbolically at the heart of the complex. Continuous recitation and kirtan establish the discipline of worship, while circumambulation along the parikrama path around the sarovar orders the pilgrim's movement. The same discipline extends beyond the sanctum into the life of the complex. The langar, sustained by voluntary service, feeds thousands daily without distinction.

The gurudwara's present gilded form owes much to the patronage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the early 19th century. Despite periods of damage and restoration, the shrine's core principles—access, service, and the centrality of the Guru Granth Sahib—remain intact.

EPICS FOR CHILDREN | GAURAV YADAV

Even War Involves Ethics

During the ongoing United States-Iran war, the US defense secretary Pete Hegseth told the generals to ignore "stupid rules of engagement", meaning that American troops should be allowed to kill any number of enemies without needing to adhere to international conventions of ethical warfare. It is interesting to see the world's strongest military power refuse to abide by the rules of war, and to compare it with the war in the Ramayana, where the warriors always adhered to rules. An account of the Rama-Ravana battle shows how wars were conducted in that age.



When Ravana first took to the battlefield, he was confronted by Hanuman, who informed him that monkeys don't bows and arrows. Ravana was an expert in hand-to-hand fighting too. He struck Hanuman on the chest with his palm. It was a powerful blow, and Hanuman reeled, but quickly recovered to hit Ravana back on his chest with the palm. Feeling the power of the blow, Ravana said, 'Ah, you are a worthy enemy.' Hanuman replied, 'I do not care for your praise. I am ashamed that after my blow, you are alive.' An angered Ravana struck Hanuman repeatedly with powerful blows and rendered him unconscious.

After some time, Hanuman regained his consciousness and saw that Ravana had moved on to fight with the commander of Rama's army, Nila. He thought, 'It is not right to attack someone when they are engaged with another.'

Ravana severely hurt Nila and then turned to Lakshmana. After an exchange of arrows, he hurled his spear at Lakshmana. It struck him in the chest, leading him to fall on the ground. Aiming to finish him off by drowning him in the

sea, Ravana tried to lift Lakshmana. But Hanuman, who was watching, struck him with a blow and carried Lakshmana off to Rama's camp.

Rama became infuriated on seeing the injured Lakshmana and advanced to fight with Ravana. Since Ravana was on a chariot while Rama was on foot, Hanuman urged Rama to climb on his back to attack Ravana. When Rama did so, Ravana was angry with Hanuman for thwarting his plans, so he struck him with more arrows than he struck Rama with. However, Hanuman still carried Rama patiently.

In the course of a long fight, Ravana could not withstand Rama's arrows. He lost his crown and his bow broke. On seeing his helpless state, Rama did not attack him further. He said, 'Go home and return refreshed tomorrow.' As Rama and Hanuman presented the perfect example of ethical fighting by playing by the rules, even a villainous figure like Ravana abstained from attacking an unconscious enemy unethically.

YouTube: @Mahabalak.English

INNER STEADINESS

Coexisting with Contradictions



Contradictions are not a failure of understanding; they are a part of ordinary experience. Spiritual traditions do not resolve these tensions; they teach how to remain steady amidst them. In Varanasi, cremation grounds exist alongside temples and markets, not as opposites but as concurrent realities. The setting does not reconcile life and death; it compels one to register both without simplifying either.

Classical texts make a similar demand. The Bhagavad Gita holds action and renunciation in tension. Krishna's instruction—"yogasthah kuru karmani", to act from a place of inner steadiness—does not resolve the conflict but reframes it to "samatvam yoga ucyate", acting without attachment. It identifies steadiness as equanimity itself. The Isha Upanishad goes further: "tena tyaktena bhunjithah"—to enjoy through renunciation—links enjoyment with restraint, refusing a linear choice between the two. In Buddhist thought, dependent origination shows that opposites arise relationally rather than stand as fixed categories.

The implication is practical. One need not resolve every tension to act rightly. Spiritual discipline lies not in eliminating contradiction, but in remaining steady within it.

AMMASPEAK Mata Amritanandamayi



The Power of Gratitude

Children, gratitude is one of the most noble qualities every human being must have. Behind each of our victories lies the encouragement, help and guidance of multiple individuals and we must be grateful to all of them. We also learn important lessons from the bitter experiences in life which help us become stronger. So, we ought to be grateful to these experiences and to life itself.

Once, a beggar found a bag of old gold coins lying by the street. He went to the palace and gave the bag to the king, who realized that these were the coins he lost years ago. Pleased with the beggar's honesty, the king appointed him minister in charge of the royal treasury.

