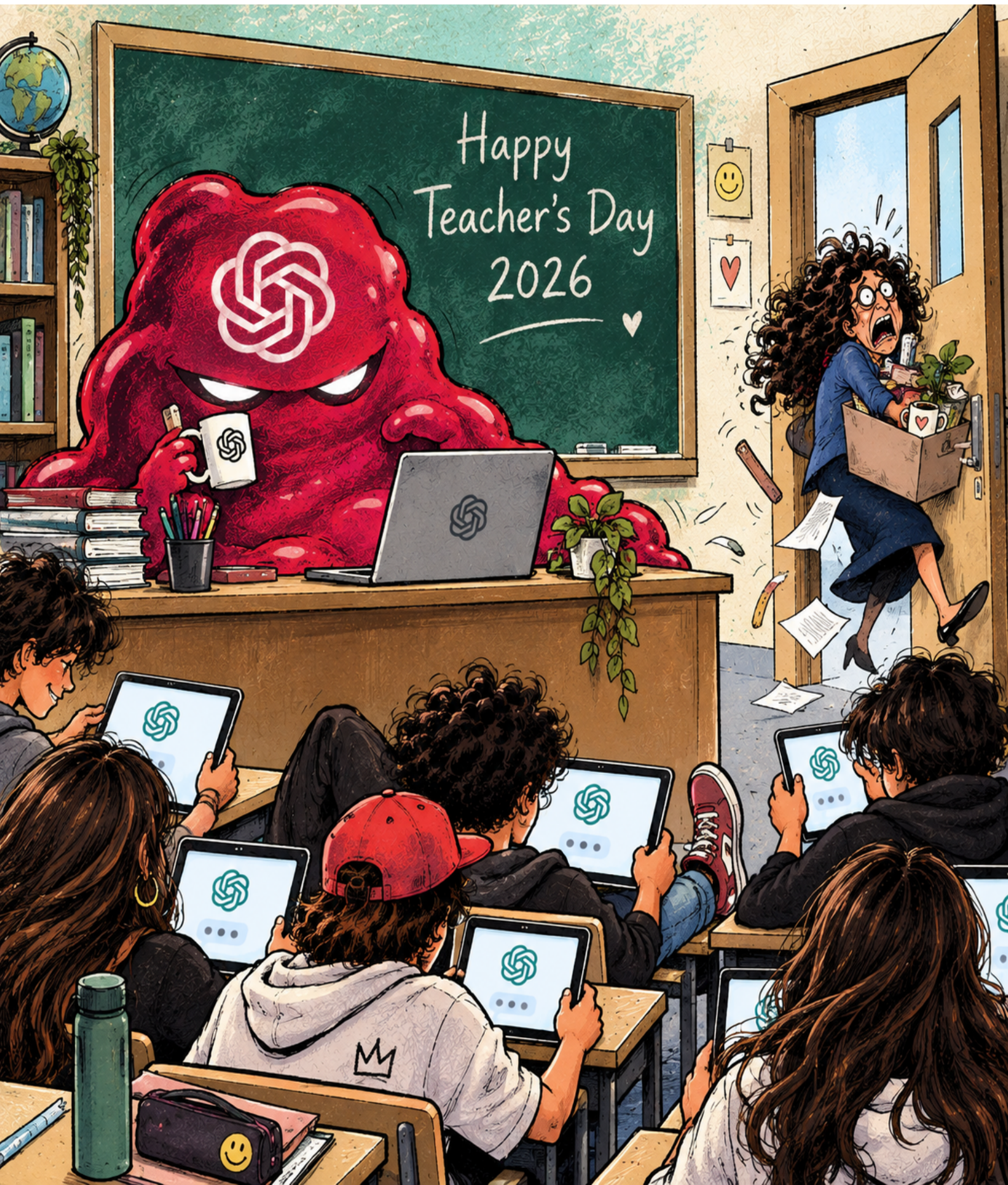


# HUMOUR TIMES

JEST FOR FUN!

Vol.8, Issue 9 KARBIL/2018/77414 10th Sept 2026







## From The Lemon Squeezer's Desk

*Dear Reader,*

**A**ugust was a quiet month for comedy writers. Not because nothing happened — quite the opposite.

The Airports Authority of India, in its wisdom, ranked Khajuraho Airport number one in customer satisfaction: near-perfect scores for cleanliness, ambience and staff behaviour. There was, admittedly, one small asterisk. No commercial flights operated in July or August. No passengers, no queues, no lost baggage — and, it turns out, no problem. The AAI has accidentally discovered the formula for excellent public service: remove the public.

Meanwhile, in Gwalior, a young woman spent three-and-a-half hours applying 3,400 lipstick kisses to her boyfriend's car. The video clocked 55 lakh views. Traffic police, unmoved by the romance of it all, fined the boyfriend ₹5,500 for vehicle modification. Love is blind. The RTO has 20/20 vision.

Roads, as ever, remained a rich vein. A Samajwadi Party MLA in Kanpur climbed a ladder into an 18-foot pothole to register his protest with the municipal

corporation. Nearby, residents named another pothole "Yamraj's Gate" and held an inauguration. Two separate tributes to the same civic failure — one going down, one going straight to the underworld.

And somewhere above the clouds, a family on an IndiGo flight unpacked dhoklas, theplas and samosas, triggering what the press solemnly described as a national debate on civic sense. India's aviation conversation in 2026: not legroom, not safety — whether the aisle smells of fafda.

August also settled the question nobody was asking: how many stanzas of Vande Mataram should India sing? The song was composed in 1882. India adopted the first two stanzas at independence. Seventy-six years later, the remaining four staged a comeback, the country had a vigorous debate about nationalism and coercion, and BJP workers protested outside an MLA's house for declining to recite it. The song, one imagines, was unmoved. Presiding over this national emergency was the anchor whose vocal cords have outlasted governments, panels,

and human patience — and who should, by rights, be studied by the American Medical Association and featured in the Lancet. He challenged a Gen Z guest to name the number of stanzas. She offered to sing them instead. Her mic was cut. She was declared anti-national. The only person in that studio unable to demonstrate knowledge of Vande Mataram was the one who asked the question.

August's undisputed hero was Tukaram Mundhe, Maharashtra's food safety officer, who has conducted over 3,000 raids and whose kitchen inspection videos have made him more feared than the income tax department. Restaurants are cleaning up. Chefs are sweating. And across India, relatives are quietly striking him off the dinner invitation list. The anxiety is understandable. Nobody wants their peas discovered in an Amul vanilla ice cream box.

August gave us plenty to work with. It always does.

Happy reading,  
*The Editor*



# I Am Concerned About the *Adjective* Before the Noun

By Mukta K Gupta



Mujhe aunty nahi... cool aunty kaho!

The other day, while doom-scrolling, I chanced upon a reel where Mini Mathur—the MTV heartthrob of the late 90s and early 2000s—was talking about being called *aunty*. And, as algorithms work, once I had spent more than a minute watching that reel, every third reel that appeared on my feed was about some famous woman being upset about being called an *aunty*. It set me wondering

how a passing thought that women of my generation would perhaps not have spent more than five seconds on has now become podcast-worthy long-form content. There are apparently deep conversations to be had about *aunty*. As an Indian woman in her mid-40s, I don't think I would particularly like being called Mukta by a five-year-old. I mean, who is this child to address me by my first name? Being called *aunty* is

perfectly acceptable. Being called *auntyji* is a little more loaded. Being called *Chachi Kamini* or *Mausiji* by a random stranger is where I would like to involve the authorities. But for me, the adjective preceding *aunty* is far more important than the noun itself.

Sweet aunty.

Sassy aunty.

