

# HUMOUR TIMES

JEST FOR FUN!

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## VOTE POLITICS OF FOOD IN INDIA

FROM KITCHEN TO CAMPAIGN,  
FOOD FEEDS MORE THAN HUNGER.



WHAT WE EAT. HOW WE VOTE.  
THE RECIPE OF DEMOCRACY.



# FROM THE LEMON SQUEEZER'S DESK

## April 2026: The Month That Kept on Giving

*Dear Reader,*

April, they say, is the cruellest month. T.S. Eliot clearly had a subscription.

Where do we even begin?

Internationally, Iran spent April firing ballistic missiles at Qatar, hitting a QatarEnergy oil tanker, while simultaneously the Iranian president wrote a letter to the American people suggesting diplomacy was still possible. Nothing says “let’s talk” quite like a burning tanker.

By mid-month, cooler heads prevailed, though peace talks remained stalled, with Iran insisting the U.S. lift its blockade as a condition for negotiations. Standoff, but make it theatrical.

On a more hopeful note, NASA’s Artemis II crew broke the record for the furthest humans have ever been from Earth, swinging over 252,000 miles around the far side of the Moon, the furthest any human has travelled since 1972. Getting away from Earth is once again aspirational. Can’t blame them.

Back home, India had quite the month. The BJP won a majority in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, ending Mamata Banerjee’s 15-year reign. No one, not even Didi, gets to keep Bengal forever.

Meanwhile, the Delimitation Bill proposing to expand Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 850 failed to pass, proof that Parliament has its limits, even if those limits are precisely 543 seats.

And then there was Raghav Chadha. The man who once called the BJP a “party of illiterate goons” and patron of criminals quietly joined said party in April, bringing along two other AAP Rajya Sabha MPs for company. His wife, Parineeti Chopra, was unavailable for comment. His old quotes, however, were very much available, and doing the rounds with considerable enthusiasm.

Finally, two separate fireworks factory explosions rocked Tamil Nadu and Kerala within days of each other, killing dozens. A reminder that some punchlines write themselves, and some, heartbreakingly, should never have been written at all.

Stay sharp. Stay laughing. It’s the only sane response.

— *The Editor, Humour Times*





# The Ballot Box is in the Kitchen

By Mukta K Gupta

**A** brief, delicious, and occasionally violent history of how India votes with its stomach.

There is a theory, popular among political scientists, that elections are decided by ideology, economic policy, charismatic leadership, and the mobilisation of social coalitions. There is another theory, less popular among political scientists but considerably more accurate, that elections in India are decided by the price of onions.

## The Holy Trinity: TOP

Before we go further, you must know about TOP. Not a spy thriller. Not a Bollywood item number. TOP is the acronym — Tomato, Onion, Potato — that Narendra Modi coined at a 2018 election rally to declare that farmers were his government’s “top priority.”

It was a clever bit of wordplay. Unfortunately, it also accidentally created a checklist that opposition parties would spend the next six years ticking off every time prices of any of the three vegetables crossed acceptable limits.



### 1980: The Garland That Won an Election

When Indira Gandhi launched her political comeback in 1980, she did not wave a manifesto. She waved a garland of onions. At rally after rally, she held up the strung bulbs as evidence of the Janata government's failure to manage food prices. She called it the "onion election." She won in a landslide. The first non-Congress government in independent India fell, partly because onions hit ₹6 a kilo, which, yes, was genuinely alarming in 1981.

In the Rajya Sabha that year, Lok Dal's Rameshwaram Singh walked in wearing a garland of onions to protest rising prices. The Chairman of the House, M. Hidayatullah, looked at him and said, unmoved: "Let's see what you'll wear when the prices of tyres go up."

### 1998: The Onion That Ended a Government

Onion prices in Delhi rose from ₹9 a kilo to ₹50 in the months before the December 1998 Delhi assembly elections. The BJP's central government watched, did nothing of substance, and then watched some more. The satirist Jaspal Bhatti arrived at a market in Chandigarh flanked by black-cat commandos, explaining that a commodity this precious deserved exceptional protection. He then organised a fashion show where models walked the ramp wearing onions.

The BJP lost Delhi. Sheila Dikshit of Congress swept in and stayed for fifteen years. It was a ₹50 vegetable, and it governed the capital's political trajectory for a decade and a half. Congress MP Chhagan Bhujbal, in a gesture of seasonal good humour, sent a box of onions to BJP's Maharashtra CM Manohar Joshi for Diwali.

The accompanying note explained that since onions were the most precious thing available that year, it was the appropriate gift.

Joshi was forced to arrange subsidised onions at ₹15 a kilo for ration card holders. This is what political satire looks like when it has actual consequences.

### 2013: Modi Sharpens His Onions

Onion prices hit ₹100 a kilo in parts of north India in August 2013. India floated tenders to import onions from Pakistan, Egypt, and China. At a campaign rally, Modi said: "There were bets on whether Sachin would score a century or the price of onions."

The Congress-led UPA was routed in Delhi and Rajasthan state elections that year.

Five years later, when tomatoes rose to ₹200 a kilo, BJP activists sold onions outside party offices in Delhi for a third of market price and gifted bags of them to women on Raksha Bandhan.

### The Tomato's Brief, Fiery Political Career

The tomato is a newcomer to Indian electoral politics. The onion has decades of seniority. But in the summer of 2023, the tomato made a bid for the record books. Prices hit ₹200 in July, ₹350 in some cities by August. McDonald's briefly removed the tomato from its burgers. This was the moment Indians understood that something had gone genuinely wrong.

In Uttar Pradesh, a man hired two bouncers to stand guard over his tomato cart. He described it as a security arrangement appropriate to the value of the merchandise.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav declared in the state assembly, with magnificent timing, that the BJP government should provide "Z Plus security" to tomatoes. Yadav then went further, noting that tomato prices had made Yogi Adityanath go "red in the face." It may be the finest vegetable-based legislative insult in recorded parliamentary history.

## The Potato Dialogues

The potato is different from the onion and the tomato. The onion makes governments fall. The tomato makes politicians blush. The potato, uniquely, made a politician the subject of a national joke, and also, via a remarkable act of rhyming genius, made another politician immortal.

Lalu and the Samosa: The Greatest Political Slogan Ever Coined

*“Jab tak rahega samose mein aloo, Tab tak rahega Bihar mein Lalu.”*

(“As long as there is potato in samosas, Lalu will be CM of Bihar.”)

