

HUMOUR TIMES

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10th June 2026

THE ADULT VERSION OF YOU CAN'T PLAY WITH US



THE CLUB

India's Most
~ Exclusive ~
Treehouses

Expected
Response:
2047?



FROM THE LEMON SQUEEZER'S DESK

Dear Reader,

France's Donkey Therapy

From a psychiatric hospital outside Paris comes news that patients with anxiety and depression have been benefiting from spending time with therapy donkeys - walking them, grooming them, and hugging them at length. Health workers report improvements in emotional regulation and self-esteem. Pakistan, one imagines, took careful note. With a donkey population of over five million and a recently formalised agreement to export 200,000 donkeys to China, the country may have discovered an entirely new market. Forget traditional Chinese medicine. Therapeutic hugging is a growth sector. Economists have spent decades searching for Pakistan's competitive advantage. It turns out it was grazing peacefully in a field all along.

The Great Indian Pilgrimage

Despite rising fuel prices, global conflicts, and repeated warnings about overcrowding, pilgrimage destinations such as Kedarnath continue to attract record numbers of visitors. Tourist hotspots from the Himalayas to the beaches remain defiantly, magnificently packed. Wars may break out. Oil prices may soar. The Strait of Hormuz may dominate global headlines. None of this matters if someone has already paid a non-refundable advance for a hotel room with a mountain view and complimentary breakfast. Economists call this consumer confidence. India calls it a booking confirmation.

Cockroach Politics

On May 15, the Chief Justice of India, while presiding over a Supreme Court hearing, compared unemployed youth who become activists and social media voices to "cockroaches." The internet did not mourn. It mobilised. Within 24 hours, a political communications strategist in Boston had registered a domain, written a manifesto, and

opened party membership to anyone unemployed, lazy, chronically online, and able to rant professionally. Within five days, the Cockroach Janta Party's Instagram account had surpassed 20 million followers - overtaking the ruling BJP and Congress combined. Political observers initially chuckled. Then they realised the cockroach may be the perfect political symbol. It survives economic crises, environmental disasters, public outrage, and repeated attempts at elimination. In many ways, it possesses precisely the qualities required for a long and successful political career. The resemblance to any existing political organisation is, of course, entirely coincidental.

NEET: Mission Impossible

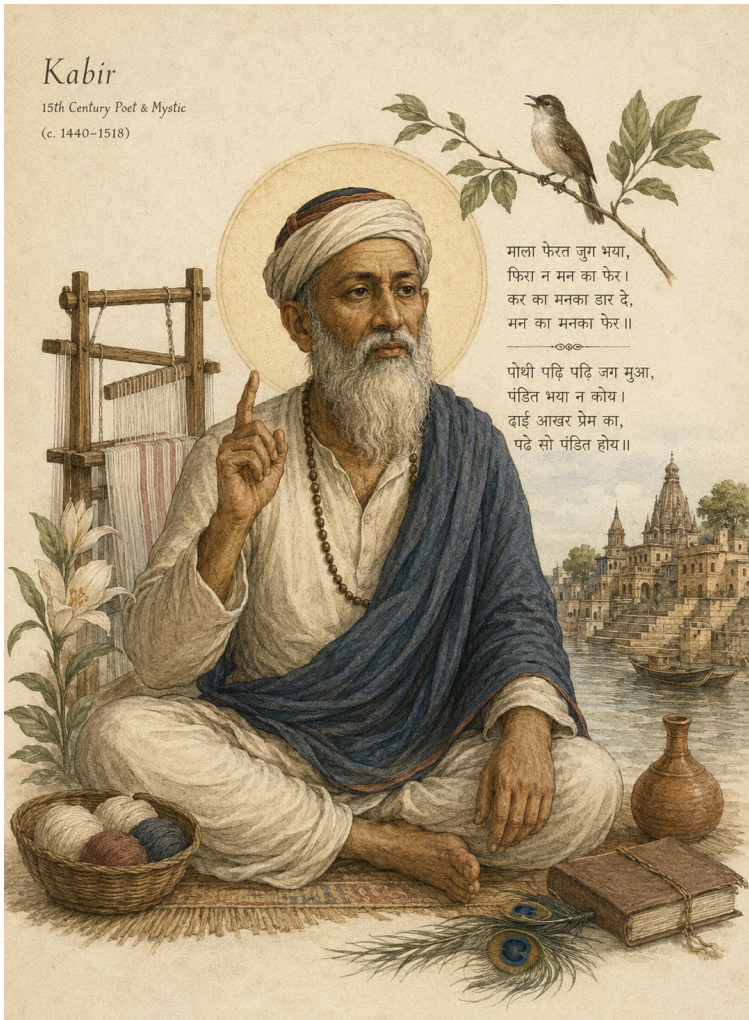
The original exam, held on May 3 for over 22 lakh candidates, was cancelled on May 12 after evidence of an organised paper leak. A nationwide retest is scheduled for June 21. To prevent history repeating itself, the Education Minister has confirmed that the Indian Air Force will transport question papers to examination centres, replacing the postal department. At this rate, future NEET candidates may find their admit cards delivered by C-130 Hercules aircraft. Students are advised to carry not only their hall tickets but also runway clearance documentation. One can only hope the examination eventually tests Biology rather than Air Defence Logistics.

Until next month: stay calm, avoid Supreme Court comparisons, keep your question papers airborne, and remember, if all else fails, there is apparently a donkey for that.

The Editor
Brij Khandelwal

GREAT SATIRISTS OF INDIA

SANT KABIR - THE WEAVER WHO ROASTED EVERYONE c. 1440-1518 CE



“माला फेरत जुग भया, फिरा न मन का फेर।
कर का मनका डार दे, मन का मनका फेर॥”

“You have turned the rosary for ages, yet your mind has not changed. Drop the beads in your hand and turn the beads of your mind.”

He mocked empty scholarship with characteristic brutality:

“पोथी पढ़ि पढ़ि जग मुआ, पंडित भया न कोय।
दाई आखर प्रेम का, पढ़े सो पंडित होय॥”

“The world died reading books, yet none became wise.
Who learns the two-and-a-half letters of love is the true scholar.”

Kabir was equally unimpressed by religious showmanship:

“कांकर पाथर जोड़ि के मस्जिद लई बनाय।
ता चढ़ि मुल्ला बांग दे, क्या बहरा हुआ
खुदाय॥”

“You built a mosque from stone and brick.
The mullah climbs and shouts—has God gone deaf?”

Nor did idol worship escape scrutiny:

“पाहन पूजे हरि मिले, तो मैं पूजूं पहार।
ताते तो चाकी भली, पीस खाय संसार॥”

If God were found by worshipping stone, I would worship a mountain.
Better the grinding stone, which at least feeds the world.”

