

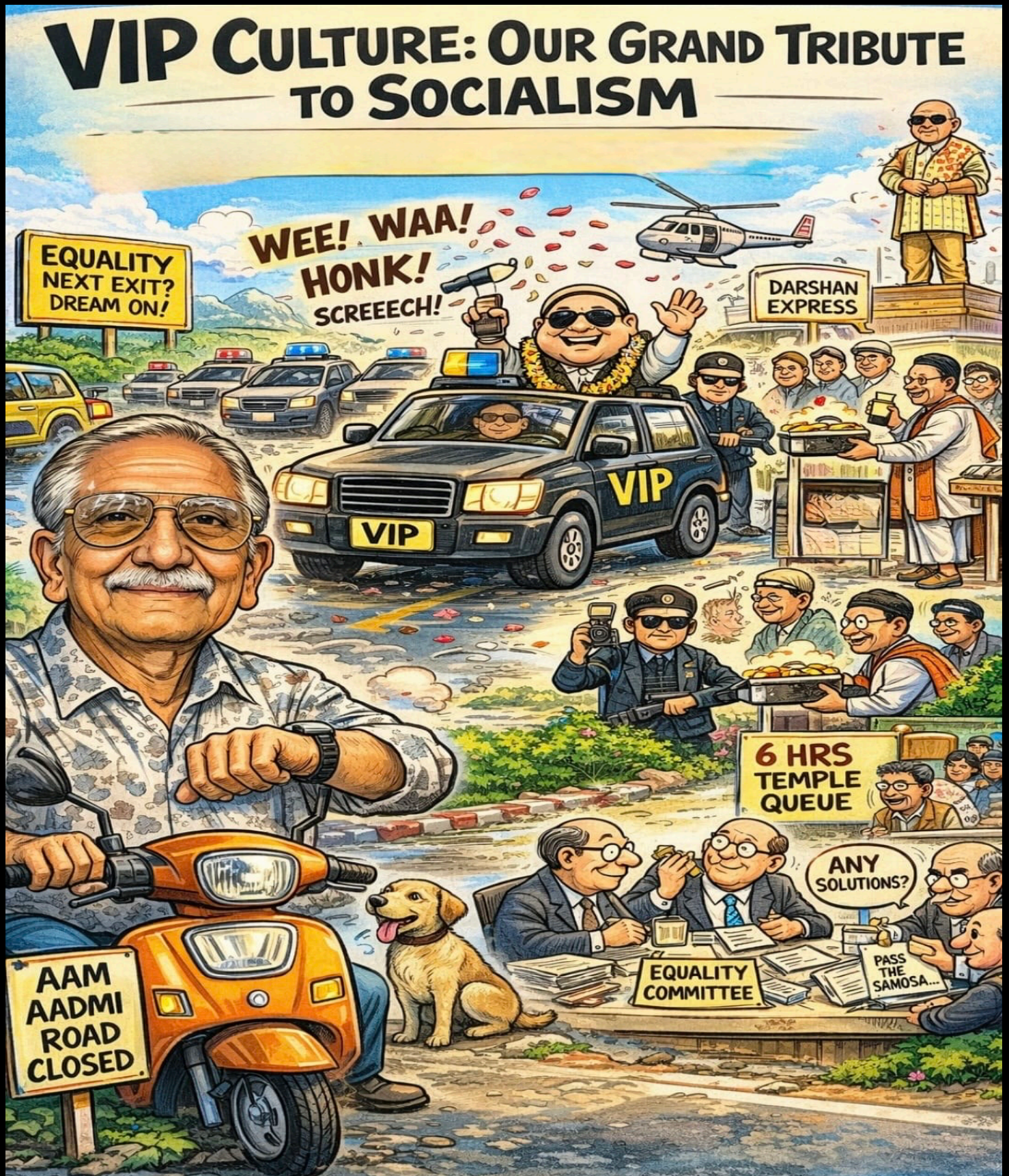
# HUMOUR TIMES

JEST FOR FUN!

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# FROM THE LEMON SQUEEZER'S DESK

Dear Readers,

March was not a month. It was a **multi-genre production** - part political drama, part geopolitical thriller, part IPL highlight reel.

Let's start globally.

Across the world, leaders gathered to discuss serious matters with the same energy as people deciding where to eat, lots of discussion, very little resolution. Meanwhile, Donald Trump appeared to be stuck in a full-blown Hamletian dilemma:

*To escalate the Iran situation, or not to escalate...*

Except unlike Hamlet, the consequences here involve oil prices, global anxiety, and WhatsApp forwards from that one uncle who "knows what's really happening."

**The Strait of Hormuz** entered the chat or rather, threatened to leave it, and suddenly Indians rediscovered their deep emotional relationship with LPG cylinders. Panic was subtle but real. Not the "run to the store" kind. More the "mentally calculate how many days the current cylinder will last" kind.

Back home, elections in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal

turned politics into a full-scale creative writing competition.

Kerala stood out by offering *two free gas cylinders*, a promise that hit Indians exactly where it matters: the kitchen, the budget, and the fear of refilling.

In Tamil Nadu, rhetoric was high, alliances were fluid, and promises were made with the confidence of people who absolutely will not be audited later.

West Bengal, as always, delivered high-voltage political theatre, where speeches felt less like policy discussions and more like dramatic monologues competing for a standing ovation.

The **Dhurandhar craze** swept through conversations, timelines, and living rooms. Everyone had an opinion. Nobody had a moderate one. It was either "masterpiece" or "national concern."

And then, like clockwork, came India's most reliable coping mechanism:

The IPL.

Suddenly, geopolitical tensions, election promises, and cinematic debates were all politely placed on hold.

The nation aligned itself around:

- Strike rates
- Team combinations
- Deep emotional investments in players who don't know we exist

Meanwhile, somewhere quietly in the background, a **new transgender bill controversy** sparked debates, reminding us that in India, no topic is too complex to be simplified into a loud, uninformed opinion within minutes.