This slogan did not appear in any party manifesto. It was not designed by a political consultant. It emerged, as all great slogans do, from the streets, a folk verdict on a politician so rooted in his terrain that to separate him from Bihar felt as absurd as a *samosa* without potato filling. Lalu Prasad Yadav governed Bihar for a decade. The slogan governed longer. No food item, in the entire history of Indian electioneering, has been more elegantly deployed.

## The Aloo-Sona Saga: A Misinformation Masterpiece

In November 2017, a twenty-second clip from Rahul Gandhi's campaign speech in Patan, Gujarat went viral. In it, Gandhi appeared to say:

*“Aisi machine lagaunga, iss side se aaloo ghusega, uss side se sona niklega”*

“I will install a machine where potato goes in one side and gold comes out the other.”

For years afterward, Rahul Gandhi was asked about potato machines at press conferences. The BJP printed it on posters. Modi referenced it from the dais with visible enjoyment.

By 2024, when someone placed potatoes in front of Gandhi at a rally, he looked at them calmly and said: “Next time, gold.”

## Beef — When the Plate Becomes the Battlefield

If the previous three items are about kitchen economics, beef is about something older and sharper: identity, caste, religion, and who gets to decide what goes on your plate.

The BJP put a promise in its 1996 election manifesto to impose “a complete ban on the slaughter of cows, calves, bulls and bullocks.” In 2014, candidate BJP accused the Congress government of having orchestrated a “pink revolution”, a boom in India's meat exports, which had made the country the world's largest exporter of bovine products.. That the exported product was technically buffalo meat - carabeef, not beef from cows - was a distinction that disappeared rapidly in the heat of campaign rhetoric.

After the 2017 UP election, the newly installed CM Yogi Adityanath clamped down on slaughterhouses across the state. Vegetable prices in Lucknow skyrocketed, because the chicken and goat sellers, in solidarity or in fear, downed their shutters too. An elected government had, through a policy about meat, caused a crisis in vegetables. This is Indian electoral food politics at its most surreal.

Meanwhile, in the northeast, where the BJP was trying to expand, the calculus was entirely different. In Meghalaya, a BJP leader promised to lower beef prices and throw a “rice beer and beef party” to celebrate the government. In Mizoram, the state BJP chief clarified that as per the Bible, eating beef was permitted. The party had, effectively, a two-menu approach to the same ideology, depending on the longitude.

## Bengal 2026 — The Full Thali Campaign

India's most elaborate food-as-politics performance of the current era unfolded in West Bengal. The ₹10 Jhalmuri That Shook the Establishment.

On a campaign swing through Jhargram, Prime Minister Modi's convoy made an unscheduled stop. The PM stepped out, walked up to a roadside stall, and asked the vendor, in Bengali-inflected Hindi, *“Bhai, apka jhalmuri khilao, kitna? Accha se bana do.”* (“Brother, treat me to your jhalmuri. How much? Make it tasty.”)

He handed over ₹10. He insisted the vendor accept the money. He asked for everything in it except salt, which he avoids for health reasons. The photo went on his X handle. The vendor was bewildered. The internet exploded.

In Bengal, there is a phrase: *"jhalmurir thonga hoe geche"* roughly, "it's become a jhalmuri packet" used to describe yesterday's news, the disposable sensation, the thing that wraps tomorrow's snack. The TMC immediately deployed this framing against the moment itself. "It's all drama," said Mamata Banerjee the next day. "How come a camera was present when the Prime Minister suddenly made an unscheduled stop? The entire episode was scripted. He was seen carrying a ₹10 note in his pocket."

Modi ate a slightly bland jhalmuri, observers noted the preparation was minimalist, and created the most-discussed snack of the 2026 election cycle.

### The Man Who Campaigned with a Fish

While Modi was busy with puffed rice, BJP candidate Sharadwat Mukherjee was doing something more direct in Bidhannagar. He went door to door canvassing voters while carrying a large 5-kg Catla fish. When he folded his hands in greeting, the Catla swung from its hook. His message was explicit: a BJP government would never interfere with your fish, your mutton, or your chicken. He was, essentially, a manifesto with fins.

At Modi's Brigade rally in Kolkata, the BJP permitted organisers to cook and serve dim bhaat egg curry and rice to the crowd. Party spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya went on record to note that the late PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee had been fond of fish.

### The MSP When the Price of Food Becomes the Price of a Vote (Every Single Election)

The MSP is the floor price the government guarantees farmers for their crops. Before every major

election cycle, the government announces MSP hikes. Before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, MSPs for kharif crops were raised across the board, paddy, moong, sesame, cotton. Farmers noted that the government had done nothing for months before the election committee's recommendations; the increases arrived with impeccable electoral timing.

The 2020-21 farmer protests, which blockaded Delhi for over a year and forced the repeal of three farm laws, were fundamentally about this. The demand was simple: give MSP legal teeth. The government resisted. It eventually repealed the Farm Bills, announcing the decision, with characteristic symbolism, on the morning of Gurpurab.

Indian elections have opinion polls, exit polls, and psephologists with spreadsheets. But the oldest and most reliable indicator is none of these. It is the vegetable market.

When onions hit ₹50, governments fall. When tomatoes hit ₹200, opposition parties get their best material. When a samosa costs more because of the aloo inside it, Bihar pays attention. When beef becomes a manifesto item, it is no longer about food, it is about who belongs and who doesn't, whose hunger is legitimate and whose is a threat.

In India, you do not eat outside of politics. You eat with politics, seasoned by it, priced by it, sometimes policed by it.





## Kurrupistan Votes: All Exit Polls Prove Right Again

The Ruler, Lord Guddan Pyare, has been elected with 99.9% of votes; one short because he and his large family abstained to appear neutral.

By Brij Khandelwal

In Kurrupistan, they don't trust machines. Ballot papers with invisible ink, specially manufactured in Yousore, were used in the recently concluded elections.

Once the voters of Kurrupistan had spoken (loudly, clearly, and in perfect unison, like a well-rehearsed school band under the strict supervision of a retired military bugler), a dozen teams of soothsayers, psephologists, political drum-beaters, and sleepy specialists were unleashed to entertain TV audiences. The ten-day gap until counting day proved a profitable opportunity for advertisers, as

cricket matches failed to attract eyeballs this time. The nation glued itself to the most irrelevant oracles: exit polls, thanks to loudmouthed anchors whose penchant for non-serious engagement with collar mics and teleprompters is an open secret.

And oh boy, what a spectacle!

At exactly 6 p.m., as polling booths shut and samosa consumption hit peak levels, every news channel erupted into synchronised hysteria. Anchors, with veins popping and decibel levels threatening public safety,

declared what citizens already knew but pretended not to: the Supreme Leader was set for a historic mandate. “How historic?” you dare ask.