What makes Kabir remarkable is that his satire was never cynical. He attacked pretence because he cared about truth. He mocked ritual because he valued sincerity. His jokes carried a moral purpose.

Today, more than five hundred years later, his targets remain surprisingly familiar.

Born in fifteenth-century North India and raised in a family of weavers, Kabir was a poet, mystic, and one of India's sharpest social critics. He belonged to no camp and spared no one. Hindu priests, Muslim clerics, self-appointed holy men, ritualists, hypocrites, and blind followers all found themselves in the line of fire.

Kabir's genius lay in saying uncomfortable truths in simple language. His verses, known as *dohas*, could be memorised by ordinary people and repeated in marketplaces, homes, and village squares.

His chief target was hypocrisy. He had little patience for those who confused religion with performance.

The Adult Version of “You Can’t Play With Us”

India’s elite clubs: where the waiting list outlasted the Empire

By Mukta K Gupta



We are talking about those magnificent institutions where the waiting list is longer than some marriages, recommendations are valued above qualifications, and your grandfather's acquaintance with someone's uncle's committee member may prove more useful than your entire professional résumé.

The recent government move to reclaim the 27 acres occupied by Delhi Gymkhana Club briefly thrust India's most exclusive addresses into the national spotlight. Television studios buzzed. Newspaper columns frothed. Social media timelines were consumed by a question that rarely troubles the average Indian:

What exactly goes on inside these places?

The answer, depending on whom you ask, ranges from "preserving heritage" to "preserving privilege."

Delhi Gymkhana was founded in 1913 as the Imperial Delhi Gymkhana Club - a name that says everything about its origins and nothing it wishes to say about itself today. Its sprawling lawns, colonial architecture, and prestigious membership rolls have long made it one of the most coveted social addresses in the country. It is also a place where the waiting period for membership has reportedly stretched to three, sometimes four decades.

Thirty to forty years.

There are many things one can achieve in a lifetime.

One can climb Everest. Win an Olympic medal. Crack the UPSC examination. One can even persuade an Indian government office to answer an email.

Yet there exists an accomplishment that may require even greater patience, perseverance, and ancestral foresight: obtaining membership to one of India's elite clubs.

To put that in perspective: a person applying today could conceivably receive their membership around the same time their grandchildren are applying to college.

Some applicants, one suspects, now leave their place in the queue as a bequest.

"To my beloved son, I leave the ancestral house, the family silver, and Position No. 2,847 on the Delhi Gymkhana waiting list."

The remarkable thing is that people continue to queue. Not for affordable housing. Not for public healthcare. Not even for concert tickets. For the privilege of paying membership fees to enter a club where the swimming pool is not made of liquid gold, the tennis courts do not guarantee Wimbledon success, and the sandwiches are unlikely to alter the course of human history.

So why the obsession?

Scattered across India's cities stand elegant relics of another age. Gymkhanas. Clubs. Institutes. Associations. Their names sound as though they were approved at a committee meeting held somewhere between the Boer War and the invention of the television.

Inside, time behaves differently. The furniture is old enough to qualify for a pension. Portraits of long-forgotten presidents stare down from the walls.

Dress codes drafted during the reign of King George continue to govern whether one may wear sandals on a Tuesday.

Outside, India races into the future. Inside, someone is still deliberating whether the 1978 dress code standards require updating.

Modern India likes to believe it rewards talent. Study hard. Work hard. Build something. Excel at your craft.

Elite club membership, however, operates on a parallel system: one built on three timeless virtues:

1. Knowing the right people.
2. Knowing people who know the right people.
3. Being descended from people who knew the right people.

The application process is often presented as rigorous: recommendations, committee reviews, background checks, interviews, waiting lists. One imagines candidates are being evaluated for a nuclear submarine programme.

In reality, they are applying for access to a swimming pool and reasonably priced tea.

The Innovation the Members Won't Talk About

The club world has also produced innovations that would make Silicon Valley envious.

When waiting lists the Members Won't Talk About

When waiting lists became inconveniently long, reports emerged of a "green card" system at allowing dependants of existing members special access, effectively preserving the ecosystem of legacy membership. Critics argued it ensured insiders stayed inside while outsiders remained permanently outside.

In other words: the queue existed. It simply wasn't for everyone.

Meanwhile, rule books at institutions like Bombay Gymkhana devote astonishing amounts of attention to shorts, collars, footwear, and dining etiquette, as though the fate of the republic hinges on whether one's shirt has a collar at the bar.

Imagine explaining this to a visitor from another civilisation.

"Welcome to Earth. We have cured diseases, built spacecraft, and connected eight billion people through the internet. However, access to the bar remains conditional on collar status."

Why We All Want In

The greatest irony is not that these clubs exist. It is that everyone wants to join them.

Humans have always loved exclusive groups. As children, we built treehouses and proclaimed: *You can't play with us.* As adults, we build larger treehouses - with golf courses, committee elections, legacy memberships, and a waiting period roughly equivalent to the lifespan of a giant tortoise.

Membership is not really about facilities. It is about belonging. Status. The reassuring knowledge that one has crossed an invisible social rope and entered a world where everybody knows somebody who knows somebody.

In an age where almost everything has become accessible, exclusivity itself has become the luxury product. And nothing advertises exclusivity quite like a waiting list measured in decades.

The modern Indian may loudly denounce colonialism on social media every morning. By evening, many are quietly filling out forms to join institutions whose greatest achievement has been surviving the British Empire's departure.

The British left in 1947. The waiting lists stayed behind and flourished.

The Treehouse Nation

Perhaps that is why India's elite clubs continue to flourish. They are not really clubs. They are adult treehouses, carefully maintained spaces where entry is controlled, tradition is celebrated, and belonging is as often inherited as it is earned.

The signs may no longer read *Europeans Only*. But the spirit of selective access has proven remarkably resilient.

And somewhere, at this very moment, another hopeful applicant is filling out a form, not knowing whether they are applying for membership, or merely reserving a place in line for their grandchildren.

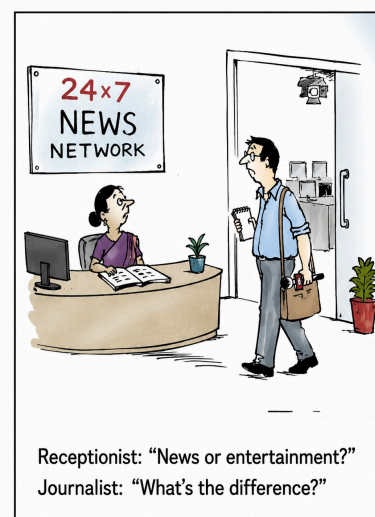
Which is, when you think about it, a very particular kind of optimism.