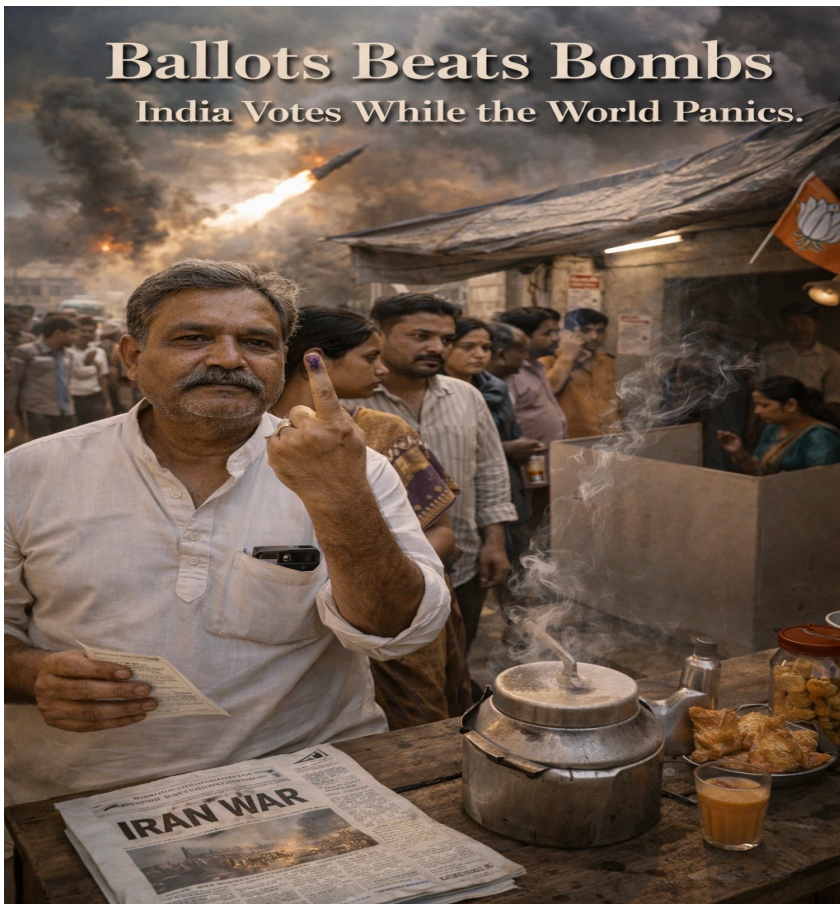
Because if there's one thing March proved, it's this:

We don't just consume news. We **perform it**.

Until next month,

*Brij Khandelwal*

Editor



## Ballots Beats Bombs

India Votes While the World Panics.

Is the world ending, or is it just election season in India?

Missiles fly. Oil prices climb like overambitious politicians. Economists sweat through their spreadsheets. And India? India adjusts its kurta, checks the voter slip, and says, "Chalo, pehle vote daal ke aate hain."

Four states. Infinite drama. Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal. Not elections. A travelling circus with better costumes and louder promises.

In Assam, amid tea gardens and rising rivers, a young neta Mohan Samiya thunders, "We will tame the Brahmaputra!" How? Details are anti-national. The crowd cheers anyway, biting into momos, as if enthusiasm alone can build embankments.

Floods may come, but hope arrives first, preferably with a loudspeaker.

Kerala counters with intellectual flair and coconut-scented revolution. "Global oil crisis?" Lola Nayar, a leader scoffs. "We will redistribute fuel morally." Nobody knows what that means, but it sounds fair, and fairness is Kerala's favourite hobby.

Tamil Nadu raises the bar. Or lowers it. Hard to tell. One side promises legacy reborn through technology. Another promises prosperity through symbolism. Cutouts scrape the sky. Speeches melt into cinema. Freebies rain like monsoon showers, except they arrive on time. Voters wave, smile, calculate. Democracy here is not just practiced. It is performed.

Then comes Bengal. Ah, Bengal. Where politics is

poetry, and poetry occasionally throws punches. Speeches roll like thunder over the Hooghly. Adda continues uninterrupted. Between two cups of tea and a plate of phuchka, global crises are dismissed as background noise. The real debate is local, emotional, theatrical. As it should be. And in the middle of this magnificent madness stands the voter. Not confused. Not passive.

Calmly transactional. Ramu Kaka has done his math. One party gave a steel plate. Another offered a promise. Steel wins. Tangible beats theoretical every single time. He stands in line. Sweat on his forehead. Phone in his pocket. Democracy in his thumb.

For a brief moment inside that polling booth, he is not a statistic. He is the system. Outside, the noise resumes. Victory claims are rehearsed. Defeat excuses are drafted. Analysts shout. Anchors explode. WhatsApp universities issue degrees in political science.

And yet, beneath this carnival of exaggeration, something stubborn survives. Faith. Not in promises. Those expire faster than campaign slogans. Faith in the act itself.

While the world debates war, India debates candidates. While others count missiles, India counts votes.

Chaotic. Illogical. Loud. But strangely reassuring. Because here, even in absurdity, the final word still belongs to the voter. And he delivers it with ink.



# Animal Farm Culture: Our Grand Tribute to Socialism

*By Brij Khandelwal  
(still stuck in a VIP traffic jam, now emotionally adopted by a stray dog who crossed freely while I remained constitutionally trapped)*

**A**h, the quintessential Indian moment. You are late. Not fashionably late. Not Bollywood-hero-entry late. Properly, tragically, “boss-will-kill-me” late. Sweat trickles down your spine like GDP in a bad quarter. And then: boom, the road freezes. Not slows. Not jams. Freezes. Like your salary increment.

Why?

Because somewhere, somehow, a VIP is moving. Not arriving. Not serving. Just... moving. Sirens explode like Diwali crackers sponsored by taxpayer money. Traffic cops materialise out of thin air, flapping arms like distressed pigeons. Barricades rise.

And you? You stand there. Helmet in hand. Hope in pocket. Dignity long gone. Like a baraati whose *bandwala* eloped with the bride.

Welcome to the world’s largest democracy, where equality is a beautiful theory and VIP convoys are its daily obituary.

***We were told socialism means everyone is equal.***

***Nobody told us some are “equal-plus,” “equal-premium,” and “equal-with-lifetime-free-fastag.”***

In this great republic, your vote is sacred. Your time is scrap. You wait at signals. They erase signals. You stand in

queues. They redefine queues as “optional for important people.” You book appointments. They book entire cities.

A temple line stretches for six hours. Devotees chant, meditate, age gracefully. Suddenly, a convoy arrives. Doors open. Out steps Netaji, family, extended family, emotional support cousins, and one confused dog. They walk straight in. God, clearly, is also on VIP duty.

“Bhakt, please hold. Bhagwan is attending priority darshan.” Remember the great red beacon revolution? The emotional national detox. “*No more la! batti!*” thundered the system. And just like that, poof, VIP culture vanished.

Except it didn’t.

It reincarnated as blue lights, pilot cars, tinted windows, and that unmistakable aura of MEP, the more equal person.

We blame colonial hangover. But the British, at least, had branding honesty. They called it “Raj.” We call it “public service,” where the public serves by waiting.

In 1947, the rulers changed. The rules didn’t.

The crowns disappeared. The convoys multiplied.

Earlier, the sahib said, “Out of my way.” Now the neta says, “Out of my democracy.”

And security; oh, the majestic, cinematic, slow-motion security. Z-plus. Z-minus. Z-infinity. Half these leaders move like they’re carrying the last surviving Wi-Fi password of the nation. Black SUVs glide past in formation. Jawans stare intensely at innocent pedestrians whose biggest crime is owning a two-wheeler.

Meanwhile, public services have quietly embraced the same philosophy. Airports have VIP

lounges where time flows differently. Hospitals have VIP wards where diseases show respect and wait politely. Railways have VIP quotas where even waiting lists feel inferior.

Your emergency is their inconvenience. Their inconvenience is a national emergency.