Well, according to "Taxis My Nation Ultra Pro Max," the Leader was winning 99.9% of votes, with a margin of error of  $\pm 0.1\%$  treason.

Another agency, Yesterday's Bhanakya Reloaded (Now with NI: Natural Intelligence), offered a more cautious estimate: between 99.8% and 100%, depending on whether the last voter pissed off due to fear or joy while marking the already-stamped ballot. (For safety reasons, they skip ink pads.)

Exit polls are astrology for data-driven souls who wish to exit this world! In Kurrupistan, they're not mere surveys, they're a spiritual experience. Pollsters roam outside booths like modern-day ash-smeared Naga Babas, peering not into palms but into reluctant faces. They ask profound questions: Did you have a good laugh today? Are you happy? Is someone watching us right now?

The answers, naturally, are consistent.  
 “Yes.”  
 “Yes.”  
 “Yes.”

One pollster in the Meerutistan region tried digging deeper. He whispered to a voter, “Sir, honestly, what's your choice?” The voter smiled nervously. “Beta, this isn't part of the syllabus here.”

The Great Voter Silence or Survival Strategy, has confused both stargazers and Pranboy Roys.

TV experts say 70% of voters refused to respond. This sparked intense debate. Arnab

demanded the nation know: Are voters shy? Confused? Or practicing a nationwide maun vrat until results? A public TV reporter quoted one elderly gentleman adjusting his kurta: “Why should I tell you? Last time I told the truth, I started receiving power and water bills.”

Another voter was more philosophical: “In Kurrupistan, silence isn't golden. It's... advisable.” We treat facts as an avoidable nuisance. For wholesome entertainment, creative speculation rules. Meanwhile, TV studios in the capital turned into circus arenas.

Anchor (shouting): “Is this the biggest mandate in human history?!”

Ruling Party Spokesperson: “Absolutely! The people love stability, progress, and fear.”

Opposition Spokesperson (smiling bravely): “These exit polls are imaginary. We're winning 120% of seats.”

Data Expert (adjusting glasses): “Our model shows a clear trend... that numbers can be arranged creatively.”

After three hours of debate, one conclusion emerged: No one heard anything. But everyone felt very informed.

Every agency predicted a landslide. One bold outfit even predicted a “moral victory for democracy.” (Seat counts don't matter.)

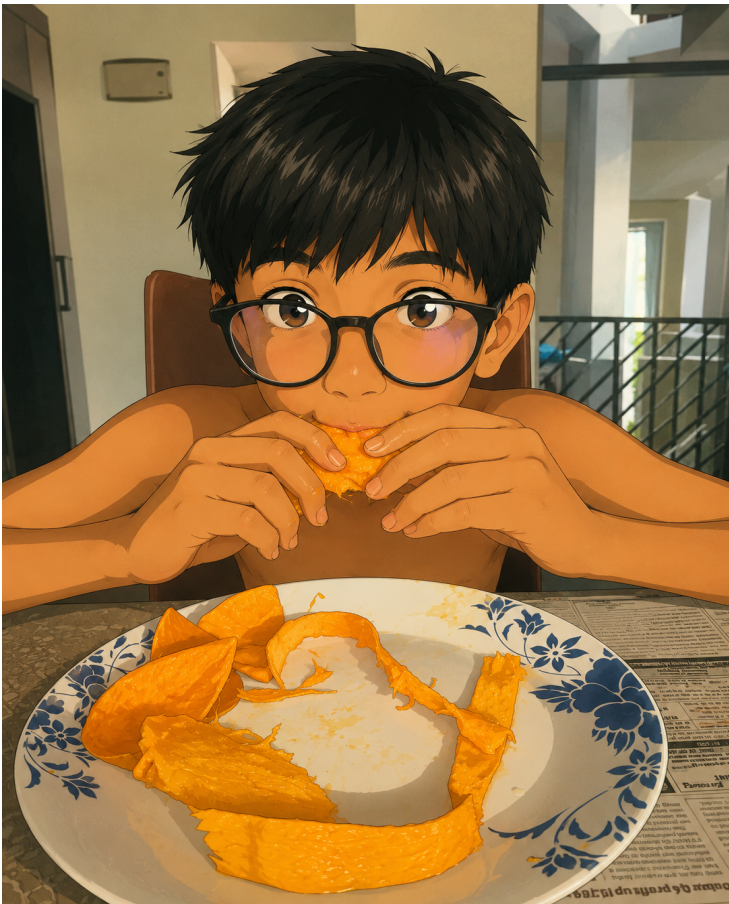
An average of all Kurrupistan exit polls shows:

- 87% accuracy
  - 12% overconfidence
  - 1% accidental truth
- Margin of error:  $\pm$  reality.

And as the nation sleeps, one final prediction echoes through the corridors of power: “A people get the government they deserve.”

# WHAT YOUR MANGO-EATING HABIT SAYS ABOUT YOU

By Veer Al Gupta



**I**t is mango season! A time where all Indians come out of hibernation and get up and get some mangoes.

Yes you heard me right! The sweet, juicy, and overpriced mangoes everyone knows and loves.

But that is only one similar thing about the mango season. What is more interesting is how people eat it. This tells us a lot about their personality, and these are the different types of mango eaters:

**The hoarders:** These guys eat mangoes like it is the end of the world, you ask them to share it's always the same answer "no", however, it also tells us these are the type of people that are most likely to advise you on your diet plan.

**The messy eaters:** These people either love getting messy or love being judged, these are the type of people that live just for the vibes.

**The cleaners:** These people will eat their mango like it's the last one of their lives. It tells us that these are perfectionists and silent judges of the world.

**The Aam Choosnas:** These people are either VIPs or the people that see life as sunshine and rainbows they either have all the time in the world or the opposite, but the two opposites unite just to eat mangoes like this.

**The non-mango eaters:** The people that do this are looking for attention and want to stand out, it's either that or they secretly love mangoes but are too lazy to buy them.

And that's the mango eaters for you.



## DIGITAL CULTURE · GENERATIONAL MYTHOLOGY · CONTENT ECONOMY

### The Grandmum Upgrade

She survived a tyrannical mother-in-law, and forty years of making chai at 4 am. Now she has a ring light, a dastarkhaan, and 2.3 million subscribers. Meet the new-age dadi of the internet.

## A COMPLETELY UNSOLICITED CULTURAL AUDIT

Between the collapse of the joint family system and the rise of Instagram Reels, the Indian grandmother got a rebrand. She did not ask for it. She did not need it. But Gen Z, found her in the kitchen and said: dadi, you are content.