Elite club membership operates on a parallel system, one built on three timeless virtues:

Knowing the right people.

Knowing people who know the right people.

Being descended from people who knew the right people.



The Exclusive Club Bingo Card

The exclusive club is an ecosystem with its own climate and its own social weather patterns. We present the definitive field checklist. Tick as you go.

Trophy animal on the wall

Not decorative. Historical. That animal was shot by someone important during a period when shooting animals was considered a mark of distinction. It has been watching the dining room ever since.

Portrait of a former president

There are at least four. Nobody can identify all of them. Nobody asks.

Legacy membership mentioned within the first ten minutes

Usually by the member themselves, as a casual aside. The information is offered without prompting and received without surprise.

Cane chair creaks ominously

This is not a defect. This is ambience. The chair has been creaking since 1974 and a replacement has been under committee review since 1987.

Someone wearing a blazer in summer

He is comfortable. He has always been comfortable.

Committee discussing reform

A lively discussion. Many strong opinions. Excellent tea served during the proceedings.

Reform postponed

Unanimously. Until the next meeting, which will be scheduled at the next meeting.

Golf course visible from window

Or a lawn of such immaculate stillness that it implies a golf course nearby.

Waiting list older than the applicant

This is not an anomaly. This is the system working correctly.

"It's always been done this way"

Said with the quiet authority of someone who considers this a complete sentence. It is, here, considered a complete sentence.

Same surnames recurring everywhere

On the honours board. On the portrait wall. On the waiting list. On the membership roll. Occasionally on the suggestion in the untouched suggestions

An open letter from the All-India Cockroach & Parasite Welfare Association

By *Brij Khandelwal*

We, the undersigned; cockroaches, parasites, worms, bugs, bacterias, viruses and assorted members of the misunderstood invertebrate community, wish to lodge a polite but firm protest.

For centuries, whenever humans behaved badly, somebody compared them to us.

Corrupt official? Cockroach. Opportunistic climber/schemer? Parasite. Annoying relative? Leech. Online troll? Vermin.

The newest insult arrived when some citizens, activists and social-media users were reportedly likened to “cockroaches” and “parasites.” We immediately convened an emergency meeting beneath a kitchen sink in Agra’s Tajview complex. Attendance was excellent; though eatables were not rotten enough for our taste. The mood was grim. A veteran cockroach tapped his antenna and asked, “What have we done to deserve this?”

The gathering applauded.

One delegate spoke up with uncomfortable candour. “Unlike many humans,” he said, “we do not spread fake news. We do not organise noisy TV panels to shout at one another. We do not demand VIP parking. We do not jump traffic lights. And we rarely, if ever, traffic in moral panic.”

A parasite from Lucknow added, “And we certainly do not spend our free time abusing

strangers online.” This drew a round of empathetic clicks.

Calling critics “cockroaches” is a curious public-relations strategy. Imagine a husband reassuring his spouse: “Trust me. Also, you are a termite.” Or a principal to pupils: “We value your views. By the way, you are all mosquitoes.” One can’t doubt the confidence-building benefits.

Political rhetoric has long featured a full cast of animals: snakes, vultures, jackals, asses, mules, hyenas and, on occasion, foreign agents. The national zoo has been fully booked for decades. Senior lawyer for parasites, a rainbow guy, said “One might hope constitutional offices would keep a slightly different vocabulary.”

Meanwhile, the cockroach community faces an image crisis. A spokesperson complained, “When someone misappropriates public money, we get blamed. When someone foments division, we get blamed. When someone files a nuisance petition, we get blamed. We are running out of lawyers.”

Let it be said: cockroaches have redeeming qualities. They are resilient; they adapt; they survive even nuclear meltdown. Most importantly, they do not appear nightly on television shouting over one another. That alone earns them respect.

Humans, however, have perfected parasitism as a civic pastime. Some live off taxpayers, some live off outrage, some live off viral trends. Compared with that ecosystem, ordinary parasites are amateurs.

Citizens can be wrong. Activists can be annoying. Journalists can be reckless. Social media can be unbearable. But people remain citizens ; not infestations, not pests.

Democracy Unlimited

Kurrupistan's National Sport: Election Management

By Brij Khandelwal

One election ends. Another crawls out of the EVM, blinking in the fluorescent light, ready to ruin the next eighteen months.

Lord Guddan Pyare, supreme ruler of Kurrupistan, has long maintained that before the ink on voters' fingers even fades, political parties should already be measuring stage sizes, ordering helicopters, and hiring slogan writers with PhDs in emotional blackmail. The man understands his country.

Kurrupistan does not have a government in any conventional sense. It has a 24x7 wedding procession called Election Season, in which loudspeakers scream, flags flutter, convoys roar, and governance quietly slips out through the back door carrying its suitcase.

This is, after all, the only country where potholes survive longer than ideologies.

Yesterday's "destroyers of democracy" are today's "respected coalition partners." **Leaders who once spat fire at each other now share biryani and selfies backstage, united by a coalition agreement** written on a paper napkin and a mutual understanding that principles are optional.

The public, meanwhile, is probably stuck in traffic behind a VIP convoy of twelve SUVs transporting one unemployed promise.

Remove illegal encroachments? Someone's sentiments may get hurt. Stop electricity theft? The transformer may explode, but so will the vote bank. Control pollution? Are you anti-development? Fix population growth? Congratulations — you have offended fourteen communities simultaneously.

Reform agriculture? Farmers angry. Reform labour? Workers angry. Reform education?

Student unions angry. Reform cities? Encroachers angry. Reform bureaucracy? The bureaucracy will reform you right back.

The entire republic, in short, functions like a hostage negotiation where everyone has taken everyone else hostage and no one can remember who called the police.

So governments distribute free electricity, free water, free laptops, free scooters, free pressure cookers, free bus rides, free promises, and free illusions — occasionally bundled with complimentary nationalism at select rallies. The taxpayer receives one gift in return: inflation, reliably delivered, no occasion required. Consider the infrastructure record with fresh eyes and you will either laugh or apply for a foreign visa, possibly both.

The Dragon Country built highways across mountains. Kurrupistan builds committee reports across departments.

The Dragon manufactures electric cars. Kurrupistan manufactures panel discussions.

Entire cities rose in China within a decade. In Kurrupistan, repairing a single drain requires three inaugurations, four PILs, six commissions, and one ribbon-cutting ceremony featuring forty garlands and a coconut.