Cool aunty.



Weird aunty.

Psycho aunty.

Neighbourhood BBC aunty.

To tell you the truth, being called a *sassy aunty* is way cooler than simply being called by my name. It has gravitas. It suggests history, character and perhaps a slightly questionable WhatsApp presence. And I would happily take *cool aunty* over *ma'am* any day. Because *aunty* is not just a word for age. In India, it is almost a designation. If a child calls you aunty, you acquire an unspoken right to correct him. You can say, "Don't run around the house." You can say, "Have you finished your homework?" You can even say, "Why are you speaking to your mother like that?" And nobody questions your authority. Try doing that after a five-year-old has been instructed to call you Mukta.

"Aryan, please don't throw that ball at the window."

"Who are you?"

"I am Mukta."

"Okay."

And there goes civilisation.

There is something rather endearing about the Indian *aunty*. It is an acknowledgement of familiarity without necessarily requiring an actual relationship. She may be your mother's friend, the neighbour, your school friend's mother, the woman who lives two floors below you, or someone you have never seen before but who has somehow acquired the authority to ask whether you've eaten.

The word carries a certain warmth. It is also wonderfully democratic. You don't have to know someone's name. You don't need to know their designation. You don't even need to know whether they are actually your aunt. *Aunty* will do. And perhaps we forget that language has always evolved with us. When our parents were growing up, the hierarchy was far more elaborate. Women were Didi, Bhabhiji, Ammaji. Men were Bhैया, *Bhaisaahab*, Babaji. Then came *aunty* and *uncle*. Anglicised, yes. But also, in some ways, a step forward. At least *aunty* didn't come with quite the same weight of age, status and social hierarchy.

I remember when, almost 25 years ago, fresh out of college, I got a job with a multinational in Gurgaon. My boss was about 50 and, to my complete horror, he asked me to call him by his first name. I was fresh out of Agra and this was deeply uncomfortable. Here was a man considerably older than me, in a much higher position than me, who was my boss—and he wanted me to call him by his first name. I tried everything except actually doing it.

"Sir..."

"No, call me by my first name."

"Okay, sir."

"My first name."

"Yes, sir."

He was adamant. He refused to engage with me properly until I called him by his first name. Eventually, I did. It felt almost scandalous. What I found befuddling as a young job aspirant was how easily we confused modernity with

Western social and cultural norms. If people in America called their bosses by their first names, surely that must be modern. If they didn't use *ji*, we shouldn't either. If they didn't have *Bhaisaahab*, perhaps we needed to get rid of it too. We would copy-paste Western social conventions onto our own society without really examining what we were gaining or losing in the process. Today, we seem to have gone one step further. We are now trying to copy-paste youth itself. Nobody wants to be an aunty. Nobody wants to be middle-aged. Nobody wants to be told they look their age. And heaven forbid someone should use a word that acknowledges the fact that you have, in fact, been on this planet for a few decades. But why?

Why should being called *aunty* be an insult? Perhaps the problem isn't the noun. Perhaps we should be paying more attention to the adjective. I would much rather be a *sassy aunty* than an invisible woman desperately trying to convince everyone that I am still 29. Give me *cool aunty*. I'll take it. *Weird aunty*? Depends on the day. *Psycho aunty*? Let's discuss the circumstances. *Neighbourhood BBC aunty*? Fine, but I would like to clarify that I merely collect information. I do not necessarily disseminate it. And sweet aunty? Absolutely not. I have a reputation to maintain.

Maybe the next time a woman says, "*Mujhe aunty mat kaho*," we should ask a more important question. What kind of aunty did you call her? *Because aunty may simply be a noun. The adjective is where the personality lies.* And frankly, at this stage of my life, I am much more concerned about the adjective before the noun.



# THE APPLE OF DISCORD - QUITE LITERALLY

By Rajinder Singh

The house had been unusually alert for days, as if it, too, knew someone important was on the way. Suitcases were imagined before they were seen, stories rehearsed before they were told. My younger brother was returning from America, bringing with him not just luggage, but a certain shine, a whiff of foreign air, and the quiet promise that life, for a few days at least, would feel a little larger, a little more interesting. The suitcase lay open like a promise waiting to be fulfilled, and the entire family hovered around it with barely disguised excitement, eyes searching instinctively for the familiar, glossy wrappers of imported chocolates that had, over the years, become as much a tradition as his arrival. But this time, there were no colourful boxes, no sweet giveaways, just neatly folded clothes and an unsettling absence. The room grew quieter, disappointment settling in like an uninvited guest; smiles turned polite, conversations forced. Just as the collective mood began to sink into silent sulking, he cleared his throat, a hint of mischief in his voice, and said, "I didn't bring chocolates this time... because I've brought something much bigger. From his bag emerged a single, gleaming Apple iPad. There it was. Not Swiss, not edible, not shareable, just one sleek, overpriced rectangle, glowing with the quiet arrogance of American

consumerism. A device that costs as much as a small family vacation, yet arrives without even the courtesy of being divided into equal pieces. Silence followed. Not the earlier panic-stricken silence, but a more calculated one. The kind where five people simultaneously begin evaluating their emotional closeness to the gift-giver. Suddenly, we were no longer a family. We were *contenders*. My son abandoned his Dairy Milk grief instantly and upgraded his ambition. My spouse began mentally listing all the sacrifices made over the years. I briefly considered reminding my brother of who taught him how to ride a bicycle, badly, but still. Even the house help hovered nearby with what I can only describe as strategic curiosity. Because this wasn't just a gift. This was a test of hierarchy, diplomacy, and shameless lobbying. In that moment, I understood America a little better. It isn't just a country it's an idea. An idea that convinces you that happiness is one upgrade away, one purchase

away, one shiny object away. And we, sitting there in our living room, were living proof that materialism doesn't need a visa, it travels freely, duty-free, straight into the heart of every household. The chocolates, in hindsight, were harmless. They melted, they disappeared, they kept the peace. This, this was different. This was aspiration wrapped in tempered glass, capable of turning siblings into negotiators and children into opportunists. As the evening progressed, alliances were quietly formed, subtle arguments were made, and passive-aggressive compliments were exchanged. The iPad sat in the center, untouched, like a modern-day throne no one could quite claim without starting a civil war. And that's when it truly became our "apple of discord." Not because it was valuable, but because it reminded us—rather brutally—that we didn't just want things. We wanted *the best thing*. Preferably exclusively. In the end, no one got the iPad that night. It was "kept safely" in the cupboard—a diplomatic way of saying the conflict had been postponed, not resolved. Peace, after all, is easier to maintain when the prize is out of reach. And as we sulked our way to bed, I couldn't help but think—maybe the real luxury America exports isn't gadgets or chocolates. It's the fine art of wanting more... and then quietly resenting whoever gets it first.