And dadi, bless her, agreed.

Now she sits in a freshly starched cotton saree, ochre, always ochre, it photographs beautifully against terracotta walls, and speaks in a voice that sounds like rain on a tin roof and old *ghee* on a hot tawa. She talks about *dal gosht* the way poets talk about heartbreak. She calls the kitchen a *khaansama's* domain. She spreads a *dastarkhaan* with the ceremony of a state dinner.

The comments section weeps.

*"Nobody is calling their mother for the recipe anymore. They are watching a grandmother they have never met tell them that the secret ingredient is patience, and that their generation has none of it."*

### AN OBSERVATION, NOT A COMPLIMENT

The grandmother on YouTube is a different species altogether. She is well put together. Her silver hair is neat without looking styled, a considerable achievement that requires considerable styling. Her kitchen is clean in a way that no kitchen used for actual cooking has ever been clean. The utensils are copper or brass, photographed with the reverence of museum artefacts. The whole aesthetic reads: we were poor but we had grace. We were limited but we had culture. We had no dishwasher, but we had a *dastarkhaan*, and that, dear child,

is worth more than your Zomato subscription.

*"The past is only romantic from a distance. Up close, it smelled of kerosene, involved a great deal of squatting, and the women doing the squatting were not being filmed."*

### INCONVENIENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Here is the thing about struggle that the internet finds most useful: it must photograph well. The hardship of the *humare zamane mein* grandmother must be the kind that looks, in retrospect, like wisdom. It must be the kind of hardship that produced character, produced recipes, produced grandchildren who now have the cultural credibility to run a successful channel about it.

What it must not be is the hardship that was actually hard. The mother-in-law who did not let her daughter-in-law sit in the living room when guests came. The husband who handled the money and handed over just enough for provisions, not one rupee more. The dreams - nursing, teaching, singing, any of the above - that were set aside not with drama but with the quiet, total efficiency of a door being closed. The silence that was not wisdom but the particular silence of women who had learned that speech was expensive.

None of this is in the content. The content has saffron milk and silver *katoris* and a grandmother laughing at something just off-camera. **The content has the recipe. The content does not have the cost of the recipe.**

The comments section, populated entirely by people who cannot be present for more than four minutes without checking their phone, finds this deeply moving. Nobody points out that the grandmother who actually used the *sil batta* every single day for forty years has carpal tunnel and a bad knee. That information does not serve the narrative.

## THE IRONY, FULLY PLATED

These channels are watched most enthusiastically on phones, in transit, at speed, between tasks, by people who will order dinner online twenty minutes later. The algorithm, optimised for watch time, not wisdom, is the very opposite of everything the grandmother is describing. She is speaking of slowness. The medium is built for the opposite. Nobody mentions this.

It would be easy, too easy, and therefore wrong, to simply call this cynical. Some of it is genuinely lovely. Some grandmothers are genuinely extraordinary, genuinely funny, genuinely worth listening to. The recipes are real. The warmth is real. The grief that younger generations feel for a connection they sense they have lost, that is real, and it is not nothing.

But the framing is a product. The authenticity is a production. The grandmother has been selected, styled, and scripted, sometimes literally, often by implication, to be a particular kind of grandmother. The kind that vindicates a particular nostalgia. The kind whose past confirms what we already want to believe: that things were harder but more meaningful, that convenience is a kind of corruption, that somewhere in the old ways is a self we lost and can recover - by watching a fifteen-minute reel and saving it to a folder called "recipes to try."

The actual grandmothers, the ones who got the bath water ready for their *sasumas*, who made tea at 4 am for *babuji*, who lived lives that were not heritage experiences but lives - they are mostly unavailable for comment.

They are watching their serials. They are, for the first time in decades, not making tea for anyone.

## Scientifically Proven Facts Indians Hear at Home

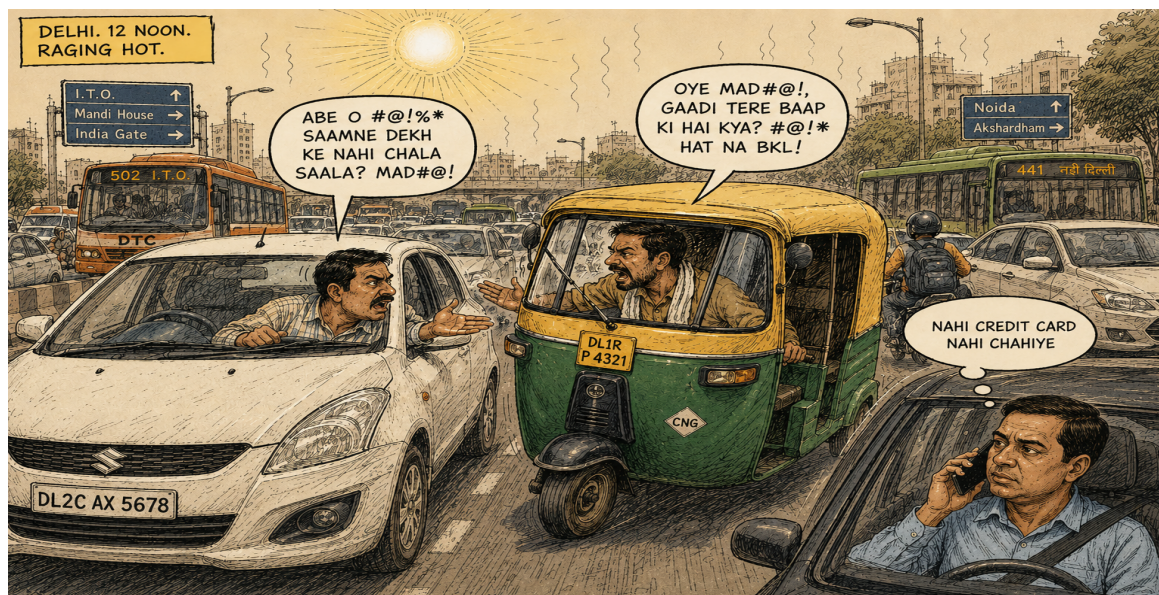
Following Jyotiraditya Scindia's revolutionary summer survival advice of carrying onions in pockets to beat the heat, Indian families have once again unlocked ancient scientific knowledge unavailable to modern researchers.