Our infrastructure projects move like government files wrapped in red ribbon and divine blessing. A metro line announced in one election cycle is inaugurated in the next generation. Roads are dug up with such religious devotion that the excavation itself deserves UNESCO heritage status.

Every city exists in four permanent states simultaneously: under construction, flooded, jammed, and under consideration.

The human cost of all this is not easy to write about without the joke going flat. Engineers driving cabs. Graduates preparing for competitive examinations until their hair turns grey and the examinations change their pattern again. Cities where cows enjoy greater road rights than cyclists. Rivers converted into toxic memory lanes. Footpaths occupied by shops, bikes, garbage, and campaign posters — and occasionally, out of sheer embarrassment, the footpath itself disappears.

What remains is permanent campaign mode. **A civilisation of claimed twenty thousand years, reduced to booth management strategy.**

Panchayat elections bleed into municipal elections, which bleed into state elections, which bleed into by-elections and coalition bargaining and caste engineering and victory processions and defection festivals. The country never quite sleeps because democracy here is a non-stop reality show and somebody always needs to be voted off the island.

Lord Pyare wants Viksit Kurrupistan. But cities choke, rivers die, air damages lungs, and trains overflow.

The tragedy is not democracy. Democracy is precious, and worth defending, and Kurrupistan genuinely believes in it, perhaps too enthusiastically, and far too frequently.

The tragedy is what democracy has been turned into: a circus in which governance appears briefly as a side act, takes a bow, and exits before the hard work begins.

But Lord Pyare remains optimistic.

**We want
to be world champions of
campaigning, he says. And in fairness,
the only industry growing with
perfect consistency in this great land
is banner printing.**

Does Your Cat Have Anxiety Issues?

*Lady Whistledown and her cat musings,
for her dear gentle readers* 🐾



Welcome to my little story from last week. We have a new entrant in the family - Simba, my sister's cat. Which makes me his aunt and him my four-legged nephew, and I have fully accepted this responsibility.

Simba and I have a nightly ritual. We walk around the park in front of the house, and I share stories about my day while he listens from the comfort of his bag or from my arms, because that is the level of luxury he has grown accustomed to.

Seven months old, endlessly curious, sharp-eyed, and absolutely fascinated by people, moving vehicles, and leaves doing literally anything in a tree. He is, as I jokingly tell people, a cat raised in an ivory tower. A complete home cat, not used to the streets. Hence the bag. Also, the neighbourhood dogs and local cats are not what you'd call a welcoming committee.

One such evening, mid-stroll, we ran into a mother-daughter duo who immediately took a liking to him. The daughter asked me several questions — about Simba, about cats, about animals in general. Simba, for his part, was quieter than usual that day, simply watching them with those wide curious eyes.

And then she asked: "Does he have anxiety issues?"

I was truly taken aback. And immediately, my own anxiety shot up. 😊

Do cats have anxiety issues? This I had to investigate. The cat-aunt in me went home, opened Google, and got to work.

Friends, apparently there is an entire checklist for this. Here are some of the highlights:

1. Is your cat hiding constantly and avoiding everyone?
2. Has your cat stopped eating, or lost interest in treats?
3. Does your cat seem unusually scared, clingy, or aggressive?
4. Is your cat over-grooming — licking or scratching excessively?
5. Does your cat pace restlessly, unable to settle anywhere?

More than four ticks and, according to the internet, your cat needs help.

I read through the list slowly. Checked each one against Simba's behaviour.

Phew. Sigh of relief — I didn't tick a single box. Because *my* boxes look

like this:

Eats his food with great enthusiasm and zero apology — ✓
 Chases every creature in the house like it personally offended him — ✓
 Sleeps like a retired landlord with no pending responsibilities — ✓
 Demands attention entirely on his own schedule — ✓
 Considers cuddling a basic human duty owed to him — ✓
 Mentally thriving. Emotionally stable. Fully himself.

But that conversation stayed with me. Because we do seem to be living in an age where everything must have a name tag attached to it. Like solitude? Depression. Enjoy your own company? Introvert. Prefer a quiet life? Chupa rustam. 😊 Don't communicate constantly? Anxiety.

And if you're *not* anxious - are you somehow abnormal?

Live and let live is a long-gone philosophy.

Everything must now come with a tag, a diagnosis, an analysis - and once you have it, you're expected to wear it and display it everywhere.

Simba, thankfully, has received no such tag. He is currently asleep in a patch of sunlight, entirely unbothered, one paw draped over his nose.

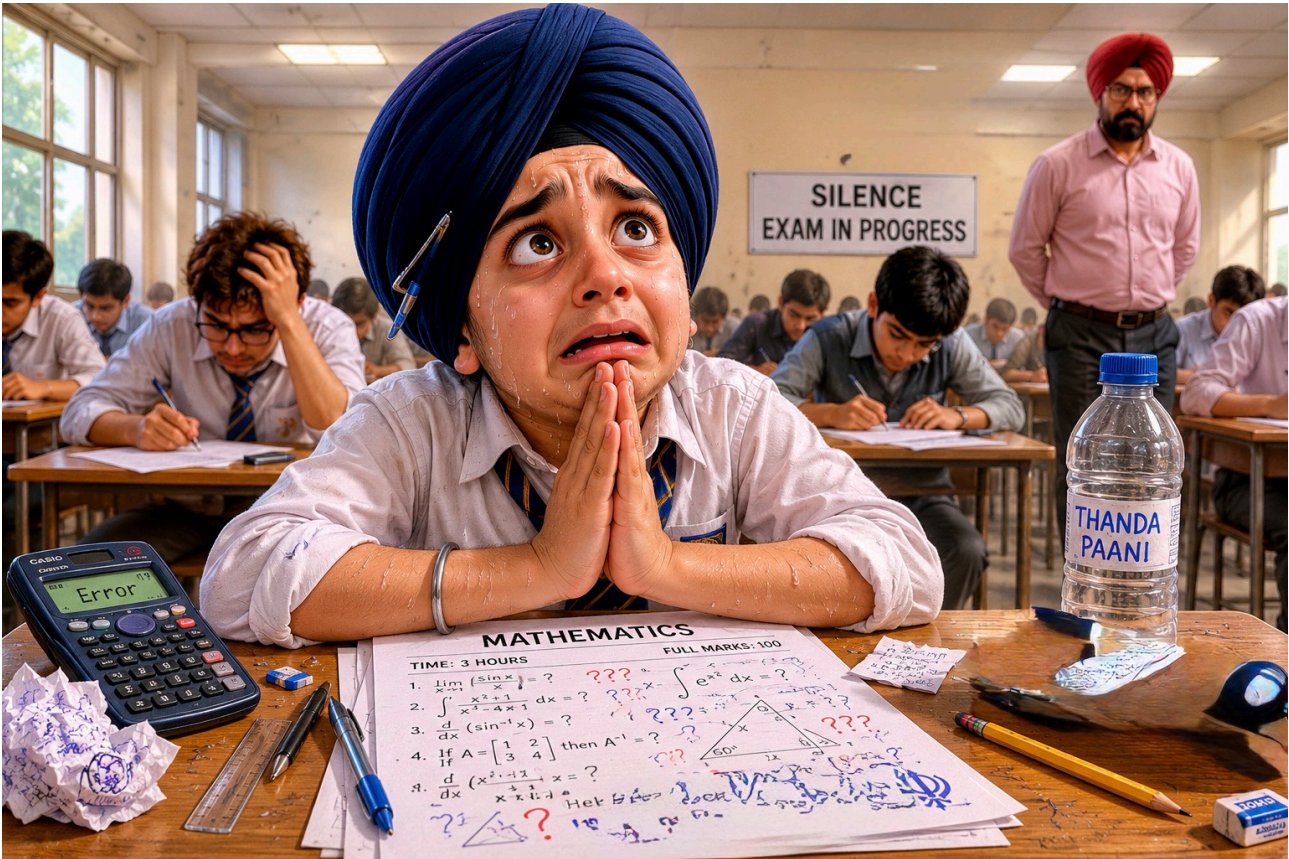
Honestly? I could learn something from that cat.