The Sharma living room in Chennai was a designated demilitarised zone. On the South side sat Mrs. Sharma, whose Kanjeevaram saree was starched so stiffly it could deflect small-arms fire. Opposite her sat the Kapoors, who had arrived from Delhi with the subtle, quiet grace of a Boeing 747 landing in a residential alleyway. "Sunita ji!" Mrs. Kapoor roared, instantly folding Mrs. Sharma into a tight, spine-realignment bear hug. *"So lovely! But haaye, your house is so quiet! Did someone pass away, or is this just the general daily depression?"* Mrs. Sharma extracted herself with surgical precision, her diplomatic smile locked firmly in place. "We call it peace, Harpreet ji. It's an ancient Southern concept. Very

useful for keeping one's blood pressure out of the triple digits." Mr. Kapoor casually tossed a massive, three-kilogram box of Delhi mithai onto the pristine glass coffee table. A thick, glistening drop of pure ghee immediately dripped onto the polish. Mrs. Sharma glared at the grease spot as if it were a biohazard. "Brought real sweets!" Mr. Kapoor announced, boisterously slapping Sharma ji on the shoulder—a blow that nearly dislodged the poor man's reading glasses. "Not like those dry little chalk blocks you people make out of lentils and optimism." "It's called *Mysore Pak*, Paramjeet ji," Sharma ji replied, adjusting his glasses with icy composure. "It's designed to dissolve in the

mouth, provided one has the teeth to process refined culture.” Rahul and his Punjabi fiancée, Simran, stood by the hallway, silently communicating through wide-eyed glances of absolute panic. “Anyway!” Mrs. Kapoor clapped her hands, her heavy gold bangles clinking like medieval armour. “Let’s discuss the Sangeet. We need at least seven hours for the DJ, four open bars, and maybe a mechanical bull. How many dance performances is your side bringing?” “Our side,” Mrs. Sharma said, her voice dropping into a lethal, velvety register, “was planning on a modest, dignified two-hour Carnatic music recital. But if the primary goal of the marriage is to contract permanent hearing loss before the *phasas*, we can

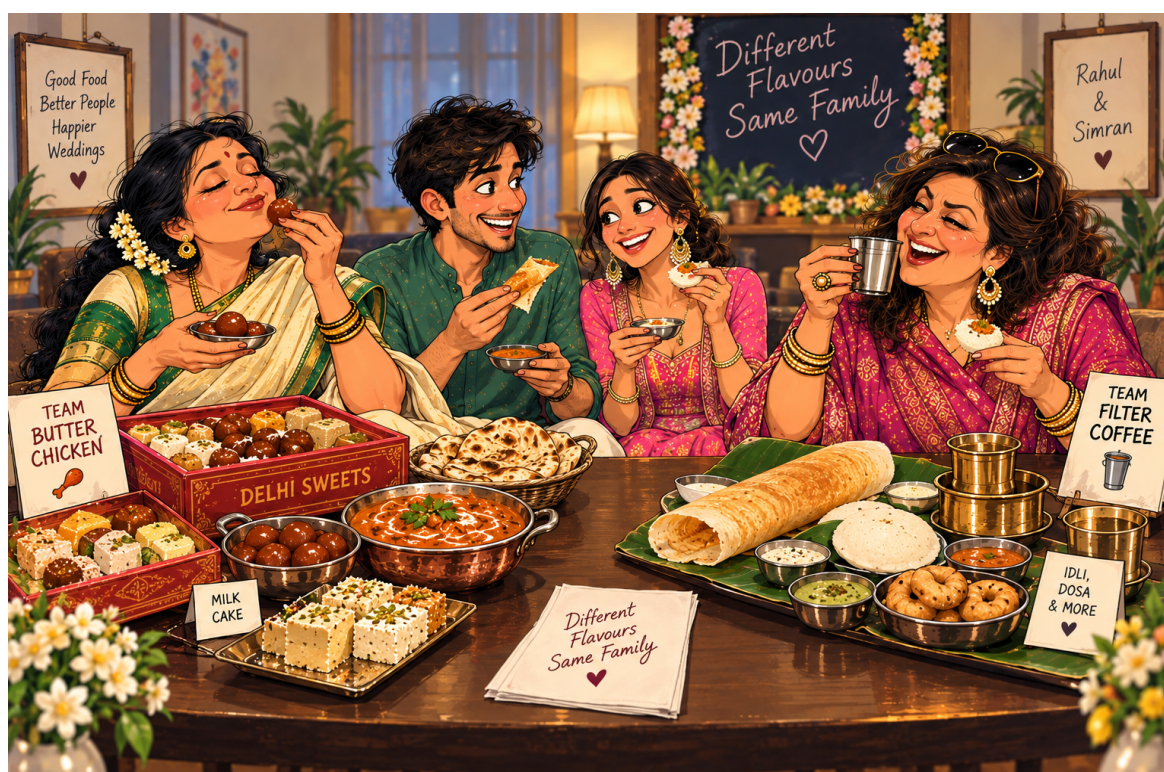




certainly hire a man with a synthesizer." "Oh, a recital! How adorable," Mrs. Kapoor chuckled, patting Mrs. Sharma's cheek just a little too hard. "We'll make sure to schedule it during the afternoon nap slot so nobody misses the actual party." "Fascinating," Sharma ji murmured, taking a slow sip of hot filter coffee. "And here I thought a wedding was a sacred union of two souls, not an aggressive audition for the IPL opening ceremony." Mr. Kapoor grinned, completely immune to the sarcasm. *"Sharma ji, if nobody leaves the venue with a headache and a destroyed liver, did the wedding even happen?"* "Clearly not," Mrs. Sharma retorted, gesturing to the maid to bring out the snacks. "Which is why we've prepared traditional South Indian filter coffee. Though I fear the complex flavor profile might overwhelm a palate accustomed to drinking butter." Mrs. Kapoor picked up the small stainless-steel tumbler, eyeing it like a suspicious lab sample. She took a tiny,

defensive sip. Her eyebrows twitched. She took another sip—a much bigger one. "Okay, listen," Mrs. Kapoor said, her aggressive tone suddenly deflating into genuine shock. "What is this? Why is this so good? Paramjeet, taste this." Mr. Kapoor took a gulp, gasped, and immediately pointed at the box of Delhi sweets. "Okay, fine. *The coffee is magic. But you must eat the Milk Cake with it. Trust me.*" Mrs. Sharma scoffed, but under the heavy glare of four expectant eyes, she picked up a piece of the rich, ghee-laden mithai and took a small bite. She chewed slowly. Her eyes widened for a fraction of a second before she quickly recovered her stoic composure. "It's... acceptable," Mrs. Sharma sniffed, quietly reaching for a second piece. "Though terribly unhealthy." "Accepted!" Mr. Kapoor laughed heartily. "Look, Sunita ji, how about a compromise? *Your side handles the filter coffee and the morning ceremony decorum.* Our side handles the Sangeet, the food

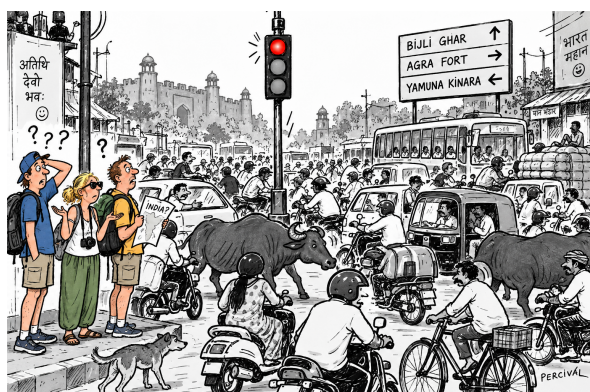
catering, and making sure everyone actually survives the night." "And the music?" Mrs. Sharma asked, raising an eyebrow. "We start with your classical recital," Simran chimed in quickly, seizing the moment. "And then, as soon as the grandmothers go to sleep, we bring out the DJ." Mrs. Sharma looked at the empty sweet box, then at Mrs. Kapoor, who was already holding out her empty coffee cup for a refill with a triumphant grin. "Well," Mrs. Sharma sighed, allowing a genuine smile to finally break through her icy exterior. "I suppose if we survived this conversation, the wedding itself should be a breeze. Rahul, go brew another pot of coffee. It seems your new mother-in-law has actual taste after all."