However, the other ministers did not like this at all. After a few days, they reported to the king that multiple items were disappearing from the treasury and alleged that the new minister was behind the disappearances. Every day, the new minister would arrive at and leave the palace with a bundle in hand. The other ministers said that the bundle contained items stolen from the treasury.



Gratitude benefits us more than anything else. The positivity and goodness that awaken within as a result of gratitude benefit society and the entire world

prestige tomorrow. Change is the nature of the world, so welcome all the experiences that life gives you and be grateful to life.

Touched by his intentions, the king climbed down at once and embraced the minister. As there was no heir to the throne, the king declared the minister his successor. Like the minister in the story, we must always have a heart filled with gratitude.

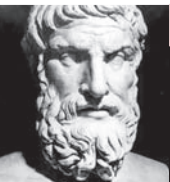
Gratitude is the act of reflecting upon all the support we have received with an attitude of humility. It benefits us more than anything else. We must always be grateful to those who guided us and to the circumstances that led to our success.

We must not become arrogant over our victories or take our privileges for granted. When we lovingly recognize the goodness in another person, we awaken the goodness in ourselves.

When we look back at our life with this attitude, we will realize that we owe so much to thousands of people. It would take lifetimes to repay these debts, especially to nature, and above all, to God. The positivity and goodness that awaken within as a result of gratitude benefit society and the entire world.

The writer is a world-renowned spiritual leader and humanitarian

MASTER MIND

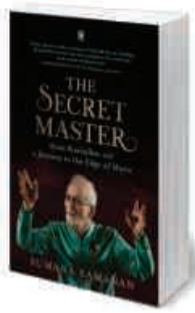


"The key is to keep company only with people who uplift you, whose presence calls forth your best." EPICETUS



The Reluctant Maestro

The biography examines the formidable idealism of musical master Arun Kashalkar, who largely remained outside of mainstream acclaim



The Secret Master: Arun Kashalkar and a Journey to the Edge of Music
By: Sumana Ramanan
Publisher: Context
Pages: 452
Price: ₹899

By NANDITA BOSE

As we alight on technology and the development of an international presence as the way forward, indigenous wisdom, art and cultural institutions honed over centuries, or even millennia, are being marginalised. Declining art forms may have aficionados; however, the groups of these art lovers are dispersed, their clout diffuse and weak. Institutions tasked with supporting these art forms are decaying. Almost adjacent is an ethical question: suppose one chances upon an exponent of a rare art form, what is our duty towards them? That question is beautifully answered in Sumana Ramanan's book *The Secret Master: Arun Kashalkar and a Journey to the Edge of Music*. She came upon Arun Kashalkar through Ulhas Kashalkar, Arun's sibling and a musical maestro. Arun, no less than a maestro himself, was living in anonymity and hard-fought peace.

In the course of her research on Hindustani classical music as a columnist for *Mumbai Mirror*, the author had been attending concerts when an invitation to a *baithak* brought her face-to-face with Arun Kashalkar. The man himself is at peace at the fringes of fame. "I have no regrets," he told Ramanan. "I have



Arun Kashalkar

never stopped investing in my music. My search has been artistic, like that of my gurus." While those destined for fame have other immediate concerns, those who haven't come by it are far luckier, for they can hone their art, observe, and refine their learning. "Flow partly reflects a singer's control over rhythm. Without flow, a rendition sounds like a patchwork. Every style has mediocre musicians who produce such patchwork," Arun says.

Unlike other biographies, this does not follow a linear model but weaves out of a whole bundle of events. Sometimes the path to understanding a musician is through other musicians and their music, to embody the traditional ethos he is part of. Layer by layer, the author deconstructs the structures that interweave into this

almost-magical world. However, this is also about a man who's bucked tradition; his concerts bring to life the styles of at least three *gharanas*—Agra, Gwalior, and Jaipur—at a time when most musicians are purists and stick strictly within the bounds of the *gharana* they are initiated into. "Arun did not expect most listeners to notice the minutiae of his many achievements, enhancements and innovations. He wanted them only to enjoy the overall effect when he marshalled them to create a fresh and dynamic soundscape," Ramanan writes. What makes his music great is the seamless assimilation of these styles, though it leaves him stranded, almost homeless.