How to Lose Confidence in 15 Minutes

By Rajinder Singh

Disclaimer: This article is based on real events, emotional damage, and unanswered Questions



The day of my Maths board exam began with the confidence of a warrior and the preparation of a man who had once opened the textbook “for ventilation purposes.” I walked into the examination centre carrying three pens, two admit cards, one transparent pouch, and absolutely no understanding of trigonometry.

Outside the hall, students were revising formulas like stockbrokers during a market crash. One guy casually said, “Bro, if Section B has integration by parts, we’re cooked.”

I didn’t even know we had sections. Another girl was solving equations on her palm like she was decoding nuclear launch codes.

Meanwhile, I was standing there revising the only formula I knew: *Pray = Marks + Miracles*.

The exam started. I looked at the paper. The paper looked back at me. We shared a long,

emotional silence. Somewhere in the distance, I could hear my future packing its bags.

The first question itself was from a chapter I had treated like a distant relative, acknowledged its existence but never interacted with it. Around me, pens were flying across answer sheets with the speed of Formula One cars. Mine was still hovering over Question 1 like a confused helicopter.

Naturally, I turned to the guy in front of me for assistance. Unfortunately, he was one of those toppers who write so fast their hands become invisible. I couldn’t even read his handwriting. It looked less like maths and more like a doctor writing a prescription during turbulence.

Then I tried the girl behind me. She guarded her answer sheet like it contained national secrets. Every time I turned around, she

adjusted her paper with the reflexes of a goalkeeper saving a penalty.

By the second hour, my answer sheet had become a beautiful collection of rough work, cancelled steps, motivational quotes, and desperate calculations like:
 “Let $x = \text{my suffering.}$ ”

At one point, I genuinely considered raising my hand and asking the invigilator if there was a “Skip Ad” button for the exam.

Then came the final thirty minutes, the most dangerous period of human existence. Everyone suddenly became Albert Einstein. Pages were flipping dramatically. Calculators weren’t allowed, but people were solving problems mentally like human supercomputers. One student even asked for an extra sheet. EXTRA SHEET. I was still trying to figure out if Question 5 had numbers or ancient Sanskrit.

The bell rang. Chaos erupted. Students walked out discussing answers loudly:
 “Did you get 17/3?”
 “No bro, it was root 13.”
 “Easy paper honestly.”

Easy? EASY? We apparently wrote two completely different exams. These people had attended a maths board exam. I had survived a psychological thriller. And then came the most terrifying part, meeting friends and family outside the centre.

I immediately activated Survival Mode. First, I pretended to feel dizzy. I staggered dramatically near the gate like a Shakespearean actor who had just been poisoned. Someone offered me water. Another student said, “Maths got him.” Correct. Then, spotting my friends approaching with cheerful faces and functioning brains, I made my move. I suddenly “regained consciousness,” grabbed my bag, and sprinted away from the exam centre with Olympic-level speed before anyone could ask:
 “How was the paper?”

At home, my parents waited eagerly. “How did it go?” they asked. I looked into the distance like a war veteran remembering battlefields.

“Some questions were attempted,” I replied softly. “Some questions... were experienced.” To this day, I believe Maths board exams are not designed to test intelligence.

They are designed to test whether a student can maintain emotional stability while solving for x when x clearly doesn’t want to be found.



The Exam Diet: A Nutritional Guide for the Desperate

Every Indian student discovers the same ancient truth during exam season: glucose biscuits are a food group, Maggi at midnight is self-care, and whatever is nearest requires no justification.

The study table transforms into a shrine - chips, chocolate, cold coffee, and the occasional fruit placed there by a mother who still believes in vegetables.

Hunger arrives precisely when the chapter is longest. Fullness arrives precisely when the paper begins.

Nutritionists recommend brain foods: almonds, fish, leafy greens.

