

HUMOUR TIMES

JEST FOR FUN!

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FROM THE LEMON SQUEEZER'S DESK

A Letter of Gratitude to the Hon'ble Chief Minister (Leaked from the Chief Minister's Office)

Subject: Please Don't Repair Our Roads. We Are Finally Living in Peace.

Hon'ble Chief Minister,

I write not with a complaint, but with profound gratitude. For years now, roads across our cities have been thoughtfully dug up, partially repaired, re-dug, abandoned, rediscovered and left to mature naturally. We, the grateful citizens, wish to thank the authorities for this extraordinary achievement in urban planning.

The benefits are simply beyond imagination.

First, pollution has reduced dramatically. Motorists avoid damaged roads as though they have been declared archaeological sites. With fewer vehicles passing through residential streets, we wake up to birdsong instead of blaring horns. Even the neighbourhood dogs appear calmer.

Second, accidents have reduced in a rather innovative way. Nobody can drive fast on a road that resembles the surface of the moon. Every pothole functions as a speed breaker, traffic calming measure and suspension tester—all absolutely free of cost.

Third, our social lives have improved immensely. Friends, relatives and uninvited guestshave stopped dropping in.

The moment we share our address,

they suggest meeting at a café instead. Such priceless privacy could never have been achieved through urban planning manuals.

Property dealers, too, have become refreshingly scarce. Prospective buyers rarely venture into neighbourhoods that require four-wheel-drive vehicles and unwavering optimism. We are finally free from unsolicited enquiries asking whether we'd like to sell our homes.

The roads have also brought us closer to our roots. Every monsoon transforms our neighbourhoods into picturesque villages complete with ponds, streams and muddy trails. Why spend money on rural tourism when the countryside arrives at our doorstep every rainy season?

Children no longer waste time glued to mobile phones. They spend their evenings balancing over heaps of gravel, hopping across puddles and navigating trenches. Future mountaineers, obstacle racers and parkour champions are being trained entirely free of charge.

Fitness levels have improved remarkably as well. Every walk involves stretching, jumping, bending, twisting and maintaining perfect balance while avoiding potholes of varying depths. Our civic authorities have unknowingly created the country's largest network of open-air adventure courses.

Local mechanics are thriving, tyre shops are flourishing and wheel-alignment centres have never been busier. It is heartening to

see such sustained support for small businesses.

Most importantly, patience has become a national virtue. We have mastered the art of waiting—for roads to be completed, for diversions to disappear and for projects to reach their mysterious final stage. Such character-building cannot be taught in schools.

A few pessimists continue demanding smooth roads, proper drainage and timely completion of public works. We sincerely hope their negativity will be ignored. Development is overrated. Tranquillity is priceless.

We therefore humbly request your government not to spoil this heavenly arrangement by laying uninterrupted stretches of smooth blacktop. If possible, kindly declare our urban roads **National Heritage Excavation Corridors**, preserving them as living monuments to administrative endurance, perpetual construction and engineering permanence. Should any enthusiastic official accidentally attempt to complete a road on time, we request your immediate intervention in the larger public interest. With deepest appreciation for replacing traffic with tranquillity and speed with spirituality,

Yours gratefully,
**A Blissfully Isolated Citizen
On behalf of Road Users Across
Urban India**

Disclaimer: Humour Times does not subscribe to the views of the writers and cartoonists. We take no responsibility for the views expressed and any resemblance to the views expressed is coincidental.

Curd Rice Before Brownies

A Satirical Inquiry into India's Obsession
with International Schooling.

By Mukta K Gupta



A consultant in Finland writes a paper suggesting that children should occasionally remove their shoes to feel connected to nature.

Within six months, schools in Bengaluru are proudly advertising:

Barefoot Pedagogy™

Annual Fee:

₹6,80,000.

(Shoes not included.)

Every educational conference in the West is treated in India much like ancient sages treated Himalayan caves.

The first sign that you have entered an international school isn't the gleaming campus, the Olympic-sized swimming pool or the café serving quinoa idlis with gluten-free ketchup.

It is the language. Nobody teaches anymore. They facilitate learning.

Children don't answer questions. They demonstrate learner agency. Teachers don't explain. They scaffold understanding. Homework has become asynchronous reflection. Tests are now formative

assessments.

The timetable is a learner journey. The classroom is a collaborative ecosystem where children construct meaning while simultaneously forgetting how to divide fractions.

Ask for Class Six.

Someone smiles sympathetically.

"We don't say Class Six."

"Oh."

"We say Year Seven."

"What happened to Years One to Six?"

"They're on a continuum."

Nothing in these schools is ever simple.

Discipline has also evolved.

In our childhood, if you talked in class, the teacher simply said, "Silence."

Today's child receives a fifteen-minute restorative conversation designed to unpack his emotional relationship with interruption. The conversation ends with the teacher apologising.

Parents, naturally, have adapted. No parent now says, "My son is in third standard." That would be socially disastrous. Instead they announce, "My son is in the PYP." "My daughter is doing the MYP." "My younger one is exploring Reggio-inspired inquiry."

Nobody actually knows what this means. Least of all the child.

Parents are informed that children must become:

Compassionate.

Reflective.

Balanced.

Open-minded.

Risk-takers.

Communicators.

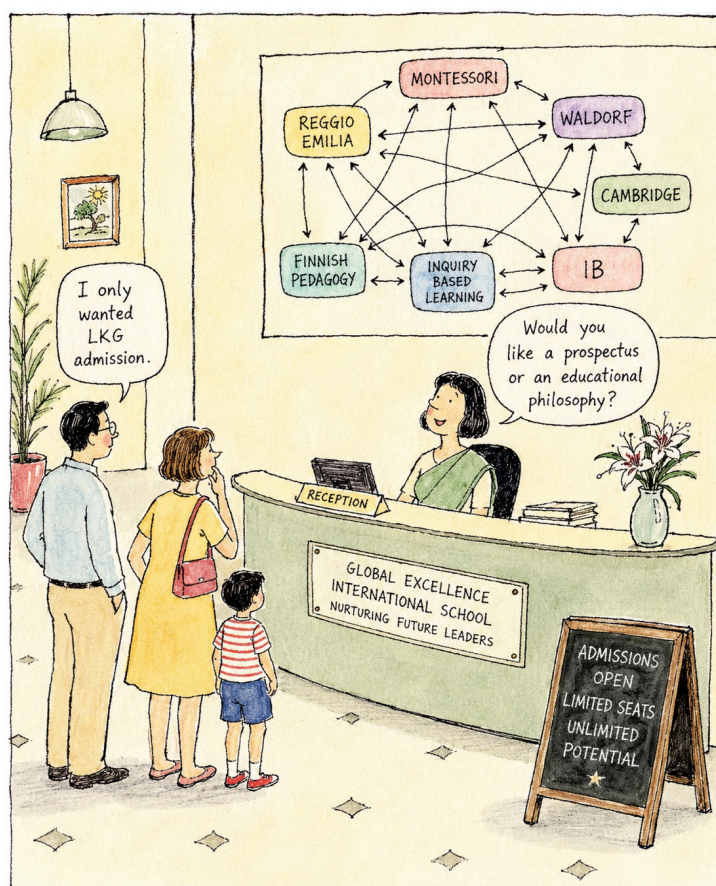
Thinkers.