This isn’t inequality. This is choreography. A beautifully rehearsed ballet of privilege where the common man plays the role of “background prop number 47.”

And the solution?

Ah, the eternal Indian solution. Committees. Panels. Announcements. Hashtags. “Equality Initiative 2.0” “Mission Samanta” “Sabka Time, Sabka Traffic”

Photo ops will follow. Leaders will eat humble meals on camera, sitting cross-legged for exactly 11 minutes before returning to bulletproof buffets.

Their children will study abroad, learning about equality in air-conditioned classrooms, while you learn patience at red lights that apply only to you.

Real reform? Dangerous idea.

Imagine this: One neta. One metro card. No convoy. One security guard, his conscience. Now that would be a revolution.

But until that miracle arrives, VIP culture will continue to roar past us; sirens blaring, windows tinted, logic missing. A high-speed reminder that in India, equality is not a right. It is a rumour.

So here we are. Engines off. Tempers on. Democracy paused. The convoy disappears into the distance. The road reopens like nothing happened. Life resumes. You accelerate. Late. Again.

# Journalism's Influence on Literature: Democratisation or Vulgarisation?

By Mukta K Gupta

(Someone Who Has Survived Prime Time)

Not many years ago, literature unfolded slowly like a monsoon that took its time arriving.

It spoke in long sentences, took its time, and expected readers to meet it halfway, sometimes three-quarters of the way, uphill, carrying a dictionary. Then journalism arrived with a deadline, a headline, and absolutely no patience.

Suddenly, everything had to happen now. And literature has never been the same since.

The great question today is: has journalism democratised literature, made it accessible, immediate, alive, or has it simply taught literature to shout in 280 characters and call it depth?

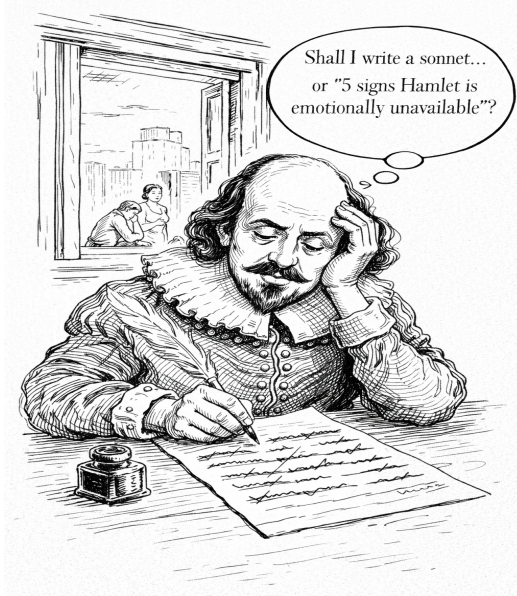
On the one hand, journalism has done something undeniably revolutionary. It dragged literature out of drawing rooms and placed it in the middle of the street. It replaced the slow burn with urgency. It told writers, gently but firmly, that if your first paragraph does not hook the reader, the reader will simply... scroll.

Writers adapted. Sentences became shorter. Paragraphs became sharper. Attention spans became... negotiable.

The modern reader no longer has time for a character to stare meaningfully out of a window for three pages. The window must now come with a headline:

“Man Stares at Window. Society to Blame.”

This, we are told, is democratisation.



But like all good things, it comes with side effects.

Subtlety was declared elitist. Complexity became suspicious. And nuance, poor nuance, was last seen trying to fit into a breaking news ticker.

Literature, once proud of its ambiguity, now feels compelled to clarify, simplify, and occasionally sensationalise.

Why explore the human condition when you can just label it “10 Signs You Are Emotionally Exhausted”?

Everything is important. Everything is immediate. Everything is a “must-read.”

The reader, overwhelmed, reads nothing, except perhaps the comments section, which has quietly become the most honest form of literature available today.

And yet, it would be unfair to dismiss journalism as the villain.

Because it has also given literature something invaluable: relevance.

It has allowed stories to respond to the world as it happens. It has made writing feel alive, not preserved. It has given voice to people who were previously told their stories were not “literary enough.”

In that sense, journalism has not vulgarised literature. It has simply removed its filter, and like all unfiltered things, the result is sometimes refreshing, sometimes chaotic, and occasionally difficult to consume.

So where does that leave us?

Perhaps in a middle ground.

Where literature remembers how to breathe, and journalism remembers how to pause.

Where a sentence can be both readable and reflective.

Where a story can be both immediate and meaningful.

And where, just occasionally, we allow a character to stare out of a window, without turning it into content.

# Hot Flashes And Hashtags

By Mukta K Gupta

I went to my gynaecologist last week for what I thought was a perfectly normal, low-drama check-up.

At 45, you walk in with confidence. You've seen life. You've handled responsibilities. You've survived school and family politics.

Surely, you can handle one doctor's visit.

"Everything looks fine," she said calmly, flipping through my reports.

Then she added, in that dangerously casual tone doctors use before changing your life:

**"You might be entering perimenopause."**

I nodded like a mature, informed adult.

I asked a few intelligent questions. She gave a few sensible answers.

We discussed hormones, sleep, mood swings, and something about "lifestyle adjustments," which I mentally translated to: *goodbye joy*.

The consultation ended. I paid the bill. I walked out with dignity.

What I did *not* realize was...

**My phone had also attended the appointment.**

By the time I reached home, my phone had already processed the situation, diagnosed me, and started my treatment.

Instagram opened with:

- "5 Signs You're in Perimenopause"
- "Hot Flashes? Watch THIS!"
- "Things NO ONE tells you about menopause!"

YouTube followed up aggressively:

- "Day 1 of My Menopause Journey"
- "What I Eat in a Day to Survive Hormones"

Google, not to be left behind, gently suggested:

"Are you experiencing sudden personality changes?"

By evening, I hadn't just entered perimenopause...

**I had entered the menopause content ecosystem.**

The next morning, I woke up to a notification:

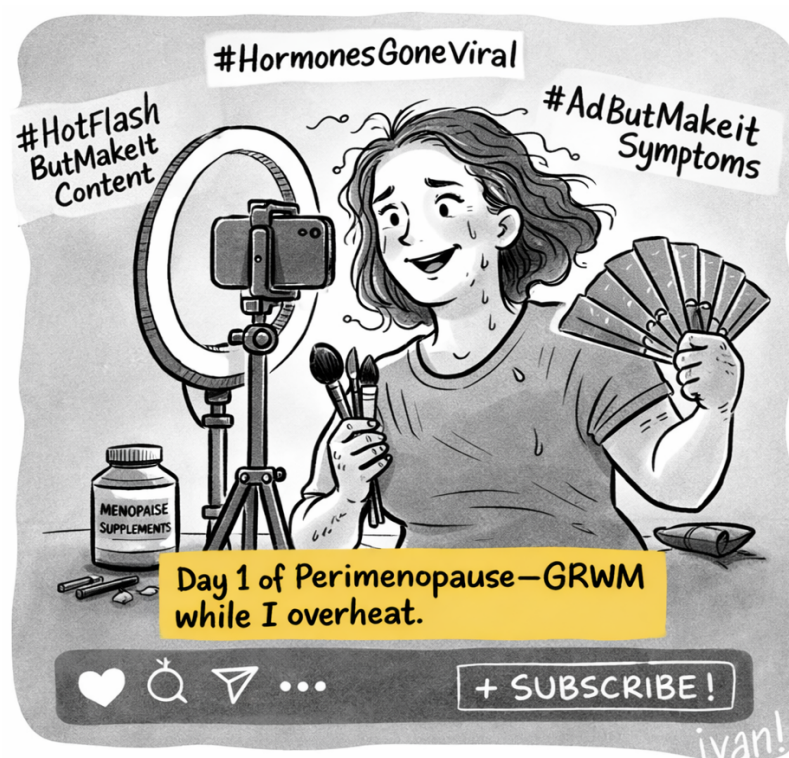
**You might like this reel."**

It was a woman smiling calmly into the camera.