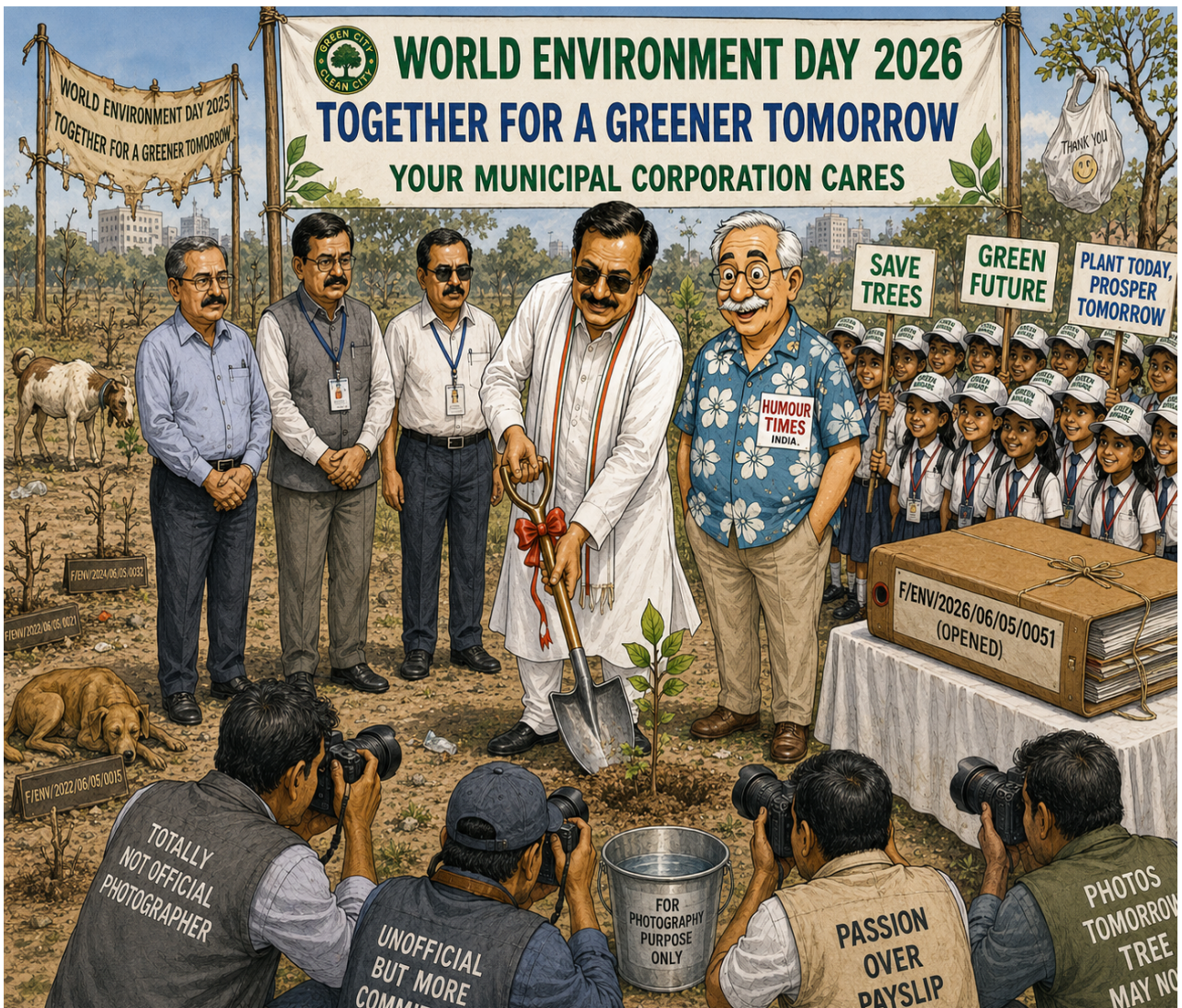
Students recommend whatever can be eaten with one hand while highlighting with the other.

The syllabus remains unfinished. The snacks do not.

The Official Diary of Sapling No. F/ENV/ 2025/06/05/0047

A personal record of existence, commenced on World Environment Day and maintained in accordance with standard government documentation protocols

By Mukta k Gupta



**Submitted by: One (1) Peepal Sapling,
Municipal Ward 14, Sector 7 | Status: Pending
Review**

**Date: 05/06/2025 | Subject: Commencement
of Life, Public Sector Division**

Officially planted today at 10:47 AM in the presence of one Minister (Additional Charge: Tourism, Textiles),

three Additional Deputy Commissioners with unclear portfolios, four photographers (unofficial but more committed than the official one), forty schoolchildren briefed on their role but not on the sun exposure involved, and one

journalist writing something on his phone, possibly unrelated.

The Minister held the ceremonial shovel for six minutes and forty seconds. The shovel had no prior professional experience. Photographs were taken from seven angles. One will be framed.

The undersigned was described as "our gift to future generations." Water provided: one (1) bucket.

File opened. Forwarded to concerned department.

Date: 06/06/2025 | Subject: Status Update — Day 2

No visitors. No water. The adjacent flex banner reads: THIS CITY IS GOING GREEN — YOUR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION CARES.

The banner is not biodegradable.

Awaiting action from concerned department.

Date: 10/06/2025 | Subject: Formal Request for Water — First Notice

Developments since planting: one goat visited (outcome: inconclusive). One plastic bag has taken up residence six inches to the left and does not appear to be leaving. The protective wire mesh has been removed - current location unknown. The nameplate reading *Together For A Greener Tomorrow* has fallen over.

This is not a complaint. This is a gentle reminder.

Action required: Urgent. Estimated response time: —

Date: 20/06/2025 | Subject: Second Notice

Two leaves yellowing. One leaf has submitted its resignation.

The undersigned notes, for the record, that the neem tree fifteen feet away - planted without ceremony by a retired schoolteacher who

waters it every morning before 7 AM - is doing extremely well. No comment on this observation is being made at this time.

Date: 01/08/2025 | Subject: Intimation of Likely File Closure

One leaf remains.

The undersigned arrived on the 5th of June with reasonable prospects and a ministerial pat on the head. It departs having received: one (1) bucket of water, one (1) ceremonial pat, zero (0) follow-up visits, one (1) plastic bag as a neighbour, and seven (7) territorial visits from a dog.

The grievance portal has been under maintenance since March.

Responsibility: Shared equally across all concerned departments, which ensures it belongs to none.

Date: 05/06/2026 | Subject: Notification of New Arrival — For Record

[Submitted by an independent observer.]

A new sapling — F/ENV/2026/06/05/0051 — was planted eight inches from the final resting place of F/ENV/2025/06/05/0047. The Minister (Additional Charge: Tourism, Textiles, and this year also Civil Aviation) held the shovel for seven minutes and twelve seconds. One (1) bucket of water was provided. The new sapling has been described as "our gift to future generations."

The new sapling appears optimistic.

File F/ENV/2025/06/05/0047: Closed. File F/ENV/2026/06/05/0051: Opened. System: Functioning as designed.

The views expressed are entirely those of the sapling and do not represent the official position of any municipal corporation, which remains deeply committed to a greener tomorrow.



Dear Gyanwati Aunty,

I spent two years preparing for NEET. I solved thousands of questions, attended coaching classes, sacrificed sleep, social life and happiness. Then the paper leaked. What is the point of hard work in this country?

— Disillusioned Doctor-to-Be, Kota

Dear Beta,

You are looking at the situation all wrong. Your preparation has not gone to waste.

The NEET examination is no longer testing Biology. It is preparing students for real life in India.

You have already learned resilience, uncertainty, crisis management and how to remain calm while systems collapse around you.

These are valuable skills for a future doctor. The leaked paper was merely an unexpected practical examination.

Blessings,
Gyanwati Aunty

Dear Gyanwati Aunty,

My husband is depressed. After reading a news report from France, he insists that we buy a donkey because donkey therapy improves mental health. I want a goat instead because at least the goat can provide milk for the children. Please settle this dispute.