Principled.

Caring.

Knowledgeable.

One parent timidly asked, "Can they also become engineers?"



Technology, of course, is everywhere. Every child receives an iPad before receiving handwriting. Homework arrives through six different apps. Attendance through another. Lunch through another. Transport through another. Fee payment through another. Parents require eleven passwords, three OTPs and a postgraduate degree in Information Technology merely to discover that tomorrow is *Yellow Sock Appreciation Day*.

Annual Day has undergone similar transformation. It is no longer a school function. It is the opening ceremony of the Olympics. Professional lighting. Drone cameras. LED walls. Smoke machines. Background dancers. One hundred and eighty rehearsals. Children appear on stage for fourteen seconds. Parents receive photographs costing ₹650 each.

Lunch has become global. Curd rice has disappeared. Lemon rice has vanished. Poori bhaji has become culturally inappropriate.

Today's lunch contains quinoa salad, hummus wraps, avocado toast, activated almonds, chia pudding and something described as fermented oat parfait.

The schools proudly declare that they reject rote learning. Instead, children memorise an entirely new syllabus.

Critical Thinking.
Visible Thinking.
Design Thinking.
Systems Thinking.
Computational Thinking.
Reflective Thinking.
Growth Mindset.
Metacognition.
Student Agency.
Inquiry Cycle.

By the end of the year everyone is thinking. Nobody is multiplying.

Report cards have become literary masterpieces.

Nobody scores 42%.
Instead, "Aarav is
developing resilience while
navigating collaborative
uncertainty within
transdisciplinary inquiry."
Translation:
He borrowed Rohan's eraser
without asking.

Perhaps the greatest irony isn't found inside the classroom. It begins at 3:30 p.m., when the school bus drops the child back into India.

Inside school, the child has spent eight hours discussing learner agency, personal voice, emotional regulation and democratic classrooms. Outside the school gates waits an India that didn't receive the same orientation manual.

Grandparents expect to be greeted with folded hands. Guests are welcomed before anyone asks whether the family is emotionally ready for visitors.

The oldest person at the dining table still serves the first helping. Birthdays begin with touching the feet of elders before cutting the cake.

Nobody announces, "I'm not in the right headspace to attend this wedding." One simply goes. The child has spent the morning learning that every opinion deserves equal space. By evening, he has discovered that Grandma's opinion deserves slightly more. Not because she's oppressive. Because she's Grandma.

Indian society has never been built solely around the individual. It revolves around families, neighbourhoods, festivals, obligations, cousins who appear without warning, and uncles who know exactly which stream you should choose after Class Ten despite having failed Mathematics in 1978.

An education that ignores
this reality doesn't
produce global citizens. It
produces cultural tourists
in their own country.

Language offers perhaps the saddest example. The school proudly advertises French. Spanish. German. Perhaps even Japanese. The prospectus glows with internationalism. Meanwhile, the child cannot hold a five-minute conversation with the vegetable vendor in Kannada.

Or explain his science project to his grandmother in Hindi. Or write a letter in his mother tongue without consulting Google Translate. He can order coffee in French. He cannot ask the auto-rickshaw driver to take a different route.

Please don't misunderstand. Many of these educational ideas are excellent. Project-based learning works. Inquiry matters. Creativity matters. Children should ask questions instead of merely memorising answers.

The trouble is not that these pedagogies are foolish. Quite the opposite. **Montessori** was born in early twentieth-century Italy, where Dr. Maria Montessori was working with children in a very specific social and educational setting.

Waldorf Education emerged in post-World War I Germany, shaped by Rudolf Steiner's philosophy and the needs of factory workers' children. The **Reggio Emilia** approach grew out of a small Italian town rebuilding itself after the Second World War.

The **Forest School** movement flourished in Scandinavia, where forests are, quite inconveniently for us, actual forests.

The **International Baccalaureate** was designed in Geneva for the children of

diplomats who changed countries more often than they changed school bags. Each of these approaches evolved in response to a particular history, culture and society.

In India, however, they are often imported with the enthusiasm usually reserved for Black Friday sales.

No adaptation.

No context.

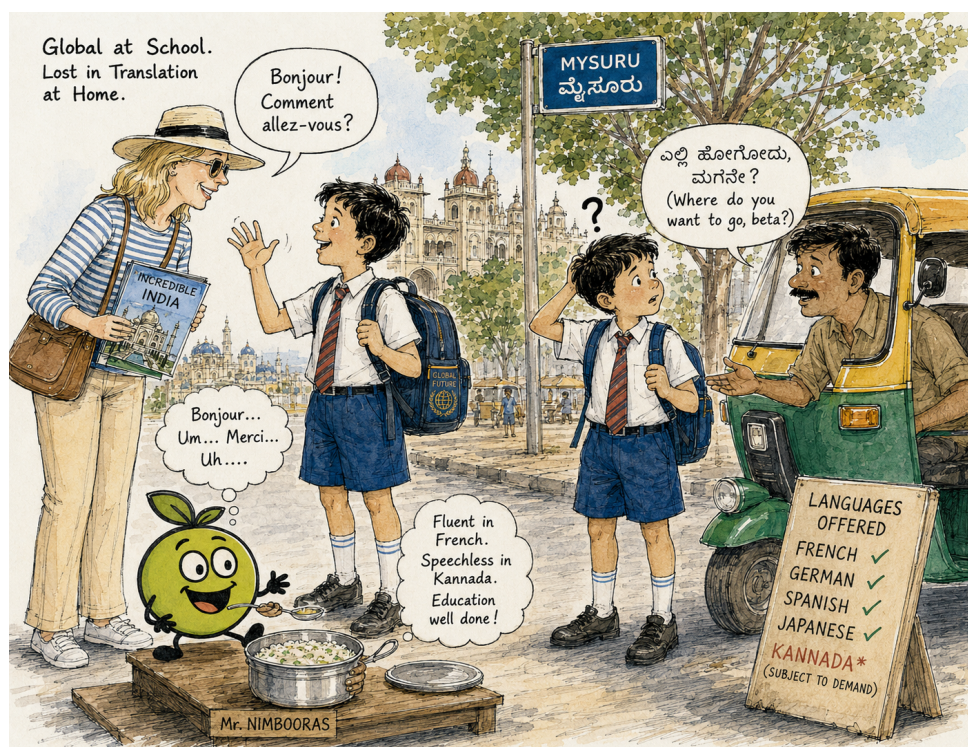
No questions.