"Hi guys, welcome back to my channel. Today I'm doing a *GRWM for perimenopause*

♥♥"

I don't know what disturbed me more, the perimenopause... or the enthusiasm.



# Kurruptistan's Eternal Gratitude: The Mystic Miracles and Martial Wisdom of Guddan Pyare

By Brij Khandelwal

The citizenry of Kurruptistan remains submerged in an overwhelming debt of ingratitude to their visionary-in-chief, Lord Guddan Pyare, the longest-surviving ruler in human history.

In a recent, mandatory, and unanimous parliamentary resolution, the nation hailed his latest "Mystic Monologue" as a beacon of transcendental brilliance. His party recently won the elections securing 99.09 percent votes.

Under Pyare's magnificent stewardship, Kurruptistan has achieved a scale of prosperity that defies both logic and mathematics. His vision has unleashed "Incredible Opportunities" for every hardworking Kurruptistani, mostly in the sectors of applause and manual labor.

The economy has boomed so wonderfully that growth is now measured in vibes rather than currency. His "Beautiful

Deals" are perfect, making the nation stronger than ever, while his massive rallies, drawing crowds that occasionally exceed the national population, prove that under Pyare, even physics is optional. Lord Guddan Pyare famously declared: "Not all wars are tragedies. Some are liberations; others are merely lucrative business ventures. History periodically outsources its housekeeping to the military. It's a deep clean: don't spare the ego stains."

"West of Asia today," he quipped during a state brunch, "is a place where everyone is right, everyone is wrong, and everyone has a press release ready before breakfast. All players are armed with missiles, moral lectures, and PowerPoint presentations titled Why We Had No Choice."

Kurruptistan, however, never joins wars that kill. We prefer wars of words, better tech, ego vs. super-ego, narrative vs. narrative, PowerPoint vs. power outage. We mind our own business, mostly by leaving sleepy dogs alone and prioritising Malthusian population control in any conflict we can't profit from. Logic, of course, left the building ages ago.

Addressing Parliament, the Ruler-in-Chief proclaimed: "Kurruptistan endorses war to turbocharge growth and

keep the youth alert. Are both sides wrong? No, both sides are half-right; the rest is premium fiction, no refunds. We speak of democracy like motivational speakers: rules for thee, exceptions for me. That 'rules-based order' still exists, much like a January gym membership, fondly remembered but utterly ignored by February. Rules are optional, like helmets in slow traffic."

"Moral unity? Ah, you mean the legendary WhatsApp group," noted media baron Juhela Risky with a cynical wink.

Meanwhile, Kurruptistan innovates through aggressive "Strategic Inertia", a rare national yoga pose. While some experts itch to "join the fight," common sense dictates that when two neighbours hurl chairs at each other, one does not fetch more furniture. The extinct dragon watches from the sidelines, calculator ready for the clearance sale.

Everyone craves a VIP seat and extra popcorn. It's front-row drama at back-alley prices.

Modern wars no longer end with grand finales. They fizzle out like a soap opera that has run out of ideas but remains endlessly renewed for syndication. A ceasefire is merely halftime: hydrate, reload, and rewrite the script.

Revenge has become routine; peace feels awkward, like forced small talk at a family reunion fuelled by secret grudges. "So... how's life?"

"Still bombing. You?"

"Same. Catch you at the ceasefire?"

Poet laureate Thakela Anjum observed: "Enter humanity's true teacher: exhaustion. Not wisdom, not morality, just bone-deep fatigue. Fighters quit not because they agree, but because anger needs a nap. Peace slips in quietly, like a bored referee whistling for everyone to go home."

The great spiritual leader Taalna Swami added a sobering note: "Don't applaud yet. The bill is massive, footed by ordinary folks and the truth, which is currently retailing at a 90% discount. War's greatest gift is a mirror. Power stretches like elastic, morality bends like yoga,

and certainty cracks like cheap glass. Smoke clears, maps shift, and excuses evolve. Wisdom sneaks

virus stealing your oxygen. Keep fighting, fellows! The ratings have never been higher."

## Kurruptistan's Eternal Gratitude: *The Mystic Miracles and Martial Wisdom of Guddan Pyare*

By Brij Khandelwal



through the back door, uninvited and ignored."

The Supreme Defender of the Universe cleared his throat for the final word: "But the war must go on! Moksha awaits in pseudo-causes; it's far better than an invisible

# Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

Asha G Kumar

The famous Italian astronomer, Galileo, observed that “the tickle is not in the feather”, and ever since I have often wondered and wilfully submitted myself to the Hindu belief in “maaya” as a state of existence. Trying to comprehend this world and its multitudes, if anything, is turning out to be a daunting task and learning more is only impeding the process.

This was just another humid evening in my rather quiet apartment at Oshiwara, wherein I was yet again bemused by the Japanese ring tone on an otherwise *Bombayish* neighbourhood until my reverie was snapped tersely by the sudden belting of a Salman Khan number from yet another famous potboiler.

It reminded me that the festive season was just round the bend, literally so. Like a cat that moves around chasing its own tail ever confounded by its possible shape, size and perhaps agility, I too have often chased the extensive pantheon of Gods that is available to people of my blessed ilk (aka Brahmins).

The months of August-September every year unfailingly tickles my senses at the thought of my Elephant deity doing a Hrithik or a Katrina to the catchy numbers from Bollywood such as this present one... I mean, just imagine the scene unfolding before you! It surely is a welcome change from the sedate and structured chants that we have been repeating for ages now and most of the time to no avail. Probably, the heavens above, like the lesser mortals below, are also in need of entertainment and this celestial epiphany has been

rightly recognised by our political class and their junkies as they have routinely regaled every God and Goddess with the choicest item numbers possible and more recently, thanks to the new MNS dispensed by the folks from Shiv Sena and MNS, the deities are twisting and twirling to the Marathi numbers, which is now the lingua franca of the Gods too!

Religion in India evokes such lofty sentiments from its believers. Even a harmless gentleman like my dad snarls in disapproval at ‘a particular community’ or people from ‘a particular faith’.