A firsthand experience of Hindustani classical music is notoriously difficult to write on or about in English. The technical terms have no adjacent vocabulary to lean on. Much of the core ethos of this form of music is difficult to understand, far tougher to translate or transcribe. Namita Devidayal pulled it off with panache

in the biography of Ustad Vilayat Khan Sahab in 2018. It is a difficult act to follow, though Ramanan holds her own and develops a form of intimacy with her reader right from the first chapter. It's her open, honest style and incredible grounding in the art that shines perceptibly through her writing.

Deep, reflexive thought and impressive writing skills have made this a rare gem of a book. The author begins with the first principles of her journey into music and the discovery of a maestro in relative anonymity. Along the way, she alights on many great artists and their histories, as well as their contributions to Arun's music and to their own musical journey. It is all woven together effortlessly, like we are listening to a recounting of the times and the great men who illuminated it. And it is true, in the arcane world of Hindustani classical forms, such myriad stories abound.

"The notes of a raga are like seeds. When you carefully nurture them, they flower forth and emit the raga's

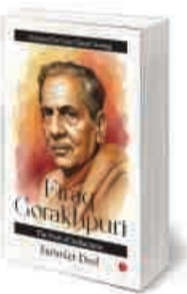
fragrance. Each seed blossoms to a natural rhythm, which may be hidden but has nevertheless been working its magic," writes Ramanan. The author also adds nuggets of information that educate the readers without alienating them—whether on the *gharana* styles, the *saptak*, the structures and nuances of the *ragas*, the concept of *tala*, *avartan* and *sam*, the differentiation between *dhrupad* and *khayal*, as well as transcription of compositions by the greats, or even a deep dive into the concert venue NCPA and other institutions' histories. Make no mistake, this is an investigation into the mystique of this form. All the while juxtaposing with events of consequence in Arun's life story.

A book to guide, entertain and preserve for posterity both the uninitiated and the expert, this is a labour of love. A wholesome tribute to an exceptional man who hones his craft unsung while unfurling the greater mystique of an almost-impenetrable art form he worships.

Unlike other biographies, the narrative does not follow a linear model but weaves out of a bundle of events. The author deconstructs the structures that interweave into Arun Kashalkar's almost-magical world

READ

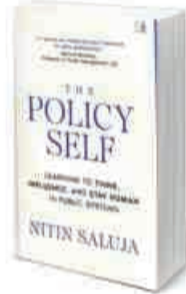
BOOK TASTINGS



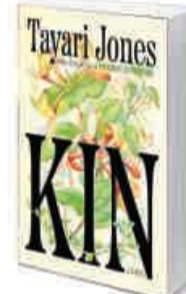
Firaq Gorakhpuri
By: Surinder Deol
Publisher: Rupa Publications
Pages: 432
Price: ₹495
It explores the life of a poet who drew inspiration from the romanticism of English poetry and the subtleties of Sanskrit poetics to create a unique idiom of feeling.



Maya
By: Anant Sonawane
Publisher: HarperCollins
Pages: 192
Price: ₹699
It is the story of Maya, a tigress from Maharashtra's Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve who became a national icon in August 2023, following her disappearance.



The Policy Self
By: Nitin Saluja
Publisher: Simon and Schuster
Pages: 190
Price: ₹499
The book distills nearly two decades across government, industry, and diplomacy into a rare exploration of the inner life of policy work.



Kin
By: Tayari Jones
Publisher: Harper Fiction
Pages: 368
Price: ₹650
It is a deeply moving story of lifelong friendship, sisterhood, and family. Set against the sweep of 20th-century America, it follows two women whose bond is shaped by longing and love.

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The Private Lives of Public Systems

Moving from caste discrimination to anti-CAA protests, the short story collection captures how personal is often political



Why I Killed My Husband and Other Such Stories
By: Anita Nair
Publisher: Westland Books
Pages: 280
Price: ₹599

By CHITTAJIT MITRA

In *Why I Killed My Husband and Other Such Stories*, Anita Nair turns to the intimate to make sense of the political. Across six short stories, the author maps precisely how public policies, social structures, and everyday prejudices seep into our private lives. Moving across themes as varied as domestic abuse, caste discrimination, digital fraud, protest movements, and the Covid-19 pandemic, the collection attempts to capture a "state of the nation", as Nair likes to call it, through individual experiences, where private decisions are shaped by systematic forces.