If Sweden replaces bells with wind chimes, schools in Gurgaon begin ringing Tibetan singing bowls. If Iceland announces that arithmetic improves when taught near volcanoes, someone in Bengaluru will immediately begin searching for affordable lava.

India does not suffer from a shortage of pedagogies. It suffers from a shortage of confidence. We behave as though every educational breakthrough must arrive with a European accent. Perhaps we forget that this country once produced **Takshashila** and **Nalanda**, where scholars from across Asia travelled to learn centuries before Oxford or Cambridge existed.

Our classrooms have much to learn from the world. The world's classrooms also have much to learn from us.

"The purpose of education is not to produce children who feel foreign in India. It is to produce Indians who feel at home anywhere in the world."



You Got Schooled!

By Mukta K Gupta

The quality department at St. Dude's International is buzzing with activity. Each year, a team of external auditors arrives to test the final products on highly plausible parameters — memory, and the ability to write gibberish for several hours at a stretch without raising one's head, looking sideways, or, God forbid, forming an original thought. That time of year has come round again.

St. Dude's International is a locally acclaimed international factory, known in the local dialect as a "school." It specialises in the mass, assembly-line production of robots — sorry, students. The factory sits in the pristine environs of a small town called Uru, in the southern peninsula, though its franchise model means there is now a St. Dude's within scooter distance of practically anywhere in the country, usually next door to a coaching centre offering the same service twice, at twice the price, with twice the anxiety.

The boss lady, known to everybody as Ms. Goodenough, is an empowering personality, usually clad in a very pseudo-NGO outfit — handloom sarees, wooden tribal jewellery, a bindi chosen to convey both spirituality and quarterly targets. She is a force to reckon with, quite literally, tipping the scales at a comfortable 250 pounds of unwavering conviction. She runs the institution on Henry

Ford's founding philosophy: 'Any customer can have a car painted any colour he wants, so long as it's black.' Every product that leaves her factory is sanded down until its angularities disappear, so that it may stand proudly indistinguishable from every other product on the shelf — a triumph of quality control, if quality is defined as sameness.

Each robot must clear a set of high-pressure tests: sitting motionless for hours, staring straight ahead, achieving a meditative state of complete non-thinking widely mistaken for concentration. Robots are additionally required to recite the size, colour, and make of every part that went into assembling them — dates, formulae, diagrams, the collected works of people they will never think about again — a rigorous process now stretched, thanks to recent "reforms," to a full sixteen years of robotic learning, up from the traditional fourteen, because someone in Head Office decided childhood was ending a touch too early.

External auditors — sometimes called Board Examiners, sometimes called Coaching Institutes, occasionally both, wearing different lanyards on different days — stamp and grade each robot. Every robot receives a unique identification number, called a Roll Number, or, in advanced markets, a Rank. Henceforth, this number **is** the robot. Not the years of assembly, not the parts, not whatever the robot might once have wanted to be. Just the number, framed, garlanded, and photographed for the local paper under the headline "Our Pride."

Roll numbers are sealed for approval or disapproval. The disapproved are returned to

the shop floor for repair. Parts are removed; the robot falls apart, sometimes literally, sometimes in ways that don't show up on any diagnostic. A senior specialist arrives and attempts reassembly through a dreaded, torturous process known as "extra hours" — currently being rebranded by senior executives as the friendlier "doubt-clearing session," because nothing calms a fourteen-year-old down like a euphemism.

Repaired robots, now carrying permanent fault lines invisible to the naked eye, must clear external audit again — and again — until they pass, or run out of battery. St. Dude's does not, as a matter of policy, ask what happens to the ones that run out of battery. That department has been outsourced.

The approved ones are packaged diligently — testimonial, photograph, LinkedIn post — and delivered to big business houses that specialise in repetitive work requiring no thinking of the lateral, out-of-the-box, or otherwise inconvenient variety. Demand for St. Dude's robots has only climbed in recent years, driven by a healthy national appetite for banning books, films, art, opinions, and any thinking sturdy enough to survive contact with a hashtag — alongside a collective public sensitivity so finely tuned it can locate offence in a weather report. In such a climate, a factory that guarantees its output will never, under any circumstances, think for itself is not a liability. It's a proposition.



For the most dazzling spectacle in the Republic of Kurrupistan, last Sunday night witnessed the arrival of the nation's Leakage Elite, at the legendary Leak Palace ; the only royal residence where the roof holds an NOC declaring it a National Leakage Sprinkler of Prosperity.

The palace shimmered with obscene magnificence. Ornate brass buckets stood where flower arrangements once did, each one lovingly monogrammed, collecting the steady blessings descending from the ceiling in a rhythm officials described as "structurally intentional," as per Bishwkarma theory of imperfection. Punctured

umbrellas were the mandatory dress code.

Then came the evening's most anticipated performance. Water dripped gracefully through the gilded ceiling into polished silver bowls, each drop timed with a precision no public project has ever managed to achieve. The organisers rose in applause, proudly introducing the piece as *The Symphony of*

Transparent Governance ; a composition in perpetual leak major, performed live by the Department of Public Works on ceiling, plaster and hope, and dedicated to the sacred principle that *in Kurrupistan, the leaks never fail.*

The ceremony was presided over by His Most Exalted Royal Majesty, Emperor Lord Guddan Pyare, Keeper of Confidential Files, Protector of Permanent Committees, Patron Saint of Anonymous Sources, Supreme Guardian of Things That Should Never Have Reached social media.

As His Majesty entered the Grand Hall, the audience rose for a thunderous standing ovation. A section of the roof, never one to be left out of a national moment, promptly joined in.

"Ladies and gentlemen," proclaimed the Emperor, adjusting his jewel-studded umbrella, "some countries celebrate innovation. We celebrate seepage. Let the leaking begin!"

The applause started instantly.

• **The Platinum Question Paper Leak Award**

The nominees had displayed exceptional commitment to destroying the hopes of millions of hardworking students.

The winner: The National Competitive Examination Leak Network, now in its

ninth consecutive year of undefeated form.

The judges praised its reliability of telegrams. Receiving the trophy, the network thanked students for "keeping faith in a system that never disappoints."

His Majesty smiled. "Education," he declared, "is temporary. Contacts are forever, and considerably cheaper than tuition."

• **The Golden Pipeline Award**

The competition was fierce, and frankly a little wet. Oil pipelines leaked. Water pipelines leaked. Gas pipelines leaked. Sewage pipelines leaked magnificently into drinking water pipelines, in what engineers called "unscheduled integration."

But **the runaway winner, by a margin so large it embarrassed the runners-up, was the Government Welfare Pipeline.**

The judges praised its extraordinary engineering ; a system so advanced it can transport a rupee from the treasury to a beneficiary's bank account while making eleven unscheduled stops, four of them permanent.

Netaji Bunkum Bhai, accepting on behalf of the pipeline, wiped away a tear. "Every rupee began its journey with dreams. By the time it reached the last beneficiary, it had become a press release, a ribbon-cutting ceremony, a selfie, and a full-page newspaper advertisement congratulating itself. Not a single economist could explain the evaporation. **We have, in**

fact, discovered a new state of matter: budget vapour."