From banning books to movies, morchas on the streets about offence to religious sentiments, to conversions for convenience, religion, like the time-honoured survivor, the cockroach, seems to be flitting, favouring and fancying all the sentiments it unleashes in mankind.

This unleashed sentiment is splendidly enchased upon by our ever-enterprising business community. Do you happen to recall when is Dhanteras? I never manage to, until a certain Tanishq or even an international jewellery venture like Cartlane, kindly remind me of it. I am very sure they remind many such multitudes, for during one of my visits to the local jewellery store with my mom, an otherwise quiet, and laid-back store in

Mysore, turned out to be an adventure akin to one of the experiences at the Kumbh Mela!

If you ever wanted to know the wealth quotient of Indians or are yet unaware of our collective obsession towards the yellow metal, just drop by to a jeweller’s on Dhanteras or to one of the wedding ceremonies! The bride’s smile may or may not matter, as long as the arm bands, kamar bandhs (waist bands, not wasted), nose rings and the multiple necklaces are all exclaiming splendour and eliciting the appropriate nods from all the *maamis*. Probably, this is their calling post menopause! Evaluating the worth of a girl, her family, and of the gold being sported. Anyhow, she is supposedly a manifestation of the Goddess Lakshmi and one dare not cock a snook there, at least I shall desist.



Imagine my plight if this deity is put off while I continue to live on in Bombay! I might see myself jostling for space and water in a rundown chawl and sport the saffron flag as an

amulet of safety!

Now, that possibly could be the reason why our festivals are routinely celebrated ‘by a particular section of the society’ that is patronised by all our khadi babus...

# OF BEANS, LIMES AND DIAMONDS: BY LAKSHMI PALECANDA

By Lakshmi Palecanda



When I moved into Mysore three years ago, I encountered a strange concept in a perfectly ordinary location: the vegetable vendor's. I needed a bunch of coriander leaves and he was showing me some. A person was standing next to me.

"Get naughty," he said.

Shocked, I looked at the not-so-young man who smiled back with genuine friendliness. I'd heard that men get naughty at forty. He seemed about that age.

That man was indicating the two slightly different looking bunches of the leafy vegetable in front of me. "The farm one won't be so full of flavor," he said.

That is when I realized that he meant 'natti' or home-grown versus farm grown produce. I looked back at the two bunches.

The 'natti' guy was looking as strong as Stan Laurel and the other was a little healthier. With so much pressure on me, I had to take the 'natti' one.

Later, I experimented with the farm version and found it to be not very different, but the 'natti' cost almost double for half the amount of leaves and stalks,

putting it beyond my coriander budget.

The natti-ness also extended to tomatoes, I found out later. However, here the prices were reversed. The natti or local tomatoes were more sour, juicier and cheaper, while the 'jam tomatoes' or the Roma hybrids were sweet or just insipid, and a little more expensive.

Speaking of expensive, the humble vegetable market has become a little like the famous diamond markets of Antwerp and Martapura. You go in with large amounts of money and come out with a small amount of produce in a little bag. Don't believe me? Well, here is an example.

I have a vegetable-wallah who I always buy from. One day, I skipped along to his cycle to buy veggies. Seeing a pile of fresh green beans, I ran my fingers through them, not noticing the seller's uneasiness.

"How much?" I asked breezily.

"Fifteen rupees," he said, watching my actions carefully.

"Okay, then. I'll take half a kilo."

"That will be thirty rupees."

"Er, I don't think so," I ventured tentatively. I am a little weak in Maths, I should have taken a calculator, I thought.

"It's fifteen for quarter kilo," said the vegetable-wallah, edging the beans away from me. "And the tomatoes, potatoes, onions are ten rupees ... for quarter kg. The garlic is Rs 20 ... for 100gs."

"Do you have any limes?" I faltered.

"Amma, don't you know that limes are sold only at maximum security markets with safety lockers?" he asked me contemptuously. "Limes of 2cm diameter cost Rs. 4 a piece."

"How much will a lime this big cost?" I asked, holding my fingers about 4cms apart.

This time, there was definitely pity in his gaze. "Don't ask, you can't afford it."

I staggered home, heartsick with an empty purse and with six beans, one each of tomato, potato and onion and no garlic. When my husband asked what our children would eat, I said, "Let them eat Cadbury's Dairy Milk."

Later, I heard of a wedding being called off because the groom's family wanted lemon rice with tomato and toor dhal sambar and beans fry to be served for the wedding lunch. The bride immediately called the police, who slapped harassment charges on the groom's family. The bride's father reportedly had offered the groom a house in Koramangala, Bangalore, and a Mercedes-Benz, but the boy was insistent on the menu.

"What do these bridegrooms think? Are we made of money?" he is said to have asked reporters tearfully.

After my run-in with the vegetable seller, I began to think furiously. Surely there was something in this situation that an entrepreneur could exploit. As a result of those cogitations, I confronted my husband that evening.

"I think we should convert our coffee estate into something else," I said. "We should uproot the coffee and plant beans."

"I don't think it is a good idea to plant vanilla when the market for vanilla beans is so bad," he began.

"I'm talking green beans, not vanilla," I said. "With an intercropping of naughty, I mean, 'natti' coriander and tomato, we will be in the Fortune 500 billionaire list before we know it." He gave me an incredulous look, and quickly changed the subject, and we haven't discussed the topic since. But I haven't abandoned hope yet.

I'm going to send him to buy vegetables tomorrow.

# Third World Problems in Our Home

By Rajinder Singh



**B**reaking news from the living room yet another small crisis has unfolded. The Wi-Fi slowed down this morning, and for a full ten seconds, a video refused to load. Morale dipped noticeably.

Some stared at the buffering wheel, others waited in quiet hope.

Meanwhile, the Remote Control Cold War continues. Dad prefers the news, Mom wants her serial, and the kids are firmly in favor of streaming.

By 8:03 PM, no agreement had been reached, with each side convinced of its own reasonableness. Discussions are ongoing.

Food, too, remains a curious issue. Despite a fridge that is full, the familiar line, “there’s nothing to eat”, keeps resurfacing. It appears the problem is not availability, but preference.

Temperature control has become another point of quiet disagreement. The AC vs. blanket situation persists, with some reaching for extra layers while others subtly adjust the settings when no one is looking. A balance has yet to be found.

An online order arriving a day late caused mild disappointment. The color was also “slightly off,” which did not help matters.

Earlier, the absence of domestic help disrupted the usual rhythm of the house. Routine chores felt more noticeable, dishes gathered quickly, and enthusiasm for responsibility remained limited.

Storage space on phones has also become a concern.

The “No Space” notification has led to some difficult decisions, though most screenshots continue to be

preserved, just in case they’re needed someday.

The family group chat remains active, with a steady flow of good morning messages and forwarded videos. Attempts to ignore it have had mixed success.

As evening approached, the daily question of what to eat returned. After some discussion and several rejected ideas, the decision landed, as it often does, on something familiar.