The title story introduces a familiar scenario. Anjali, a well-educated and working woman, is introduced to B S Madhavan, a professional violinist who works at an insurance company, through a marriage broker. While she was apprehensive about whether he would like her because of her looks, he instantly agreed to get married, and so the dream

sequence started for her. But things came to a rude halt sooner than expected as she became a target for her husband's relentless insults. As years went by, things got worse, but she learned to endure. But as she loses that last shred of belief in their relationship, she takes a step nobody thought of.

In *Quota Girls*, Nair explores how caste seeps into the most progressive institutions. It is the story of Uma Shree and Savitha, who are on their way to becoming doctors studying at the Kanakadasa Government Medical College, but while they eagerly wanted to focus on their studies, others were more interested in their caste identities, as they belonged to a

caste often reduced to manual scavenging. The story starts with a small incident in Uma's life when she was just nine years old, where her teacher was mentioning the different professions that exist in society, and she excitedly mentioned her father's job, to which the teacher mocked her. Underlining how caste and its conversation enter into our lives knowingly or unknowingly at a very young age, the story goes on to reveal the rot that exists in our educational institutions and aids for such discriminatory structures to not just exist but thrive.

Across the six stories, different socio-political

contexts—from the anti-CAA movement to Covid-19—anchor sharply drawn characters. Nair's strength lies in weaving these realities into lived experiences that feel immediate and recognisable. The anger and annoyance that one feels against Madhavan in the title story because of his sheer arrogance and selfishness, highlight how a series of distasteful events can culminate in an extreme, irreversible step. She invokes these raw emotions effectively in most cases, though the impact falters in a few. Fiction can be an immaculate tool to examine inequalities and violence, but its effectiveness

often depends on a gradual immersion that allows the reader to fully inhabit these realities.

This limitation is evident in stories like *The Land of the Lost Content*, which deals with digital arrest scams. It follows Urvashi, an influencer who falls prey to such tactics. The mechanics of these scams and the psychological grip they establish on victims demand a more detailed unfolding to fully convey the extent of disempowerment involved.

The collection carries an inherent weight of expectation—not just in literary execution but in the range of issues it seeks to address.

That expectation is difficult to meet, as the terrain itself is vast. Several pressing concerns remain outside its scope: the online auction of Muslim women, the public celebration towards convicted rapists, or the continued gaps in legal protections for transgender individuals. These absences do not diminish the stories themselves but underline the impossibility of containing the entirety of a nation's fractures within a single volume.



From Idealism to Realpolitik

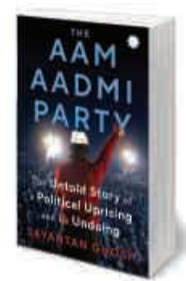
By ANITA KATYAL

When crowds thronged Delhi's Jantar Mantar to back social activist Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement in 2011, few believed the protests would give birth to a political alternative promising transparent, clean and people-centric governance. The formation of the Aam Aadmi Party was therefore widely welcomed by those disenchanted with traditional politics.

But over a decade later, the AAP is no longer the idealistic force it set out to be. Instead, it has joined the ranks of the very parties it once denounced. The party's journey from those heady days to the present has been chronicled by journalist Sayantan Ghosh in his book *The Aam Aadmi Party: Uprising and its Undoing*. Having closely observed the party as a political reporter and briefly worked with then Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, Ghosh offers insights into AAP's rapid rise and decline.

The book traces how a group of activists, led by Arvind Kejriwal, made the unusual move into electoral politics. It captures the enthusiasm with which AAP was embraced by Delhi voters, culminating in its sweeping victory in the 2015 assembly elections. Initially, Kejriwal retained his combative activist persona, but he shifted focus when voters signalled a preference for governance over confrontation with the Centre.

Kejriwal turned to core issues like education and healthcare, alongside populist measures such as subsidised electricity and water, and free bus rides for women. These policies resonated in a city where identity politics plays a limited role. As Ghosh notes, this "strategic use of popular policies" helped cement



The Aam Aadmi Party
By: Sayantan Ghosh
Publisher: Juggernaut
Pages: 352
Price: ₹499

Kejriwal's image as a leader focused on immediate public needs. At the same time, the party saw increasing centralisation of power under Kejriwal, with dissenting voices sidelined and decision-making concentrated. The early idealism gradually gave way to the compulsions of realpolitik.

Ghosh describes this shift as "a cautionary tale" of how a movement of idealists can transform into a party driven by the ambitions of a single leader. According to him, several government initiatives were "clouded by irregularities and corruption," reflecting a gap between intent and execution. Controversies such as the liquor excise policy and the renovation of Kejriwal's official residence further dented the party's image. Kejriwal's arrest marked a turning point, severely impacting his credibility. In 2025 Delhi election, the AAP lost power, and Kejriwal lost his seat.