The contractors, collectively known as the *Thekedaars*, accepted a smaller trophy on behalf of "all invisible stakeholders," a category that this year included two bridges, one flyover, and a hospital that exists only as a foundation stone.

• **Lifetime Achievement in Confidential Leakage**

Cabinet decisions won by a landslide.

Minutes after meetings began, television studios already knew the conclusions. Political editors had complete copies before ministers had located their own seats. Official files travelled faster than Starlink broadband, which was itself nominated but disqualified for being too slow by comparison. Government spokesmen routinely learned of policy changes by watching prime-time debates, occasionally live-tweeting their own confusion. Great job, Depublik TV!

His Majesty applauded warmly. "This," he declared, "is what real-time governance looks like. We have achieved something the West has spent billions trying to build: information that travels at the speed of gossip."

State Secret Chief Galibil Thom whispered to Badi Bua that the speech itself had leaked yesterday, complete with a spelling mistake that was corrected only in the leaked version.

• **The Monsoon Infrastructure Excellence Award**

This category celebrated outstanding contributions to urban flooding, a field in which Kurrupistan remains, by common consent, world class.

Roads that disappeared after twenty minutes of rain, having apparently decided they'd done enough for one season.

Bridges that developed scenic waterfalls, several now listed as unofficial tourist attractions. Footpaths that converted effortlessly into fish habitats, complete with actual fish, several of them larger than the footpath's original width. Storm drains that treated rainwater as an unexpected and rather rude guest, refusing it entry on principle.

After intense deliberations lasting slightly longer than most roads, *the judges awarded the trophy jointly to municipal corporations.*

The citation read: "For making every rainy season an unforgettable aquatic experience, and every commute a small act of personal courage." Navigation apps have reportedly added a new route option: "Travel by Boat ; 40% Faster in July."

The Cyber Leakage Excellence Medal

This medal recognised remarkable achievements in the digital age, and the winner was never in doubt.

Citizen Data swept the category in a landslide so total it barely felt like a contest.

Retired banker Nath P acknowledged, "Passwords escaped. Medical records

escaped. Identity documents escaped. Bank details escaped, several reportedly on a first-name basis with hackers by now."

The Emperor looked delighted. *"Our digital transformation," he said proudly, "ensures information enjoys complete freedom of movement. We believe deeply in data - sharing it with absolutely everyone, whether they asked for it or not."*

Even the hackers, mistaken for cybersecurity consultants applauded.

• The Promise of the Year Award

Election manifestos faced stiff competition from budget announcements and grand development schemes, but promises won comfortably, as they do every single year.

• The Imperial Diamond Leak of the Century Award

As midnight approached, excitement reached fever pitch. It was time for the grand finale.

The lights dimmed. The orchestra played something vaguely mystic. A sealed golden envelope was carried to the stage under heavy security : four guards, two dogs, and one CCTV camera that everyone knew had been disconnected since March.

The winner was...
The Republic of Kurrupistan.

The entire glorious nation ; a place where roofs leak, pipelines leak, budgets leak, pants leak, exam papers leak,

tenders leak, transfer lists leak, cabinet notes leak, loyalty leaks, and even monuments develop patriotic seepage every monsoon, standing proud as a Wonder of Water Management, the kind no tourist board has quite figured out how to advertise. Cynic by choice, Lindasami commented dryly, "Only one thing has remained perfectly sealed since independence: accountability. It has never leaked, because nobody has ever managed to find the pipe."

As fireworks illuminated the soggy night sky, Emperor Lord Guddan Pyare delivered his closing message to the nation.

"My beloved subjects, let other countries chase artificial intelligence, moon missions and economic miracles. We possess something far greater."

He paused dramatically, umbrella dripping in perfect sync with the orchestra. "We leak before we think."

The crowd roared its approval, several of them getting slightly wet in the process, which only seemed to add to the mood.

The Daily Leak reported:

"Thus ended another unforgettable Great Leakage Awards Night in the Imperial Republic of Kurrupistan. Event manager Joy Kanfuze confirmed, "Bookings for next year's ceremony have already begun, largely by people who already know they've won."

"The winners have also been leaked," gossip columnist Nansi Pol added, filing her report a full week before the event had technically taken place.

Dr. Fraud: The Man Who Made Sleep Complicated

By Rajinder Singh

There was a time when people slept peacefully. They had dreams, they woke up, shrugged, and carried on with life. Then along came Sigmund Freud or as we fondly call him in this completely unbiased article, **Dr. Fraud**, and said, "Not so fast. That dream about a goat in sunglasses? That's not random. That's *you*."

And just like that, sleep lost its innocence.

According to Dr. Fraud, dreams are not what they look like. They are coded messages from your mind. Which is interesting, because if your brain *really* wanted to communicate something important, you'd think it wouldn't choose a format that looks like a rejected script from a low-budget film festival.

You: "I dreamt I was eating biryani."

Dr. Fraud: "No. You were not eating biryani. You were consuming your suppressed desires."

You: "Yes, doctor. My suppressed desire was chicken."

But no, Dr. Fraud refuses to believe in such simplicity. For him, everything has layers. Not like an onion, but, more like a badly written mystery novel where even the author doesn't know who the killer is.

Dr. Fraud doesn't do "simple." Simple doesn't pay consulting fees.

Then comes his absolute favourite sport: **symbolism**. In his world:

A ladder is not a ladder, A tunnel is not a tunnel, A banana... well... let's just say Dr. Fraud never saw fruit the same way again

At this point, even your grocery list is under suspicion.

You could walk into his office and say,

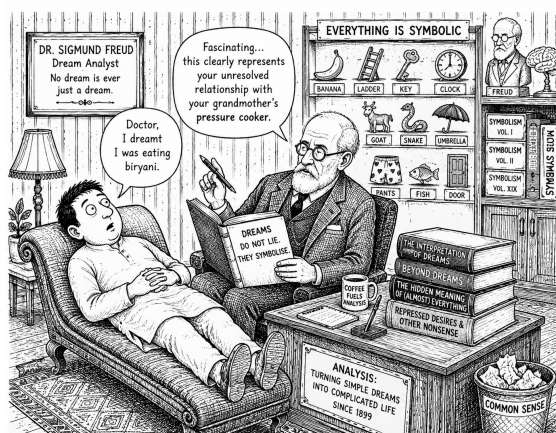
"Doctor, I dreamt I was brushing my teeth."

And he'd lean forward like he's about to crack a national conspiracy.

"Ah. This reveals a profound internal conflict."

No, doctor. It reveals Colgate.

And then there's his blockbuster theory: **dreams**



are wish fulfilment.

Ah yes. Because nothing screams "my deepest desire" like:

- Falling endlessly into a void
- Forgetting your pants in public
- Running from something but your legs move like they're buffering

If these are wishes, then somewhere inside us lives a very disturbed event planner. Dr. Fraud would argue, "These wishes are disguised."