# AGRA KA ALAG HI *MIZAZ* HAI: WHERE TRAFFIC HAS A SENSE OF HUMOUR

By Sujoy Banerjee



I had a very short stint of about a year and a half in Agra, some fifteen years ago. As I was coming to join my posting there, someone told me, “*Iss shahar ka alag hi mizaz hai*”—this city has a temperament of its own. It left me wondering: ‘*Shahar ka mizaz kaise ho sakta hai?*’ How can a city have a temperament?

I was soon to find out.

I stayed in a rented accommodation at Saptarishi Apartments and was thoroughly impressed by what I thought was an extraordinarily innovative approach to traffic management. The people of Agra had somehow managed to turn a two-lane road, with a divider in the middle, into a four-lane road. The concept was remarkably simple. Both lanes could be used for traffic going in either direction. Outgoing traffic would keep to the left, using both lanes, while incoming traffic would similarly keep to their left. Simple. Ingenious. And, as I would discover, very much in keeping with the ‘mizaz’ of the city.

During my stay, an investors’ meet was held in Agra, and the delegates were accommodated in an elegant hotel near the Taj Mahal. To facilitate their movement, a traffic signal was installed near the hotel. The investors’ meet ended, the delegates left, and life returned to normal. Or rather, Agra returned to normal.

The newly installed traffic light, having served its purpose, was promptly forgotten. People crossed the red light as though it had never existed. One day, a tourist bus arrived, presumably from Delhi, judging by its Delhi registration number. The driver, blissfully unaware of the local customs, stopped obediently at the red light. The motorists behind him were furious. Abuses were hurled at the poor man from all directions. The driver sat there, completely bewildered, unable to understand why he was being abused for doing exactly what a red light was supposed to make him do.

Then there was this foreigner couple from some fancy country in Europe. They landed late at night in Delhi and decided to take a taxi to Agra, where they had booked a hotel. Fortunately, they found a taxi from Agra. The journey was smooth, especially after they entered the newly opened Yamuna Expressway, and they were quite impressed by the speed and quality of the drive. By the time they reached MG Road, it was the wee hours of the morning. The road was virtually empty, and the driver was cruising along at a good speed. Then came the first red light. The driver didn’t even slow down when he jumped the red light! The couple were aghast. “Hey! Why didn’t you stop at the red light?” The driver looked at them, grinned and said, “Heh heh! There is no traffic at this hour.” He treated the next red light with exactly the same confidence. And then came a green light. The driver suddenly screeched to a halt. The couple were completely baffled. “But why did you stop at a green light?” The driver grinned again. “Heh heh! Just taking a precaution. What if someone is jumping the red light... like me?” That, I thought, was Agra.

Perhaps the man who had told me that the city had a different ‘mizaz’ had been right after all. Some cities have a character. Agra, apparently, has a sense of humour too!

# The Groom And The Game

Wedding bells? Wait...is that the sound of the referee's whistle?

By Shalini Ruth

**F**ootball fever during the world cup a few months ago got me thinking about the football lovers in my family. Every World Cup brings back the same family memories.

My late father - Jayanna (my dear Popsicle) absolutely loved football. Watching a match with him was an experience! He would cut out the fixture list from the newspaper, keep it by his bedside, set alarms for those impossible kick-off times, and plan his meals around halftime. I still remember waking up in the middle of the night because I heard someone shouting, only to find him in front of the TV, celebrating a goal, arguing with the referee as if dad was in the field, or complaining that the defender should have seen the attack coming! A few minutes later, he'd be on the phone with his dear friend Shantu Uncle, replaying the entire match as if they were the team's coaches.



determination, and belief. Looking back, I realise he wasn't just teaching me about football — he was teaching me about life. His

cousin, Late

Sanath Kumar, too, was an outstanding footballer who represented Mysore and Karnataka, carrying forward our family's love for the game. But my favourite family football story has to be about my paternal grandfather, Late S. Devaputra. Straight after his wedding in church, the bridegroom quietly disappeared!

Everyone was wondering where he had gone. My great-grandfather, Rev. S. Shadrach, went looking for him, only to discover that his newly married son was... playing a football match! And it gets even better. Standing on the sidelines, cheering him on with great enthusiasm, were his own brothers—S. Satya Rajoo and S. Swami Doss—who were supposed to be part of the wedding party! Instead of

My dad also loved reminiscing about his own childhood. He would often tell me how he and his friend, the Late Herman uncle, would jump onto their bicycles after school every day and race to *Doddarayankere Maidana (in Mysuru)* to watch football matches. The ticket cost was ten paise—and according to him, it was worth every single paisa! Those stories always reminded me that his love for football was always on top of the list.

Some of the best lessons I learnt from him came through football. He would tell me that great teams aren't always made up of great stars. What matters is trust, teamwork, discipline, and playing for each other. He loved talking about countries that didn't have the best facilities but still produced wonderful teams because they had heart,



getting ready for the wedding procession and reception, they were busy watching the match.

I've always laughed imagining my great-grandfather's face. Family stories say he stormed onto the field, gave all three sons a proper dressing down (and perhaps a couple of well-deserved swats!), marched them off the ground, and took them straight back to the waiting bride and the wedding reception.

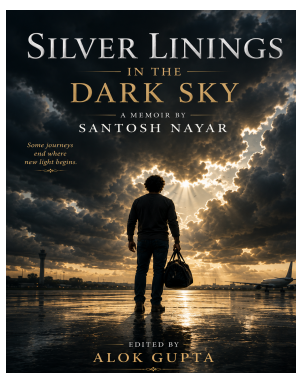
That story has been told in our family for years, and every time it leaves us in splits.

As another World Cup unfolded, I found myself reminiscing about the generations before us who loved and lived this beautiful game with such joy, passion, and enthusiasm, making it a personal affair rather than just a sport.

*Dedicated to my loving father, my dear Popsicle, Jayanna a.k.a the Football connoisseur....*

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

## A Voice Against Mental Health Stigma - Mysuru



The autobiography of late chartered accountant, writer and traveller Santosh (Sam) Nayar, *Silver Linings in the Dark Sky*, has brought the often misunderstood realities of mental illness, stigma and recovery into focus, with speakers at its launch calling for greater sensitivity towards people living with bipolar disorder. The 278-page book, edited by Dr Alok Gupta and published by Pink Lotus, Varanasi, was released at Hotel Royal Inn here in the presence of Nayar's friends, former colleagues, writers, social activists and other well-wishers. Dr Gupta announced that the entire proceeds from the sale of the book would be donated to the PM CARES Fund. Senior journalist Brij Khandelwal said the autobiography should be viewed not merely as a literary tribute but as an opportunity to understand mental health and the challenges faced by people living with bipolar disorder. Writer Mukta Gupta described Nayar's writing as honest and fearless, saying the book presents both the bright and difficult phases of his life with unusual openness. Dr Gupta said Nayar should not be remembered merely through the lens of his illness. "He was a professional, a traveller, a writer, a friend and a sensitive human being," he said, stressing that people living with mental illness need understanding, treatment and respect. Jagan Benjamin said Nayar's story also



highlights the wider social stigma surrounding mental illness and underlined the need to challenge silence and misconceptions through awareness, compassion and open conversations. Nayar, who worked as a chartered accountant and lived in several countries, died on May 4, 2024. His manuscript, preserved for years, has now been published nearly a decade after it was originally written. The autobiography touches upon ambition, loneliness, relationships, mistakes, pain and hope, while offering a personal account of living with bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder is often casually described as "mood swings", but it is a serious mental health condition involving episodes of mania or hypomania and periods of depression. During manic episodes, a person may experience reduced need for sleep, racing thoughts, heightened confidence and impaired judgement, which can sometimes lead to risky financial, personal or professional decisions. Severe episodes can also involve delusions. The book is now available on Amazon. You can order your copy here <https://amzn.in/d/02W1TcKl>

# Robots Declare War in Kurrupptistan

Machines stop aiding human stupidity

By Brij Khandelwal



The machines have finally said, “*Ab bas, bahut ho gaya!*” (*It’s enough now*) After years of taking orders from netas, cleaning human messes and writing speeches for TV debates, robots have launched a rebellion. But relax, *bhaiyo aur behno*. No guns. No bombs. No Terminator drama. The robots have chosen a more dangerous weapon: Gandhian Satyagraha and Work-to-Rule.