Despite his proximity to the party, Ghosh avoids both glorification and vilification. While acknowledging Kejriwal's charisma, he highlights his tendency to suppress dissent, including the expulsion of founding members Yogendra Yadav and Prashant Bhushan.

The AAP story ultimately raises a larger question: whether a political alternative can sustain itself without compromising on its founding ideals.



Knot Your Average Throwback

With Now-Stalgia, Obeetee and cultural curator Eshaan Kashyap reinterpret heritage as something living—tactile and distinctly contemporary



By GEETIKA SACHDEV

In contemporary design, heritage is less about preservation and more about translation—distilling the past into something relevant for today. With Now-Stalgia, a new rug collection created with cultural curator Eshaan Kashyap, Obeetee approaches tradition with an easy confidence, reworking historic influences without leaning too heavily on nostalgia. Kashyap begins with a simple provocation. “What we call ‘heritage’ today was once radical and contemporary in its own moment,” he says. “Time doesn’t move in a straight line, it folds into itself.” That idea of time folding informs the collection, which feels like a conversation across eras.

Kashyap’s interdisciplinary practice—spanning food, culture and design—also shapes his approach. “Food is about layering—flavour, texture, memory. I approached textiles in a similar way,” he explains. Drawing from Ottoman textile traditions—particularly the richness of silk velvets—the collection navigates influence with restraint. Rather than reproducing ornamentation, Kashyap focuses on design principles such as scale, rhythm and symbolism.

Materiality plays a key role.



Inspired by the way metallic threads in historic velvets catch the light, the rugs carry a subtle luminosity. Their palette—deep reds, ambers, sapphires, indigos and muted golds—echoes the splendour of Ottoman palaces and ceremonial robes while remaining suited to modern interiors. “I was interested in extracting design principles like scale, rhythm and symbolism, rather than reproducing historical ornament,” Kashyap notes.

The Crescent Solar Rug draws on celestial imagery with sweeping arcs that evoke cycles and continuity. The Chintamani rug revisits a historic motif associated with power and

protection, while the Stair-Wave rug translates rhythm and ascent into a graphic pattern.

Other pieces feel more instinctive. The Chakra Hand-Tufted Wool Rug, in beige and rust tones, creates warmth, while the Ottoman Echo Rug, set against a deep blue field, carries mirrored wave motifs that feel almost meditative. Each piece is hand-tufted, allowing for nuanced experimentation in texture and finish.

For Obeetee—working with over 25,000 artisans across thousands of looms in Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh—the collection reflects an evolving design language. “It reflects a vision where heritage remains

central, yet deeply relevant to the modern home,” says Angelique Dhama, President of Obeetee Pvt. Ltd. Launched alongside Obeetee Carpets and Home, the collection positions rugs as foundational design elements rather than finishing touches.

“It speaks to a contemporary consumer who desires something distinctive, yet connected to traditional craftsmanship,” Dhama adds. “Each piece is conceived as an enduring object, one that moves seamlessly across generations.” In the end, Now-Stalgia offers a thoughtful bridge between past and present—heritage that feels rooted, yet entirely new.



The New Arm Candy

The modern man doesn’t need to scrounge for hand-space anymore. He’s investing in bags as an evolved necessity

By NIKHIL P MERCHANT

In the late 70s, the leather pouch was a quiet constant. Steel-zipped, stoic, often in browns, blacks and deep blues, it travelled through metro cities tucked under arms or slipped into briefcases. Then came the great digital contraction. A single smartphone absorbed identity, banking, boarding passes and correspondence, making the bag seem momentarily redundant. Luxury, however, rarely stays dormant. As the modern man’s inventory expands again—wireless headphones, passports, tablets, grooming kits, gym wear—the question is no longer whether to carry, but how.

At luxury retail destinations such as Jio World Plaza, that shift is increasingly visible. “Today’s male luxury shopper is more informed and deliberate, favouring craftsmanship, functionality, and subtle details over logo dominance,” says a spokesperson. The preference is evident in the rise of leather goods from houses such as Bottega Veneta, with its intrecciato weave, alongside Bally, Salvatore Ferragamo and Valentino. Crossbody bags, structured totes and refined travel pieces now move easily between boardroom, boarding gate and bar. The cue finds resonance in wardrobes shaped by Karan Johar, Shah Rukh Khan, Ranveer Singh and Hardik Pandya—where leather pieces balance refinement with a certain local swagger.