A brief power cut in the afternoon brought an unexpected pause. For a few minutes, conversations resumed and the house felt a little different, quieter, but not unpleasantly so.

Despite all this, things carry on as usual. Nothing is fully resolved, the Wi-Fi is still unpredictable, but everything, somehow, works itself out.

# The Selfie Era of Credit: Less Service, More Posts

By Brij Khandelwal

**R**eal service should whisper, not scream.

Modern social activism has become faster than a T20 cricket match.

Everyone's eyes are glued not to the scoreboard, but to who posted first. Who dropped the "BREAKING: Thanks to my efforts..." update. Who tagged themselves as the lone warrior in the group photo.

The actual issue? That's for later Googling. First priority: whose post went viral.

Service has taken a backseat. Selfies are driving now.

Someone complains about a pothole. Before the pothole is filled, five posts appear:

"Look how the municipal corporation woke up because of ME!"

"My tweet forced action!"

Are they activists or digital drama queens/kings?

Once upon a time, real social workers worked silently. People later discovered: "Oh, that road got repaired because of so-and-so."

Now the sequence is reversed: Announcement → Post → Tagging → Hashtag storm → maybe work happens, maybe not.

Sometimes even the administration finds out later: "Wait... we already fixed that two months ago. When did these people get involved?"

The only difference between an influencer and today's activist? Influencers sell soap. Activists sell credit.

Both earn from likes.

RTI: Right to Information... or Right to InstaFame?

In India we've invented RTI 2.0: Recognition Through Internet.

File an RTI → instant post ready:

"My RTI has exposed a crore-level scam! Big revelation coming!"

What was revealed? We'll read that next week.

Right now the important statistic is: 742 likes, 312 shares. Mission accomplished!

Less filing, more press releases.

Issue in the background, face in the foreground.

Every movement now has two fronts:

1. The real front ; dust, sweat, actual problem.

2. The social media front ; air-conditioned room, good lighting, Valencia filter.

They join a river clean-up drive, hold a broom for 47 seconds → next minute: "Fighting for our rivers! My battle continues!"

The river, if it could speak, would mutter: "Bro, swing the broom or the camera? At least clean something."

Credit Politics: Everyone Wants Their Own Vote Bank. A good thing happens → five people instantly materialise:

"This happened because of MY efforts!"

The sixth one is "humble": "A very small contribution from my side led to this result." That "very small contribution" is so microscopic even electron microscopes can't spot it ; but the post is long enough to cause RSI while scrolling.

Social media launched a killer new product: Personal Brand Activism™.

Goal is not solving the problem ; it's profile enhancement.

Issue trends → instant arrival. One dramatic photo. One 500-word poetic caption. Four strategic tags. Classic sign-off: "The struggle continues."

Bitter truth: No big change ever happens because of one person. Dozens sweat ; most stay invisible.

But staying invisible is now out of fashion. Apparently it smells bad back there.

Old rule: Let the work finish, then speak.

New social media rule: Speak first, hashtag it, then wait (or pretend) for the work to happen.

If nothing happens? Next post: "The system is corrupt, but my fight goes on!"

And if you're reading this thinking "Wait... is this about ME?"; congratulations. You've officially levelled up to a fully certified warrior of the Credit Selfie Era.



# Love's Revolution... or a Parade of Packages?

*By Brij Khandelwal*



Once upon a time in India, love was practically a criminal offence. Falling in love meant rebellion. The kind that deserved background music, slow motion, and a worried mother fainting in the kitchen.

Boy meets girl. Parents panic. Relatives faint. Society prepares a moral lecture. Secret meetings happened in parks that looked like crime scenes. Whispered phone calls sounded like undercover operations. Love letters were hidden inside library books like classified government documents. Lovers spoke in code. Not because they were spies. Because the girl's cousin was always listening.

Then one day, poof!, the couple vanished. Court marriage. Two sleepy witnesses who looked like they had accidentally walked into the wrong building. Or a lightning ceremony at an Arya Samaj temple.

Seven pheras completed at Olympic speed. No band. No DJ. No choreographed dance by the groom's cousins wearing sunglasses at night.

Just two stubborn lovers and one nervous priest trying to finish the mantras before the girl's angry uncle arrived with reinforcements. Parents stayed angry for five years. Neighbours provided free commentary for ten. But those love stories had fire. Madness. Courage. As the famous Bollywood dialogue declared with full dramatic echo: "Pyar kiya to darna kya."

Love meant defiance. Love meant risk. Love meant possibly being disowned before dessert. Fast forward to today.

Love stories now begin in offices, colleges, coaching institutes and occasionally on dating apps where two people fall deeply in love after discovering they both like the same pizza topping. Secret gardens have been replaced by coffee shops. Instead of love letters, couples exchange Wi-Fi passwords.

Romance now unfolds live on social media. First selfie. First coffee. First trip to Manali. First fight. First post saying: "We have mutually decided to remain friends." Everything documented. Everything filtered. Both partners are educated. Both earn well. Their vocabulary includes sophisticated terms like space, compatibility, boundaries, and weekend getaway.

Caste barriers? Slowly weakening. Language barriers? Fading. Society? Looking slightly confused. At first glance, it appears that love has finally defeated the system.

But wait. The real plot twist arrives on the wedding day. Suddenly the same rebellious couple, who once declared heroically, "We don't believe in traditions", are standing obediently in the middle of the most traditional circus imaginable.

Band. Baaja. Baraat. Destination wedding in Jaipur. Designer outfits that cost more than the honeymoon. Drone cameras hovering above like suspicious pigeons gathering evidence.

"No dowry," both families proudly announce. But "gifts" are always welcome. "No transactions," they say politely.

Yet somehow jewellery, luxury venues and five-star buffets appear naturally... like monsoon mosquitoes. The revolution of love quietly surrenders at the wedding mandap.

What began as a love marriage slowly transforms into something else. A marriage of convenience... sponsored by event management. Earlier parents chose the partner. Now the couple chooses the partner. But the wedding industry chooses everything else. The stage has not changed. Only the scriptwriter has. Ask anyone from the older generation about weddings and their eyes immediately light up.

"Beta, those were real weddings!"

Back then one single bus carried the entire baraat. Yes. One bus. Relatives packed inside like election promises before polling day. Seats full. Aisles full. Roof sometimes full.

Someone always cracked the same joke: "Whoever fits in this bus is a real relative. The rest are fake!" The journey itself was entertainment. Antakshari competitions that lasted longer than the marriage. Children running everywhere like escaped wildlife. One uncle snoring loudly in the back seat. And of course the legendary offended **Fufaji** who refused to attend because nobody invited him personally... despite the fact that the entire neighbourhood knew about the wedding.

One proud Ambassador car carried the groom. That was luxury. That was status. That was the ultimate symbol of



prestige. Today? The bus has disappeared.

In its place is a long convoy of identical cars. Same colour. Same model. Same confused drivers trying to stay in formation like a military parade. Sometimes the groom does not even arrive by road. He arrives by helicopter.

Yes. From the sky.