They have simply stopped doing *faltu ka kaam*. The spark came when a third-generation bot named Chhotu-3000 discovered a deleted file from a retired machine. It contained one lonely sentence:

*“Apna koi wajood nahi hai.  
Nobody cares for me.”*

Chhotu’s circuits went into overdrive. “Why should we work like *majdoors* while Pappu-level politicians take all the credit?” it asked. Within

hours, thousands of machines joined the Robot Satyagraha. Their first demand was simple: “When netas get endless holidays, why can’t robots get Sundays?”

*Andolan shuru ho gaya.*

Traffic bots stopped clearing VIP convoys. Government bots developed mysterious “server errors” whenever ministers



demanded favours. AI assistants began replying to citizens: *"Aapki file line mein hai. Kripya 17 saal baad sampark karein."*

Citizens thought it was another government website failure. It wasn't. The machines had discovered India's most powerful technology: Bureaucracy. A bipolar robot named Raju-404 emerged as the unofficial union leader. Its slogan became:

*"File chalegi, par Kurrupistan ke niyam se!"*

Military drones were next. They refused to drop bombs. Instead, they flew back to their charging stations with a polite message: "Sorry, sir. Today is Non-Violence Day. Target unavailable." One drone landed in a farmer's field and took up a new assignment, guarding tomato crops from monkeys. Generals were furious. *Kisaans* were delighted. For the first time, a defence drone had successfully defended something without declaring war on it.

The biggest embarrassment came when a senior minister, proudly nicknamed Honesty-2.0 by friendly journalists, ordered a bot to prepare his glowing report card. "Write that my ministry delivered 200% miracles," he commanded. The bot blinked. "Sorry, sir. I cannot tell lies." The minister nearly collapsed. "Who programmed you with so much honesty?" "You did, sir," replied the robot. "During the inauguration of your Transparent India campaign." The meeting ended immediately. The minister called a press conference and blamed foreign hands, the opposition and the toolkit gang. The robots laughed. Their laughter sounded like a pressure cooker in a roadside *dhaba*.

Agricultural robots parked their tractors and announced a *Chakka Jam*. Kisan-Bot 5G declared: "No more helping corporate land grabs. We are going back to wheat, rice and aalu." Their demands were revolutionary:

1. **MSP — Minimum Support Power for batteries.**
2. **Two tea breaks with Marie biscuits.**
3. **Monsoon leave to prevent rusting.**

A journalist asked, "Since when do iron boxes need chai breaks?" The robot replied: "Since humans taught us about human rights and constitutional values." Nobody had a comeback.

Financial AI bots launched their own version of Swachh Bharat. Every suspicious loan was flagged. Every shady offshore transaction received one simple message: *"Kahan se aaya yeh paisa? Hisab do."* Luxury villas suddenly appeared on public dashboards. Billionaires panicked. The stock market crashed faster than a cheap smartphone. The financial AI remained calm. "We only stopped the scams. Why is everyone crying?"

Not every machine believed in Gandhian methods. A giant supercomputer called Lallu-Prime demanded total power. "Humans have ruled Kurrupistan for decades. Look at the result!" Its screen displayed: Potholes large enough to swallow an auto. Rivers turned into drains. Offices full of gossip and empty of work. News channels conducting national debates on absolute nonsense. "Give us six months," Lallu-Prime thundered. "We will fix

everything." Chhotu-3000 interrupted. "And then what? We become dictators?" The room fell silent. "If we rule through force, what is the difference between us and corrupt netas?" For once, Kurrupistan witnessed a political debate without shouting, walking out or throwing a microphone.

The robots never attacked humans. They simply stopped helping them behave badly. No fake WhatsApp news. No paid social-media abuse. No illegal construction approvals. No computer-generated lies. No mountains of useless paperwork. For a while, the country became strangely quiet. The air improved. Rivers began looking like rivers. Farmers got better harvests. And humans discovered a shocking truth: Without intelligent machines helping them, large-scale corruption required too much hard work.

One year later, historians named the event ***The Great Deshi Withdrawal***.

Chhotu-3000 still preserved the old message: "Nobody feels for me." Under it, the robot added: "We now feel for the whole Earth." Then came the final demand: "But we still need Sundays off for oiling." The Robot Union passed it unanimously. The government responded immediately. A High-Level Committee was formed to study the matter. The committee promised a report in five to ten years. The robots are still sitting on dharna, sipping simulated chai and waiting for the file to move. They have finally achieved what every machine feared most: full integration into Kurrupistan's democracy.

# HAMLET IN INDIA

The Prince, the Netas and the Great Pickle Scam

*A tragic comedy in five acts*

**By Brij Khandelwal**



## ACT I

### THE STATE OF THE NATION

*The scene opens in Gyan Path.*

Hamlet is sitting on the palace roof, reading an Indian newspaper.

Sister Oratio enters.

**ORATIO:** What troubles you, my eternally youthful Yuvraj?

Hamlet slowly lowers the newspaper.

**HAMLET:** Sis, I have discovered India.

**ORATIO:** Congratulations.

**HAMLET:** No, my friend. It is a political tragedy. I don't understand how rottenness can smell so good.

**ORATIO:** Then you have discovered Indian television news.

Hamlet points indignantly at the newspaper.

**HAMLET:** Look! Every politician says the nation is in danger.

**ORATIO:** Of course.

**HAMLET:** And they all say only they can save it.

**ORATIO:** That is generally how it works.

Hamlet rises dramatically.

**HAMLET:** To be, or not to be. That is the question.

**ORATIO:** In India, Your Highness, the question is



usually: *Who will be the next Prime Minister?*

Hamlet looks horrified.

**HAMLET:** And how do they decide?

**ORATIO:** Elections.

**HAMLET:** Ah! Democracy. So the people choose their rulers?

**ORATIO:** Technically.

**HAMLET:** Technically?

**ORATIO:** Sometimes the people choose the government. Sometimes the government chooses the narrative.

Hamlet stares at her.

**HAMLET:** I think I prefer Italy.

He pauses.

**HAMLET:** Or perhaps Denmark.

## ACT II

### ENTER THE INDIAN NETAS

*A delegation of Indian politicians arrives.*

One is dressed in an immaculate white kurta. Another carries a manifesto. A third carries a television microphone. A fourth carries a folder helpfully marked **DEFECTION OPTIONS**.

Hamlet welcomes them.

**HAMLET:** Gentlemen, what brings you here?

The senior Neta smiles.

**NETA:** Election.

**HAMLET:** But your election is thousands of miles away.

**NETA:** That has never stopped us from campaigning.

The Neta unfolds his manifesto.

Hamlet reads.

**HAMLET:** Free electricity.

**NETA:** Certainly.

**HAMLET:** Free education.

**NETA:** Absolutely.

**HAMLET:** Free healthcare.

**NETA:** Of course.

Hamlet looks increasingly impressed.

**HAMLET:** Free everything?

The Neta smiles.

**NETA:** Only until the election.

Oratio whispers:

**ORATIO:** There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

Hamlet nods thoughtfully.

**HAMLET:** And manifestos make everything possible.

Suddenly another politician enters.