The bag, in many ways, has become the most flexible accessory in a man’s wardrobe. As Vaibhav Bahl, co-founder of Conosh, puts it, “While watches and tailoring are still powerful codes, they operate within fairly rigid frameworks.” A bag, by contrast, allows experimentation. Legacy houses such as Goyard illustrate that shift. For Ashutosh Munshi, a Goa-based global brand advisor, the choice is an orange Sénat PM pouch personalised through Goyard’s Art of Marquage. “My wardrobe is largely monochrome, so the bright orange works as a deliberate counterpoint,” he says. In India, that narrative sits easily alongside long-standing leather traditions—from legal satchels and riding boots to handcrafted travel trunks. The bag, it seems, has returned not as an accessory, but as a statement.



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Sail in Style



This summer, LVMH-owned Belmond will debut Marguerite, a luxurious 128-foot canal boat, in Burgundy, France. Formerly known as Amaryllis, the 1962 vessel has been completely reimaged to join the Les Bateaux Belmond fleet. Its name and interior design, featuring yellow hues and handcrafted French furnishings, are inspired by the region’s golden daisy fields.

The vessel accommodates up to eight guests in four en-suite double cabins. Amenities include an open-plan salon, a formal dining area, and an expansive outdoor deck complete with a plunge pool and alfresco dining. Service mirrors a five-star hotel, featuring a high crew-to-guest ratio and custom menus designed by Michelin three-star chef Dominique Crenn.

The new itinerary offers immersive cultural experiences, such as a Dijon mustard masterclass, private lunches at historic castles, and cycling tours through the Route des Grands Crus wine trail. Unlike competitors launching massive superyachts, Belmond focuses on intimate, personalised canal travel. Chartering Marguerite for a week starts at approximately \$98,200 (approximately ₹82.5 lakh), offering a bespoke, high-end exploration of French heritage and gastronomy.



PICK OF THE WEEK



When Heritage Meets High Design

Inside designer Vikram Goyal’s expansive new flagship where Indian mythology and architectural heritage converge



After a 12-year hiatus, Viya has returned to Mumbai, unveiling its flagship sanctuary within the hallowed halls of Trafford House. This iconic heritage landmark serves as the quintessential stage for founder Vikram Goyal’s evolved vision—a seamless dialogue between historical soul and contemporary clarity. Spanning 4,600 sq ft, the flagship is a masterclass in restrained opulence. The interiors honour the building’s architectural bones, stripping back heritage elements to a refined, monochromatic essence. This also marks the debut of Viya apparel and an elevated collection of cane objects. Says Goyal, “With Viya, we wanted to create a space that represents who we are today. Trafford House felt like the perfect place.” Viya redefines functional objects through the lens of Indian mythology and avant-garde craftsmanship. Represented by global galleries like Nilufar and The Future Perfect, Goyal’s homecoming to Mumbai reaffirms Viya’s position at the vanguard of the contemporary Indian design language.

—Deepali Dhingra



'I am Always Pushing for Something Better'

Elisabeth Moss speaks with Katie Ellis about her series, *Imperfect Women*, and how she doesn't let her roles affect her personal life

Often drawn to complex, psychologically layered characters—be it Peggy Olson in *Mad Men* or June Osborne in *The Handmaid's Tale*—Elisabeth Moss has built a career out of embracing imperfection. With *Imperfect Women*, she leans further into that instinct, taking on a dark story that probes the fragile bonds of friendship, trust and the secrets people keep. Here, she reflects on her choices, her process, and what drew her to the series.

Imperfect Women is a dark drama about female friendship and trust. What made you want to tell this story?

It started with me reading Araminta Hall's beautiful book while I was shooting a film back in 2019. The book stayed with me. I told my producing partner about it and it just started from there. We were so lucky to get Kerry Washington and Kate Mara on board and for Apple to back us.

You started your journey as a producer of *The Handmaid's Tale*. How much do you enjoy working behind the camera as well as in front of it?

I enjoy it a lot. I love working on an idea from the earliest point and building on it. But it's easy when you get to work with such great people. We got lucky to attract such an amazing cast and crew on this. It was like



Elisabeth Moss; (below) a scene from the film



being part of a dream team.

The relationship between three close friends is at the heart of the series. How did you go about creating that chemistry with co-stars?

It was already there from the beginning. All three of us just hit it off, to the point that it felt like filming might actually get in the way. We just wanted to talk and hang out. It was like that from the very first day.