Disguised? My brain isn't disguising anything, it's clearly *improvising*.

Imagine Dr. Fraud analysing modern dreams:

You: "Doctor, I dreamt I was stuck in an endless WhatsApp group."

Dr. Fraud: "This reflects your fear of social obligations."

You: "No, it reflects my relatives."

You: "I dreamt my phone battery was at 1%."

Dr. Fraud: "A symbol of existential depletion."

You: "A symbol of bad charging habits."

Despite all this, one must admire Dr. Fraud's sheer confidence. He looked at humanity's most chaotic, illogical, utterly confusing experience, and said, "Yes. I can explain this." That's not science. That's bravery.

In conclusion, thanks to Dr. Fraud, we now have two ways of looking at dreams.

And honestly, both are equally believable.

So tonight, when you dream of dancing with a talking potato while your school principal plays the guitar, remember:

You could analyze it...

Or you could simply accept that your brain has a wicked sense of humour and terrible scriptwriting skills.

I am overwhelmed by the unsolicited advice and the FOMO that seem to be everywhere these days, especially around yoga practice.

Ironically, my journey into yoga began because my physiotherapist suggested it for mobility. Even before that recommendation, I had occasionally considered starting yoga, but I carried a great deal of conditioning around it. Growing up in a Protestant Christian household, yoga was often presented to me as something closely associated with Hindu religious practices rather than as a discipline with physical and emotional benefits. As a result, I found myself looking for teachers who had Christian or non-Hindu students and who were open-minded enough to accommodate a student's request for certain exceptions.

Looking back, I have to acknowledge my own biases in this area. There is always so much work to do on ourselves (A note to myself, and perhaps to everyone else too). Thankfully, a few Christian doctor friends encouraged me to focus on the health benefits of the practice rather than my assumptions about it. Eventually, I made up my mind to begin. Even then, I was afraid. I came with several physical limitations; a diagnosis in fact and constantly questioned whether I would even be capable of doing yoga.

My first step was meeting a yoga teacher. I met someone and spoke for about thirty minutes, and I felt encouraged enough to try. Being a woman-to-woman interaction, I assumed it would be easier to communicate my concerns. I attended a trial class

that was combined with an online session involving another student who was far more advanced than I was. I struggled through the entire sequence, but I completed it. Yes, I left feeling intimidated. The pace felt overwhelming, and my fear of injury took over. When I expressed my concerns, the teacher told me that if I started slowly, I would never succeed. While I understand that was her way of motivating me, sadly, it left me feeling uncomfortable and even more anxious. At that stage, my confidence was fragile, and those words did not help.

CONTENTMENT OVER COMPETITION

By Maya Stretchwell

Eventually, my neighbour Pooja convinced me to meet the yoga teacher I am with. Pooja and I used to attend the same gym, and we share a few common back and shoulder issues, along with the same physiotherapist. Sometimes female bondings are built around such unexpected things ;)

When I met Ankur, I was immediately struck by his calm demeanour and quiet confidence. I still felt nervous and wondered whether I would look foolish in front of everyone else, but I said yes and began. That was eight months ago.

Looking back, I can see that although I was regular with my practice, I spent a lot of time focusing on my shortcomings and doubts. One day, I asked Ankur, "Can I really do this?" In his usual easy-going manner—

and perhaps slightly exhausted by my endless doubts—he replied, "If I can do it, so can you." I cannot adequately explain how uplifting those words felt. Metaphorically, they lifted me up. Practically speaking, however, I still cannot hoist myself up without support ☺

And watching Ankur demonstrate Asanas turned out to be disastrous for my mental health ;) Every bit of concentration I have disappears, and I find myself obsessing over the picture-perfect execution but again stemming out of appreciation and in turn motivating me to strive further. (He should probably be punished for causing unnecessary distraction. I am, of course, speaking entirely for myself (in jest).

Since the last two months a lot changed when a few friends in the neighbourhood—and a couple of others who discovered that I had started yoga— and thus began offering opinions. Suddenly, I found myself surrounded by unsolicited advice. The comparisons started and competitive undertones emerged. People began telling me why I should transition to a different teacher after a year, what style I should learn next, and how quickly I should be progressing.

I had never asked for any of it.

Within a short period, I received recommendations for four new yoga teachers, invitations to attend drop-in classes, and even friendly reminders from a friend who teaches yoga asking when I would finally attend his classes!

Honestly, I felt dizzy but - My answer remains the same: "I've only just begun."

I keep wondering where all of this is coming from. It feels as though people were projecting their own insecurities, ambitions, or preferences onto me. Other times it simply felt as though everyone had an opinion about how I should be living my life.

As I reflected on these experiences, I found myself asking a larger question. Why are so many of us in such a hurry?

Why do we feel compelled to accelerate every journey, and constantly chase the next milestone before we have fully experienced the current one?

I can understand the urgency if someone's goal is to become a yoga teacher. In that situation, rapid learning, advanced study, and extensive training make perfect sense.

But I often think about the people (like me) and every other

person who walks into a yoga class for the very first time. Some arrive with strong bodies and confident minds, some with fragile bodies, self-doubt, old injuries, fears, and insecurities. Many have read a little about yoga and come armed with opinions, assumptions, and expectations. Yet beneath the surface, they are simply trying to understand whether this practice has a place in their lives.

Over these past several months, I have realised that one of the reasons I value my teacher so much is because he understands my need for autonomy. He seems to recognise that I prefer to move at a pace that feels sustainable, realistic, and comfortable for me. More importantly, he respects that choice without judgement. For me, that is a gift.

At this stage of my life, I am enjoying a slower, more deliberate exploration of my

body and mind. For perhaps the first time in a long while, I feel comfortable in my own skin. Every morning, I look forward to showing up for practice. I wake up curious -What will I discover about my body? What will I notice that I missed yesterday? There is something deeply satisfying about not knowing all the answers and allowing myself to learn gradually, mistakes and all.

Through this journey, I have come to appreciate yoga very differently from how I once imagined it. Rather than teaching me how to do more, it has quietly taught me how to notice more. Like Ankur rightly mentions – ‘growth does not always come from pushing harder; sometimes it comes from listening more carefully, respecting our limits, and showing up consistently even when progress feels invisible’.

I am content to learn slowly yet intentionally....



Gridlock Breeds New Government

By Riya Sharma

If you ask any Mumbaikar what their biggest fear is, they won't say ghosts or inflation. They'll say traffic. In this city, gridlock isn't a transportation issue; it's a competitive sport where everyone is losing.

I should know. As a local journalist, my life was already a masterclass in claustrophobia. I lived in an apartment so tiny that when guests came over, we had to play a high-stakes game of musical chairs just so someone could inhale. My editor affectionately called it "compact urban living." I called it a glorified cupboard where my laundry pile was actively plotting a mutiny.