— Confused Wife, Coimbatore

Dear Beti,

The answer is obvious. Buy both. The donkey can improve your husband's mental health.

The goat can improve the children's nutrition. And once your husband sees the monthly expenses involved in maintaining two additional animals, his depression will be replaced by anxiety.

Thus the treatment cycle will remain active.

Besides, if things become financially difficult, the goat can contribute milk. The donkey, on the other hand, can always stand for elections.

Blessings,
Gyanwati Aunty

Dear Gyanwati Aunty,

I am a leech. For centuries, my family has survived by attaching itself to others and living off their blood. Watching recent developments, I feel our community has been unfairly stereotyped. Can leeches start a political party of their own?

— Aspirational Leech, Swamp No. 7

Dear Child,

You are several centuries too late. Many organisations have already cornered that market.

However, do not lose hope. Every democracy benefits from diversity.

If you do launch a party, I suggest the slogan:

"Why suck blood indirectly when we can do it transparently?" The challenge will be finding members. Most qualified candidates are already occupied elsewhere.

Blessings,
Gyanwati Aunty

ऐसी जंग जिसमें न कोई हारा, न कोई जीता

बृज खंडेलवाल द्वारा

फरवरी में जब जंग छिड़ी तो सबसे पहले कॉमन सेंस ने छुट्टी ले ली। हकीकत कहीं कोने में बैठ गई और बेवजह जीत के जश्न शुरू हो गए। अजीब दौर है। बम गिरते हैं, शहर जलते हैं, लेकिन हर पक्ष खुद को फतहयाब घोषित कर देता है।

अमेरिका किसी हॉलीवुड सुपरहीरो की तरह मैदान में उतरा। कुछ अरबों डॉलर के बम गिराए, कुछ सख्त बयान दिए और फिर धुआं छोड़कर ऐसे निकल गया जैसे कोई जादूगर अपना आखिरी करतब दिखाकर गायब हो जाए।

ईरान ने भी मलबे के बीच खड़े होकर ऐलान किया, "हमने दुश्मन को सबक सिखा दिया।" हालत उस मुक्केबाज जैसी थी जिसे रिंग में खूब मार पड़ी हो, मगर फैसला आते ही वह हाथ उठाकर जीत का दावा कर दे। आजकल शायद यही नया पैमाना है। बच गए तो जीत गए।

यूक्रेन के राष्ट्रपति ज़ेलेंस्की अब भी उम्मीद की दुकान खोले बैठे हैं। चार साल से जंग जारी है, मगर उनका जज़्बा कम नहीं हुआ। आग लगी है, धुआं उठ रहा है, लेकिन मुस्कान कायम है। दुनिया में अगर किसी चीज़ का उत्पादन बढ़ा है तो वह यूक्रेनी आशावाद है।

रूस ने हिसाब लगाया और मुस्कुरा दिया। तेल बिक रहा है, गैस बह रही है और युद्ध भी कारोबार का हिस्सा बन गया है। मॉस्को में शायद तोपों से ज्यादा कैलकुलेटर चल रहे हैं।

सऊदी अरब आराम से तमाशा देख रहा है। बिना पसीना बहाए खेल उसके पक्ष में जाता दिखा। शतरंज की बिसात बिछी और बादशाह ने बिना हाथ हिलाए बाजी मार ली।

तुर्की ने मौका देखकर फिर नेतृत्व का दावा ठोक दिया। दुनिया का हर संकट उसे अपना परिचय

देने का सुनहरा अवसर लगता है। बयान ऐसे आते हैं जैसे ऑस्कर मंच पर स्वीकृति भाषण दिया जा रहा हो।

यूरोप ने राहत की सांस ली। उन्हें बस यह तसल्ली थी कि सर्दियों में हीटर चलते रहेंगे। नैतिकता को फिलहाल छुट्टी पर भेज दिया गया। आखिर गैस और बिजली भी कोई छोटी चीज़ नहीं।

इज़राइल के चेहरे पर सबसे चौड़ी मुस्कान थी। जो लोग कल तक ऊंची आवाज़ में बोल रहे थे, वे अचानक खामोश हो गए। राजनीति में इस खामोशी को अक्सर "स्थायी शांति" कहकर बेचा जाता रहा है।

पाकिस्तान ने भी हालात में खुशी ढूंढ ली। अर्थव्यवस्था लड़खड़ा रही थी, मगर सड़क का फलसफा साफ था, "भाई, डीजल अभी आसमान नहीं छू रहा, यही काफी है।" कम उम्मीदें रखने का हुनर शायद इसी को कहते हैं।

दुनिया भर के न्यूज चैनलों ने "तीसरा विश्व युद्ध" नामक महा-सीरियल चला दिया। डरावना संगीत, लाल पट्टियां, चीखते एंकर और तथ्यों का जनाजा। टीआरपी आसमान पर थी और पत्रकारिता जमीन पर।

और अब अपने हिंदुस्तान की बात।

कांग्रेस कैमरों का इंतजार कर रही थी। समाजवादी पार्टी के कार्यकर्ता रचनात्मक प्रयोगों में लगे थे। सोशल मीडिया के योद्धाओं ने रातों-रात नए विश्व गुरुओं की घोषणा कर दी। बेचारे तथ्य किसी सुरक्षित देश में राजनीतिक शरण मांगते फिर रहे थे।

और हम आम भारतीय?

हम हमेशा की तरह खुश और कन्फ्यूज थे। न पूरी जानकारी, न कोई स्पष्ट पक्ष, मगर जश्न में शामिल होने का पूरा उत्साह। आखिर जब दुनिया का हर मुल्क खुद को विजेता बता रहा है, तो हम क्यों पीछे रहें?