1. Drinking water while standing causes your knees to resign.
2. Swallowing chewing gum means it stays inside your stomach till your retirement.
3. Going out with wet hair immediately invites pneumonia, fever, and disappointment.
4. Eating curd at night directly contacts the mucus department.
5. Mobile phones kept in shirt pockets can delete future generations.
6. Cracking knuckles permanently converts your hands into bubble wrap.
7. If you sit too close to the TV, your eyes become square.
8. Mangoes are "heaty," bananas are "cooling," and nobody knows who certified this.
9. One raisin soaked overnight contains the power of 14 almonds and inner peace.
10. Cold water after tea creates "gas" powerful enough to disturb planetary motion.
11. Refrigerated rice becomes dangerous exactly 14 minutes after sunrise.
12. Every Indian medicine tastes bad because "that means it's working."
13. Parents can detect fever by touching forehead for 0.3 seconds — more accurate than NASA.
14. The TV remote only stops working when father asks for it.

(From the Whatsapp University Research Centre)

# Thanda Matlab...Cool Down

By Rajinder Singh



That legendary punchline from a soft drink ad didn't just sell cola, it practically became India's unofficial anger management policy.

Somewhere between cricket breaks and family dinners, it lodged itself in our brains that its memory is still fresh and etched deep in our memories. However, today, it signals towards a grave, uhhhh, I mean an issue that is really grave.

While there's nothing common between the chilled soft drinks shown on television screens and the boiling tempers of people just about everywhere. Let's accept it, we are a society constantly on the verge of flying off the handle.

Yesterday began like any other glorious Indian morning, trapped in traffic that hadn't moved since the Mughal era. Horns blaring like a badly conducted orchestra, sunlight attacking my eyeballs, and patience quietly resigning from duty.

Just when I thought things couldn't get more entertaining, an auto rickshaw decided to perform a stunt. From the extreme right lane, it took a sharp left turn, because clearly, traffic rules are more like "friendly suggestions."

An irritated middle aged guy whose car almost ran into the autorickshaw, emerged out of his car like the God of Death himself, He asked the auto driver the classic Indian question:

"Yeh road tumhare baap ka hai kya?" (A question that has never once received a logical answer, but always triggers a full-blown argument.)

The auto driver, unfazed, claimed he had been "waiting to turn left." From the extreme right.

Physics, logic, and geography quietly left the chat. What followed was a verbal wrestling

match with abuses flying towards the man of the moment, our auto wallah. The car guy, however, began to retreat slightly. Maybe he suddenly remembered the argument he'd had with his wife that morning. Maybe he saw a familiar spark in the auto driver's eyes. Either way, survival instincts kicked in. This circus went on for a few minutes and there was a huge traffic jam, and the public was getting impatient now, I wanted to give them a piece of my mind, but at the last moment stopped myself, partly because I accepted that, I was no match to the collective force of the commuters in the jam.

Eventually, the road cleared. Sadly, my mood did not.

I drove on, fully suited in emotional armour, when my phone rang. Work call, I assumed. Responsible adult mode activated.

Nope. Bank call.

A cheerful voice offered me a personal loan because my credit score was apparently more impressive than my life choices. I politely declined. She persisted. She explained benefits, schemes, offers basically everything except how to escape this conversation.

And just when I was getting emotionally invested in not taking a loan, a traffic policeman waved me over.

Phone usage while driving.

One thousand rupees gone. Just like that.

Irony called. It laughed.

Now suddenly, I *needed* that loan.

So naturally, I called the bank back this time unleashing my frustration on a completely different, innocent executive who had absolutely nothing to do with my fine, my

mood, or my life. Thirty minutes later, I hung up, slightly calmer, slightly ashamed, and significantly poorer.

As if the universe hadn't had enough ,  
Another call came in, life insurance

Perfect timing.

I parked the car, answered it, and for a brief moment considered asking the agent to first UPI me my ₹1000 before discussing my future death benefits. But maturity prevailed. I hung up.

Reached work two hours late, emotionally exhausted and financially enlightened.

The rest of the day? Oh, just the usual office meltdowns, passive aggressive emails, and domestic arguments waiting at home like a sequel nobody asked for.

So here we are.

Anger is everywhere on roads, on calls, at work, at home. It's practically our most reliable companion. But here's the inconvenient truth every time you lose your cool, the first casualty is you. Your peace, your mood, your wallet, sometimes all three in one day.

Can we avoid it? Yes.

Will we? Debatable.

But next time you feel that volcanic eruption building up inside you, pause.

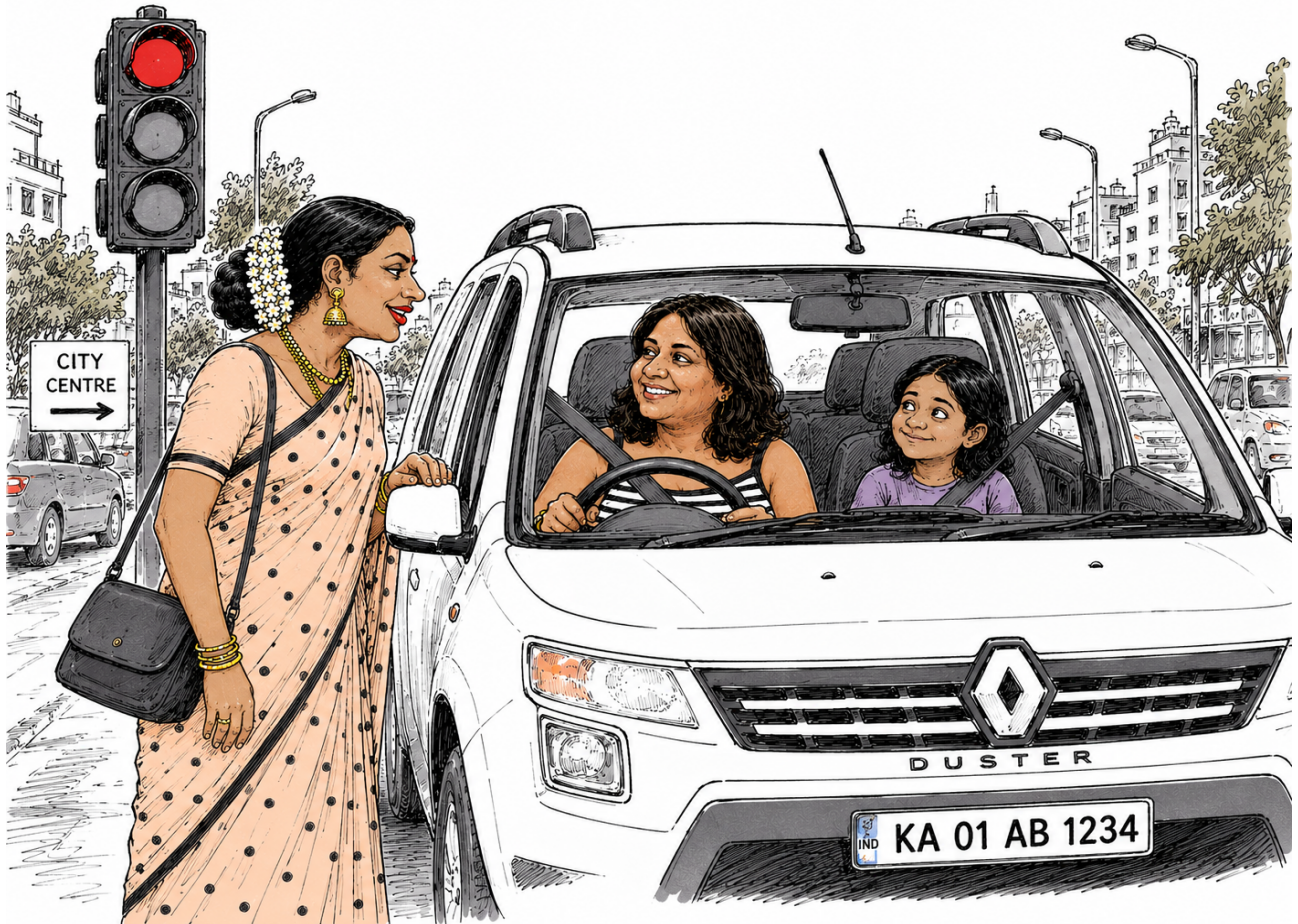
Pull over. Breathe. Cool down.