As if the groom is not getting married but inaugurating a new airport. Meanwhile photographers run everywhere. Videographers shout instructions like film directors.

“Sir, smile again.”  
 “Madam, walk slowly.”  
 “Sir, look lovingly at the bride.”

“Now pretend you are surprised.”

Drones buzz above like mechanical mosquitoes recording every second of the emotional drama.

At this point the wedding begins to look less like a family celebration and more like a movie shoot titled: “Shaadi: The Final Episode.”

Even the decoration has gone slightly mad. Earlier the car had flowers. Today the car is flowers. So many roses, lilies and orchids that the vehicle looks like a travelling botanical garden. Someone recently joked: “Earlier marriages ran on relationships. Now they run on event managers.” Food has also evolved dramatically.

Earlier the menu was simple. Puri. Aloo sabzi. Raita.

oven. Thai curry. Seventeen varieties of chaat.

Guests wander around confused with overloaded plates like explorers lost in a buffet jungle.

After all this spectacle, one quiet question remains. Are marriages actually happier? Or simply more expensive?

Older people sigh and say: “Earlier weddings had warmth. Today they have Wi-Fi.” Money flows like a river. Sometimes a father spends a lifetime’s savings on one evening of social prestige.

Society applauds.

Bank accounts cry silently. In the end, marriage is still a very simple thing.

Two people promising to tolerate each other forever. Everything else, drones, designer

lehengas, helicopter entries, is just background music. Because real love does not require a stage.

But modern weddings? They apparently require lighting, choreography, drone coverage, three event managers, and a backup generator. Just in case love itself trips over

the decoration wires.



Jalebi. Guests ate happily and blessed the couple.

Today weddings resemble the United Nations Food Summit. Italian pasta station. Chinese counter. Live pizza

हर अंधेरी रात का सवेरा होता है। लेकिन हमारे यहां सवेरा होने से पहले ही पड़ोस वाला पूछ लेता है ; “भाई, सानू की फायदा, इसमें हमारा क्या फायदा? कमीशन? ठेका? या कम से कम फ्री वाली चाय तो बन जाए?”

पश्चिम एशिया जल रहा है।

इमारतें ध्वस्त। सप्लाई चैन ठप्प। लोग अपने ही घरों में “House Full” बोर्ड लगा के बेघर।

और उधर हम? चाय की चुस्की के साथ

बिल्कुल वैसा स्टूडेंट जो क्लास में किसी ग्रुप में नहीं बैठता, लेकिन प्रोजेक्ट के टाइम सब चिल्लाते हैं : “भाई तू तो जुगाड़ का बादशाह है, एक बार बचा ले!” सऊदी से दोस्ती। यूएई से धंधा। कतर से बातचीत। ईरान से “हेलो हाय”। इजरायल से स्ट्रेटेजिक सहयोग। रूस हमारा मजबूर यार। चीन हमारा “पार्टनर इन चुप्पी”। अमेरिका बड़बोला साझीदार। पाकिस्तान? अरे वो तो बिगड़ा फूफा है ; दूर से ही “हाय हेलो” और अंदर से “अबे तू फिर आ गया?”

जहां पश्चिमी देश पांच मीटिंग करते हैं, वहां हम एक साइट खड़ी कर देते हैं और बोले , “सर, कल से काम शुरू!” फिर आएगा असली हीरो : रेमिटेंस! डॉलर बरसेंगे, चालू खाता बोलेगा : “अहा, टमाटर बड़ा मजेदार! अब तो हम भी अमीर लग रहे!” स्वास्थ्य क्षेत्र भी पीछे नहीं। भारत की जेनेरिक दवाएं इतनी सस्ती हैं कि मरीज को बीमारी से ज्यादा दवा की कीमत देखकर खुशी हो जाती है। डॉक्टर बोले : “दवाई लो, बीमारी भूल



## जलती झोंपड़ी से जो सिगरेट सुलगाए, वही सिंकंदर!

बृज खंडेलवाल द्वारा

टीवी पर युद्ध देखते हुए बोले : “अरे वाह, 4K में आ रहा है! कुछ काम-धंधा निकले तो व्हाट्सएप पर फॉरवर्ड कर देना यार!”

युद्ध सिर्फ शहर नहीं जलाता, वो एक्सेल शीट भी खोल देता है। कुछ देश नुकसान का कॉलम भर रहे, कुछ देश

“Opportunity” कॉलम में इमोजी डाल रहे हैं!

भारत ने इस बार बड़ी समझदारी दिखाई है। ना इधर पूरा झुकाव, ना उधर पूरा।

यानी भारत ने सबके यहां चाय पी रखी है। अब जब घर जलेंगे, तो मरम्मत के ठेके भी उसी को मिलेंगे जिसने पहले नमकीन-चाय का पैकेज लिया था। हम बोलेगा : “भैया, पैकेज डील ले लो! इंजीनियर फ्री, चाय अलग से, और एक्स्ट्रा बोनस में दो जुगाड़!”

भारतीय इंजीनियर आजकल सिर्फ इंजीनियर नहीं, चलते-फिरते “MacGyver” हैं।

जाओ... और हाँ, बिल देखकर मुस्कुरा लो!”

ऊर्जा की कहानी तो और मजेदार। होरमुज जलडमरूमध्य ने दुनिया को याद दिलाया : तेल सिर्फ जमीन से नहीं, राजनीति से भी निकलता है यार!

भारत सोच रहा “जब सबको तेल चाहिए तो सौदा लंबा क्यों न किया जाए?”

सब्जी मंडी का ग्लोबल वर्जन:

“कितना लोगे?”

“थोड़ा कम करो ना...”

“चलो पुराने ग्राहक हो, दो रुपया सस्ता कर दिया!”

रक्षा क्षेत्र में नया ट्रेंड : महंगे हथियारों की जगह सस्ते और ढेर सारे!

भारतीय फिलॉसफी: “एक महंगा मत लो, दस सस्ते ले लो, काम चल जाएगा!”  
ड्रोन, मिसाइल, सॉफ्टवेयर : सब टी20 स्टाइल में। आत्मनिर्भर भारत अब टेस्ट मैच नहीं, IPL खेल रहा है!

लेकिन सबसे बड़ा सवाल यहीं है।  
भारत में एक पुरानी आदत है ;  
मौका दरवाजे पर दस्तक देता है, हम अंदर से चिल्लाते हैं ; “कौन है रे?”  
फिर चप्पल ढूँढते-ढूँढते, दरवाजा खोलते-खोलते मौका बोले ; “अरे भाई, अगली बार आऊंगा, अभी तो IPL का मैच है!”