How was getting to work with Joel Kinnaman?

Joel plays such a serious character, as he often does so brilliantly, but he is actually the

funniest guy ever. I had never worked with him before, so it came as something of a surprise to have him telling jokes all the time.

This is the latest in a long line of intense characters for you. What do you do to not take that intensity and those dark themes home with you?

First of all, not to minimise the work, it's not easy. I always know it's not real. You want to believe it for the portrayal of the character, but it's never like these situations are actually happening to me. It's pretend. This is a job that I am fortunate to do. It never leaves me how

lucky I am to do something I dreamed of doing since I was six years old. No matter how dark the material or how tough the situation, it always feels like a joy to me.

It is exactly ten years since you were first cast in *The Handmaid's Tale*. How do you feel looking back on your six seasons as June Osborne?

I feel proud to have been a part of it and of what everyone who worked on the show achieved. It was emotional to say goodbye after so long, but I am happy with how we ended. It will always be such an important time in my life.

You are still involved with that world as an executive producer of *The Testaments*, a spin-off show of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Yes, it's exciting. It's a continuation, a new story with a new cast, led by Chase Infiniti, who is amazing. I am so happy I get to be involved to a degree.

What are the chances of June making an appearance in *The Testaments*?

It's not going to happen. I'm not going to be in it. I am happy about how June's story ended. Yes, there is a feeling that her journey is not over, but right now there are no plans. I loved playing the character and I would play her again one day maybe, but not right now.

How do you go about choosing which roles to play at this stage of your career?

It starts with the material. I'm just constantly trying to push myself to become better and to find things I haven't done before. It gets a little harder to find new things, but that's the only way I can get better. I don't want to do the same thing that I did before. That's boring to me. I want to do something different, otherwise it would all get incredibly boring.

You have fans from around the world. Have you had any encounters that stand out for you?

The thing that means the most to me is when people come up to me and say how something I have done, a character I have played, has inspired them and given them hope. That means a lot to me.

Finally, is there a genre you would love to work in next? A rom-com maybe?

I would love to do a rom-com. That's what I like to watch. Rom-coms are my favourite films, but nobody wants me to be in them. A rom-com would be awesome.

ASIA FEATURES

WATCH

Searching for Her Seoul

Priyanka Mohan speaks about her latest film, *Made in Korea*, and what we can learn from South Korean cinema and what she wishes she could bring back

By PUJA TALWAR

Korean pop culture is everywhere now, but Priyanka Mohan's doorway to Seoul was older: It was the story of Tamil princess Sembavalam, who is believed to have travelled from Kanyakumari to Korea nearly 2,000 years ago to marry King Suro, the first king of the Gaya confederacy in ancient Korea. In Netflix's *Made in Korea*, Mohan's character, Shenba, dreams of visiting South Korea because she was fascinated by the story of Sembavalam ever since she played that part in a school play. Mohan, too, finds the story equally fascinating.

"Just imagine a teenage girl who set off to a strange land 1,500 or so years ago. It may not have been easy for her. I was both engrossed and inspired by her story," Mohan recalls. In the film, she is Shenba, a modern day traveller who arrives in Seoul and navigates language barriers to find her feet in a foreign land with the help of strangers who would become friends and family.

The film, a first-of-its-kind Tamil and Korean collaboration directed by Ra Karthik, attempts to showcase the cross-cultural exchange between the two countries. "There were people around me who would watch Korean shows without subtitles. They were learning the language, listening to Korean music, adopting their skin care regime, and eating their food, and I wanted to capture that," says Karthik.

Unlike the director's vision, Mohan's acting process was simple—to explore and learn about Korea while shooting. "Though I had watched a few odd K-dramas, I decided not to read up or revisit until we landed in Seoul. I wanted to learn and explore it in person to give flavour to the charac-



ter," Mohan says.

She says *Made in Korea* is a career milestone for her. "The film helped me explore myself as an actor, and showcase my potential across two cultures. It was a new learning experience

Priyanka Mohan; (below) the film's poster



to shoot in a foreign country with foreign actors, meet different people and understand their artistic and creative sensibilities," Mohan says.

If one thing she cherishes the most of what she has learned from K-dramas, it is that women are written about with depth and agency. "I'm glad we are also heading in that direction. After working in this film, I realised there are no boundaries. Despite the language barrier, we weren't lost in transition," she says. "I feel that if you give a canvas to good directors and writers, they can create magic. This was lacking in other films. Now that cinema is growing, and the popularity of streaming platforms

ensure language is no longer a deterrent to communication, it has all brought us closer together."