Because sometimes, the smartest thing you can do in life is absolutely nothing, except whisper to yourself.

**Thanda matlab... cool down.**

# Short Meetings with My Stylish Friend

By Mukta K Gupta



On a warm, sultry morning in May, my eyes searched the familiar chaos of the intersection for a figure I had grown accustomed to seeing every day. I was on my way to badminton class, my daughter beside me, when I finally spotted her, and the moment our eyes met, Jyothi flashed me that knowing smile.

She rose from her wooden stool outside the Shalimar tea stall and sashayed towards my car with an unhurried ease that the morning rush simply could not touch. She knew, as I did, that we had only seconds, the signal's mercy, before she had to move on to other vehicles. But Jyothi never let urgency disturb

her gait. The languid sway of her hips would have made many a woman self-conscious.

A transperson, she wore her identity with a quiet, luminous authority that only deepened her mystique. Not a single flower was out of place in her long, fragrant gajra. She clapped her hands in the way of her community, a percussive, joyful greeting, and blessed my daughter and me before asking, in her richly inflected Kannada, "*Thindi aaytu, madam?*" Have you eaten?

"Yes," I told her. "What about you, Jyothi?" "I finish early," she said with a small wave of her hand. "I have to be here before the

signals come on.” Then she turned to my daughter and, with extraordinary gentleness, ruffled her hair.

In the two months we had been exchanging these twenty-second conversations, Jyothi had never once pressured me for money. She was always impeccably turned out, with an instinctive, enviable sense of style, and a grace that made the daily theatre of the traffic signal feel somehow ceremonial.

One morning I asked if she’d accept accessories and clothes, things I’d bought on impulse and never worn. She agreed warmly. “Yes, akka, I’d love to.” My gaze drifted to the gleaming gold necklace at her throat, the shimmery peach saree catching the morning light. I felt a flicker of embarrassment. “It’s nothing fancy,” I said, “not like what you’re wearing.”

She laughed. “This is my uniform, akka. I dress up for work.” A pause, then, lightly: “At home I like simple clothes. Why don’t you come over someday? I live nearby.”

A man on a scooter alongside my car had been watching our exchange from the corner of his eye, his expression carrying the particular weight of disapproval that strangers sometimes appoint themselves to dispense. I chose not to notice him.

The light turned green. A horn shrieked behind us. We said quick goodbyes, and Jyothi moved on, to the next car, the next brief encounter, with exactly the same unhurried elegance with which she had arrived.

## Pakistan’s Greatest Contribution to Indian Education

By Mahi Heather Gupta



**F**or years, Indian students believed only coaching institutes could save weak maths students. Then came an unexpected hero: alleged paper leakers, after reports of the Cambridge Mathematics paper, May-June 2026, circulating in Pakistan before the exam.

After Cambridge confirmed that the AS-Level Mathematics paper had been “shared prematurely,” thousands of students who walked out of the exam hall looking like defeated freedom fighters have now received the greatest gift of all, another attempt.

Many students are calling it “Operation Second Chance.”

Parents who spent weeks saying “*Beta*, you have disappointed us” have suddenly returned to saying “This was all part of God’s plan.”

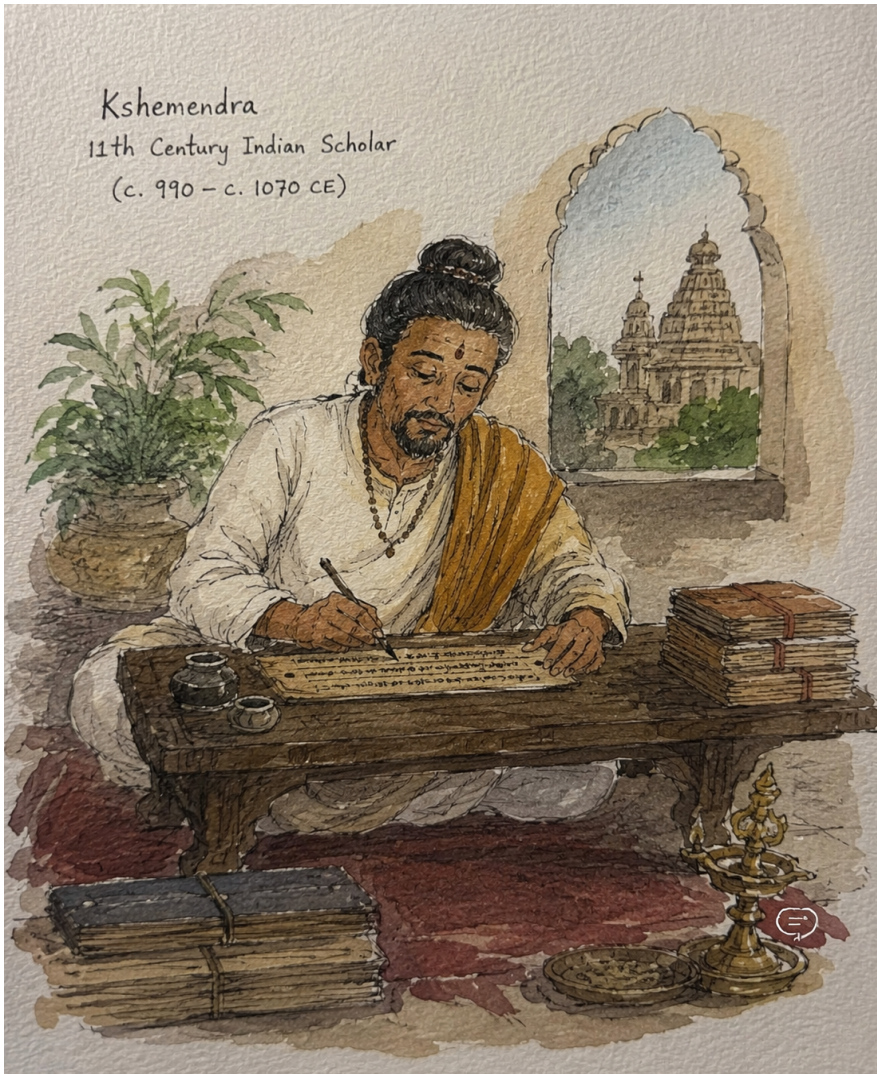
Meanwhile, toppers across South Asia are reportedly furious that average students have accidentally unlocked resurrection mode.