So, when my editor ordered me to cover a political rally in Dadar during peak hours, I knew my day was cooked. Forty minutes into a cab ride that moved exactly twelve feet, I abandoned ship and stumbled straight into a historic civilian uprising.

Here is the exact article that broke the internet that evening:

THE DIAPER REVOLUTION: HOW ONE MOTHER TOTALLY RECKED A POLITICIAN WITH A BABY WIPE

By Riya Sharma

MUMBAI — Move over, classic freedom fighters.

Today, the ultimate symbol of anti-establishment rebellion wasn't a megaphone or a fancy banner. It was a completely unhinged, sleep-deprived mother in a white hatchback, staging a one-woman protest against municipal madness.

The afternoon began with Dadar in absolute gridlock—a total parking lot of stalled dreams. Google Maps had suffered a complete emotional breakdown, displaying a singular crimson line that looked like a severe medical emergency. Looming over this hostage situation were giant banners of a local politician smiling so widely I wanted to charge his teeth rent. The text claimed he was leading us toward progress. Unfortunately, progress was currently stuck in a three-hour bottleneck behind a local bus emitting pure black smoke.

The boiling point arrived when the rally actually commenced. As the political circus blasted through the loudspeakers, a baby in a nearby hatchback took the noise pollution as a personal declaration of war. He began crying. This wasn't ordinary fussiness; this was a high-frequency, Olympic-level siren that forced nearby stray dogs to reevaluate their life choices.

His mother, sporting a hairstyle that resembled the immediate aftermath of a tornado, finally reached her absolute limit. You could see

her psychological rubber band snap. She unbuckled her seatbelt, threw open her door, and marched straight toward the VIP stage. The crowd parted like the Red Sea—because everyone recognizes the terrifying aura of an Indian mother who has nothing left to lose.

"OI, NETAJI!" she yelled, instantly hijacking the microphone's vibe. "My baby has been wailing for two hours because your ego has blocked the entire municipality!"

The politician offered a patronizing smile from his pedestal.

"My sister, your minor inconvenience is a sacrifice on the altar of democracy. We are discussing the future of the nation."

"Wonderful," the mother shot back, launching a devastating activist salvo. "Can someone tell the future of the nation to stop pooping its diaper every fifteen minutes?"

As a nearby bystander literally choked on his cutting chai, Netaji tried a classic bureaucratic defense:

"Development requires civic patience."

"Patience?" The woman pointed a finger at a Zomato delivery rider staring blankly into the cosmic void. "That boy accepted his delivery

order when he still possessed hopes, dreams, and youthful optimism. And look at that taxi driver—that uncle's beard was pitch-black when this traffic jam started. Your 'development' is aging us in real time."

(The taxi driver nodded solemnly, fully endorsing the union of frustrated commuters.)

The crowd, realizing she was speaking absolute truth to power, started wilding out. At this point, a seasoned political figure with millions in campaign funding was demonstrably losing a structural debate to a woman wielding a pack of antibacterial baby wipes.

The final blow came from the infant himself. The baby

The crowd absolutely exploded. It wasn't just a funny moment anymore; it was a full-blown protest against VIP culture.

By evening, Netaji's meticulously produced campaign speech garnered a meagre 40,000 views online.

This manifesto of a frustrated mother? Four million.



"You people spend half your budgets bragging about 'Digital India,'" she continued, exposing the ultimate systemic hypocrisy. "Use it! Launch a livestream! Annoy people virtually from the comfort of their own homes! Why must our bodies undergo anatomical decomposition out here in the smog just so you can get a photo-op?"

suddenly went dead silent, locked eyes with the politician, analyzed his entire campaign platform with intense scrutiny, and then let out a massive, visceral wail of pure, unfiltered disgust.

The mother sighed, throwing her hands up to the crowd.

"See? Even the next generation detects a total lack of substance."

Democracy hadn't just spoken; it had successfully revolted against the traffic.

HOW WHATSAPP BROKE A FAMILY!!

By Paras C

Family WhatsApp groups are a conundrum. They remind me of the *chakravyuh* in the Mahabharata. Abhimanyu, the great warrior and son of mighty Arjun, knew how to enter a *chakravyuh* but had no idea how to leave one. That lack of an exit plan cost him his life.

The initial few months went by smoothly. Everybody had so much to share. Some of them were grandparents now and had plenty to talk about. On the whole, it resembled the great Indian family of a Barjatya film — harmless, and about as eventful.

My uncle decided the now-insipid group needed some spice. Handily, the Viksit Bharat campaign had just picked up steam — fought as fiercely by the real foot soldiers of various political parties on the ground as by their artificial counterparts

commenced. The once-Barjatya family had, by now, turned into an Anurag Kashyap production. It was total anarchy. Most of the group disapproved of the two men's provocative, divisive conduct, and — like true citizens of the world's largest democracy — decided to put it to a vote: should the troublemakers stay, or be banished?

The verdict was unanimous. Banishment. The admin swung into action and blocked them both without

ceremony. My uncle was heartbroken at this treatment from his own near and dear ones. Countless apologies followed; even his sister took up his case in the group. Nobody budged.

The once high-strung family WhatsApp group has since returned to being boring, its only traffic now the obligatory morning and evening "Good Morning"/"Good Night" forwards. My jolly old

uncle,

meanwhile, has — much to his wife's displeasure — found deeper solace in spirituality; his sessions now begin at 7 pm instead of 8. His rancorous cousin, not to be outdone, has started a rival group with a band of loyal followers of his own.

He is the admin now. He calls the shots.



One should always keep, in one's arsenal, a way out of tricky situations. One of my uncles learnt this important life lesson the hard way. My mother's side of the family decided to start a WhatsApp group with great gusto. What better way, they thought, to rekindle old and some conveniently forgotten relationships!

online.

His enthusiasm was palpable, especially after he'd get spiritual — pun intended — every evening at 8 pm. His steady supply of doctored videos and vitriolic memes eventually offended one of his cousins in the group, who happened to favour the opposing political camp. Swords were drawn, sides were taken, and battle

NOTES FROM HORMUZ

By Mahi Heather Gupta

“**E**verything loaded Vance?” A gruffy voice called out from behind him. The wooden floors of the dock creaking against the heavy weight of dark brown boots. Malcom placed his rough hand around Vance’s shoulder, “Yup’ just finishing up my packing.” Vance stated. His large hands busy stuffing pieces of clothing into the medium brown suitcase on the floor of the dock in front of him. The sight of the wooden dock leading straight to the ship where Vance was about to sail solo for the first time, transporting small barrels of oil across the border, was truly a sight for sore eyes. The shallow waters of the light blue ocean spilled into a gradient of deep blue as the sun’s rays glittered across the calm waves. The ship’s sail danced gracefully, a duet with the soft breeze that flew by.

Vance buckled up his suitcase, as a thin man struggled to lift it onto the dock, getting ready to finally set sail. “Good luck mate.” Malcolm gave Vance a knowing, genuine smile. Vance returned it for one of his own.