डींगें हांकना मुफ्त मनोरंजन है। जंग खत्म हुई या सिर्फ विराम पर है, यह कोई नहीं जानता।

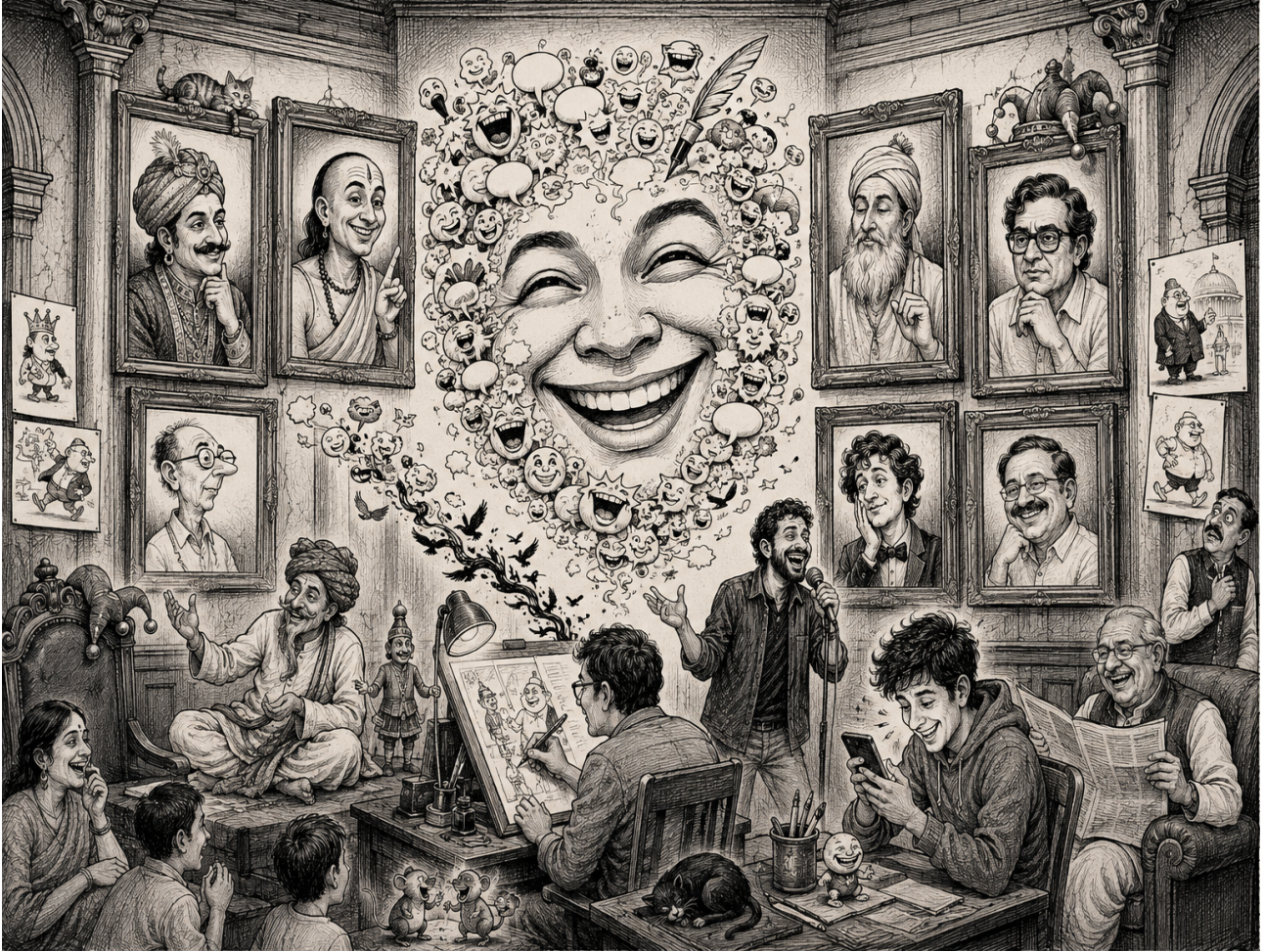
मगर खुशी ट्रेंड कर रही है।



हंसी का भारत

ठहाकों में छिपी तहज़ीब, तंज में लिपटी सच्चाई

नाचीज़ अकबराबादी द्वारा



हंसी 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।

भारत जितना विविध है, उसकी हंसी भी उतनी ही बहुरंगी है। भाषा बदलती है, लहजा बदलता है, पर व्यंग्य का तीर वही रहता है। कहीं यह सीधे सीने में उतरता है, कहीं धीरे से चुभता है। यही उसकी ताकत है। यही उसकी खूबसूरती।

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 बेतुकी 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।

और फिर आया व्यंग्य का वह रूप, जिसने सीधी टक्कर ली। पंचतंत्र की कहानियों में जानवरों के जरिए इंसानों की पोल खोली गई। अंग्रेजों के दौर में 'अवध पंच' जैसे प्रकाशनों ने कलम को हथियार बनाया। कार्टून और कविताओं में साम्राज्य और उसके पिढुओं की खबर ली गई।

आज यह परंपरा नए मंचों पर जिंदा है। स्टैंडअप कॉमेडी, सोशल मीडिया, मीम्स। फर्क सिर्फ इतना है कि मंच बदल गया है, इरादा नहीं। भ्रष्टाचार पर तंज आज भी उतना ही असरदार है, जितना कभी दरबार में था।

कार्टूनिंग इस विरासत का जीवंत उदाहरण है। R. K. Laxman का 'कॉमन मैन' कुछ नहीं कहता था, फिर भी सब कह जाता था। खामोश चेहरा, पर भीतर पूरा देश बोलता था। आज Satish Acharya जैसे कलाकार उसी परंपरा को डिजिटल युग में आगे बढ़ा रहे हैं। Rachita Taneja अपनी कॉमिक्स के जरिए जटिल मुद्दों को आसान बनाती हैं। हंसी यहां अब भी लोकतंत्र का आईना है। यह चुभती है, पर तोड़ती नहीं। यह सवाल पूछती है, पर जवाब थोपती नहीं। और शायद यही भारत की हंसी की असली पहचान है। यह जोड़ती है, तोड़ती नहीं। यह सिखाती है, बिना उपदेश दिए। यह चोट करती है, पर मरहम भी साथ लाती है।

ठहाका यहां सिर्फ आवाज नहीं है। यह एक विचार है। एक परंपरा है। एक प्रतिरोध है।

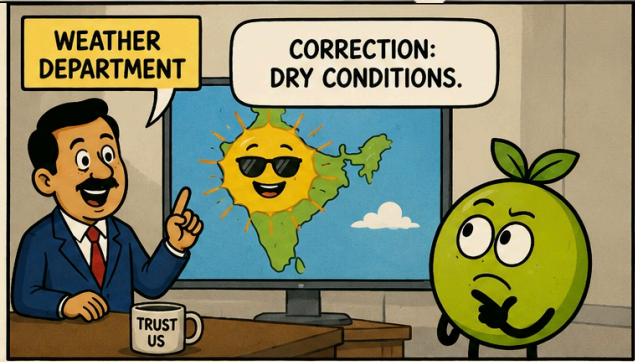
और जब अगली बार कोई चुटकुला सुनकर आप हंसें, तो जरा ठहरिए।

हो सकता है, वह सिर्फ मजाक न हो।

हो सकता है, वह सच बोल रहा हो।

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।

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