### Sources:

[Cambridge International Update](#)  
[The Media Line](#)

## GREAT SATIRISTS OF INDIA · A MONTHLY SERIES

### Kshemendra — The Voltaire of Kashmir (c. 990–1070 CE)



enjoy wealth honestly, sent dambha (hypocrisy) down from heaven, where it shattered and lodged in the hearts of doctors, astrologers, officers, teachers, and holy men alike. The institution meant to restrain corruption is the corruption. The doctor kills thousands to build his reputation. The astrologer consults fishermen about the weather, then charges for prophecy.

*In Narmamala*, Kshemendra gave the Kayastha bureaucrats a cosmological origin story - offspring of a demon, armed by the goddess Kali with “the weapon of the pen.”

*In Desopadesa*, he catalogued every social type with the dispassion of a naturalist describing species.

He described a sunset over Ujjain as “a gambler stripped bare by cheats.” He called himself Vyasadasa, servant of Vyasa. The humility was real. The wit was lethal.

*(R.S. Pandit called him the Voltaire of Kashmir. The comparison flatters Voltaire.)*

*“God, sensing that humans could not enjoy wealth while accumulating it honestly; created hypocrisy — and sent it to earth, where it entered every respectable profession.”*

*— The origin myth of dambha. (Kalavilasa)*

*“When one specialist fails the patient, he creates the market for the next. The patient remains sick throughout.”*

*— On the ecosystem of expertise. (Narmamala)*

Kashmir’s most inconvenient writer was also its sharpest. Kshemendra, poet, theorist, student of the great Abhinavagupta, spent nearly three decades producing some of the most precise, merciless satire in the Sanskrit canon. He wrote thirty-four works. The kings he chronicled are mostly forgotten. His satires survive. This is entirely appropriate.

His three principal satirical works, *Kalavilasa*, *Narmamala*, and *Desopadesa*, form a complete anatomy of a corrupt society.

*In Kalavilasa*, he traced hypocrisy to its divine origins: God, sensing that humans could not

# सीट पर पन्नी, दिल पर फिक्र: एक नई गाड़ी की अजीब-सी धार्मिकता”

By Sujoy Banerjee

हमारे देश में नई गाड़ियों की सीटों पर चढ़ी हुई पन्नी का अपना अलग महत्व है। आपने देखा होगा कि बहुत समय तक लोग इसे नहीं उतारते। गाड़ी भले ही सिर-से-सिर बैठे ट्रैफिक में सब तरफ से ठुक-भीड़ जाए, लेकिन सीटों की पन्नी “नई की नई” रहती है। भले ही गर्मी में कपड़े पसीने से लथपथ हो जाएँ, पीठ पर घमौरियाँ और पैरों पर दाने आ जाएँ, लेकिन नहीं, पन्नी वहीं की वहीं रहेगी।

चाहे हर बार ब्रेक लगाने पर गाड़ी चलाने वाला अपनी सीट से सरक-सरककर एकसीलेटर के पास बैठा मिले, और बाकी यात्री अपनी सुविधा के हिसाब से ज़मीन पर पड़े हों या दरवाज़े-खिड़कियों से लटके हों, तब भी पन्नी से ढँकी सीटें जस की तस ही रहेंगी।

शायद पन्नी से ढँकी सीट पर बैठने से वही एहसास मिलता होगा, जो पहले दिन नई खरीदी हुई गाड़ी में बैठने से मिलता है।

अभी हाल ही में नोएडा में एक कार-एक्सेसरीज़ की दुकान पर एक व्यक्ति को अपनी महंगी गाड़ियों पर ऊँचे दाम वाले एक्सेसरीज़ लगवाते हुए मैंने कुछ इस तरह कहते सुना:

“यार, ये लोग कार की सीट पर अच्छी क्वालिटी की पन्नी नहीं चढ़ाते। मैंने अभी २६ लाख की मार्क्यूज़र गाड़ी ली है, लेकिन उसकी सीट की पन्नी दो महीने में ही फट गई। वहीं हमारे पड़ोसी ने तीन साल पहले होंडा की गाड़ी खरीदी है, लेकिन उसकी सीट की पन्नी आज तक नहीं फटी।”

अब मेरी समझ में आ गया कि अगर कोई अपनी गाड़ी में सीट कवर चढ़ावा रहा है, तो इसका मतलब यह है कि उस “अभागे” की गाड़ी की असली पन्नी घिस-घिस कर फट गई है और वो ये काम मजबूरी में कर रहा है।

ऐसे में कार बनाने वाली कंपनियों के पास कुछ नया करने का साफ़ मौका है। अब उम्मीद कर सकते हैं कि आने वाले दिनों में कारों के ऐड कुछ इस तरह सुनाई देंगे: “...*dual tone interior with limited-edition Om Jai Jagdish Hare polythene seat covers.*”