Vance wasn’t a talkative fellow, in fact he was a man

of very few words. His brown hair sat silkily on his head, his broad shoulders carrying him well, as he stood tall. One would think he was a lean man. He wasn’t. His pot belly bulged out abruptly, followed by a pair of thick thighs burdened from carrying all his weight. Vance had ocean blue eyes, an unshaven beard and bloodshot eyes. He smoked pipe on the regular.

The sun’s glow soon had cast a wave of orange across the sky, replacing it with a sinister blue that engulfed it as the sun slowly disappeared. Vance had already set sail, everything going smooth so far. He didn’t carry much oil, just a few barrels as it was a small ship, he’d been sailing since he was a kid so it was nothing new for him. It was however, the first time he’d be in the middle of the ocean all alone. That didn’t scare him. He was a man.

He had no family, no friends. A weird fellow, but he wasn’t always like this. He craved love. It was his goal to be a loving husband to a beautiful bride. She’d cook and clean and they’d have lots and lots of children running around their house. Poor girl. It never happened. Instead, he got a job in his home town, after juggling quite a few. For a man in his forties, he sure was unhealthy obsessed with youth. Judging by his figure, it was not his youth he was obsessed with, rather, the youth of his beloved bride waiting for him to find her.

He sat out in the open near the stirring, blowing circles of smoke from his pursed lips. He thought. Of love, of his future, of Mary. Mary was his high school sweetheart. The two were almost certain to have been married off. He was deeply in love with her, he always had been. Fortunately for her, she soon realised that she wanted more out of life, and chased her dream of cinematography, moving to the city. Poor Vance. Mary used to sing him lullabies, as if he was a child although, in many ways he was. The man struggled after the passing of his mother. She did everything for him. Washed his clothes, dried them, made him dinner, fed him, you’d be surprised she didn’t bathe him. She sang on nights they spent together in a barn, but he preferred to sleep under the stars, marking each shooting star with a wish purely of his own. Love. Long lasting love.

The gush of water hitting the ship was all Vance heard for hours. He found peace with the ocean. The air was salty, cold. As the boat rocked back and forth, Vance was left with nothing but his thoughts of Mary. He thought about her a lot. Did she ever end up getting married? Did she get that assistant director job she’d always dreamed of? No matter how cruel and selfish Vance’s thoughts were, he always thought of how Mary should be grateful he let her

go. It's not like it was her choice to chase her dreams anyway. The wooden floor groaned as Vance went into a little room to change into something warm. The ocean was eerily cold at night, he knew that. He set his pipe on the bench outside and went to go change. He emerged, the moonlight hitting his face softly, gently, as if caressing him. His all white nightshirt and pants imitated the colour of the circular bright moon that gleamed at the ocean. Two estranged lovers, the moon and ocean, they could never meet, nor touch. It reminded him of him and Mary.

As most of the night passed by, Vance had fallen asleep near the stirring. The boat went off path due to his ignorance. He was stranded, off the path he should've been on. But maybe he didn't mind, after all he had nothing to lose. He wanted to be lost, maybe that's why he rested. He had no one. No Mary to keep him warm on cold breezy nights, no mother to feed him and care for him, no one.

The boat rocked him, as a mother does her baby. *"Hush now little wanderer, close your weary eyes."* A woman's voice so gentle, so calming, sang in the distance. It was getting closer. *"The moon has lost its silver, and the stars have said goodbye."* The voice drew closer. Vance juttet open his eyes. "Mary?" He called out. Maybe he was dreaming. It felt like a dream. It *was* her voice, it had to be.

The lullaby didn't stop, so he called for her again. "Mary!" He screamed to nothing. He rushed to the edge of the boat, looking for *something*. For her. His true love. *Splash*. Vance turned his head quickly and saw something in the water. Someone. "Who's there!" He called out. He grabbed a flashlight nearby. The lullaby stopped. A head popped out. A woman. A young one. He pointed the flashlight right at her, she appeared to be swimming, getting closer and closer to the boat. The soft creak of the ship and the crash of the waves continued in the background. She had red hair, and blue eyes. Bright blue eyes. *Beautiful* he thought. She was. Her skin was pale, and freckles coated her nose and cheeks. She finally got close enough to the boat. Her eyes were mesmerising. Vance was enraptured by her beauty, he'd never seen anything like it. She was breathtaking. Literally. Vance scratched his bulging belly nervously, gulping loudly, and looked at her in awe. He was in love.

She stopped right at the edge of the boat, and stared right back at him. Her doe eyed expression doing no justice to the perfect features of the rest of her face. Delicate hands poked out of the waves, and she tucked back her hair. She was perfect. "D-do ya' need help ma'am?" Vance called out to her, stuttering. She smiled. A simple, kind smile. Her rosy lips being the only other colour besides her eyes and freckles that her face

displayed. Vance blushed. How could such a small smile completely undo him? He loved her. He was sure of it. She was his.

Her hand reached out, asking him to pull her onto the ship. He obliged. He reached his hand out, and came to the complete edge of the boat, the salty ocean water reaching for his boots, as though about to pull him right in. His hairy hand at arms length from the girl. She took his hand, which immediately sent a jolt of a thousand volts of electricity through Vance's entire body. Her soft hands were no match for his rough hard ones, but fit perfectly in his. Moulding into his. As if she was made for *him*. Her smile deepened, as their eyes locked onto each other. It deepened again. And again. Displaying a menacing eerie expression, as her face stretched painfully. It deepened and deepened until it could no more. The corners of her mouth almost touching the crease of her eyes. Vance's expression changed into a look of horror. It was horrifying. It was uncanny. Vance tried to withdraw his hand from hers, but her grip was so firm he couldn't match her strength. It was too late.

A violent splash of water was the last thing he heard as she pulled him into the freezing ocean. Her plump pale skin replaced by scales. He looked up and yelled for no one as she drowned him, into the deep, deep, blue.

Operation Fig Leaf! आखिर हमारी संस्कृति बच ही गई!

बृज खंडेलवाल द्वारा

लो जी, देश की तहजीब बच गई।
न महंगाई से। न बेरोजगारी से। न
प्रदूषण से। न टूटी सड़कों से।
देश बचा है... एक दो हजार साल
पुरानी पत्थर की मूर्ति से।

अंग्रेज़ 1947 में भारत छोड़कर चले
गए थे। लेकिन लगता है, महारानी
विक्टोरिया अपनी शर्म-ओ-हया वाली
ऐनक यहीं भूल गई। वही ऐनक अब
हमारी किताबें तैयार करने वालों की
नाक पर चढ़ी हुई है।

यह वही भारत है जहां कामसूत्र लिखा
गया। यही वह धरती है जहाँ खजुराहो
और कोणार्क के मंदिर इंसानी जीवन,
प्रेम और सौंदर्य का खुला जश्न मनाते
हैं। हमारे पूर्वजों ने पत्थरों में जीवन
की धड़कन उकेरी थी। और हम? हम
उन मूर्तियों पर कपड़ा ढूँढ़ रहे हैं।

ज़रा उस दफ़्तर की मीटिंग का मंज़र
देखिए।

"सर, किताब में एक मूर्ति बिना कपड़ों
के है।"

"हे भगवान! बच्चों का क्या होगा?"