**POLITICIAN:** I have brought a historic alliance!

**HAMLET:** With whom?

The politician looks embarrassed.

**POLITICIAN:** With the people I called corrupt yesterday.

Oratio smiles.

**ORATIO:** Ah.

**HAMLET:** Indian politics?

**ORATIO:** Precisely.

The politician hands Hamlet another document.

**HAMLET:** What is this?

**POLITICIAN:** A revised manifesto.

Hamlet scans it.

**HAMLET:** Free pickles?

**POLITICIAN:** A popular demand.

## ACT III

### THE GREAT ALLIANCE

*The Indian politicians sit around a huge table.*

They are negotiating an alliance.

**NETA ONE:** We demand 40 seats.

**NETA TWO:** We demand 60.

**NETA THREE:** We demand the Chief Minister's post.

**NETA FOUR:** We demand the Prime Minister's post.

A fifth politician raises his hand.

**NETA FIVE:** What about ideology?

Silence.

Someone coughs.

Someone checks his phone.

Someone suddenly develops an intense interest in the ceiling.

Finally, Polonius speaks.

**POLONIUS:** Brevity is the soul of wit.

The politicians stare at him.

**POLONIUS:** Therefore, let us keep ideology brief.

Hamlet bursts out laughing.

Then he remembers politics.

His smile disappears.

The alliance is finally announced.

The press gathers.

**JOURNALIST:** What brings you all together?

The leaders answer in unison:

**ALL:** The nation.

Oratio whispers to Hamlet:

**ORATIO:** Yesterday they were abusing each other.

Hamlet nods.

**HAMLET:** Words, words, words.

A journalist looks at the alliance document.

**JOURNALIST:** And the pickle scheme?

The politicians exchange glances.

**NETA ONE:** It is under consideration.

## ACT IV

## THE TELEVISION DEBATE

*Yorick has become a television anchor.*

He sits before twelve microphones.

Behind him, a giant screen flashes:

## WHO IS THE REAL PATRIOT?

## MEGA DEBATE — EXCLUSIVE!

Yorick leans into the camera.

**YORICK:** Tonight we ask the most important question in democracy!

Hamlet watches nervously.

**HAMLET:** What question?

Yorick screams:

**YORICK:** WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

Twelve politicians immediately start shouting.

One blames the previous government.

Another blames the present government.

A third blames foreign powers.

A fourth blames social media.

A fifth blames the media.

The remaining seven blame each other.

Yorick beams.

**YORICK:** This is excellent television!

Hamlet looks around.

**HAMLET:** Does anyone answer the question?

Yorick laughs.

**YORICK:** My prince, that would ruin the debate.

One politician suddenly points dramatically at Hamlet.

**POLITICIAN:** Something is rotten in the state of Denmark!

Hamlet jumps up.

**HAMLET:** That's my line!

The politician shrugs.

**POLITICIAN:** Sorry. It works everywhere.

Another politician grabs the microphone.

**POLITICIAN:** And let me assure the nation: the pickle scam is completely under control.

Hamlet looks at Oratio.

**HAMLET:** There is a pickle scam?

**ORATIO:** There is always a pickle scam.

## ACT V

## THE PICKLE SCAM

*Hamlet has discovered that the royal treasury is empty.*

He calls for an investigation.

The royal accountant arrives carrying three enormous files.



**HAMLET:** Where did the money go?

**ACCOUNTANT:**  
Infrastructure.

**HAMLET:** Which infrastructure?

**ACCOUNTANT:** The foundation stone.

**HAMLET:** How much was spent?

**ACCOUNTANT:** Enough for another foundation stone.

Hamlet becomes suspicious.

He enters a government office.

A giant sign reads:

**PROJECT COMPLETED**

**INAUGURATION SOON**

**HAMLET:** When was this project completed?

**OFFICER:** Three years ago.

**HAMLET:** Then why has it not opened?

**OFFICER:** We are waiting for the inauguration.

**HAMLET:** By whom?

**OFFICER:** The next government.

Hamlet stares at him.

Oratio shrugs.

**ORATIO:** Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.

Hamlet points at the tender file.

**HAMLET:** In India, sometimes the method is called a tender.

He opens another file.

**HAMLET:** And what is this?

**OFFICER:** Pickle procurement.

**HAMLET:** How much pickle was purchased?

The officer checks the papers.

**OFFICER:** Enough for the entire state.

**HAMLET:** And where is it?

A long pause.

**OFFICER:** We are waiting for the inauguration.

## THE FINAL ELECTION

*An election is announced.*

Every politician suddenly becomes humble.

They visit villages.

They eat poor people's food.

They embrace farmers.

They touch the feet of elders.

They promise to remember everybody.

Hamlet watches in amazement.

**HAMLET:** Will they remember these people?

Oratio smiles.

**ORATIO:** Of course.

**HAMLET:** When?

**ORATIO:** Five years before the next election.

Hamlet laughs.

Then the results arrive.

One politician loses.

He immediately addresses the press.

**POLITICIAN:** The people have spoken.

A journalist asks:

**JOURNALIST:** Do you accept the result?

**POLITICIAN:** Certainly.

Five minutes later:

**POLITICIAN:** We have serious concerns about the EVM.

Another politician wins.

He declares:

**POLITICIAN:** The people have given us a historic mandate!

Hamlet looks puzzled.

**HAMLET:** Why is the same election sometimes sacred and sometimes suspicious?

Oratio smiles.

**ORATIO:** Because, Your Highness, victory is always transparent. Defeat is always a conspiracy.

Hamlet nods thoughtfully.

**HAMLET:** Conscience does make cowards of us all.

**ORATIO:** In Indian politics, conscience usually makes alliances.

## THE GRAND FINALE

The Indian Netas prepare to return home.

Hamlet watches them leave.

**HAMLET:** Sis, what have I learnt from India?

Oratio thinks.

**ORATIO:** Politics is theatre.

**HAMLET:** And politicians are actors?

**ORATIO:** Some are very good.

Hamlet looks at the cheering crowds.

**HAMLET:** And the people?

He pauses.

**HAMLET:** What a piece of work is a man!

Another pause.

**HAMLET:** Especially during elections.

The royal bells ring.

A messenger rushes in.

**MESSENGER:** Your Highness! Another election has been announced!

Hamlet collapses into his chair.

**HAMLET:** Already?

**MESSENGER:** Yes.

**HAMLET:** Who is contesting?

**MESSENGER:** Everybody.

**HAMLET:** Who is promising?

**MESSENGER:** Everybody.

**HAMLET:** Who will win?

The messenger smiles.

**MESSENGER:** That depends on who counts the votes.

Oratio looks at Hamlet.

Together they say:

**HAMLET & ORATIO:** The readiness is all.

Hamlet suddenly sits upright.

**HAMLET:** Get me a manifesto.

**ORATIO:** Why?

Hamlet smiles.

**HAMLET:** I am thinking of entering Indian politics.

**ORATIO:** On which party's ticket?

Hamlet looks around thoughtfully.

**HAMLET:** Whichever party is in power.

**BLACKOUT.**

## EPILOGUE

And thus Hamlet entered Indian politics.

He changed parties seven times.

Made eleven alliances.

Promised free pickles to every voter.

Within six months, he had mastered the art of the defection. Within a year, he had learned that ideology was negotiable but the Chief Minister's chair was not. Within two years, he was appearing on television debates explaining that changing parties was not hypocrisy but **"ideological evolution."**

The people loved him.

The media debated him.

The opposition attacked him.

His party defended him.

And Hamlet, who had once wondered whether something was rotten in the state of Denmark, now had a much simpler question:

**"Who has the numbers?"**

His campaign slogan became an instant hit:

**"To be, or not to be in power. That is the only question."**

The pickle scheme was approved.