वहीं कुछ कार कंपनियाँ सीधे फोम पर पन्नी चढ़ाकर ही बेच देंगी,

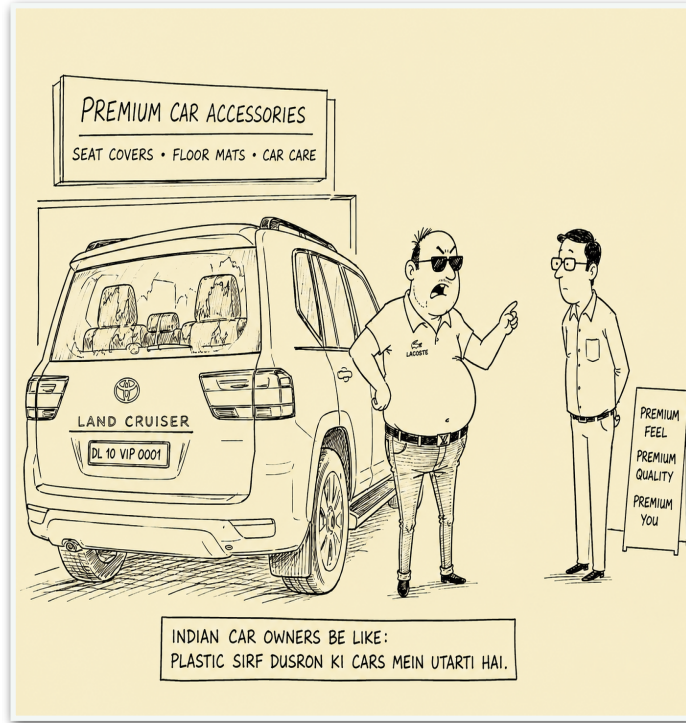
जिससे वाहनों के दाम में न्यूनतम पच्चीस हजार रुपये की बचत होगी। लेकिन मैं यकायक दूसरों की कारों पर चढ़ी पन्नी की बात क्यों

कर रहा हूँ? वो इसलिए कि साल भर पहले जब मैंने गाड़ी खरीदी, तो नासमझी में एक झटके में ही उसकी सीटों की पन्नी फाड़ दी। गलती का एहसास होने पर मैं शोरूम पर वापस गया और

सेल्समैन से गिड़-गिड़ाया कि “भैया, कैसे भी करके इसकी सीटों पर फिर से पन्नी चढ़ा दो।”

वो बोला, “अगर कार कंपनियाँ सीटों पर पन्नी न चढ़ाएँ, तो यहाँ नोएडा-दिल्ली में गाड़ियाँ बिकना बंद हो जाएँगी। आपकी सीटों पर पन्नी चढ़ाना संभव नहीं है, लेकिन इनकी जगह नई सीटें लगा सकते हैं, जिन पर ताज़ी पन्नी चढ़ी होगी। इसमें कम-से-कम एक लाख का खर्च आएगा।”

इसलिए अगर आप में से किसी को दिल्ली-एनसीआर में कोई ऐसी दुकान का पता हो, जो सस्ते दाम पर सीट पर पन्नी चढ़ा दे, तो कृपया ज़रूर बताएँ। साल भर पुरानी गाड़ी के साथ-साथ तेरह साल पुरानी वाली पुरानी गाड़ी पर भी मैं पन्नी चढ़वा लूँगा।



# The Book That Won't Die (No Matter How Hard We Try)

**The genius of Orwell was not prediction. It was diagnosis.**

**He was not describing a future. He was describing a tendency — one as old as the first bureaucrat who called a tax a "contribution."**

Every few years, someone in power says something so spectacularly Orwellian that bookshops quietly reorder their paperback stock of Nineteen Eighty-Four. The novel was published in 1949. It has not been out of print for a single day since. This tells you something. Whether it tells you something about the book or about us is a matter for debate.

The latest occasion involves Pete Hegseth, the United States Secretary of Defense, and some rhetorical gymnastics around the phrase "peace through strength", a formulation that, in certain mouths and certain contexts, has a way of sounding less like a policy and more like a punchline Orwell already wrote. The comparison people reached for, almost instantly, was the Ministry of Peace from the novel: the government department responsible for conducting perpetual war. Its name, in the invented language of Newspeak, means the opposite of what it does. Orwell called this doublethink.

Here is what makes Nineteen Eighty-Four structurally indestructible as a reference point: it is not really about totalitarianism. Or rather, it is about totalitarianism the way

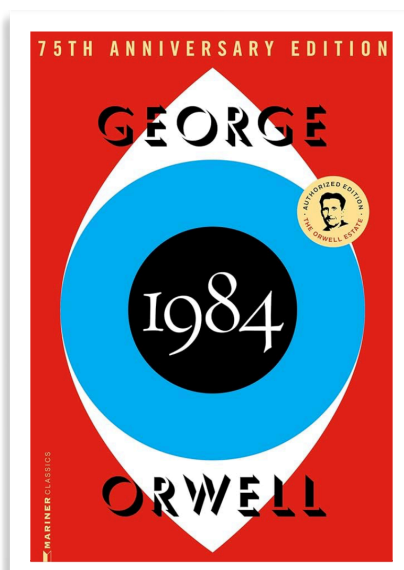
Hamlet is about a Danish prince, technically accurate, entirely beside the point.

What Orwell was really writing about was language. Specifically, the ancient human instinct to use language not to describe reality but to replace it. The Ministry of Truth rewrites history. The Ministry of Love administers torture. The Ministry of Plenty manages scarcity. None of this requires a dystopia. It requires only a press office.

**WAR IS PEACE  
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY  
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH**

These three lines are not satire. They are observation. The war that brings peace. The freedom that requires obedience. The strength that comes from not asking questions. Orwell wrote them on the wall in

very large letters and said: look, here they are, dressed up in plain sight. The horror of the book is not that it describes something foreign. It is that it describes something familiar. The Ministry of Peace conducts war not because Orwell imagined it but because the gap



between what institutions do and what they call themselves is a permanent feature of organised human life.

Nineteen Eighty-Four will become irrelevant on the day that gap closes.

# Gyanwati Aunty

Your neighbourhood  
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+9198-SAB-PATA-HAI gyanwati@aunty.com



*"Dear Gyanwati Aunty, I have been dating someone for four years but we haven't talked about marriage yet. My friends say I should give him an ultimatum. Should I?"*

Ultimatum is so aggressive, so Trump. Instead, simply start discussing your wedding budget loudly on the phone with your mother whenever he is in the room.

Mention caterers. Compare hall prices. If he does not propose in three weeks, he is either not interested or he is deaf, and honestly both are deal-breakers.

You are welcome.

*"Dear Gyanwati Aunty, I have started doing intermittent fasting, cold plunges, and drinking celery juice every morning. I feel terrible but everyone online says this is the path to optimal health. Am I doing it right?"*

Yes, you are doing it perfectly. You feel terrible, this is exactly correct. This is called "wellness." My neighbour Mrs. Subramaniam also felt terrible for six months and now she looks like a question mark with good skin. The people on the internet are very fit and very unhappy, which is the goal, no?

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