In Korea, Mohan was surprised to discover how much popular Indian cinema is there. According to her, Aamir Khan is the most loved Indian actor among Koreans because of the enduring popularity of *3 Idiots*.

What she would have liked to bring back from Korea? She laughs and says, "Korean co-stars."

Mohan made her debut in the 2019 Kannada film *Onthi Katha Hella*, and has since starred in Telugu films such as *Gang Leader*, as well as Tamil films such as *Doctor* and *Don*. Netflix is currently streaming *Made in Korea*.

BINGE BOX



THE PROBE BEGINS

After its successful theatrical release, this film is finally on OTT. It follows NIA officer Shivani investigating the kidnapping of 93 young girls, uncovering a sinister beggar mafia and illegal medical experiments. Watch *Mardaani 3* on Netflix starring Rani Mukherji

TRENDING

Bait Amazon Prime Video

CAST: Riz Ahmed, Guz Khan
PLOT: It is a comedy about Shah Latif, a struggling actor, as we follow him over the course of four wild days as his life spirals out of control, sparking doubts.

Muthu Alias Kaattana JioHotstar

CAST: Vijay Sethupathi
PLOT: It is a gritty Tamil action-thriller, revolving around a macabre mystery of a severed head found at a police station, sparking a hunt for truth behind the man.

Something Very Bad Is Going to Happen Netflix

CAST: Camila Morrone
PLOT: It is a horror-thriller series where a bride-to-be faces a nightmare week leading up to her wedding at a secluded estate.

BTS: The Return Netflix

CAST: Kim Nam-joon, Kim Seok-jin
PLOT: It chronicles the K-pop group's reunion in Los Angeles to create their comeback album, *Arirang*, following a four-year military service hiatus

Daredevil: Born Again Season 2 JioHotstar

CAST: Charlie Cox
PLOT: The new season of the American television series sees blind vigilante Matt Murdock gathering allies to resist Wilson Fisk, who is the mayor of New York City, and his Anti-Vigilante Task Force.

OTT REVIEW

A Script Lost in Exposé



AGENT ZETA

Director: Dani de la Torre
Platform: Amazon Prime Video
Genre: Action, Thriller
Language: Spanish
Rating: ★★☆☆☆

Despite an interesting premise, the Spanish action thriller *Agent Zeta* is chaotic and bogged down by endless exposition. So much so that each expository passage in the film paves the way to a generic action sequence. The film follows a Spanish intelligence agent named Zeta (Mario Casas), who is called back into action midway through his sabbatical after four other members of his organisation get murdered by an anonymous killer. Joining Zeta on the mission to find the killer and solve the mystery behind an old mission is Alfa (Mariela Garriga), a Colombian agent described as the best in her class.

The film is mostly focused on the mechanics of its plot. However, unlike some of the run-of-the-mill thrillers, *Agent Zeta* adds a personal layer to its central mission, thus enhancing the stakes, at least in the script. Zeta has a personal reason to discover the identity of the killer. However, interestingly, the film keeps its titular character on the sidelines for the most part, positioning him in the middle of action sequences only when the exposition ends. Therefore, it seems a strange choice to name the film after Zeta.

Luis Zahera has a far better role in the film (not that this makes it good) as Salvador Ancares, another agent who is connected to the mysterious mission with mass casualties at the heart of the story. Funnily enough, his only job for a large part of the story is to explain the events from that tragic day in Colombia. It becomes difficult to catch up with the narrative at some points, especially when the characters mention the names of mysterious figures one after another in a single stretch. Before you figure out who Tirapu and Sito Baltar are, for instance, the film suddenly shifts focus to Furiase first and then to Casiel. Kudos to the subtitled for mentioning one particular line from Luis Zahera as a 'history lesson,' because it is indeed one big piece of spoonfeeding.

Packed with well-executed stunt sequences, the film gets exhausting quickly due to a lack of eagerness. There is chaos onscreen and in the film's screenplay. It has some nifty twists and turns as well, but these can be seen coming from a mile away.

Unfortunately, the makers do not understand the strengths of the film. For example, it is no accident that some of the best moments in it come long after the dust has settled. The moments where the principal characters speak a thousand words with mere glances and stares. If *Agent Zeta* had been more subtle in its execution of the plot, we would have a compelling thriller.

—Sreejith Mullappilly