"लेकिन सर, यह तो दो हजार साल
पुरानी कला है।"

"इतिहास बाद में पढ़ेंगे। पहले
तौलिया लाओ!"

बस, फिर क्या था। फ़ोटोशॉप का
बटन दबा और सभ्यता पर अंजीर का
पत्ता चिपका दिया गया।

अब तो लगता है यह मुहिम यहीं नहीं
रुकेगी। शायद अगली बार खजुराहो
के मंदिरों पर बड़े-बड़े पर्दे टांग दिए
जाएँ। कोणार्क के घोड़ों को भी शर्म
से सिर झुकाने का आदेश जारी हो
जाए।

कौन जाने, जीव-विज्ञान की किताबों
में इंसानी शरीर के चित्र भी स्वेटर
पहनकर आएँ। गुलाब को काँटों
सहित सेंसर कर दिया जाए, कहीं
प्यार का खयाल ही न आ जाए।

हद तो यह है कि आज का बच्चा
मोबाइल पर दुनिया भर का कंटेंट देख
रहा है। हिंसा, फेक वीडियो, अश्लील
वेबसाइटें और न जाने क्या-क्या
उसकी हथेली पर मौजूद है।

लेकिन हमारी सबसे बड़ी चिंता यह है
कि कहीं इतिहास की किताब में
संगमरमर की एक मूर्ति का सीना न
दिख जाए।

वाह री समझदारी!

हम योग का डंका पूरी दुनिया में पीटते
हैं। आयुर्वेद पर गर्व करते हैं। भारतीय
संस्कृति का झंडा बुलंद करते हैं।
लेकिन उसी संस्कृति की कला और
मूर्तियों से आँख चुराते हैं। इसे कहते
हैं, "घर की मुर्गी दाल बराबर।"

सच तो यह है कि हमारी मूर्तियाँ
सदियों तक आक्रमणों से बचीं।
आँधियों से बचीं। बारिश से बचीं।
वक्रत की मार से बचीं।

लेकिन बेचारा पत्थर... बाबुओं के
फ़ोटोशॉप से हार गया।
मुबारक हो!

आखिरकार हमने अपने बच्चों को पाँच
हजार साल पुरानी भारतीय सभ्यता से
सुरक्षित बचा लिया। अब वे निश्चिंत
होकर मोबाइल पर दुनिया की बाकी

सारी "आधुनिक शिक्षा" हासिल कर
सकते हैं।

संस्कृति भी बच गई।

और समझदारी... शायद कहीं अंजीर
के उसी पत्ते के नीचे दब गई।

लगता है मुल्क में सबसे बड़ा खतरा
बेरोजगारी, महंगाई या प्रदूषण नहीं,
बल्कि पत्थर की मूर्तियों की गंगी टांगें
हैं। फ़रमान जारी हुआ है कि
संग्रहालयों की मूर्तियों को अब
शराफ़त का सर्टिफिकेट मिलेगा।
पहले खजुराहो से शुरुआत होगी, फिर
विक्टोरियन दौर की नैतिकता का
चश्मा पहनाकर पूरी विरासत को ढक
दिया जाएगा।

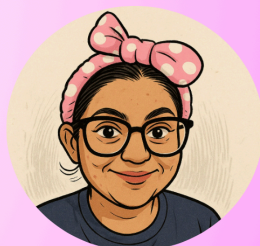
कमाल यह है कि जिस देश ने
कामसूत्र लिखा, खजुराहो और
कोणार्क जैसे अद्भुत मंदिर बनाए, वही
अब अपनी ही कला से शर्मिंदा खड़ा
है। लगता है इतिहास नहीं बदला जा
रहा, इतिहास को पायजामा पहनाया
जा रहा है। धोती की जगह पतलून,
मूर्तियों की जगह पर्दा, और सच की
जगह संकोच।

मेडिकल कॉलेजों के कंकाल भी
शायद अगली सूची में हों। कहीं उनकी
पसलियाँ देखकर किसी की तहजीब
आहत न हो जाए! फिर शरीर रचना
विज्ञान भी परदे के पीछे पड़ाया
जाएगा।

असली सवाल यह है कि रंग मूर्तियों
पर चढ़ रहा है या हमारी सोच पर?
यह वही औपनिवेशिक विक्टोरियन
नज़रिया है जो डेढ़ सौ साल पहले
आया था, मगर जाने का नाम नहीं ले
रहा।

Gyanwati Aunty

Your
neighbourhood
aunty in print...



1. The Family WhatsApp Group

Dear Gyanwati Aunty,

My uncle keeps sending "Good Morning" messages with glittering roses every single day at exactly 5:43 a.m. The family group has been muted by everyone except him. How do I stop this without starting World War III?

— Sleep-Deprived in Shimoga

Dear Beta,

Do not stop him.

These messages are the only thing preventing him from discovering Instagram Reels.

If you remove his audience, he will migrate to your personal chat and begin sending voice notes explaining the health benefits of drinking hot water with cumin, cinnamon, turmeric and mild disappointment.

Simply reply once every six months with "Beautiful, Uncle."

He will survive on that appreciation until Diwali.

2. International School Problems

Dear Gyanwati Aunty,

My eight-year-old daughter corrects my pronunciation of croissant, celebrates Bastille Day, and insists quinoa should be washed three times. Last week she asked why our dosa wasn't gluten-free. Is this normal?

— Confused Parent, Bengaluru

Dear Parent,

Perfectly normal.

Children today return from school with two foreign languages, three leadership certificates and absolutely no idea where the gas cylinder is kept.

Do not panic.

Take her to one wedding where forty-two relatives ask why she has become so thin despite eating well.

Within three days she'll remember she's Indian.

3. Fitness Advice

Dear Gyanwati Aunty,

Every time I tell someone I have started exercising, they immediately become my fitness coach. One recommends keto, another intermittent fasting, another says I should only eat after

sunset. Yesterday my neighbour suggested goat yoga. What should I do?

— Permanently Motivated, Pune

Dear Beta,

Excellent.

You have accidentally joined India's largest fitness programme.

The exercise is not in the gym.

It is carrying the weight of everyone else's opinion.

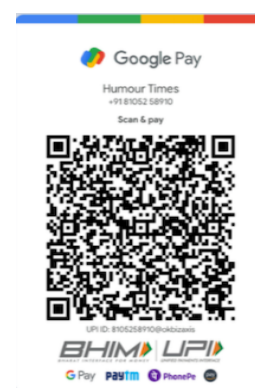
Smile politely.

Nod wisely.

Then go home and eat one samosa in complete silence.

Mental health is also a muscle.

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