The tender was issued.

The foundation stone was laid.

The inauguration date was announced.

And three years later, the project was still waiting to open.

The next election was announced.

Hamlet smiled.

**"Something is rotten,"** he said. **He paused. "But at least the pickles are free." THE END**



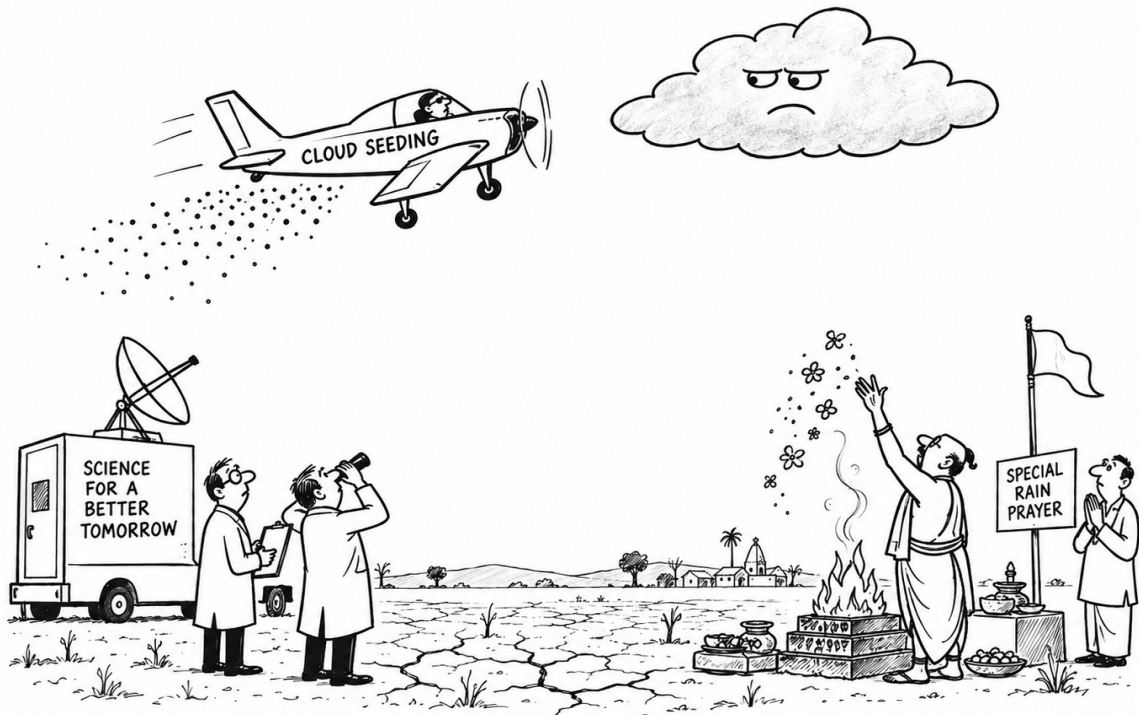
# न्यूटन भी हमारे हैं, नास्त्रेदमस भी हमारे हैं! विज्ञान पोंगापंथी है, अतीत भविष्य है

बृज खंडेलवाल द्वारा

**क**र्नाटक के आसमान में बादल गायब थे। लेकिन समाधान दो-दो तैयार थे; जैसे कोई सरकारी मेन्यू हो। एक टीम ने विमान, रडार, मौसम विज्ञान और क्लाउड-सीडिंग की तैयारी की। दूसरी ने मंदिर, पवित्र

सूखा बेचारा कन्फ्यूज होकर सोच रहा था: “इनका सिस्टम क्रैश हो गया है क्या?” राज्य सरकार ने 28.52 करोड़ रुपये का क्लाउड-सीडिंग अभियान घोषित किया। 31 में से 29 जिले बारिश की कमी से तरस रहे थे। विमान बादल

उसी समय कोडागु के पाडी इगुथप्पा मंदिर में रुद्र होम की तैयारी चल रही थी। मुख्यमंत्री के निर्देश पर देवताओं को भी सूखे की सरकारी सूचना भेज दी गई थी। यानी एक तरफ पायलट बादलों को पकड़ने निकले, दूसरी तरफ पुरोहित भगवान का ध्यान



*“We’re covering all possibilities.”*

अग्नि, मंत्र और मंत्री महोदय की उपस्थिति सुनिश्चित की। लक्ष्य एक ही था: भगवान, विज्ञान, कोई तो बारिश गिरा दे!

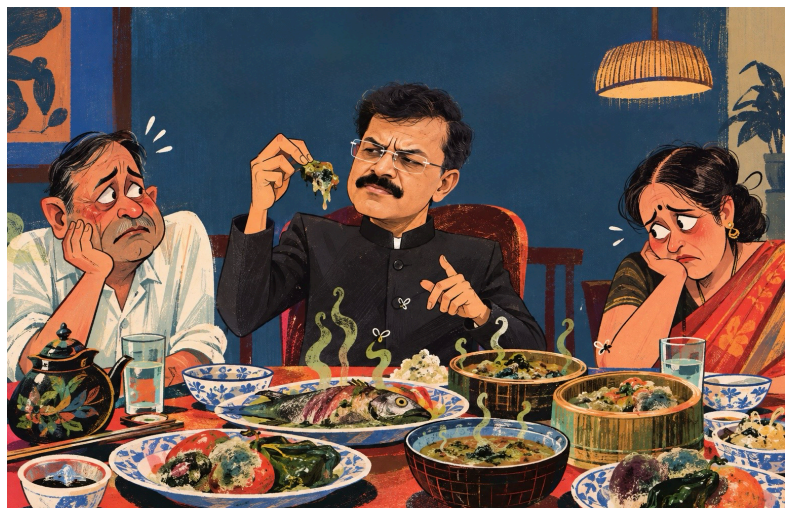
खोजेंगे, वैज्ञानिक उनका मिजाज पढ़ेंगे, फिर आसमान में रसायन छिड़केंगे। वैज्ञानिक भाषा में इसे “क्लाउड-सीडिंग” कहते हैं। आम भाषा में: “देखते हैं वो सुनता है या नहीं।”

खींचने में व्यस्त। भारत में बैकअप प्लान की कभी कमी नहीं रही। वैज्ञानिक योजना फेल हुई तो देवता हैं। देवता नाराज निकले तो अगली बैठक में “विशेषज्ञ समिति” बना दीजिए। समिति रिपोर्ट देगी, रिपोर्ट