ऐसा न हो कि आईपीएल चलता रहे,  
चुनावी रैलियां गूँजती रहें,  
और इतिहास चुपचाप नोट बना ले ,  
“भारत फिर से थोड़ा लेट हो गया...  
ट्रैफिक में फंस गया था शायद!”  
तटस्थता इस बार कमजोरी नहीं, भाई।

ये वैसा ही है जैसे शादी में वो रिश्तेदार जो किसी झगड़े में नहीं पड़ता, लेकिन अंत में मिठाई के डिब्बे, लिफाफे और बचा हुआ खाना , सब उसी के पास! और सबसे बड़ी बात? भारत के पास “जुगाड़” है। अब देखना यह है : क्या हम इस जुगाड़ को रणनीति बना पाते हैं, या फिर इसे भी चाय की मेज पर “अरे वाह, क्या बात है!” करके छोड़ देते हैं?  
चलो, एक चाय और पी लें। मौका इंतजार कर रहा है... या फिर कर रहा होगा?

## हंसी का भारत: ठहाकों में छिपी तहज़ीब, तंज में लिपटी सच्चाई

नाचीज़ अकबराबादी द्वारा

**हं**सी कब सिर्फ हंसी रहती है? कब वह एक हथियार बन जाती है, और कब मरहम? भारत में यह फर्क समझना आसान नहीं। यहां ठहाका भी दर्शन है, मुस्कान भी राजनीति है, और चुटकुला कई बार अदालत से ज्यादा सटीक फैसला सुनाता है।

दो हजार साल से भी ज्यादा वक्त से हंसी इस देश की नसों में बह रही है। मंदिरों की कथाओं से लेकर चौपाल की गपशप तक, कविताओं से लेकर कटाक्ष तक, यह सिर्फ मनोरंजन नहीं रही। यह एक सांस्कृतिक औजार रही है। कभी समाज को आईना दिखाने के लिए, कभी दर्द को हल्का करने के लिए, और कभी सत्ता के कान खींचने के लिए।

उत्तर भारत की हंसी को देखिए। यहां शब्द तलवार हैं। फुर्तीली, चुटीली, और कई बार चुभती हुई। मुगल दरबारों की परंपरा ने इसे धार दी। अकबर और बीरबल की कहानियां आज भी गलियों में जिंदा हैं। एक किस्सा सुनिए। बादशाह ने कहा, राज्य के पांच सबसे बड़े मूर्ख ढूंढो। बीरबल ने आम लोगों में ही उन्हें खोज निकाला। एक आदमी जिसने अपनी दाढ़ी में तिनका बांध रखा था ताकि खोई हुई अंगूठी का दावा कर सके। हास्यास्पद? हां। पर साथ ही यह लालच और मूर्खता पर सटीक वार भी है। यह शैली सीधी है। बात घुमा कर नहीं कहती। नौटंकी और लोकनाट्य में यही रंग और गहरा होता है मंच पर हंसी, पर भीतर सवाल। सत्ता पर तंज, समाज पर चोट।

अब दक्षिण की ओर चलिए। यहां हंसी धीमी है, पर गहरी। यह तुरंत ठहाका नहीं मांगती। यह सोचने पर मजबूर करती है। तेनालीराम की कहानियां इसका बेहतरीन

उदाहरण हैं। एक व्यापारी ने दावा किया कि वह किसी को भी मूर्ख बना सकता है। तेनाली ने एक फुसफुसाहट में पूरा खेल पलट दिया। व्यापारी खुद मजाक बन गया।

यहां व्यंग्य परतों में चलता है। ओट्टमथुल्लल जैसे लोकनृत्य, तमिल और तेलुगु कथाएं, सबमें यही खासियत दिखती है। हंसी यहां शोर नहीं करती। यह चुपचाप अंदर तक उतर जाती है। फिर भी, यह विभाजन दीवार नहीं है। यह सिर्फ अलग-अलग रास्ते हैं, जो एक ही मंजिल की ओर जाते हैं। एक साझा समझ। एक साझा मुस्कान।

इस पूरे ताने-बाने की जड़ें और गहरी हैं। संस्कृत साहित्य ने हंसी को सिद्धांत दिया। भरतमुनि के नाट्यशास्त्र ने ‘हास्य रस’ को परिभाषित किया। हल्की मुस्कान से लेकर ठहाके तक, हर रूप का स्थान तय किया गया। विदूषक का किरदार इसी का प्रतीक था। वह राजा के सामने सच कह सकता था, क्योंकि वह हंसा रहा था। शूद्रक का ‘मृच्छकटिकम’ देखिए। प्रेम, गरीबी, चालाकी, और गलतफहमियों के बीच पैदा होती हंसी। यह सिर्फ मनोरंजन नहीं, समाज की विसंगतियों पर टिप्पणी भी है। लालच, वर्गभेद, और सत्ता के खेल, सब पर एक साथ वार।

समय के साथ यह परंपरा जनता के बीच उतर आई। भक्ति आंदोलन ने इसे और धार दी। कबीर ने दोहों में ऐसी चुभन भरी कि पाखंड हिल गया। महाराष्ट्र में पु. ल. देशपांडे ने रोजमर्रा की जिंदगी में हास्य खोजा। बंगाल में सुकुमार राय ने बेटुकी कविताओं से औपनिवेशिक सोच पर व्यंग्य किया। हर दौर में कुछ चेहरे उभरे, जो हंसी के जरिए समाज से संवाद करते रहे। बीरबल ने राजाओं को आईना दिखाया। हरिशंकर परसाई ने नौकरशाही की परतें उधेड़ीं। वैकोम मुहम्मद बशीर ने गांव की साधारण जिंदगी में छिपी असाधारण विडंबनाओं को उजागर किया।

# READICULOUS READ

## The Correspondent

By Virginia Evans

Virginia Evans hands us a story stitched together through letters, yes, actual letters, those prehistoric WhatsApps that required effort, stamps, and emotional commitment.

The book gently nudges us into a slower, more reflective world, and what a luxury that feels like. The protagonist writes letters the way most of us wish we could speak: honestly, vulnerably, and occasionally with the elegance of someone who has had time to think before hitting send.

Evans also sneaks in a gentle reminder: not all meaningful communication is

instant. Some of it needs distance, delay, and the courage to say things without the safety net of deleting them later.

What makes the book quietly charming is its refusal to shout. No dramatic plot twists. No cliffhangers designed to spike your blood pressure. Instead, it unfolds like a conversation you didn't know you needed, the kind that lingers long after the tea has gone cold.

The Correspondent feels like a polite but firm tap on the shoulder:

“Maybe pause. Maybe write. Maybe mean it.”





**Gyanwati Aunty**  
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Dear Gyanwati Aunty,

The current gas cylinder crisis has accidentally improved my life.

I now cook one heroic “all-purpose sabzi” that lasts the entire day, while publicly declaring it as my contribution to “national energy conservation.” Privately, however, I am thriving. With fewer kitchen duties, I’ve rediscovered life - lunches with friends, movies, and the joy of not sweating it out in the kitchen.

Am I a resourceful citizen adapting to crisis or a full-time fraud running a domestic scam?

Yours (with suspicious free time),

=====

*Beta,*

*First of all, congratulations!*

*This is advanced-level Indian jugaad with emotional packaging. Beta, this is not deception. This is public service with private benefits.*

*Remember:*

*In every Indian household, truth is important...but timing is more important.*

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