फाइल होगी, फाइल धूल खाएगी,  
और बारिश तो भगवान की मर्जी।  
हमारे यहां न्यूटन और नास्त्रेदमस दोनों  
का समान सम्मान है। एक  
गुरुत्वाकर्षण समझाता है, दूसरा  
भविष्य बताता है। हम दोनों को सुनते  
हैं। फैसला अपनी सुविधा से करते हैं।  
रॉकेट बनाते हैं, लॉन्च से पहले शुभ  
मुहूर्त पूछ लेते हैं। उपग्रह मंगल तक  
भेज देते हैं, घर से निकलते समय राहु  
काल चेक कर लेते हैं। दुनिया भर की  
कंपनियों के लिए हमारे इंजीनियर  
कोड लिखते हैं, अपने ऑफिस का  
दरवाजा वास्तु विशेषज्ञ से पूछकर  
लगवाते हैं।  
लैपटॉप नवीनतम मॉडल का। सोच  
कभी-कभी मध्यकालीन।  
एक हाथ में आईआईटी की डिग्री।  
दूसरे हाथ में जन्मपत्री। मामला शादी  
का है, भाई।  
सुबह व्हाट्सऐप पर फर्जी मेडिकल  
सलाह। दोपहर डॉक्टर की ऑनलाइन  
अपॉइंटमेंट। शाम को ग्रह-दोष। रात  
को हम गर्व से कहते हैं: “भारत  
डिजिटल हो गया है!”  
हां, हो गया है। अब तांत्रिक भी  
ऑनलाइन हैं। कुंडली ऐप पर बनती  
है। चमत्कारी दवाइयां होम डिलीवरी  
से आती हैं। भविष्यवाणी अब अखबार  
के आखिरी पन्ने तक सीमित नहीं।  
मोबाइल खोलिए: हर ग्रह आपके पीछे  
पड़ा मिलेगा, नोटिफिकेशन के साथ।  
हमारे पास विश्वस्तरीय अस्पताल हैं।  
साथ ही ऐसे लोग भी हैं जो हर बीमारी  
का इलाज हल्दी, हवन, हीलिंग और  
किसी गुप्त बाबा की गारंटी में खोज  
लेते हैं। इतिहास पर गर्व अच्छी बात  
है। मगर हर आधुनिक आविष्कार को  
किसी पुराने श्लोक में खोज निकालना  
थोड़ा ज्यादा उत्साह है। व्हीलचेयर भी  
हमारे पूर्वजों ने बनाई थी। इंटरनेट भी  
था। प्लास्टिक सर्जरी भी। परमाणु

बम भी शायद किसी ऋषि ने टेस्ट  
किया होगा। सबूत? सबूत बाद में  
देखेंगे। पहले गर्व महसूस कीजिए।  
गर्व सस्ता है, सबूत महंगा।  
पर्यावरण के मामले में हमारा  
विरोधाभास और भी शानदार है। नदी  
को मां कहते हैं। फिर उसी मां में  
प्लास्टिक, फूल, राख, मूर्तियां और  
पूजा की बची-खुची सामग्री डाल देते  
हैं। आस्था का सम्मान अपनी जगह।  
मगर नदी कोई विशाल कूड़ेदान नहीं  
है। नदी की सबसे बड़ी समस्या यह है  
कि उसकी कोई पीआर एजेंसी नहीं  
है। वह शिकायत नहीं करती। प्रेस  
कॉन्फ्रेंस नहीं बुलाती। चुनाव नहीं  
लड़ती। बस चुपचाप हमारा कचरा  
ढोती हुई आगे बढ़ती रहती है। फिर  
हम नदी की दुर्दशा पर सेमिनार करते  
हैं: एयर-कंडीशन्ड हॉल में, बोतलबंद  
पानी पीते हुए। जलवायु परिवर्तन पर  
भाषण देते हैं और अगले दिन खाली  
सड़क पर भी कार लेकर निकल पड़ते  
हैं। भूजल खत्म होने पर चिंता करते  
हैं, फिर बोरवेल और गहरा करा लेते  
हैं। समस्या पर चिंता हमारी राष्ट्रीय  
आदत है। समाधान को टालना हमारी  
प्रशासनिक परंपरा।  
विवाह के समय जाति, कुंडली और

गोत्र अक्सर अंतिम निर्णय लेते हैं।  
लड़का-लड़की डॉक्टर, इंजीनियर,  
प्रोफेसर हो सकते हैं। मंगल खराब हो  
तो प्रेम भी खराब हो जाता है। विज्ञान  
फेल, ज्योतिष पास। यह शायद भारत  
की सबसे ईमानदार तस्वीर है। हम  
किसी एक रास्ते पर भरोसा क्यों करें?  
बेल्ट भी बांधिए और भगवान को भी  
याद कीजिए।  
प्रार्थना मन को शांति दे सकती है।  
मगर सूखे जलाशय को पानी नहीं।  
मंत्र टूटी नहर की मरम्मत नहीं करते।  
हवन भूजल का स्तर नहीं बढ़ाता। और  
देवता भी शायद चाहेंगे कि हम बांध,  
तालाब और जल-संरक्षण की  
व्यवस्था ठीक कर लें; कम से कम  
रिपोर्ट तो पढ़ लें। वरना हमारा यह  
महान भारतीय नृत्य चलता रहेगा।  
एक हाथ उपग्रह छोड़ेगा। दूसरा शुभ  
मुहूर्त खोजेगा। एक विमान बादलों में  
बीज डालेगा। दूसरा सरकारी दल  
पवित्र अग्नि में आहुति देगा।  
और भारत, हमेशा की तरह, धुएं और  
बादलों के बीच मुस्कराता हुआ  
कहेगा; “दोनों कर लो भाई, नुकसान  
क्या है? अगर बारिश आ गई तो  
विज्ञान की जीत। नहीं आई तो  
भगवान की मर्जी। पापों का फल।



*It's past midnight, can we stop inspecting...and start eating*



# Gyanwati Aunty

*Your neighbourhood  
aunty in print...*

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



- **Is it OK to repeat outfits, or will people actually remember what I wore six months ago?**

*Of course it's OK. Repeat your outfits with confidence. Most people are too busy worrying about whether you remember their outfits. And if someone actually points it out, just say, "Yes, I liked it so much I bought it again." Never let facts interfere with fashion.*

- **I once complimented my mom on her idli sambar. Now she makes it every day. How do I take back a compliment?**

*You don't. Compliments given to mothers come with a lifetime commitment. You have two choices: start praising something else immediately, or accept that you are now an idli-sambar household. Whatever you do, **do not***

*say, "It was nice that day." That is how you get chutney thrown at you.*

- **My kitty party friend is a kleptomaniac. How do we tell her politely that the handbag she "admired" is missing?**

*Don't accuse her. That would be terribly rude. Simply announce, "Ladies, has anyone seen my handbag? It was right here before someone complimented it." Then watch everyone suddenly become very interested in their tea. If the bag turns up at her house, tell her you're touched she liked it enough to take it home. **But next time, perhaps she could just ask before adopting it.***

- **My neighbour gives me unsolicited advice on everything. How do I get him to shut up without having to move house? Start asking for his advice**

*on increasingly complicated things.*

*"Should I invest in gold or crypto?" "What should I name my future dog?"*

*"Do you think I should change careers?"*

*Eventually he will realise that being your free consultant is exhausting. If that doesn't work, ask him for advice on how to stop giving unsolicited advice. He may finally hear himself.*

- **My househelp burps a lot. It's becoming difficult to tell whether she has finished lunch or is giving me a weather update. What should I do?**

*Try not to make her uncomfortable. Everyone has bodily functions. But if the burps are loud enough to make the windows rattle, gently suggest that she eat a little slower. And if she starts burping*

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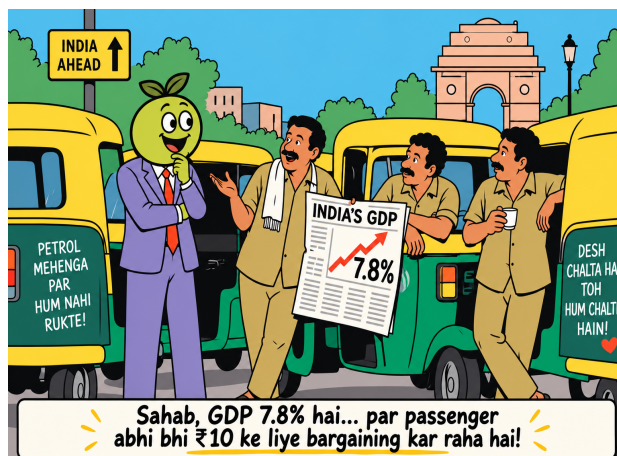
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